

Attitudes and perceptions of newspaper journalists towards public relations practitioners  
in 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.”

Signed:

Hayley Callard



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AUT University Ethics Committee Approval number: 09/144.

## **Abstract**

This study examines the attitudes and perceptions newspaper journalists hold towards public relations (PR) practitioners in New Zealand and why such attitudes exist. To date, only two academic studies in New Zealand have explored the topic. This study updates and expands on knowledge that exists overseas and in New Zealand. A combination of data collection methodologies were used for this study, comprising an online, predominantly quantitative, survey and a series of eight semi-structured interviews with working newspaper journalists. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse and interpret qualitative data. The findings show that the attitudes newspaper journalists hold towards PR practitioners in New Zealand are generally negative and complex. Such attitudes are borne out of frustrations arising from some of the media relations tactics employed by PR practitioners, as well as the oppositional nature of two industries, and economic pressures of the newsroom. These frustrations, particularly the latter two, challenge a journalist's ability to uphold traditional journalistic values. This study also found evidence of some warming in the attitudes New Zealand newspaper journalists have towards PR practitioners. This is restricted predominantly to perceptions about unethical behaviour, status and toeing an organisational line, all of which point to a downward shift in the level of hypocrisy journalists have long been accused of holding when it comes to PR practitioners. Furthermore, it is apparent that journalists' attitudes vary according to the sector and even the organisation in which a PR practitioner works, highlighting the view that consumer PR, in particular, is poorly regarded by newspaper journalists in New Zealand. This study acts as a useful resource to PR practitioners and the wider PR industry by highlighting where and how PR practitioners have the ability to improve interactions to create more harmonious, beneficial relationships.

## Introduction

### *Research Question*

This study seeks to answer the question: what attitudes and perceptions do newspaper journalists' hold towards public relations (PR) practitioners in New Zealand and why?

### *Background Context*

The relationship between PR practitioners and journalists is a territory of fertile debate and, at times, vehement opinions, particularly for those working within PR and journalism. While many international academics have studied the relationship seriously over many decades, in New Zealand very few academic studies on the topic have been conducted.

Every day, newspaper journalists and PR practitioners around the world interact with each other as part of the news production process. PR practitioners suggest stories and provide journalists with information they have shaped that they would like to see published in the newspaper. Journalists contact PR practitioners with requests for information or interviews to help produce news stories they are writing. While this may, from the outside, seem like a simple and smooth transaction, it is often not the case. Instead, the relationship that journalists and PR practitioners have can often be troubled (Hobsbawm, 2006; Jenkins, 2006), due in part to their mutual dependence (Anderson & Lowrey, 2007; Charron, 1989; Desiere & Sha, 2007; Neijens & Smit, 2006) but often, also, their conflicting goals (Shin & Cameron, 2004).

According to DeLorme and Fedler (2003), difficulties in the relationship can be traced back to the rise of publicity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the unethical tactics, such as bribes, gifts, stunts and fakes, that early PR practitioners used as a way to garner media attention and coverage for their clients or organisations. Over time, this behaviour led journalists to view PR as “deceptive, unethical and foolish” (p. 105). Such views, however, have done anything but abate, with a great deal of literature (Anderson & Lowrey, 2007; Charron, 1989; Hobsbawm, 2006; Shin & Cameron, 2004; White & Hobsbawm, 2007) claiming the relationship is burdened by an antagonism borne out of more than just unethical behaviour.

Much of the literature on the relationship indicates that the majority of attitudes and perceptions journalists hold towards PR practitioners are generally negative (Aronoff, 1975; Hobsbawm, 2006; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver, 1985; Kopenhaver, Martinson, & Ryan, 1984; Shin & Cameron, 2004; Sterne, 2010; Tilley & Hollings, 2008; White & Hobsbawm, 2007). Some researchers believe PR practitioners often make fundamental mistakes when they interact with journalists. Such mistakes include being ignorant about the needs of a journalist (Grabowski, 1992), offering media releases and story ideas that lack news value or relevance to the newspaper’s target readership (Curtin & Rhodenbaugh, 2001; Kopenhaver, 1985; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a), contacting journalists when they are frantically busy on deadline (Hobsbawm, 2006; Pomerantz, 1989), and being obstructive (Adams, 2002; Charron, 1989; Davis, 2003; Jeffers, 1977; Pomerantz, 1989). These mistakes and tactics frustrate and annoy journalists and often result in them viewing PR practitioners negatively.

Others (Davis, 2003; Gower, 2007; Sterne, 2010; White & Hobsbawm, 2007) posit that the political economy of the media has an impact on journalists’ attitudes towards

PR practitioners. This is because increasing commercial and economic constraints placed on newsrooms mean journalists are required to do more with less (Davis, 2003; Gower, 2007), which fosters a reliance on PR practitioners and their PR materials:

Journalists are being asked to do more with less resources . . . forcing them to rely more and more on information from public relations practitioners . . . they are being forced increasingly into reactive, passive positions rather than pursuing their own investigations. (Gower, 2007, p. 2-3)

Traditionally journalists have wielded power and control over what is published. As news organisations have made cutbacks on editorial resources, the PR industry and the abundance of PR materials has grown significantly (Davis, 2000; Gower, 2007), resulting in a shift in the balance of power. Greenslade (2003) argues that this causes friction in the relationship because journalists traditionally pride themselves on being more powerful than and superior to PR practitioners. Rather than believing PR is a positive, helpful source of information, journalists feel conflicted about using PR materials, needing them on the one hand, while resenting them on the other (Haller, 2007; Tilley & Hollings, 2008).

This is because the nature of each industry is traditionally in opposition to the other. Journalists are said to strive for objectivity, fairness, accuracy, and balance, and do not withhold information, hide or advocate for particular agendas, or act unethically (Belz, Talbot, & Starck, 1989). PR is regarded as more subjective, serving the interests of the client first and foremost (White & Hobsbawm, 2007). White and Hobsbawm (2007) say this causes journalists to view PR in a negative light because they believe that for PR practitioners to be able to do their job they may have to deny the whole truth. This leads

them to view PR practitioners suspiciously, seeing their material as a self-serving source that may be deceptive or misleading.

Several studies (Cline, 1982; Shaw & White, 2004; Wright, 2005) have argued that negativity towards PR practitioners is developed before journalists embark on their working career. Indeed, journalists may first encounter negative stereotypes about PR practitioners during their education. These authors found that communication text books and journalism educators present biased, and often prejudiced views about public relations, calling it “the dark side” (Sallot & Johnson, 2006b, p. 158).

Others have touched upon the view that negative attitudes towards PR practitioners may not be as strong towards PR practitioners in specialist fields of communication. Corbett and Mori (1999) found evidence that journalists are more dependent on health sector PR practitioners for information and were generally supportive of the media releases they presented to them. This more favourable attitude is thought to be due to the lack of specialist and in-depth knowledge that journalists often have in relation to the subjects they write about (Cho & Cameron, 2007). At the same time, it has also been reported that journalists perceive PR practitioners who work for non-profit organisations to be more ethical than those working in other sectors (Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). Gower (2007), however, argues that little research has actually focused on such a phenomenon.

Some have suggested (Neijens & Smit, 2006; Sallot & Johnson, 2006b) that the perceptions of journalists towards PR practitioners may be improving. A longitudinal study by Sallot and Johnson (2006b) concluded that from 1999 to 2004 journalists’ held less hostile perceptions about their relationship with PR practitioners in comparison to earlier studies of a similar nature. Furthermore Sallot and Johnson (2006b) also

suggested journalists do appear to view relationships with PR practitioners as important, but in their eyes PR practitioners are responsible for building such relationships.

### *The New Zealand Newspaper Industry*

In New Zealand the majority of newspapers are owned by two international profit-driven corporations, Fairfax and APN, while Allied Press and a couple of family-run newspaper companies each own a share of remaining newspapers. This means that within New Zealand, a “near duopoly” of newspaper ownership exists (Rosenberg, 2008, p. 1). According to a report from the New Zealand Journalists Training Organisation (NZJTO) (2009) New Zealand has 21 daily newspapers, consisting of four metropolitan and 17 regional titles, along with many weeklies and non-dailies. Furthermore, the NZJTO states there are approximately 1316 newspaper journalists and 674 newspaper editors in New Zealand, adding that there is a higher-than-average number of 25 to 34-year-olds, and a lower-than-average number of over 55-year-olds when compared to the New Zealand workforce as a whole.

### *The New Zealand Public Relations Industry*

In New Zealand the body that represents the combined interests of PR and communication practitioners is the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ). PRINZ has 1400 members and believes there are approximately 5000 PR practitioners in New Zealand (P. Dryden, personal communication, November 11, 2009). In a recent PRINZ survey report, which elicited responses from 731 PR practitioners, 73 per cent were female, 70 per cent worked in Auckland or Wellington and the average age of practitioners was 40.6-years-old. Interestingly, one in three (30.7%) claimed to have come to PR from journalism and, on average, PR practitioners were earning an average of \$89,000 per year (Public Relations Institute of New Zealand, 2010).

Public relations can be defined as “the management of communication between an organization and its publics” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 8) and the work of a PR practitioner can vary immensely due to the wide variety of functions they are often responsible for. This includes media relations, community relations, internal communication, public affairs and government relations, to financial PR, consumer and brand PR, publicity, reputation management, issues and crisis management, as well as fundraising and public communication campaigns (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Public Relations Institute of New Zealand, 2010).

### *The Purpose of this Study*

This study seeks to determine what attitudes and perceptions newspaper journalists have towards PR practitioners in New Zealand and why. To date, the majority of literature on the topic has been conducted overseas, with only a couple of academically important studies on the topic published in New Zealand (Sterne, 2010; Tilley & Hollings, 2008). While this topic of study is not new, it is, however, ripe for exploration within a New Zealand context.

This study is, therefore, important to both the body of knowledge that exists and to the PR and journalism industries, not only within New Zealand but from an international perspective. Firstly, this study updates the work of Tilley and Hollings (2008) and Sterne (2010), who previously explored the orientation of feelings held by media professionals towards PR practitioners in New Zealand, particularly as both studies collected data in 2007. Updating research not only reveals current thinking on the topic but, over time, allows data to be tracked to determine what patterns and trends exist on a given topic. This study, for example, supports the findings that have been made by others (Aronoff, 1975; Grabowski, 1992; Hobsbawm, 2006; Jeffers,



1977; Pomerantz, 1989; Ryan & Martinson, 1988) over many decades, that PR practitioners still commit certain “sins” (Grabowski, 1992) that journalists dislike, causing them to view PR practitioners negatively.

This study is also important to the existing body of knowledge in that it differs from and expands upon the work of Tilley and Hollings (2008) and Sterne (2010) in several key ways. Firstly, this study specifically narrowed its focus to concentrate, in-depth, on the attitudes and perceptions of one group of media professionals in New Zealand – newspaper journalists. Tilley and Hollings (2008) and Sterne (2010) collected data from a broad cross sample of print, broadcast and online media. The decision to focus on one group of media professionals for this study was made because an in-depth, focused study with a single group of media professionals had not been undertaken in New Zealand before. This is important because there are likely to be a number of variables within each media platform (print – newspapers and magazines, broadcast – radio and television, online) that may have different influences on the attitudes and perceptions that each group of media professionals hold towards PR practitioners, for example, the different news production processes of each medium. The author of this study, therefore, believes it is more beneficial to thoroughly study each group separately. It is, therefore, suggested that the research conducted by this study could be replicated, in turn, with each media group to provide a comprehensive account of the attitudes and perceptions that exist among media professionals in New Zealand.

Secondly, this study employed two data collection methodologies to increase the validity of the data. The first data collection method was a predominantly quantitative online survey, issued to 401 practising newspaper journalists throughout New Zealand. A longitudinal component was added to the survey by replicating 25 survey

statements first employed by Aronoff (1975). These 25 statements were also employed by Kopenhaver, Ryan and Martinson (1985) and formed the first half of this study's online survey. In total, 102 newspaper journalists' responses to the survey were used in the study.

Once the survey was complete, eight semi-structured interviews with working newspaper journalists were conducted. This allowed the topic to be interrogated in more detail, which assisted in answering the "why" component of the research question. All qualitative data was analysed using a hybrid inductive/deductive thematic analysis approach.

Thirdly, this study specifically expands the New Zealand literature on this topic by exploring aspects of the journalist/PR practitioner relationship that have not previously been examined in any detail within a New Zealand context. This includes examining whether newspaper journalists' attitudes and perceptions towards PR practitioners change according to the sector or organisation for which a PR practitioner works, and whether journalism educators may negatively influence student journalists' attitudes. Furthermore, this study explored the attitudes and perceptions newspaper journalists have towards a career in PR, along with an in-depth examination of the daily tactical level interactions, including the "sins" (Grabowski, 1992) that newspaper journalists accuse PR practitioners of committing.

In exploring these topics, this study found that the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists is one of strained coexistence where negative attitudes are widespread, but not omnipresent. One of the most significant findings of this study suggests there may be a softening of attitudes towards PR practitioners, particularly in relation to comparisons of status, unethical behaviour and toeing an organisational

line. This softening of attitudes also suggests a shift may have occurred in the level of hypocrisy that journalists have traditionally been accused of holding in their views towards PR practitioners.

This study asserts that where attitudes and perceptions are negative, three key sources of frustration are responsible: the sins of PR practitioners; the traditionally opposing goals of both industries; and the economic pressures of the newsroom. Furthermore, it highlights the possibility that some journalism students may develop negative attitudes towards PR practitioners before they even graduate.

This study did find evidence of some positive attitudes towards PR practitioners. However, where positive attitudes occur they are quickly contradicted by negative perceptions, indicating newspaper journalists are highly conflicted about their views of PR practitioners. What is clear is that this study found that newspaper journalists hold remarkably different attitudes towards PR practitioners depending on the organisation and sector within which they work. Furthermore, an interesting and important offshoot to this finding was that newspaper journalists also distinguish there to be a difference between PR practitioners and communications practitioners. In particular, communications practitioners were considered to perform more serious and worthwhile roles.

Several recommendations to improve newspaper journalists' attitudes and perceptions are put forward by this study, along with recommendations to improve the relationship as a whole – a task that both industries must be prepared to undertake given the benefits both sides could reap. This study should prove to be a vital resource, particularly for PR practitioners and the wider PR industry because it provides further evidence for, and understanding of, the often negative attitudes and

perceptions directed towards them. In doing so the study provides a form of guidance to those in the PR industry, allowing them to see where improvements on their part should be made. Although, given the longitudinal view that PR practitioners have repeatedly committed the same sins over many decades, it begs the question: will PR practitioners in New Zealand actually heed and act upon the advice given to them by the very people they are so keen to influence?

### *Thesis Composition*

The intention of this introduction was to set and frame the context and agenda of this research study. It introduced the research question, presenting the background context from which it arose, while emphasising the importance and necessity for this research, particularly within a New Zealand context.

The literature review draws attention to the nature of the working relationship between journalists and PR practitioners, including its historical context. The chapter highlights the attitudes and perceptions journalists throughout the world have previously been found to hold towards PR practitioners and the factors that influence such feelings.

The methodology chapter presents the two different methods used to collect primary data from working newspaper journalists in New Zealand – a predominantly quantitative survey and a series of semi-structured interviews. The chapter provides an explanation for and a description of each method, including why it was the appropriate choice for this study, how it was implemented and the techniques (thematic content analysis) used to extract and analyse findings from the data.

The data chapter presents the data collected from the survey and the semi-structured interviews, while the discussion chapter presents a discussion of the data, interpreting the meaning they have in their own right, while discussing the connection or differences they have with existing literature on the topic.

The final chapter presents the core conclusions of this research study. It highlights the implications that the findings of this study have for both industries and their practitioners, as well as providing recommendations for further research on the topic. Finally, it notes the potential limitations and delimitations of this study.

## **Literature Review**

This chapter draws upon existing literature to provide a detailed account of the relationship between journalists and public relations (PR) practitioners. It highlights a spectrum of attitudes and perceptions that previous studies profess journalists to hold, along with the motivations for such feelings. The chapter is split into several sections: the historical context of the relationship, mutual dependence and conflict, the sins of media relations, news values, prejudice in education, sector influence on attitudes, abstract versus up-close perceptions, hypocrisy, truth and ethics, and an overview of New Zealand literature on the topic.

### *The Historical Context*

The relationship between journalists and public relations (PR) practitioners has attracted serious attention over many decades from overseas academics. Scholars such as Aronoff (1975) and Jeffers (1977) began by examining how the two perceived each other in terms of credibility and status. Even these early studies showed that all was not well and that it was by no means an easy relationship. This view has persisted to recent times with a steady flow of literature claiming journalists and PR practitioners have an often-troubled relationship fraught with antagonism (Comrie, 2002; Lucarelli, 1993; Pomerantz, 1989; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Shin & Cameron, 2004; White & Hobsbawm, 2007).

According to Delorme and Fedler (2003), the unease in the relationship has deep roots firmly tied to the emergence of publicity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Andersen (2007) believes this is connected to the birth of the mass media. Although newspapers were first published in the 1600s and quickly became an important vehicle for public

communication, it was not until the boom of big business and the advent of high speed printing presses in the mid-1800s that newspapers became cheap enough for the average citizen to buy and, therefore, a prime target for people with goods to peddle (Andersen, 2007).

As people began to realise the value of promoting their wares to the masses through newspapers, some paid for advertisements, while others tried their luck at getting free publicity. According to Andersen (2007), “they could buy advertising, but even better, they could wheedle and pressure writers to promote their wares for free – clothes, furniture, gadgets, plays, books, ideas, politicians, whatever” (p. ix). Delorme and Fedler (2003) assert that the tension and negativity in the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners was, therefore, initially caused by unsophisticated and unethical tactics such as the use of bribes, gifts, stunts and fakes used by early publicists to gain media attention and free coverage for their product, client or organisation. Some literature (Andersen, 2007; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Stauber & Rampton, 1995) suggests the most famous early publicist was PT Barnum, an American showman, entertainer and circus founder who was renowned for the stunts, fakes and hype he generated to attract media attention and increase ticket sales for his shows:

Barnum was not averse to buying advertising space, [but] he also knew the news interest of his attractions and reaped a harvest of free publicity. With Barnum, and after him, came a host of other press agents whose speciality was getting into free public print. The agents’ methods were not quite so important to them as the results. All manner of stunts, such as fake jewel robberies, marital spats and love affairs were reported. (Marston, 1979, p. 21)

As a former newspaper publisher and editor, PT Barnum knew any newspaper coverage, positive or negative, would attract attention and get people flocking to his shows (Andersen, 2007). On one such occasion he bought an elderly black woman and exhibited her to journalists and the public as being 160 years old and George Washington's childhood nursemaid. To create hype and controversy, Barnum wrote a series of fake and forged letters to the editors of New York newspapers. In some he claimed Barnum was a fake, in others he claimed Barnum was providing a great service to the public. His stunt worked and the newspapers ran not only the letters, but news articles and editorial comment. The public, spurred on by what they had read, turned out in huge numbers, paying to see the extraordinary old lady, earning Barnum a fortune. When the elderly woman died, doctors determined she was only 80 years old. Ever the showman, Barnum "handled the situation like the PR pro that he was. He said that he was shocked, deeply shocked, at the way this woman had deceived him" (Stauber & Rampton, 1995, p. 17).

Before long, actions such as those of PT Barnum led to complaints from journalists who began to view publicity and subsequently public relations, as being an unethical, foolish and deceptive practice (Delorme & Fedler, 2003). These views were solidified in the early 1900s with the arrival of the so-called muckraking era. Literature (Gower, 2007; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Wright, 1979) claims this era saw an increase in the number of journalists who set out to expose the dirty tactics and corruption of Government and big business. Exposés of this nature often drew a violent public reaction and over time Government and big businesses soon realised they needed to communicate with the public because silence during an attack was ineffective and non-beneficial (Gower, 2007). In an attempt to manage attacks but still maintain profit margins, corporations began to call upon PR practitioners to promote their side of the story through newspapers, heralding the rise of corporate public relations.



One such example was the Rockerfeller family who were widely despised because of the merciless tactics employed by their company, Standard Oil (Stauber & Rampton, 1995). In 1914, several coal miners and their families were shot by local militia at Rockerfeller-owned coal mines during the course of a long-lasting strike. To defend the company, former newspaper journalist turned PR counsellor Ivy Lee, was hired. According to some (Andersen, 2007), Lee spun the truth, claiming the deaths in Ludlow were caused by an overturned stove.

According to Wright (1979) this kind of behaviour was not uncommon. Many of the early corporate PR practitioners lacked professional standards, ethics and social responsibility, often doing whatever it took to further the corporate aims of their employer. What was ironic in the case of Ivy Lee was that at the start of his PR career in 1905, he issued a declaration of principles to all New York City editors, claiming the role of a PR person was to be open, accurate and to verify statements of fact (Russell & Bishop, 2009). As the practice of public relations evolved, businesses became aware of the power of persuasion when communicating with the public. During World War I, the power of persuasion was realised through the use of wartime propaganda. This not only helped to get the United States into the war, but was important in helping to convince Americans to support the British war efforts and to view the Germans as evil (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

During this time, Edward Bernays, who is now regarded as the father of public relations (Tye, 1998) and whose uncle was Sigmund Freud, began working for the United States Committee on Public Information (Ewen, 1996; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Tye, 1998). Here Bernays used techniques he had learnt as a publicist to encourage Americans to support the American war effort. At the same time he planted propaganda behind German lines to spread dissent. Broadly speaking, Bernays' role is thought to

have significantly helped the United States in seeking support for a largely unwanted war.

During the post-war era, Bernays became regarded as a master of persuasion and of “crystallizing public opinion”, which in 1923 also became the title of his first book and the first official book about public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). As acknowledgement of his skills grew, Bernays began to tap into public trends, capitalising on them for clients. Take, for example, the work he carried out for the American Tobacco Company. Bernays used a variety of deceptive tactics to breathe life into the “Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet” campaign, which encouraged American women to take up smoking to demonstrate their independence (Ewen, 1996) and keep themselves trim (Tye, 1998). According to Tye (1998), throughout this era Bernays did more than just convince women to begin smoking. Instead he showed an entire army of future potential PR practitioners the power that public relations and the art of persuasion could have:

If housewives could be guided in their selection of soap, so could husbands in their choice of car. And voters in their selection of candidates. And candidates in their political posturing. Indeed the very substance of American thought was mere clay to be moulded by the savvy public relations practitioner, or so it seemed. (Tye, 1998, p. viii)

Public relations as an occupation was beginning to flourish. Many wartime publicists took their newfound skills and started to work for private companies which saw the benefits of having a publicity department. The proliferation of PR meant that now, more than ever before, newspapers were being contacted by publicists keen to get free space to promote their wares. This was not met with amusement by journalists and editors.

Lucarelli (1993) explains that a shortage of newsprint in the 1920s resulted in significant paper conservation measures and a subsequent rise in newspaper production costs. The behaviour of publicists and PR practitioners, keen to gain free publicity for their clients, was increasingly frowned upon by journalists and editors, who saw them not only as newsprint space wasters, but also as a threat to the economic wellbeing of newspapers (Stauber & Rampton, 1995). The newspaper industry, antagonised by such approaches, waged a campaign against PR practitioners, tightly restricting access to free newspaper space, with trade journals counselling publishers and editors to “categorically deny requests for space from press agents and to throw their handouts and press releases into the wastebasket” (Lucarelli, 1993, p. 888).

According to Stegall and Saunders (1986), ever since this time journalists and PR practitioners have tried to work out what each other’s role entails to determine where the boundaries in their relationship lie. During this process, however, misunderstandings have taken place and stereotypes have been created. Such stereotypes include journalists dismissing PR practitioners as “spin doctors, media manipulators, corporate flunkies, flak catchers and . . . paid liars” (Comrie, 2002, p. 158). Adding to this, Len-Rios, Hinnant and Park (2009) claim the stereotypical view of a PR practitioner is someone who seeks publicity for free and who obstructs the media, which has had a negative impact on how the PR industry as a whole is viewed (Henderson, 1998; Scrimger & Richards, 2003). On the other hand, PR practitioners’ view of journalists is not always rosy, with some believing journalists are “incompetent bunglers who quote out of context and sensationalize the negative” (Stegall & Saunders, 1986, p. 341). The historical origins of the relationship, therefore, appear to have laid the foundations for a troubled relationship that over the years has done anything but ease.

### *Mutual Dependence and Conflict*

The relationship between PR and journalism is mutually dependent (Anderson & Lowrey, 2007; Belz et al., 1989; Comrie, 2002; Desiere & Sha, 2007; Neijens & Smit, 2006; White & Hobsbawm, 2007). PR practitioners need journalists to publish and promote their clients' interests, while journalists depend on newsworthy PR material to help them fulfil their role (Aronoff, 1975; Kopenhaver, 1985; Pincus, Rimmer, Rayfield, & Cropp, 1993; Shin & Cameron, 2004). Despite the simplicity and practicality of this view, the relationship is a complex and uneasy one. Shin and Cameron (2004) believe both sides bring conflict to the relationship through the nature of their roles and goals, and the values, attitudes and views they hold of each other. According to Charron (1989), while the relationship is one of mutual dependence, a tension between conflict and cooperation exists between the two parties as they tussle over the production of news. Negotiation on the part of both the journalist and PR practitioner is required:

The journalist seeks information from the public relations practitioner, while the latter seeks publicity from the journalist. The exchange relationship consists of an adjustment between the public relations practitioner's supply of information and the journalist's demand for information, and conversely, between the journalist's supply of publicity and the public relations practitioner's demand for it. (Charron, 1989, p. 52)

Over the past two decades, there has not only been an increase in the number of PR practitioners, but the economic climate of news production has changed significantly (Baker, 2007; Curtin, 1999; Davis, 2000; Lewis, Williams, & Franklin, 2008; Neijens & Smit, 2006; Nicolas, 2006). Such a shift is regarded by these authors and others as being

due to a combination of technological advancements such as the internet, continuing consolidation of news media ownership, an increasing proliferation of news communication channels, and a decline in newspaper circulation and advertising revenue. Shrinking circulation figures and a decline in advertising revenue, coupled with the commercial interests of newspaper ownership to maintain or increase profits for shareholders, has had a major impact on the working life of newspaper journalists (Baker, 2007; Curtin, 1999; Lewis et al., 2008; McChesney, 2003). As newsroom budgets are slashed to maintain profits and new revenue generating initiatives such as feature supplements and online news content are encouraged, newspaper journalists have to do more with far fewer resources (Davis, 2000).

Further adding to the pressure that journalists face is the proliferation of news media outlets. This has resulted in “increased competition between journalists and an intense contest to make the news” (Neijens & Smit, 2006, p. 233). Such factors have led journalists to rely increasingly on PR practitioners as key sources of access, information and news so they can meet the “demands of daily news production” (Comrie, 2002, p. 158). Despite the valid reasons for this reliance, some (Comrie, 2002; Hobsbawm, 2006) claim many journalists are unwilling to accept that there is a reliance on PR material and in fact have little respect for PR practitioners (Walters, Walters, & Starr, 1994). White and Hobsbawm (2007) agree, claiming that “while public relations practitioners are aware of the extent to which they work with and provide information to journalists, journalists are perhaps less willing to acknowledge the use made of public relations material” (p. 290).

In the book *Toxic Sludge is Good for You*, authors Stauber and Rampton (1995) provide a pretty dim overview of the PR industry. Despite their negative portrayal of PR, the authors concede in the concluding chapter that the media, while often critical of

PR activities, constantly fails to report critically on its own industry. To do so, they argue, “would reveal the extent of its dependency on PR for access, sources, quotes, stories and ideas” (Stauber & Rampton, 1995, p. 192). Providing an example of this, Comrie (2002) says journalists are often quick to make a song and dance about the number of media releases which they throw straight in the bin because they contain puffery or blatant advertising. What they are not so quick to talk about are the media releases that are published often in verbatim form. This belief is one that Lewis, Williams and Franklin (2008) found evidence for during their study into the use of PR and news agency copy by journalists, stating there is very little acknowledgment that it comes from PR even when materials are published in verbatim form. Shin and Cameron (2005) put this lack of acknowledgement down to the fact that journalists strive “to maintain their autonomy in the news selection process” (p. 320) and that they may have a reluctance to admit that PR can and does influence the media agenda (Anderson & Lowrey, 2007; Turk, 1986). In further attempting to explain journalists’ reluctance to acknowledge PR material as a legitimate source, some literature (Aronoff, 1975; Jeffers, 1977; White & Hobsbawm, 2007) points to the view that journalists have traditionally prided themselves as being morally superior to PR practitioners because they believe they act in the interests of public good:

Admitting their dependence would shatter cherished ideals. Journalists were proud of their ability to uncover stories, verify details, and expose sham. Thus they were unlikely to admit their dependence, lack of scepticism, failure to verify, and failure to expose every sham. (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003, p. 113)

So while it appears journalists do require information subsidies from PR practitioners to assist their work, it also appears journalists view this dependency in a shameful way. Hobsbawm (2006) sums this up in a particularly frank way when she describes the

relationship between PR and journalism as being like that of the “prostitute and the regular punter who relies on his ‘whore’, yet who is ashamed and often resentful of his dependence on this regular, secret tryst” (p. 5). Such shame may stem from the view that journalists often see their role as diametrically opposed to that of PR and believe PR practitioners “serve the bottom line” and “have sold out to profit concerns” rather than serving the public good (Curtin, 1999, p. 71). Journalists, therefore, do not see PR practitioners as status equals or as having similar ethical or skill levels (Aronoff, 1975; Jeffers, 1977). Others (Belz et al., 1989; Sallot, Steinfatt, & Salwen, 1998; White & Hobsbawm, 2007) believe such perceptions have led journalists to view PR practitioners with suspicion, seeing their material as a self-serving source that may be misleading or dubious. Given their mutual dependence, tensions and misperceptions in the relationship have great implications for the dissemination of information to the public (Kopenhaver et al., 1984).

### *The Sins of Media Relations*

Media relations is the term used in PR to describe the interaction between its practitioners and journalists as they exchange information, often for mutual benefit (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Media relations often forms the biggest part of a PR practitioner’s role (Bland, Theaker, & Wragg, 2005). On the one hand it encompasses proactive media relations, where the PR practitioner may seek coverage for a positive story on behalf of their client or organisation, or may look to communicate specific information to a particular audience (Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). On the other it encompasses reactive media relations where a PR practitioner responds to a journalist’s enquiry (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Turk, 1985).

PR practitioners who take the time to develop good media relations skills and who make the effort to build good relationships with journalists are more likely to achieve better results for their clients or organisation (Pincus et al., 1993). Supporting this theory, Comrie (2002) says “successful PR people wanting publicity operate from a clear understanding of what it is that journalists are looking for in a story” (p. 166). Similarly, Sallot and Johnson (2006a) found PR practitioners could create mutually beneficial relationships with journalists by getting to understand their style of writing and what makes them tick. PR practitioners who heed these words and who frame their stories with benefits for the journalist’s readers are, therefore, more likely to be successful achieving their goals. (Sallot & Johnson, 2006a).

Despite such words of wisdom, literature (Adams, 2002; Grabowski, 1992; Pomerantz, 1989; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a) shows PR practitioners often do not follow these basic rules. A survey by Sallot and Johnston (2006a) showed that journalists complained about PR practitioners’ “lack of news sense and values, accuracy, timeliness and style of presentation” (p. 84). Grabowski (1992) also highlights a number of wrongdoings at the hands of PR practitioners when it comes to media relations. These include the view that PR practitioners often lack knowledge about their subject matter, are ignorant about journalism, have poor sales skills, poor writing skills, rely too often on gimmicks and fail to plan appropriately.

According to Hobsbawm (2006) a weakness of PR practitioners is poor pitching. In most circumstances PR practitioners do not convey their message concisely or have all the information the journalist may require at hand. Hobsbawm believes that PR practitioners should, therefore, take more time to think about whom they are contacting and when they should make contact. Calling on deadline is regarded as particularly



sinful. Such a view was also supported by Pomerantz (1989) who believes such PR sins include:

Phoning on or near, deadline times; failing to deal even-handedly with the press . . . proposing inappropriate story ideas that clearly reflect ignorance of editorial content; sending pitch letters filled with information the reporter already knows; making unnecessary follow-up calls; persisting in pushing an unwanted story. (p. 15)

Journalists also view some information supplied by PR practitioners as unabashedly seeking to promote self-serving interests without having any real news value. According to Ryan and Martinson (1988) PR practitioners are often far too interested in their organisation's needs, rather than being primarily interested in supplying the journalist with clear, succinct information. Similarly, lack of local relevance is also regarded as a sin. PR practitioners commonly fail to identify a local angle when approaching community or regional newspapers (Curtin & Rhodenbaugh, 2001). Sending media releases without an adequate local angle can be damaging to the relationship (Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). Agreeing with this, Kopenhaver (1985) states that:

Editors reject news releases for a variety of reasons, the most important of which is that they lack news value, followed closely by the fact that they lack a local angle . . . Public relations practitioners must consider the news value and local angle on any news release they send to the media. In addition a common complaint from journalists is that important information is frequently missing, most notably time, place and date. (p. 37)

Sallot and Johnson (2006a) believe that to avoid having media releases discarded by journalists, PR practitioners must act in an ethical manner, be accurate with the

information they communicate, constantly improve their writing skills; particularly when it comes to media releases, and make sure they provide a relevant local angle.

On the reactive side of media relations, PR practitioners are often viewed by journalists as obstructing the truth (Adams, 2002; Charron, 1989; Pomerantz, 1989). Jeffers (1977) found journalists believe that no matter what type of organisation a PR practitioner works for they are more often than not “obstructions in the newsman’s path to the truth” (p. 299). Agreeing with this, Kopenhaver (1985) and Pomerantz (1989) believe PR practitioners purposely obstruct journalists’ access to their clients. Davis (2003) provides a good summary of how PR practitioners restrict access:

Public relations is all about managing routine access or, perhaps more importantly, restricting media access . . . In terms of restricting access, PRPs go to great lengths to stop information being released, to hinder journalists’ access to organisational figures, scupper exclusives and side-track investigative reporting. In fact, in the corporate sphere the most politically effective use of public relations appears to have been in restricting mainstream reporter access and in quashing negative stories. (p. 39)

White and Hobsbawm (2007) believe that journalists strongly dislike having their access to sources and information being denied or restricted for nearly any reason. PR practitioners should, therefore, be more helpful by serving to facilitate the press, rather than restricting their access (Kopenhaver, 1985). According to Sallot and Johnson (2006a), such media relations sins can frustrate journalists to the point where some keep a little book of blacklisted PR practitioners with whom they have had less than satisfactory dealings.

### *News Values*

When it comes to news values, literature (Aronoff, 1975; Kopenhaver, 1985; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sallot & Johnson, 2006b) shows that while journalists typically believe they possess very different news values to those held by PR practitioners, there is actually very little difference. A study by Kopenhaver et al. (1984) asked journalists and PR practitioners to rank the importance they place on eight news values: accuracy, interest to reader, usefulness to reader, completeness, prompt publication, depicts subject in favourable light, mechanical/grammatical factors and news story style. They were also asked to rank the importance they believed the other group would place on each value. Not only did journalists and PR practitioners rank accuracy first and interest second, but they both assigned the same ranking to the news values of completeness (3), usefulness to reader (4), mechanical/grammatical (5), and depicts subject in a favourable light (8). The only two values that received different rankings by the two groups were prompt publication, which was seen as more important by journalists than PR practitioners, and news story style which was regarded as more important by PR practitioners than journalists. Journalists, however, thought that depicting a subject in a favourable light and prompt publication would rank at the top of the list for PR practitioners. Overall the study showed that journalists were not particularly accurate at assessing PR practitioners' perceived news values, whereas PR practitioners were far better at assessing journalists' news values (Kopenhaver et al., 1984).

Similarly, Belz et al. (1989) used role theory to study the cross-perceptions of journalists and PR practitioners and they too found that journalists held more dissimilar perceptions than PR practitioners. Fourteen years after the work of Kopenhaver et al. (1984), Sallot et al. (1998) published a study to update the findings, using the same eight news values to determine any changes in the perceptions and cross-perceptions

that journalists and PR practitioners had. The results again showed that accuracy and interest to readers were ranked highest by both groups, while the values “mechanical/grammatical” and “depicting news subjects in a favourable light” were ranked lowest by both groups. One shift that Sallot et al. (1998) found was that PR practitioners were slightly less adept at predicting the views of journalists than in previous studies. In general though, this study confirmed the results of previous research about news values, highlighting that journalists in particular are quite unaware of the similarities that exist between the way the two professions view news values.

### *Prejudice in Education*

While PR practitioners may undoubtedly be held responsible for a number of media relations sins, literature (Cline, 1982; Kopenhaver, 1985; Shaw & White, 2004; Wright, 2005) suggests prejudice on the part of journalists towards PR practitioners may not necessarily be solely related to negative personal experiences with them. Instead, such prejudice may be embedded in journalists’ minds before their career begins. Such a theory is supported by Ryan and Martinson (1988) who found that antagonism and prejudice in the relationship is firmly embedded in journalism culture and that this has an impact on the whole communication process. Cline (1982) found evidence of this during an analysis of the public relations chapters contained in mass communication textbooks. The chapters that were analysed showed that such books generally communicated a lack of understanding and ignorance about PR along with a “fierce anti-public relations stance” (p. 64).

Wright (2005) states that it is not only mass communication textbooks that perpetuate a negative view of PR. Prejudice and discrimination also exist within journalism education, particularly print journalism education, where journalism educators often use exaggerated stereotypes about the practice of PR to ridicule the

profession. Such discrimination is not always organised or blatant. Rather it is subtly drip-fed into the minds of journalism students over a prolonged period of time. Wright (2005) also believes many university educators turn a blind eye to the professional prejudice and discrimination that PR education, educators and practitioners receive. “Journalism educators appear to look the other way when narrow-minded, Neanderthal-like news-editorial . . . faculty members unleash unfounded, generalized, flagrant, negative and discriminatory comments upon public relations and those who teach or study this discipline” (Wright, 2005, p. 102).

Griffiths (1996) believes any discussion of bringing public relations into the same academic sphere as journalism is a sure-fire way to provoke a reaction among journalism educators. This, he says, is because many journalism educators believe PR will taint the journalism curriculum, in part because of the perceived lack of an ethical connection between the two industries. Despite this, he believes journalism educators should welcome the opportunity to influence the learning and development of future PR practitioners, so they can be exposed at an early stage to the newsgathering and writing processes used by journalists. “Public relations professionals would then have something other than a textbook acquaintance with deadlines, the varying demands of editors, and the ethical mandate for balanced reporting” (Griffiths, 1996, p. 82). On the other hand Stegall and Sanders (1986) suggest journalists may get on better with PR practitioners if the journalism education curriculum incorporated basic public relations courses for journalists, to help them better understand the practice of public relations.

A study conducted by Shaw and White (2004) into the perceptions that PR and journalism educators hold about media relations found a shift in opinion. Although prejudice against PR appears to be embedded in journalism culture, journalism educators did not seem as negative in their opinions about PR as previous literature

indicated. This finding reflects a similar trend in other literature (Neijens & Smit, 2006; Pincus et al., 1993; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a), which points to the view that the perceptions each industry holds of each other may be improving.

### *Sector Influence on Journalists' Attitudes*

Literature suggests journalists may have better working relationships with PR practitioners who work in specialist fields of communication such as government or health and science, than they do with those working in consumer PR (Ankney & Curtin, 2002; Cho & Cameron, 2007; Turk, 1986). Cho and Cameron (2007) claim journalists are more open towards PR practitioners in specialised areas because of the lack of specialist, in-depth knowledge journalists can have in relation to the topics they write about. Supporting this, Anderson and Lowrey (2007) state that:

Public relations practitioners who work for medical, scientific, or engineering organisations, or who deal with high finance, are more likely to shape journalists' reporting because they work with specialised knowledge that is communicated through arcane terminology. This knowledge is less accessible to journalists, who typically do not have educational backgrounds in specialised, abstract knowledge areas. (p. 390)

A study by Pincus et al. (1993), which examined the perceptions that news, business and sports editors have towards PR, found sports editors viewed PR more favourably than news editors, who viewed PR least favourably. Pincus et al. (1993) argue this reflects the type of information each newspaper department looks for and the degree of expert or specialist knowledge they require. The role of a PR practitioner in such highly specialised areas could, therefore, be seen as a crucial function, by helping to clarify the

ideas, opinions and needs of journalists and experts to each other (Ankney & Curtin, 2002).

Literature also shows journalists may be more open to PR information subsidies (for example media releases, story ideas, media statements (Gandy, 1982; Turk, 1985)) from PR practitioners who work in specialist sectors. Corbett and Mori (1999) found that in medical news journalists were generally more supportive and accepting of the PR materials that were sent or pitched to them by health sector PR practitioners. This is because of the reliance that journalists have on the medical community for story cues. Supporting this, Len-Rios et al. (2009) believe “health journalists may have favourable attitudes towards writing about certain health topics promoted by practitioners” (p. 57).

According to Cho and Cameron (2007) journalists tend to believe they have more power than PR practitioners and that they also play a more valuable role in society. When it comes to health news, however, the reverse may be true because of the complexity of the subject. Cho and Cameron (2007) argue that the more health expertise a PR practitioner has the greater the potential for power influence. When it comes to power influence in the relationship, Ankney and Curtin (2002) are wary of the dependence journalists have on PR practitioners who work in specialist fields. This is because they believe it may cause journalists to resent their dependence on such PR material because of their own lack of knowledge. Anderson and Lowrey (2007) claim that unless journalists have a complex knowledge base on the topic they are writing about, it will challenge their power to control the story, which in turn may lead them to become frustrated with their reliance on PR practitioners.

Some literature (Len-Rios et al., 2009; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a) highlights the view that journalists may view PR practitioners who work in the not- profit sector in a more

favourable light. Sallot and Johnson (2006a) claim this is due to the lack of a profit motive which means PR practitioners in the non-profit sector are sometimes seen by journalists as less self-serving and more ethical than those who work in a profit-driven environment. According to Turk (1985), journalists are more likely to use story ideas and media releases from PR practitioners in the non-profit sector, especially when they receive a feel-good factor from them. Many journalists have specific criteria for determining what PR material they are prepared to use. Such criteria usually places “social causes” above “economic gain” (Curtin, 1999, p. 63). Materials with a non-profit motive, therefore, usually take precedence over those with a profit motive. Adding to this, Curtin (1999, p. 67) claims PR subsidies from organisations with a clear profit motive are often considered to be an “economic drain” on the newspaper, because of their attempt to gain free advertising when they can afford to pay for it.

Sallot and Johnson (2006a) found some journalists clearly see the value of PR to non-profit organisations. In such circumstances journalists believe PR helps the organisation to get its voice above the crowd and its messages out to the public or those in need. Without PR, journalists could see this may not happen. Furthermore, some journalists also indicated PR practitioners who work for non-profit organisations are usually more grateful for the coverage they receive, which in turn promotes better relationships.

#### *Abstract Versus Up-Close Perceptions*

Literature suggests journalists favour and trust individual PR practitioners whom they know more highly than the field of public relations (Anderson & Lowrey, 2007; Jeffers, 1977; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). In a study that assessed PR information subsidies (for example, media releases and story ideas), Curtin



(1999), found that “personal relations with practitioners led to more favourable attitudes towards those practitioners’ materials” (p. 70). Journalists’ views are largely based on the individual-level interactions that they have with PR practitioners. The more positive the interactions, the more positive journalists’ perceptions are likely to be. PR practitioners, therefore, hold the ability to influence journalists’ negative perceptions for the betterment of the industry (Ryan & Martinson, 1988). Instead, those PR practitioners who “waste journalists’ time with trivialities of no news value and who are dishonest or overly persistent may be more memorable as the generalized other” (Sallot & Johnson, 2006b, p. 158).

Some journalists, however, have little respect for PR practitioners in general and believe they are superior to them (Ryan & Martinson, 1988, p. 132). Jeffers (1977) agrees, stating journalists do not consider themselves status equals with PR practitioners. While this might be the case, some studies have shown that journalists who have been educated in public relations or who have worked as a PR practitioner may hold slightly better attitudes towards PR practitioners (Cline, 1982; Pincus et al., 1993). This is a view with which Stegall and Saunders (1986) agree, concluding that journalists may relate to PR practitioners better if they had a better understanding of PR, suggesting it would be fruitful for many journalists to take a class in basic PR practices. Similarly, Sallot and Johnson (2006a) found that journalists’ perceived PR practitioners who were former journalists to be more skilled and ethical than those who have not. Furthermore, the journalists who took part in Sallot and Johnson’s (2006a) study hoped that one day PR practitioners would be required to have a journalism background or to at least have taken a journalism course before being allowed to work in public relations.

### *Hypocrisy, Truth and Ethics*

Literature outlined so far in this review has shown that journalists often have a pretty dim view of public relations. Journalism is regarded as a superior occupation and journalists often refute claims that similarities between the two industries exist. Despite these views, literature (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Sallot et al., 1998; White & Hobsbawm, 2007) suggests that similarities do indeed exist, but journalists prefer to keep knowledge of these similarities to themselves for fear of being seen as hypocritical. Several studies (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Fedler, Buhr, & Taylor, 1988; Jempson, 2005) have suggested animosity in the relationship may be associated with jealousy and hypocrisy from journalists.

According to Sallot and Johnson (2006b) a key driver of jealousy for journalists is that PR practitioners are perceived to earn more and have better workplace conditions. Jempson (2005) agrees and says there is “a resentment that many of those who promote the wares of government, commerce and celebrity are paid a great deal more than those expected to regurgitate their press releases” (p. 268). Adding to this, Nayman, McKee and Latimore (1977) claim journalists are frequently dissatisfied with a lack of opportunity for professional development, such as learning new skills or being mentored by a supervisor, as well as commonly being disappointed with their work environment.

Despite the negativity with which journalists seem to view PR, there are still many journalists who are willing to turn to a career in public relations (Burton, 2007; Fedler et al., 1988; Nayman et al., 1977). In a survey conducted by Nayman et al. (1977) more than half of the 181 journalists surveyed said they would consider moving into PR. Similarly Fedler et al. (1988) surveyed journalists about their reasons for leaving

journalism and what type of work they moved into, with 45 per cent stating that they had moved into community relations or PR.

Burton (2007) claims that despite the perception that journalists move to a career in PR purely because of the money, this is not always the case. This, he says, offers a simplistic view of why journalists may cross to the other side. Instead, he argues, while jobs in PR do typically pay more than positions in journalism, it comes down to a number of other factors that often prompt journalists to change careers. Such factors he believes tend to be rooted in the fact that a journalist's role is predominantly reactive, responding to events that occur during the day. Newspaper journalists often turn up at work not knowing what stories they will be required to write that day and often have little time to prepare, research and write stories. The constant grind and pressure of working to tight deadlines without the luxury of being able to choose the stories they wish to write or work on, can wear a journalist down, taking with it the challenge and stimulation that may have once existed. Fedler et al. (1988) found that many who moved out of journalism into another profession felt they had better working conditions and higher salaries in comparison with those experienced when working as a journalist. Furthermore, those surveyed also claimed they were benefiting from greater role variety, more autonomy, security, challenge and, therefore, a greater level of overall satisfaction. Only 16 per cent of former journalists surveyed stated their old job was better for them.

This literature reflects an interesting pattern of hypocrisy, because it shows there is conflict in what journalists say about public relations and the actions they take. While journalists may believe they hold the moral high-ground over PR practitioners, they often forget their own faults while simultaneously condemning PR practitioners for similar faults (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003). The literature argues that while journalists are

quick to state that PR practitioners peddle self-serving interests, they conveniently forget that they too peddle their own organisation's interests. "Practically all professionals work to solve client problems on one hand and pay the piper on the other . . . Of course it is recognised that commercial pressures influence journalists' professional logic" (Anderson & Lowrey, 2007, p. 389). White and Hobsbawm (2007) believe that while PR practitioners manage clients' information to ensure they are represented in the best possible light, this is also the same for journalists who "select from information in the interests of their employing organisations" (p. 289). Hobsbawm (2006) says:

The spin, the gloss, the paid-for-positive message is not vastly different from the inherent institutional bias of the media itself. It is telling that the most secretive area of any news organisation is its news planning conference . . . A fly on the wall at those daily gatherings would hear the automatic dismissal of certain stories because they conflict with the political stance of the proprietor or editor. (p. 4)

Journalists also often claim that PR practitioners twist the truth. Byrne (2006) believes you only have to look at the front page of a newspaper to see that the truth is not always reported. Instead Byrne claims that stories are shaped to reflect the desired editorial standpoint, which will be guided by the type of readership a newspaper has. In other words, newspapers also shape the news into a version of the truth that will suit their readership and encourage them to purchase the newspaper. Jenkins (2006) supports this view stating that news is shaped towards a newspaper's readership because it makes "readers feel comfortable. Comfortable readers buy papers and pay salaries" (p. 131).

According to Jempson (2005) truth usually goes out the window when it comes to making money. Using the example of well-known UK celebrity publicist Max Clifford,

Jempson (2005) states that although Clifford publicly admits that some of his successes are based more on imagination than concrete facts, he can get away with it because his stories sell papers. This turning of a blind eye, Jempson (2005) argues, is hypocritical:

When it all comes down to money, codes of conduct go out of the window . . . it would require highly contentious legislation to insist that all newsgathering operations should be independent of market pressures. All commercial operations seek a healthy return on investment. (p. 269)

Literature also suggests hypocrisy may exist when journalists accuse PR practitioners of using unethical methods. In a historical study, DeLorme and Fedler (2003) found that it is not only PR practitioners who use unethical means to get what they want. Rather, some journalists go to extraordinary lengths to get their story and sometimes journalists “lie”, “cheat”, “swindle” and “steal” for their papers. In addition, Delorme and Fedler found that the types of stories newspapers published were often sensational and focused on “lurid crimes, adultery, and other scandals” (p.109) that did little to inform the public about matters of real importance. But such hypocrisy does not appear to have changed over time. Jempson (2005) believes some journalists deliberately set out with a story idea in mind and specifically seek quotes to stack up these ideas, while White and Hobsbawm (2007, p. 287) believe others frequently “embellish an otherwise less than exciting story” as a way to attract readers and increase sales and profit margins.

Take for example a series of stories run in 2007 by *The Sun* newspaper in the United Kingdom about great white shark sightings in Cornwall. Despite experts claiming that the shark was more likely to be a porpoise or a basking shark than a great white, *The Sun* still continued to embellish a range of stories full of excitement and fear aimed at gripping readers’ attention. To top it off *The Sun* ran a story claiming a local Cornish

newspaper had published a photo of a great white shark spotted off a local Cornish tourist spot. It turned out the photo was taken in Cape Town in South Africa, a well known hot spot for great whites. Other newspapers called it the “great white lie”, but *The Sun* never admitted embellishing its otherwise unexciting stories to readers (Monck & Hanley, 2008).

While one may not expect to read the whole truth in a tabloid paper, it appears some of the better respected newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe* and *The Washington Post* have published their fair share of fabricated stories. According to Bell (2006) *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair was caught filing stories that had been plagiarised or fabricated after another newspaper claimed he had lifted the story. When *The New York Times* investigated, they found that it was not the only story he had plagiarised or fabricated (Monck & Hanley, 2008). It was a similar tale for *The Boston Globe*, which found out that one of its columnists had made up quotes from fabricated individuals, and for *The Washington Post*, which discovered that Janet Cooke’s Pulitzer winning story about a child heroin addict was complete fiction, resulting in the return of her award (Monck & Hanley, 2008).

Adding to the debate about truth, Lloyd (2006) believes journalists also hide the fact that they often receive money or gifts from PR practitioners to write stories: “PRs have lavished and continue to lavish a great deal on journalists in pursuit of good copy – most of which is not declared by the journalist. This is one of journalism’s biggest and dirtiest secrets” (p. 137). According to White and Hobsbawm (2007) this hypocrisy is not compatible with the moral views that journalists often profess their industry to live by. While PR practitioners may indeed have faults, White and Hobsbawm believe there is at least honesty in the form that you expect PR practitioners to toe a party line and present information in the best light for the client.

### *New Zealand Literature*

In New Zealand, two academic studies have explored the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists. The data for both studies were collected in 2007, with one study published as conference proceedings (Tilley & Hollings, 2008) and the other (Sterne, 2010) recently published in an academic journal, after data collection for this research project had taken place. Additionally a very small survey (10 questions, 34 responses) was undertaken by a PR company (Talkies Group, 2004) to improve its understanding of journalist experiences as a way to serve them better.

Sterne (2010) found perceptions of public relations by New Zealand media were for the most part negative, which contrasts with the findings of Tilley and Hollings (2008). Instead Tilley and Hollings found that in New Zealand a deep level of complex antagonism between journalism and public relations exists, and for some it is intense. Generally they found the animosity in the relationship reflects that found in international research, but there were several notable differences. These included that New Zealand journalists do not believe they are bribed by PR practitioners, and that journalists tend to tolerate PR at a distance but dislike PR practitioners at close range. Furthermore Tilley and Hollings (2008) found individual journalists may be conflicted by their wish to maintain independence which is affected by their need to use PR materials. They also found journalist views of the profession and role of public relations were built by their individual interactions and thus personal experiences with PR practitioners. Finally, they also found that the workplace conditions of journalists, such as pay and resourcing, may have a negative impact on their relationship with PR practitioners.

Adding to the work of Tilley and Hollings (2008), Sterne (2010) supported the notion that New Zealand media professionals are conflicted in their views about public relations. However, Sterne (2010) also believes the source of the conflict is more extensive than simply due to individual level experiences with PR practitioners and comes down to the way journalists self-create their own identities, based on the view they hold about their role. Differences in the level of conflict, therefore, come down to “power differentials” (p. 4) caused by such self-perceptions, the reality of the media environment and “perceived misalignment of interests” (p. 4).

Sterne (2010) describes the relationship between the two industries as having four faces. These are sworn enemies, traditional rivals, close collaboration and being in a different place. Sterne also underlines the importance of PR practitioner behaviour, since individuals ascribe meaning based on negotiated social interaction. Therefore, how PR practitioners behave towards journalists will influence their views and portrayal of PR in the media.

Adding to this, Sterne (2010) also found that New Zealand media, like their international peers, believe they are of a higher ethical standing than PR practitioners, as they do not perceive themselves to be driven by commercial interests. Sterne also believes this view is hypocritical because it means that New Zealand media professionals do not believe their work is affected by the commercial imperatives of their employers. Such a view also indicates that New Zealand media professionals do not see themselves as being involved in unethical practices. According to Sterne, the stronger their self-belief regarding status, the stronger the antipathy appears to be towards PR practitioners.



### *Literature Review Summary*

Literature from New Zealand and overseas points to the view that the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists is tense and that journalist perceptions of public relations and its practitioners are largely negative (Kopenhaver, 1985; Kopenhaver et al., 1984; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Shin & Cameron, 2004; Sterne, 2010; Tilley & Hollings, 2008; White & Hobsbawm, 2007). Such tensions have existed since the rise of publicity (Andersen, 2007; DeLorme & Fedler, 2003) and have continued to grow over time. Journalists attribute many of the tensions in the relationship to a lack of understanding that PR practitioners have of their needs. These include an understanding of the publication they work for, news values, timeliness, deadlines, and writing skills (Adams, 2002; Grabowski, 1992; Pomerantz, 1989; Ryan & Martinson, 1988). Obstruction and gatekeeping at the hands of PR practitioners also seem to be a bone of contention for journalists, further adding to the frustrations that exist in the relationship (Adams, 2002; Charron, 1989; Kopenhaver, 1985; Pomerantz, 1989).

While many frustrations are derived from the day-to-day dealings between the two industries, it is also suggested that trainee journalists are primed during education to hold negative attitudes towards PR practitioners. This means before they even begin their working life as a journalist, negative perceptions are embedded in their minds, which may affect their future dealings with PR practitioners (Cline, 1982; Kopenhaver, 1985; Wright, 2005). Negativity on the part of journalists towards PR practitioners also creeps in with regard to professional status. Journalists have been found to have higher status perceptions of their role and believe PR practitioners toe an organisational line and act in a less ethical manner than journalists (Aronoff, 1975; Jeffers, 1977). This can cause some journalists to distrust PR practitioners, believing they lack honesty and

integrity as they push self-serving interests (Belz et al., 1989; Sallot et al., 1998; White & Hobsbawm, 2007). Journalists, however, have also been found to be unethical at times, particularly when researching and writing stories (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; White & Hobsbawm, 2007).

An element of professional jealousy also appears to exist on the part of journalists towards PR practitioners. Several studies have pointed to the view that journalists are envious of the pay levels and working conditions that PR practitioners receive (Jempson, 2005; Nayman et al., 1977; Sallot & Johnson, 2006b). During the course of their career, many journalists move into PR (Burton, 2007; Fedler et al., 1988; Nayman et al., 1977), implying that an element of hypocrisy is present in the relationship, and suggests that many similarities between the two roles must exist for so many journalists to be able to take up roles within PR.

Despite their broadly negative views, some journalists do concede that PR practitioners and their materials can be a useful resource, particularly when it comes to the organisational pressures and constraints that they work under in the newsroom (Comrie, 2002). There is, however, a reluctance to admit to a dependence on PR materials, as it appears that there is a certain level of shame and journalistic embarrassment associated with using them (Comrie, 2002; Hobsbawm, 2006; White & Hobsbawm, 2007).

When journalists do admit to having good working relationships with PR practitioners it is usually with those they have built relationships with over time. Literature shows that journalists are more open towards PR practitioners whom they know and tend to view individual practitioners more highly than the field of public relations as a whole (Anderson & Lowrey, 2007; Jeffers, 1977; Ryan & Martinson,

1988; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). Tilley and Hollings (2008), however, found the reverse to be true; with journalists in New Zealand favouring PR from a distance and disliking it up-close. Similarly, journalists' attitudes may vary towards PR practitioners according to the sector in which they work, with PR practitioners working in health, science and non-profit organisations being viewed more favourably by journalists (Ankney & Curtin, 2002; Cho & Cameron, 2007; Corbett & Mori, 1999; Curtin & Rhodenbaugh, 2001).

In drawing this literature review to a close it is clear that journalists hold a multitude of complex and conflicting attitudes towards PR practitioners. The following research study, therefore, aims to explore these attitudinal dynamics in more detail to determine what attitudes and perceptions newspaper journalists have towards PR practitioners in New Zealand and why.

## Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed account of the research methodologies used to gather and analyse the data for this study. This study used two different methods to collect primary data from working newspaper journalists in New Zealand – a predominantly quantitative survey, which was augmented by a series of semi-structured interviews. Each method is described in turn. The chapter concludes with a description of how thematic content analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative findings of this study.

### *Data Collection Method One: Online Survey*

This study seeks to determine the attitudes and perceptions that newspaper journalists hold towards PR practitioners in New Zealand and why. To encourage a large number of journalists to communicate what attitudes and perceptions they hold towards PR practitioners, it was determined an online, Likert-scale survey would be the most appropriate data collection method. This was particularly important as the researcher wanted to generalise the findings of the data to a wider population of newspaper journalists.

### *Survey design.*

The first method of data collection used for this study was a quantitative survey based on a six-point Likert-scale, which posed an optional qualitative question. A review of the literature demonstrated that Likert-scale surveys are particularly useful for assessing attitudes and beliefs in relation to a given subject (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2000). The survey asked working journalists in New Zealand to evaluate

their attitudes towards a number of statements that required them to answer in one of the following six ways:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Not applicable

To measure newspaper journalists' attitudes towards PR practitioners in New Zealand, a series of 25 statements, first developed by Aronoff (1975), and subsequently used by Kopenhaver et al. (1984) were employed. By replicating these questions it provides a benchmark for comparative analysis and adds a longitudinal element to the research. In addition, a further 32 survey statements were developed after extensive reading on the topic. See Appendix A for a full list of survey statements.

### *Participants.*

A mailing list of 401 potential survey respondents, who were all working newspaper journalists in New Zealand was generated using the Media People database. Media People is New Zealand's primary online database of media contacts and is updated on a quarterly basis to ensure journalist information is as accurate as possible. The Media People database is created by contacting media outlets to update their listings. It must, however, be noted that while Media People provides a comprehensive database of New Zealand journalists, it is unlikely to include a complete listing of every newspaper journalist in the country. Some media

organisations, for example, provide key contact information such as the editor and news desk contact details only.

When developing the survey mailing list the researcher systematically searched through each daily, community and weekend newspaper listed on Media People. Journalists were selected according to a defined set of criteria. Only those recorded as reporters, senior reporters, chief reporters, writers, deputy editors and editors, were included. Columnists, sub editors, cartoonists, photojournalists and photographers were excluded. This was because of the lack of interaction they have with PR practitioners. As a general rule, columnists, sub editors, cartoonists, photojournalists and photographers are not usually regarded as being the interface between the PR practitioner and the story in the newspaper. For the purposes of this study it was important to ensure information-rich participants. That is, those individuals who regularly interact with PR practitioners.

The decision to include different categories of newspaper: daily, community and weekend newspapers, was also made to ensure a representative sample of all newspaper publications was included. Similarly, the decision to limit the survey to those who had more than one year of newsroom experience was made to ensure participants were knowledgeable on the topic. To this end a qualifying question was added to the survey asking whether participants had worked in a newsroom for more than one year.

#### *Survey implementation.*

A decision to host and execute the survey through a commercial online survey portal ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)) was made for several reasons. Firstly, it ensured participant confidentiality. Responses through the online survey portal did not require

respondents to submit personal information such as name or contact details. Secondly, the online survey portal made it quick and easy for journalists to respond to the survey and submit their responses. Thirdly, the online survey portal allowed for the ongoing storage of data, which was password protected and could be accessed by the researcher at any time. Lastly, it provided software tools to aid analysis and generate graphs. Once all survey questions and statements were finalised, they were uploaded to the online survey portal, and the online portal created a website link that took respondents directly to the survey. This meant that only those with an emailed invitation to participate in the survey could take part.

Before issuing the survey invitation to participants, the survey was tested by a senior university lecturer to determine whether it worked as it should, as well as to estimate length of completion. After testing the survey, a “not applicable” rating was added to the Likert-scale. This allowed anyone who felt the question was not applicable to them to proceed to the next survey statement without having to select one of the other five responses, which could have potentially skewed results. Furthermore, an optional comment box was added to the end of the survey. It was decided that respondents who had taken the time to complete the survey may wish to make further comment about the topic. This provided an opportunity to capture a rich source of qualitative data.

Four hundred and one (401) newspaper journalists were emailed at the beginning of October 2009. The email explained the purpose of the research and survey, its uses, how long the survey should take to complete, an assurance of confidentiality, as well as information about how the results would be used. Provided in the email was a webpage link that would take respondents directly to the survey. A participant information sheet, providing further details about the research project, including

supervisor and ethics committee contact details, was attached to the email as a Microsoft Word document.

Two weeks after the initial invitation was distributed (mid-October 2009), a reminder email was sent to participants on the database as a way to encourage uptake. This email included a reminder about the survey and the closing date, as well as the original invitation and participant information sheet. A final reminder was emailed two weeks later (end of October 2009), highlighting the survey closing date and again including information previously sent to potential participants. The reminder strategy proved successful with increased numbers of participants taking part in the survey each time a reminder was issued. In total, the survey was open for one month and 103 newspaper journalists responded.

#### *Survey data analysis.*

Once the survey closed, a data collection report was generated via the online survey portal. This presented each survey statement as a table, showing the absolute and percentage responses to each of the Likert-scale ratings. The table also highlighted the number of respondents each statement received and the number of respondents who skipped the question. The data reporting and presentation capabilities of the online survey portal made it relatively simple to extract the quantitative findings from the survey. This study used the mode average, that is, the most frequently occurring response when analysing the data because of the desire to reflect the true way in which newspaper journalists had responded. Other ways of analysing Likert-scale data for example by using the middle value (median average) or the mean average can distort the data (Saunders et al., 2000). Responses to each



statement were examined in turn and a narrative account of the responses to each statement was produced.

One question in the survey asked respondents to state which, if any, sectors PR practitioners are more necessary than others. In total, 46 respondents answered the question by typing their answers into an open comment box. For this question it was decided to let respondents answer in their own way, rather than to provide a choice of sector options. This is because the researcher wanted to remove any potential for influence. Respondents were, therefore, able to list as many sectors as they felt were applicable. The downside to this was that there was no standardised description to ensure clean data reporting.

Each response was systematically listed in an excel spreadsheet by the researcher as a way to sort the data. This enabled the researcher to sort the responses so they could be counted for frequency of occurrence. Responses were then grouped into categories. For example, any response which pertained to health was listed under the industry category heading “health”. This included entries such as health, health agency, hospital, DHB, or medicine. Where the term emergency services was given as a response, one count went against each of the category headings; health, police, fire and civil defence. Once each response had been listed under its appropriate sector heading, the frequency of responses was totalled for each. Sector headings were then sorted into frequency order, starting with the most frequently reported sector through to the least frequently reported sector.

At the end of the survey, respondents had the option to leave further comments through a comment box. No guidance was provided regarding use of the comment box and there was no word limit. Thirty-three respondents left comments about the survey

topic. Comments ranged in length from 13 words to 407 words. The mean average for comment length was 131 words. Comments were analysed using a qualitative thematic content analysis approach. A detailed description of the thematic analysis approach used to analyse the survey comments can be found on page 54. Although the analysis of the survey comments and the semi-structured interviews were carried out separately, both were analysed using a hybrid (inductive and deductive) thematic approach to the data. The processes used to reduce the data and identify themes were performed in exactly the same way. Therefore, to avoid duplicating a large body of text, only a detailed description of the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews has been provided. This is because the analysis of survey comments was on a far smaller scale.

#### *Data Collection Method Two: Semi-Structured Interviews*

The second method used to gather data for this study was a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews with working newspaper journalists. To answer the research question of the study more fully, that is, what attitudes and perceptions do newspaper journalists have towards public relations (PR) practitioners in New Zealand and why, conducting interviews as a second method of data collection was a logical step to take. According to Gray (2004) if the research “is largely exploratory, involving, say, the examination of feelings or attitudes, then interviews may be the best approach” (p. 214). This method was, therefore, chosen as a way to explore the results of the survey in more detail, as well as to assist in determining the “why” component of the research question.

##### *Semi-structured interview design.*

After analysing the survey data it was determined that semi-structured interviews with elite subjects would allow the researcher to explore why journalists hold certain

attitudes towards PR practitioners in more detail. The researcher also wanted the ability to guide the line of questioning, but still have the flexibility to adapt the questioning during the interview. This was both in terms of the order of questions, as well as the opportunity to omit or add new questions. This allowed the researcher to investigate responses of particular interest in more detail (Gray, 2004; Saunders et al., 2000). Using knowledge gained from the literature review and the survey data, a series of 35 predominantly open-ended questions were developed to explore the attitudes that interview participants held towards PR practitioners as well as the reasons why newspaper journalists may hold such views (see Appendix B for a full list of interview questions).

#### *Interview participants.*

Using the mailing list developed for the survey, a total of 47 potential interview participants were identified from a selection of daily, community and weekend newspapers. This was to ensure that the researcher could interview between six and ten participants. The decision about how many interviews to undertake was made based on the need to gather data from an appropriate number of participants, along with the size and time constraints of the study. Purposive sampling identified elite subjects most likely to yield information that would answer the research questions. For this reason participants were selected according to the position they held in the newsroom. Only those who were working as a senior reporter, chief reporter, news editor, deputy editor or editor were selected. Such an approach was taken to increase the likelihood that participants had several years' experience working as a newspaper journalist and, therefore, would be more likely to have had more exposure to PR practitioners than a relatively new journalist.

Once potential interview participants were identified, an email invitation was issued to each individual seeking their participation. Because participants had already been contacted by the researcher in relation to the survey, it was decided that only one invitation per person would be issued, with no reminders. Interview invitations were issued in stages during January, February, March and April 2010. Such an approach was primarily down to the researcher's capacity in relation to time available in any one month to conduct interviews. The main body of the email invitation introduced the researcher and the research project, along with an invitation to participate in the interviews and what they could expect if they chose to do so. A participant information sheet was attached to the email as a Microsoft Word document, providing individuals with further details about the research and the interview process.

Eight working journalists agreed to be interviewed. Some had worked in newspaper journalism for four years, while others had up to 20 years' experience. Four participants were male and four were female, all ranging in levels of seniority from chief reporter through to editor. Participants represented daily, community and weekend publications, with some having had experience of working in several publication types during their career.

#### *Interview implementation.*

Interviews were scheduled for February, April and May 2010. All interviews were one-on-one, with a combination of face-to-face and telephone interviews being conducted. From a consistency perspective it would have been beneficial to conduct all interviews as face-to-face interviews; however, as the researcher wanted to interview participants from a broad geographic area this was not practical. By employing telephone interviews it increased the geographic area of the research. This was important as newspaper journalists working in a remote rural location in the South

Island may have held different attitudes towards PR practitioners than those working in central Auckland.

At the start of the interview, participants were reminded about the reason for the interview, the overall purpose of the research and the researcher's obligation with regards to ensuring participant confidentiality. At the end of the interview, participants were asked whether they would like to receive a copy of the research once complete. Interviews lasted an average of one hour, as indicated to participants in the information sheet. During the interviews the researcher was careful to remain neutral at all times and allowed participants to speak freely. The researcher did not use her power as researcher to exert pressure or to promote a particular agenda or bias to the participant. Questions were written and spoken in a neutral tone.

All interviews were recorded with the use of a Marantz digital audio recorder. This allowed the researcher to save the recordings as digital MP3 files, which were later downloaded onto the researcher's computer, with password protected access. Recorded interview files were saved in individual folders identified only as interview one through to interview eight. No identifying data was attributed to any file or folder names. Once downloaded, MP3 files were deleted from the Marantz digital recorder.

The researcher was the only person to transcribe interviews. An extended period of time was allowed to transcribe interviews, since the researcher was also in full-time employment. Each recording took up to eight hours to transcribe. The transcription process began in April 2010 and was complete by the beginning of June 2010. All identifying data, including participant name and the newspaper for which they worked was removed from the transcript. In many cases identifying data was not recorded as participants were not asked to provide their name or publication during the interview.

Transcribed Microsoft Word document files were saved with the file name “interview one transcript” through to “interview eight transcript”.

*Reasons for choosing thematic content analysis.*

A thematic content analysis approach to analysing the interviews and survey comments was chosen for several reasons. Firstly rather than dealing with numerical data, both dealt with “meanings expressed through words” and contained “non-standardised data requiring classification into categories” (Saunders et al., 2000, p. 381). Secondly, thematic analysis was chosen for its ability to assist with the identification and analysis of concepts, patterns and themes embedded within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In relation to the interviews and survey comments, thematic analysis provided a useful approach to identify and interpret reoccurring thoughts, experiences, feelings and meanings as a way to uncover and understand journalists’ attitudes towards PR practitioners.

The thematic content analysis method used to analyse the interviews and survey comments was a hybrid of deductive and inductive positioning. Broadly speaking, a deductive position is usually centred on the use of existing theory and framing schema to analyse and search for meaning in the data. In contrast an inductive position focuses on identifying themes and patterns grounded in the data. In other words, findings are data driven in that they have had no pre-existing conditions or categorising schemes applied to them. The data has been allowed to speak in its own right, as the researcher searches for patterns, and ultimately meaning, that evolve directly from the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002; Saunders et al., 2000).

While the analysis of the interviews and survey comment data fits a deductive position in that it is driven by an informed interest in the subject matter, a literature review has been undertaken, and the preceding survey questions were influenced and

formed by prior research (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the actual interview data (and survey comments data) were analysed inductively. Such a position was taken because the researcher did not wish to apply pre-existing coding schema to the data as a way to reduce and organise it. Furthermore, the purpose of the research was not to test a hypothesis. Both of which are regarded as deductive.

According to Patton (2002), “qualitative analysis is typically inductive in the early stages, especially when developing a codebook . . . or figuring out possible categories, patterns and themes” (p. 453). An inductive approach was, therefore, chosen for this component of the data analysis, to discover what the data stated in its own right, rather than categorising and analysing it according to existing knowledge. To do so could have potentially limited the discovery of new findings. Corroborating this, Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that “it makes no sense to start with received theories or variables (categories) because these are likely to inhibit or impede the development of new theoretical formulations” (p. 50).

While thematic analysis is widely used, it receives little acknowledgement or distinction from other qualitative methods, and guidance on how to conduct it is scant (Boyatzis, 1998). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), “thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” (p. 78). Thematic analysis was, therefore, also chosen due to its flexible nature, in that the guidelines used to conduct it can be adapted to suit the research question and data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### *Thematic analysis coding process.*

To begin, each interview transcript (or survey comment) was read several times to increase familiarity with the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). During each reading,

thoughts and ideas about the patterns and themes emerging from the data were noted. These notes were reviewed prior to coding the data. According to Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005), the key part of thematic analysis is the coding process where the data is systematically sorted and organised by coding chunks of data (data extracts). In thematic analysis “codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). All data that contains similar information are coded in the same way. Codes can be applied to differing sizes of data right from a single word, through to sentences and whole paragraphs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once coding is complete, all data extracts that have been marked with the same code are collated into piles. With this in mind each interview transcript was carefully worked through and provisional codes were assigned to the data.

Codes for each data extract were applied directly to the left hand margin of the transcript for ease of reference. On the right hand margin the transcript number and page number were noted (for example TS1 P.10) to capture where in the transcript the data extract originated from (in the case of the survey comments the comment number was written next to each extract). As codes were generated they were also written into a codebook, with a short description to define the meaning of each code. Codes typically consisted of acronyms of the words used to define the code. For example, the code BAP was used to define “bitterness about pay” each time a respondent expressed views that suggested they, or other journalists, are bitter about the pay PR practitioners receive. Similarly the code WWPR highlighted the view that the participant would work in PR. A new code was applied each time a new point was made by the participant. In some cases a single data extract was assigned more than one code as the data contained within the extract contained multiple potential meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).



Once all transcripts (and survey comments) were provisionally coded, all codes were reviewed to ensure relevance and consistency. In some cases it was evident that some codes could be collapsed into others, particularly where very similar extracts of data had been coded differently. In such cases all relevant data extracts were reviewed and re-assigned a new code where appropriate. Reviewing provisional codes also meant that further coding took place as new patterns of action, feeling and meaning not considered during the initial coding stage emerged. It must be pointed out here that the first stage of coding mainly focused on coding descriptive aspects of the data. The second and subsequent reviews focused more on coding data interpretively as familiarisation with the data increased and further patterns became evident (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once the researcher felt that no new codes were emerging from the data, and that transcripts had been reviewed to ensure coding consistency, the codebook was updated to reflect final amended codes and their definitions.

With the coding process complete, each extract of data was manually cut out from the printed transcript and placed into coded piles. In cases where a single data extract had been assigned more than one code, the data extract was printed again, cut out and placed into its relevant second pile (and so on). To ensure data extracts remained in context, a decision was made to keep some surrounding data where necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2001).

#### *Data themes.*

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) the next phase of thematic analysis is to search for overarching themes running through the coded data. These themes then act as “buckets” into which data extracts that help to generate the theme can be placed (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). To begin this process each coded pile of data extracts were examined and analysed to determine how they combined with other codes. Being

familiar with the data also helped this process as there was a comprehensive understanding of what the data contained, along with knowledge of key reoccurring patterns. In some cases it was immediately apparent that some codes naturally combined to form an overarching theme. For example, there were several codes that together formed to create an overall theme called “career in PR”, because the differently coded data extracts all contained newspaper journalists’ perceptions about different aspects of a potential career in PR. In other cases, coded extracts were constantly compared and contrasted with other coded extracts to see how the descriptions and meanings contained within them combined together.

As themes were developed, advice from Dey (1993) that themes must combine two key components – an internal component meaningful to the data extracts, and an external component that is meaningful to other themes – was kept in mind. Advice from Braun and Clarke (2006) to ensure that themes are clearly distinctive from each other was also taken on board. To assist this process the researcher developed a series of thematic mind maps to clarify thoughts on the relationship between the various codes and emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Once provisional themes were established, each was defined to provide clarification on what the overall composition of the theme was, as well as to provide guidance regarding allocation of data extracts (Saunders et al., 2000). Survey comments were read once again to ensure that the identified themes truly reflected the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As coded extracts were collated under the proposed themes, each was further reviewed to ensure their placement within the theme was logically sound (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The codebook was then updated with the themed coding structure. In total, eight themes for the semi-structured interview data were identified out of the 122 codes that were generated (See Appendix E). The

themes for the semi-structured interviews can be seen in Table 1. Codes and themes for the survey comments can also be found in the appendices.

Table 1

*Key Themes That Emerged During the Thematic Content Analysis of the Semi-Structured Interviews*

<b>Interview themes</b>	<b>Theme definition</b>
Relationship perceptions	Journalists' perceptions of their relationship with PR practitioners at an abstract level.
Information subsidy	The dynamics of public relations materials being used by journalists as information subsidies.
Tactical interaction	Journalists' experiences and perceptions related to the daily tactical engagement between journalists and PR practitioners.
Ethics	Journalists' perceptions of ethics, honesty and integrity in public relations and journalism.
Trust	Journalists' perceptions regarding the levels of trust they have for PR practitioners.
Career in PR	Journalists' perceptions of a career in public relations.
Differentiation by sector	Journalists' perceptions of PR practitioners according to the sector and organisation in which the PR practitioner works.
Improving the relationship	Journalists' perceptions about how the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists can be improved.

In drafting the findings section of the research, each theme and its data extracts were examined and written up to form a descriptive narrative regarding the attitudes and perceptions held by newspaper journalists towards PR practitioners in New Zealand. The following questions were used to assist the researcher in writing up the findings:

- What does this theme and its data say about the relationship between journalists and PR practitioners?
- What are the key attitudes that the respondents either consciously or unconsciously exhibit towards PR practitioners?
- What are the conditions that lead respondents to feel this way?

As interview findings were documented, any ideas regarding potential discussion points were noted for review and follow up at the next stage of the study.

### *Methodology Summary*

This study used an online survey and a series of eight semi-structured interviews with elite subjects as a way to gather a rich collection of quantitative and qualitative data. The combination of using two data collection methods served to increase the validity of the data as well as to help the researcher answer the research question more fully. A hybrid inductive/deductive approach to the thematic analysis of the qualitative data allowed themes to emerge from the data in their own right, rather than limiting the potential of the data by analysing it according to an existing framework of themes.

## **Data**

This chapter presents the data collected by this study. Quantitative data from the online survey are presented first, followed by qualitative data from the online survey comments. Lastly, data from the qualitative semi-structured interviews are presented.

### *Online Survey: Quantitative Data*

In total, 103 responses to the quantitative online survey were received. The data from 102 respondents were used in this study as one respondent had less than one year's experience working in a newsroom, which was a qualifying cut-off point for this study. 87 respondents fully completed the survey. This resulted in an 85.3 per cent survey completion rate. The first 36 statements received between 91 and 102 responses. Of the remaining 20 statements, 12 received 89 responses, before dropping to 87 responses for the final eight statements. All responses were used, regardless of the point at which a respondent stopped answering questions. Survey findings are, therefore, attributed in percentage values.

### *Demographic data.*

More females than males responded, with 61 females (59.8%) and 41 males (40.2%) taking part. When it came to the age of respondents there was a broad spread. Responses were received from each age category, with the most being in the 51 to 55-year-old age group, which included 18 responses (17.6%). In total 55 respondents (53.9%) worked for a daily newspaper, while 37 (36.3%) worked for a community newspaper and 10 (9.8%) worked for a weekend newspaper. The majority of respondents were reporters, with 75 (73.5%) working in this capacity. Twenty-five respondents (24.5%) stated they were editors and two (2%) were news editors.

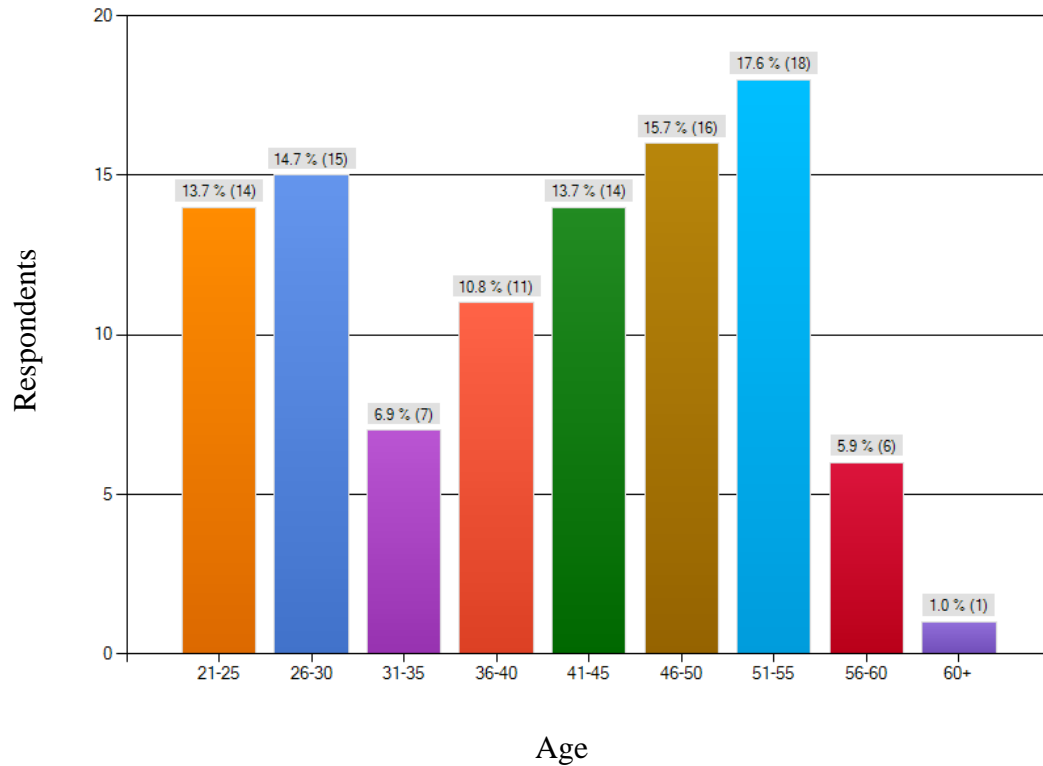


Figure 1. Age breakdown of online survey respondents.

### *Relationship perceptions.*

When it came to perceptions about the relationship between public relations (PR) practitioners and newspaper journalists, more respondents (45.9%) than not stated newspaper journalists and PR practitioners carry on a running battle and that PR practitioners are wholly responsible for the antagonism that exists between the two sides (48.3% thought this). PR practitioners were also viewed by many respondents (42.5%) as not taking the time to build relationships with reporters, although a similar number (37.9%) felt neutral about whether this was true or not. What was clear, however, was that a substantial number of journalists who responded to the survey (76.9%) believed PR practitioners who waste journalists' time with trivialities of no news value and who are dishonest or overly persistent taint the whole PR profession. With this in mind there

was the overwhelming view that journalists regard PR practitioners whom they know and have regular contact with more highly than the field of public relations as a whole (82% thought this). PR practitioners with a journalism background were also viewed more favourably overall by respondents (67.8%).

When faced with statements about whether journalism educators and journalism textbooks perpetuate negative stereotypes about public relations, the majority of respondents answered in a neutral manner. Just over 46 per cent of respondents (the most frequent response) were neutral about whether or not journalism textbooks perpetuate negative stereotypes. Neutral (44.9%) was also the most frequent answer to whether journalism educators are intent on perpetuating negative stereotypes about PR to their students. Again, there was also a relatively neutral response overall to the statement “journalists are conditioned during formal education to have negative attitudes towards PR practitioners”. While the majority (35.6%) opted for a neutral response to this statement, they were closely followed by those who did not believe it to be true (31%), and then by those who agreed (27.6%).

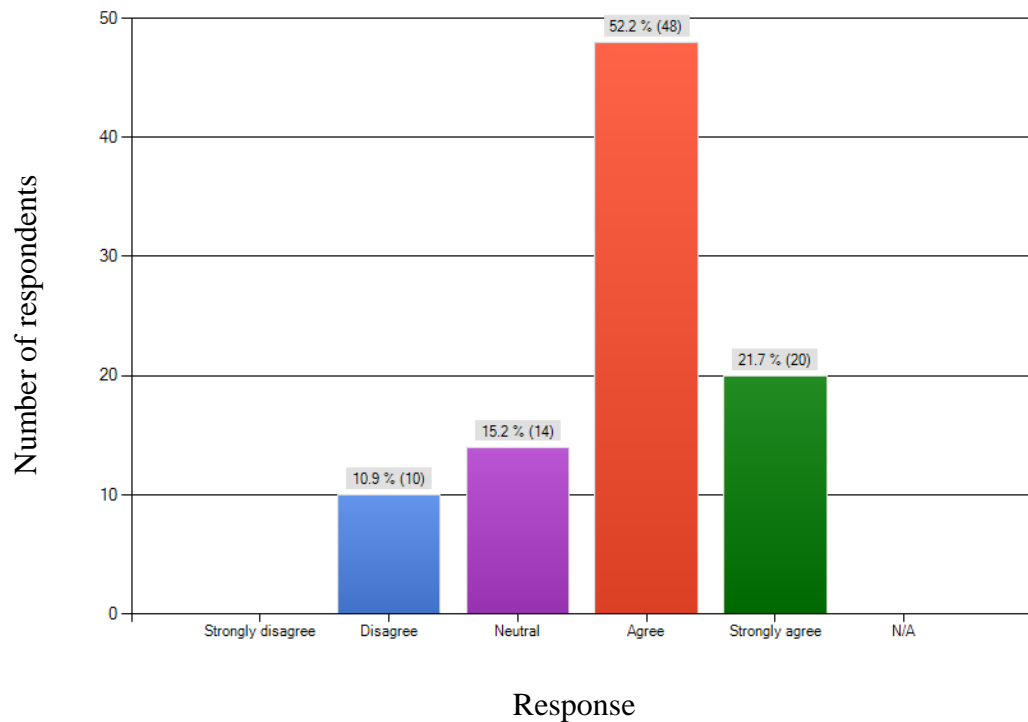
Although many respondents (39.1%) did not believe PR practitioners and journalists share striking similarities or often work to achieve similar goals, such as generating awareness about issues of public importance, the spread of responses to this statement was well balanced overall. Here, a further 33.3 per cent of respondents felt the statement was true, while 27.6 per cent were neutral, indicating no particularly strong feelings overall. Similarly, there was a lack of strong opinions when respondents considered whether PR practitioners and journalists lack awareness and understanding of each other’s role and profession. In this case, the majority of respondents (39.4%) felt this was not true, while 33.7 per cent agreed and 27 per cent were neutral.

*Tactical interaction.*

While slightly more survey respondents (41.2%) believed PR practitioners and newspaper journalists are partners in the dissemination of information, compared with those who did not (36.3%), there was not an overwhelming response one way or the other. Similarly, when it came to whether PR is a competitor with the advertising department of a newspaper rather than a collaborator with news staff, there did not appear to be any particularly strong views. Although the majority of respondents (40.2%) disagreed, not that many fewer agreed (31.3%), while many chose to remain neutral (24.5%).

More intense positions were expressed when it came to statements that focused on the news value of PR material. Overall, respondents (62.7%) felt PR practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial, uneventful happening. An even higher number of respondents (75.5%) believed PR practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities that do not legitimately deserve promotion in news columns. Adding to this, there was overwhelming agreement from respondents (82.4%) that PR material is usually publicity disguised as news. Perhaps not surprisingly then, only a small percentage (12%) of the journalists who responded, agreed PR practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value and public interest, while a substantial number (73.9%), as demonstrated in Figure 2, also felt PR practitioners often do not know the media they contact, or what the journalist writes about.





*Figure 2.* Responses to the survey statement: PR practitioners often do not know the media they contact, or what the journalist writes about.

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So-called gatekeeping was clearly a public relations tactic disliked by many, with 76.4 per cent of respondents agreeing PR practitioners obstruct them from getting access to the people they need to talk to. In comparison, only nine respondents (8.9%) disagreed that PR practitioners act in this way. More respondents (44.9%), however, were positive towards the view that PR practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest and making the best use of space, than those who were negative (31.6%). The writing skills of PR practitioners were also not particularly problematic for respondents as they were relatively neutral regarding this aspect of PR practitioners' skill levels.

### *PR information subsidies.*

A substantial number of respondents (75%) believe the main role of a PR practitioner is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.

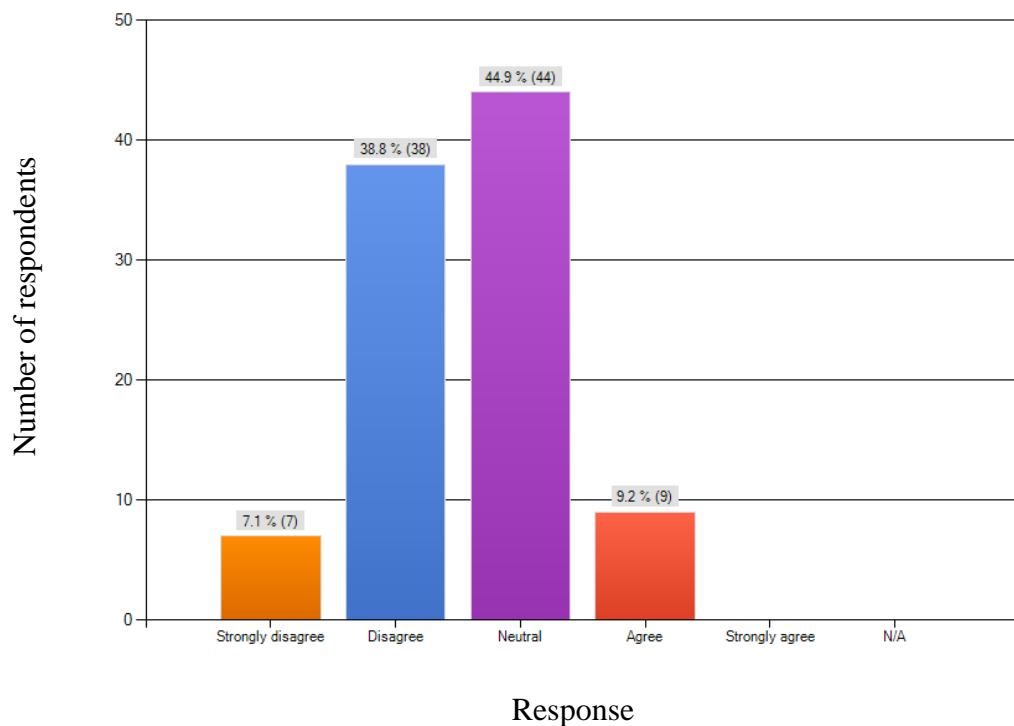
According to 69.5 per cent of respondents, this function of PR can influence the media agenda, but does not increase the quality of reporting (65.7% respondents).

When it came to the helpfulness of PR practitioners, there was a slight conflict in respondent views. While more than half the respondents (54.4%) agreed that journalists do depend on newsworthy PR material to help them fulfill their job; almost the same number (51.1%) felt PR practitioners are not necessary to the production of the daily newspaper. Furthermore, when asked whether PR practitioners' help them to obtain accurate, complete and timely news, the overarching view from most was neutral (42.9%), followed fairly closely by those who disagreed (36.7%). With these points in mind, more respondents (49%) refuted the claim that the PR practitioner does work for the newspaper that would otherwise go undone, than those who did not. They also opposed the view that PR practitioners actually work as extended newspaper staff, with 75.5 per cent of respondents disputing this claim. Overall, journalists did not appear comfortable with the suggestion that they rely on PR material. A large number (61.2%) of respondents stated that any reliance on PR material was a shame and due to inadequate staff and resources within the newsroom, or down to the economic climate of news production (53.3%).

### *Trust and ethics.*

When judging whether PR practitioners are people of good sense, good will and good moral character, 71.4 per cent of respondents took a neutral stance. This response was the same for 52 per cent of respondents who also felt neutral towards the statement

“you can’t trust PR practitioners”. Despite these neutral views, when asked if PR practitioners are typically frank and honest, the scales slightly tipped in favour of respondents who did not believe this to be true (disagree and strongly disagree), compared with those who were neutral on the matter. This is highlighted in Figure 3.



*Figure 3.* Responses to the survey statement: PR practitioners are typically frank and honest.

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When it came to ethical behaviour among journalists, there were some interesting acknowledgements, with the majority (73%) of newspaper journalists who took part in the survey stating that some journalists use unethical means and go to extraordinary lengths to get their story. Furthermore, over 60 per cent (61.5%) of respondents also stated that some journalists embellish an otherwise less than exciting story as a way to attract readers and increase sales and profit margins. Respondents (59.2%) were also predominantly of the view that PR practitioners are errand boys for whomever they

work, but a large number (71.2%) acknowledged that journalists and PR practitioners are both beholden to their employers. In particular, some felt (42.5%) that when writing news stories, some journalists select from information in the interests of their employers.

*A career in PR for newspaper journalists.*

When asked whether they would move into a career in PR at some point in the future, more respondents (47.3%) stated they would not move, than those who would (19.8%). A further 33 per cent of respondents appeared unsure, choosing a neutral answer. Despite this, an overwhelming number of respondents (77%) still felt that PR practitioners are paid more than journalists and have a better working environment. Only one respondent disagreed. Those who responded to the survey did not appear to view journalists who move into PR as having sold out, with 40.7 per cent opting for a neutral response to the question. Just over half of the respondents did not view PR as equal in status to journalism (50.9%).

*Attitudes according to sector.*

A large percentage of respondents (75.8%) believed that newspaper journalists are more open and less negative towards PR practitioners who work in specialist, technical fields of knowledge rather than consumer PR. Adding to this line of thought, respondents (69.6%) also believed PR practitioners are more necessary in some sectors than others, in which case some respondents entered the sectors for which they felt this to be true. A full list of the sectors in which respondents felt PR practitioners are more necessary than others can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

*Sectors in Which PR Practitioners are Regarded as More Necessary by Survey Respondents*

<b>Industry</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Health (District Health Boards, medicine, hospitals)	21
Science	15
Government (including mention of the word politics or the word Government organisations)	15
Police	10
Technical or specialist fields	7
Agriculture	5
Education	5
Fire	5
Technology	5
Charities	4
Councils	4
Civil defence	3
Research	3
Business	2
Anything other than consumer PR	2
NIWA	2
Public sector	2
Weather	2
Armed Forces	1
Arts	1
Aviation	1
Celebrities	1
Culture	1
Dairy	1
Entertainment	1
Environment	1
Finance	1
Large official organisations	1
Mathematics	1
Non Government Organisations	1
Ports	1
Rural	1
Sport	1

In line with the health sector being the most frequently listed sector where PR practitioners are seen as more necessary, respondents (63.2%) believed that journalists rely more on PR practitioners working in the fields of health and science due to the complexity of the topic. Despite this, respondents were neutral about whether journalists are more supportive and accepting of news stories suggested to them by health sector PR practitioners (33.7% neutral, 31.5% disagreed and 30.3% were in agreement). Over half the respondents (55%) also felt PR practitioners who work for non-profit organisations are more appreciative of the publicity they get than those working in other sectors, but were neutral (47.3%) about whether or not they are more ethical than those in other sectors.

*Improving the relationship.*

When it came to improving the relationship, the most frequent response to the statement “good relationships with PR practitioners are important, but PR practitioners are responsible for improving the relationship” was neutral (47.3%). This was not the case, however, when respondents answered whether or not PR practitioners may get on better with journalists if PR education included an introduction to news reporting. Nearly three quarters (74.1%) of respondents felt this would improve the relationship, while only 8.9 per cent disagreed. Respondents also felt the same way when it was suggested that journalism courses should incorporate an introduction to public relations, with 60.6 per cent believing it would help to improve their relationship with PR practitioners for the better.

*Online survey: quantitative data summary.*

Data from the online survey of 102 newspaper journalists in New Zealand shows that there are some areas, particularly within the tactical interaction section, where attitudes

are, at times, particularly negative towards PR practitioners. This was particularly the case in relation to PR practitioners placing too much importance on trivial uneventful happenings and promoting products or services that do not legitimately deserve promotion. It was also interesting that newspaper journalists felt PR practitioners often do not know or understand the media they contact. There were, however, examples of positive attitudes towards PR practitioners, mainly in relation to newspaper journalists stating that they do regard those PR practitioners who they know and have regular contact with, more highly than the field of PR as a whole.

Also evidenced through the survey was the view that newspaper journalists hold different attitudes towards PR practitioners based on the sector or organisation type for which they work. There were also many neutral responses in the survey. This was where newspaper journalists had either chosen “neutral” as the most frequent response or where the spectrum of responses were relatively well balanced. This was particularly the case when it came to statements that required newspaper journalists to make a judgment about the integrity and trustworthiness of PR practitioners. Overall, data from the quantitative component of the online survey, therefore, shows that newspaper journalists hold a range of mixed and sometimes conflicting attitudes towards PR practitioners.

#### *Online Survey: Qualitative Data*

This section of the chapter presents the qualitative data collected through the comment box at the end of the online survey. In total, 33 respondents provided qualitative comments about the survey topic. These were analysed using a hybrid thematic content analysis approach as detailed in the methodology chapter.

*Relationship perceptions.*

Survey respondents who left further comments at the end of the online survey expressed relatively pragmatic perceptions about the relationship between PR practitioners and newspaper journalists. In particular, respondents advised that the relationship is one of co-existence, where both sides have differing goals and agendas. “PR practitionerws [sic] and journalists have roles to fulfil that are at times complementary and at times conflicting. We are both parasites of a type, but have been known to mutually co-exist” (respondent two). However, while it was acknowledged that both professions respect each side has a job to do and that both have faults, the view that journalists would be better off without PR practitioners was made explicit: “PR and journalism need to co-exist in this age, though the more journalists do without them, the happier they will feel” (respondent six).

Despite the tendency by most respondents to see the relationship as one of co-existence, it was also viewed as being tense, with little confidence that would ever change. “It is my unfortunate experience that the relationship between journalists and PR people is getting more strained and I don't see that improving” (respondent seven), and “I can't see journalists and PR people having a rosy relationship” (respondent two). Having good relationships with PR practitioners was important for respondents: “I think if people get to know each other . . . and there is a working relationship – its [sic] better than flogging info my way just to get the info out there” (respondent 25), and “like many things it is about relationships. Once that is soured, poor decisions are made on both sides” (respondent 33). Even though relationships were regarded as important, one respondent felt PR practitioners “often don't bother to build relationships” (respondent nine). It was also suggested that relationships between PR practitioners and journalists can be affected by the senior management within an organisation. “A lot depends on the



company the PR person works for – their closed or open policy dictates the relationship the PR person has with the media” (respondent 22). Furthermore, respondents also stated that the level of truth and honesty demonstrated by PR practitioners has an impact on the condition of the relationship.

*Tactical interaction.*

When it comes to the day-to-day tactical-level interactions between PR practitioners and journalists, respondents made very few positive comments about PR practitioners. Most experiences described at the tactical-level were focused on what would be termed reactive media relations, that is, PR practitioners responding to journalist enquiries. One bone of contention immediately apparent was the strong dislike respondents have for PR practitioners who are obstructive. This was viewed as frustrating and unhelpful to journalists. Respondents believe that obstruction and stalling are tactics used by PR practitioners to buy their organisation or client more time to respond to journalist enquiries, particularly when faced with difficult questions. “The problem with PR is the obstruction and blocking and stalling, when a difficult or contentious issue is being asked about. The PR person's job is to stall and make the journo go away” (respondent 24).

Gatekeeping was viewed as the ultimate form of obstruction and was the most common tactic mentioned in the comments. Views about gatekeeping were expressed vehemently, indicating a level of infuriation with this aspect of public relations. In this regard PR practitioners were described as protectors of their organisation. Respondents see the protect-and-defend role of a PR practitioner as a barrier to receiving accurate or complete information, especially when their enquiry is of a negative nature. “I do see

their role as wholly to protect and promote their organisations, not to give the best, most accurate, most informative information to readers” (respondent 24).

Any requirement that journalists direct enquiries to the PR department or agency of an organisation, or can only speak to organisation members through PR practitioners angers respondents. “Organisations’ [sic] insistence that every bloody interview or snippet of information has to go through PR leads to major resentment among us journos” (respondent three). In such circumstances PR practitioners were viewed as impeding the flow of information to media, preventing a free press from existing, although one respondent pragmatically pointed out that “some journalists can be ruthless so it makes sense to have someone experienced in charge of communications” (respondent 16).

Within gatekeeping, a lack of access to the people with whom journalists need to speak was a key point of frustration raised regularly by respondents. This was because it was regarded to make a journalist’s job more difficult. “Frankly, it was much easier 25 years ago, when reporters just spoke to the people they needed” (respondent 24). Respondents stated that lack of access to the people with whom they need to speak creates a time consuming way of working. “Having to go through PR people . . . to get to the person you already know is the right one is ridiculously time consuming and unnecessary” (respondent 17). This time consuming way of working was due to the insistence by PR practitioners’ that journalists email their questions and then receive a written response: “Having to wait for six hours for a statement when someone says, ‘I’ve to go through PR’ is horrific and mostly needless” (respondent three).

I am a health reporter, but in the two years I have done the job, I think I have only got to speak to a “real person” in the Ministry of Health twice. Most of the time

information is gathered through emailing questions and getting responses, something which is a very stilted and frustrating way to do things. (Respondent 17)

Some respondents felt this was a disturbing trend: “The advent and insistence that questions be emailed is a worrying concern” (respondent six). This is because it is viewed as having an impact on the voice of a story:

The other disturbing trend is for our contacts to answer questions only in writing through PR people. This is not only time consumingly slow and frustrating, it means our stories lose the sparkle and freshness of actually talking to a real, live person. (Respondent seven)

Respondents also believed that written responses hinder further lines of questioning: “There is also a growing trend towards emailing questions and getting emailed answers – often the only way to get anything out of an organisation. It is sanitised and prevents differing lines of questioning developing” (respondent 21). This is because this way of working often does not give the journalist the information or response that he or she requires:

The worst bug bear is having to send a list of questions through to them and them returning that with an answer that either begs more questions or doesn't answer the question at all. A quick conversation with the person would satisfy all a lot more quickly. (Respondent 22)

Lack of direct access to employees was also viewed as a form of PR manipulation: “It is incredibly frustrating not to be able to talk to people directly and an example of how the PR industry attempts to manipulate the news media” (respondent 21). Similarly, the view that the gatekeeping process creates an imbalance of power and

control on the side of PR practitioners was also highlighted by respondents: “This gives PR people an inordinate amount of control and power” (respondent six). Sometimes, however, this power was regarded as being in the heads of PR practitioners rather than real power: “A health PR person abused me for refusing to give her the private telephone number of a journalist who the PR person believed had gone over her head and written something without her permission” (respondent seven). Respondents believed that when faced with obstruction, gatekeeping and interference, young journalists may not be able to withstand the pressures exerted by PR practitioners and may back down:

Young journalists often give up in the face of such determined non-action (and sometimes blatant interference) from PR people. It is only the thick-skinned old hands who stick with it – ignoring threats from PR people and doing our job anyway. (Respondent six)

When it came to their interactions with PR practitioners, respondents distinguished that there are different types of PR, such as consumer PR and political PR. Respondent attitudes differed based on the type of organisation the PR practitioner works for. Respondents were particularly negative towards PR practitioners who worked in government departments, bodies and politics, with phrases such as “totally and utterly useless” (respondent one) and “the worst PR people I have dealt with” (respondent seven) being used to describe them. Tertiary organisations and district health boards were also named in this regard, with local authorities, police and government bodies being seen as some of the most obstructive and uncooperative to deal with. PR practitioners who work for private companies also came under fire as they were viewed as pushy and pressurising:

I feel there is a vast difference in the approach and attitude of PR people working for private companies. They tend to be more persistent and put pressure on the news media to publicise their client's business often with little regard for its news value. They are also inclined to use "pressure" such as the fact the client is an advertiser to try and get publicity. (Respondent 30)

In contrast, some respondents viewed local government, corporate and not-for-profit organisations as more relaxed and easier to deal with, while organisations that are important to the public, such as the police, were seen to need PR practitioners to communicate information. Self-employed PR practitioners were also regarded as more helpful and flexible in their approaches to journalists. While views appeared to change according to the sector in which a PR practitioner works, respondents also noted that like any profession, some are better than others at the job they do.

#### *PR information subsidies.*

When it comes to PR information subsidies (for example, media releases and story ideas) some respondents stated that PR practitioners can be a useful source of news, story ideas and background information. "PR practitioners who identify people of news value in our circulation area and provide contact details and background information are worth their weight in gold" (respondent 30) and, "I urge my journalist colleagues to embrace PR, use what is useful and discard the rest" (respondent 15). PR practitioners were also viewed as useful when journalists face newsroom pressures. "Coming from a hard news background I have found PR people or communications staff members, for example with the police, as helpful in providing crucial interviews with people or information when I needed it on demanding deadlines" (respondent 13). However, if a PR practitioner pitches a story idea, respondents believe PR practitioners should have

information and spokespeople lined up and ready to go. “I deal with a lot of PR people. They sometimes provide useful information. If they pitch a story in which I am interested, I expect them to provide useful, comprehensive information and easy access to their client’s spokespeople” (respondent 15).

While respondents believed that PR practitioners can, therefore, be a useful and perfectly acceptable information source, respondents also pointed out that journalists should not simply publish what they are given without investigating or verifying the accuracy of what they have been given. “As a journalist, information and story ideas from PR people can be useful and lead to good stories, but always needs to be balanced with my own research and information from other sources” (respondent 11). Lazy journalism was defined as causing the proliferation of verbatim PR material being published: “I tend to blame incompetent and lazy journalists and radio and TV presenters for the amount of straight PR which appears in NZ media, and which only encourages the PR industry in its efforts” (respondent 36). One respondent, however, thought the use of straight PR material, particularly by juniors, may relate to a lack of education in journalism about PR: “My understanding is that journalist trainees are not explained the nuances for the relationship with PR people. They are not taught to use their comments as starting points leading to the truth rather than answers in their own right” (respondent 18).

Dependence on PR by journalists was regarded as a problem for journalism, particularly for junior reporters: “Over-reliance on PR is becoming a serious issue for young reporters” (respondent 24). Furthermore, some journalists who specialise in a particular round were viewed as more dependent on PR material than others: “Business reporters are often uncritically dependent on PR; political reporters slightly less so” (respondent four). By the same token, reliance on PR was also seen as a harsh reality:

“I suppose they are a necessary evil” (respondent 17). This was seen as due to economic changes in the New Zealand media industry: “With staffing levels as they are PR is now necessary to fill newspapers” (respondent three). Despite this, some respondents viewed the increase of PR in journalism as frustrating: “as someone who has come back into journalism after many years absence I have found the proliferation of PR into almost every sphere incredibly frustrating and mostly unhelpful” (respondent 17).

While some respondents felt PR subsidies may increase journalists’ productivity, the value of the information subsidy was questioned, as it was felt that PR materials do not necessarily produce high-value stories. In contrast to PR being a necessity, some respondents felt journalists are capable of doing their job just as well without PR information subsidies: “I could do my job almost as well without any assistance from PR. I would be slightly less productive, but the stories I would no longer produce would mostly be those of lower value” (respondent 15).

### *Professional integrity.*

There is a strong theme across the qualitative online survey data that respondents see a difference between the professional integrity of journalists and the professional integrity of PR practitioners: “I think the difference between public relations and journalism is the morals inherent within these professions” (respondent 16). This is because respondents believe journalists are truth-seekers and truth-tellers, whereas PR practitioners are viewed as hidiers of the truth or truth sweeteners: “Journalists want the dirt, the real story while PR people simply want to gloss over issues” (respondent two). Furthermore, PR practitioners were described as liars, as working for the dark side, misleading journalists, being evasive, not telling the whole truth, running smoke screens and sanitising information. This is particularly the case when the PR practitioner and

their organisation or client is faced with negative situations: “Often, they are not open, frank and transparent when the news is negative” (respondent 19). PR practitioners who lie were a source of frustration for respondents: “Hearing a PR person straight out lie when you know full well it is a lie, is just them doing their job, but still very frustrating” (respondent 14). In some cases this can lead to journalists attempting to avoid PR practitioners when seeking the truth: “I try to avoid Public Relations managers/execs etc at all costs. Time and time again they have not told the whole truth” (respondent 20).

Lack of honesty by PR practitioners was also blamed on the senior management of an organisation or client and what they are willing to communicate, rather than being an inherent trait of the PR industry itself. “Some PR people's role is to obscure, obfuscate and cover up. This is more about their clients and does not necessarily reflect on the profession as a whole” (respondent 15). While some respondents stated journalists typically seek the truth, it was also claimed that some may not always uphold such high moral standards:

I think there are people out there who are doing more noble work in PR, sometimes in journalism we are asked to sell-out anyway. For example, knocking on the door of a family who has recently lost a loved one, or writing a story that you know could have been better but you didn't have time to improve. (Respondent 13)

While respondents were aware that the newspaper organisation for whom they work is a business and thus seeks to make a profit, they did not believe this has an impact on the way they write their stories: “I don't write a story thinking of the papers it will sell, I write the best news story with the information I have gained. I don't even get told how many papers it sold so that's beside the point” (respondent 13).



For one respondent, telling people's stories and doing a job that makes a difference is morally superior to the work of a PR practitioner:

I became a journalist because I like writing and telling people's stories and because I think it's important that people have a voice. Also, and it might sound cheesy, I wanted to do something that might make a difference . . . I don't work for the money; I work because I genuinely care . . . Why does someone go into PR? Is it because they really care about the government organisation they work for, the electricity company? I doubt it. I think people get into PR for quite different reasons, money being one of them. (Respondent 16)

The term "dark side" was used by four respondents when commenting on public relations. One stated that in journalism, PR practitioners are viewed as those who have crossed to the dark side, while another felt that talking about "PR as the dark side is infantile" (respondent 15). One stood in middle ground stating that "not all PR practitioners work for the dark side" (respondent 17). One believed journalism educators use the term, but only do so humorously.

### *Skills and experience.*

A key bug bear of respondents that was repeatedly commented upon, was that many PR practitioners lack a clear understanding of journalists' needs and of the journalism industry as a whole. This was a huge source of frustration and annoyance for respondents and almost certainly mars the positive attitudes journalists may have towards PR practitioners. Comments regarding the lack of understanding that PR practitioners have towards journalists' needs formed an overall perception by respondents that the standard of PR practitioners in New Zealand is viewed by them as being generally low.

Respondents were particularly irked by PR practitioners who lack understanding of basic journalist needs, such as news value, when issuing media releases or suggesting story ideas: “What annoys journalists most is PR people who have absolutley [sic] no concept of news and insist, for example, that some event like a minor launch or a picture of someone receiving a giant cheque, is newsworthy” (respondent three). Adding to this, respondents commonly marked PR practitioners as lacking the ability to tailor and target media releases appropriately. This was summed up particularly well by one respondent who stated:

PR people have to learn how to cater to the media. I work in an isolated part of NZ on a daily regional paper and we are often sent items to peddle that are totally inappropriate for our area, mainly due to the fact that our readers can't find the product in the shops here, due to our isolation. Our people are employed mainly in farming/mining so receiving products that are better suited for the coffee-swilling Ponsonby Road set always end up straight in the outbox – the rubbish bin.

(Respondent 26)

Similarly, respondents felt harassed and pestered by PR practitioners who insist on constantly phoning and emailing to see whether their story idea will be published. Such pestering and pushiness was described by one respondent as simply going against the interests of PR practitioners, while others felt it to be a waste of journalists' time: “We try and ignore them when we feel we should, but PR people follow them up with emails, more emails and phone calls. What a waste of our time” (respondent seven).

Several respondents felt strongly about the lack of journalism experience among PR practitioners, believing that it results in a lack of understanding about journalists' needs, as described above. Respondents felt that not only should more PR practitioners have

journalism experience, but that it should also be a pre-requisite to becoming a PR practitioner. “A background working in the media (by that I mean tv, radio or newspaper journalism) for at least a year should be essential for any PR person” (respondent 22).

While the focus was on PR practitioners gaining journalism experience, it was also acknowledged that journalists could learn more about PR. PR practitioners who are perceived as understanding the news industry and journalist needs, were described as “worth their weight in gold” (respondent nine) and as having “some brains” (respondent three). A couple of respondents suggested that because of their industry knowledge journalists have the skills and expertise to move into a role in public relations. Journalists were said to switch careers when they become fed up with newsroom pressures or due to better remuneration.

*Online survey: Qualitative data summary.*

Qualitative data collected from the 33 respondents who left comments at the end of the online survey has a fairly negative tone overall. In many cases, respondents focused on what could be considered their gripes about the relationship and interactions they have with PR practitioners. In this regard, the comments section of the survey may have acted as an avenue for journalists to anonymously vent any frustrations or annoyances that they may have held towards PR practitioners. Once again, newspaper journalists are strongly negative towards some of the specific tactics and actions employed by PR practitioners, such as sending media releases, suggesting story ideas that lack news value, or by obstructing a journalist’s direct access to employees.

Data showed that those who submitted qualitative survey comments consider journalists to be of a higher moral standing than PR practitioners due to the belief that

journalists are truth-seekers and are performing an important role. PR practitioners tend to be regarded as “sweetening the truth”. It was, however, suggested that some journalists may not always uphold such moralistic standards and that PR does have some “noble” roles.

PR practitioners were viewed positively when it came to helping journalists by providing them with information and story ideas, particularly when it helped the journalist out of a tight spot. Data also showed, once again, that newspaper journalists’ attitudes vary according to the sector or organisation within which a PR practitioner works. Those who work in Government or public sector organisations such as district health boards were regarded as difficult to work with as they are particularly obstructive. Those who work for private organisations were regarded as pushy.

Respondents were clear that many PR practitioners lack a clear understanding of journalists’ needs, which has a direct impact on how journalists view those PR practitioners. Overall, the relationship was viewed as being one of necessary co-existence, where both sides have differing goals.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

The following section of this chapter presents data from the semi-structured interviews with eight working newspaper journalists. Interviews were analysed using a hybrid thematic content analysis approach as detailed in the methodology chapter.

### *Mixed views exist.*

The attitudes and perceptions held by interview participants towards PR practitioners were mixed and often conflicting. While most participants viewed the relationship as being fine overall, they acknowledged that there are positive and negative dynamics at

play which affect how they feel about specific aspects of their relationship with PR practitioners.

From an overarching perspective, those who viewed the relationship with PR practitioners as healthy saw the relationship as predominantly positive. These participants felt most PR practitioners were pleasant, polite and decent: “Honestly, I’ve had very few negative dealings with them” (participant eight). According to a few participants, a lot of very good relationships with PR practitioners exist and any annoyances that may occur are not serious: “I don’t even perceive that although we have a few gripes about each other at times, I don’t think that it’s serious” (participant two). Furthermore, one participant suggested PR practitioners’ standards have improved: “To be honest I think the standards are actually better than they ever have been. I think the PR agents that get on the phone to me, they’re very polite, they’re very nice. They know what they’re doing” (participant four).

On the other hand, and often at the same time, some participants viewed public relations as a waste of time and equated it with the dark side. Within this perspective PR was viewed as a waste of money because organisations could contact journalists directly. Furthermore, some felt journalists would be better off without PR practitioners because they complicate and interfere with a journalist’s work:

If PR agents disappeared tomorrow my life would be a lot easier to be honest with you. Yeah. And we’d have, probably a, just as interesting paper if not more interesting . . . . The relationships exist. We work with them, but if they disappeared tomorrow . . . we would be fine. (Participant four)

The terms “spin” and “spin doctor” were also used during a couple of interviews. While one participant was unsure of the relevance of this view in New Zealand, both

equated spin and spin doctor with PR practitioners who obstruct the truth and who present organisational information in the best light possible: “I think they do have this image of spin doctors, that are there to obstruct the truth and tell corporate or government lies . . . I think there is certainly that perception” (participant three). Despite having this view, it was stated by participants that not all PR practitioners in New Zealand are spin doctors. Instead some were viewed as being very good at facilitating journalists’ enquiries and getting the information they wanted back to them.

PR was also referred to by half the participants as the dark side. The opinion that journalism educators promote PR as the dark side to their students was conveyed during the interviews: “PR is described in some journalism schools as being the dark side” (participant seven). This was because PR practitioners are sometimes seen to present and handle information in a less open and honest way than journalists: “When we were in journalism school we used to say it was the dark side, because it’s all managing information and it’s not disseminating information as freely as you try to do in the media” (participant seven). The term dark side was also used when participants discussed journalists who move into public relations, suggesting PR is a less ethical profession: “We joke about these people leaving journalism and going over to the dark side” (participant two).

### *Antagonism.*

Antagonism was a strong sub-theme that emerged throughout all interviews. It was described as not always being present during interactions with PR practitioners, but usually appears when the two sides have opposing goals: “I think there are sometimes frustrations, because we are coming from things at very different angles” (participant

three). This clash of goals was said to cause frustration and tension in the relationship, building ill feeling towards PR practitioners:

There are certain things that they are never going to tell you, because they are working for one organisation and you're working for another so it always comes down to almost in the end, unless they tell you what you want to know, you're in an almost adversarial role with them. (Participant two)

Participants also believed the more negative a journalist's enquiry, the more antagonism is likely to exist in the relationship. Negative and potentially damaging stories were highlighted as sources of antagonism because they were viewed as causing the PR practitioner to respond to accusations while trying to maintain a favourable image for their company:

Where it can become antagonistic is where the organisation that that person works for has become embroiled in some kind of controversy or something's gone wrong and people are looking for information, and then . . . you get a company via their PR person trying to in a story to their best advantage or trying to do their damage limitation and trying to say as little as possible about the actual details of the situation. So it's one of those relationships that can be antagonistic. (Participant six)

Antagonism was also said to be caused by PR practitioners who attempt to prescribe and control stories, rather than allowing journalists to independently and objectively write their stories:

There is always the feeling that the PR people can be driving at a particular point. Whereas journalists, especially once they have a bit of experience, will be clear that what they want is information and how they construct their story around that

information is what they and their editors decide, rather than wanting it prescribed.

(Participant six)

Furthermore, several participants felt a PR practitioner's personality influences the level of antagonism that exists, rather than it being present as a matter of course. These participants held the view that some PR practitioners have antagonistic personalities and are difficult to work with regardless of the situation, whereas some practitioners are helpful even if the story is negative:

I don't know that there's antagonism there as a matter of course, I think there are between some particular people. There are particular people that I find antagonising, but I think that's about them in particular rather than about the job they do or the job I do. (Participant one)

PR practitioners who can manage negative situations without being antagonistic and difficult were viewed as being good at their job: "It partly comes down to the clash of personalities between the journalist and the PR person. If they are a good PR person there won't be a clash" (participant eight). While all participants believed antagonism exists in the relationship, half suggested it does not always need to be so. "There can be instances where it is negative but it doesn't have to be and it shouldn't be for the most part" (participant six). Instead, both sides were encouraged to recognise that they both have a job to do and that it is simply how each side has to go about doing their job:

There's no reason why the relationships with people have to be difficult. I think if you accept that you both have a job to do and you're just trying to get your job done as well as you can, and you are reasonable about it and good humoured about it there's no reason why you can't have good relationships with people and, you know, work together as well as you can. (Participant one)



*Good relationships are important.*

Despite mixed perceptions, participants still felt having good relationships with PR practitioners was an important part of a journalist's role. Good relationships were said to facilitate both sides to do their job better by smoothing interactions during difficult situations or negative stories: "Good relationships with people makes an enormous difference to how you work together and how you can, you know, manage even really difficult stories without it having to be too antagonistic" (participant one). Good relationships were also viewed as important because they can affect a journalist's ability to gain access to company spokespeople:

When the PR practitioner is a spokesperson for a particular individual or company, that often makes him/her very important for a journalist whose round coincides with that individual or company's role, because they may represent the journalist's only access route to that person. (Participant six)

Good relationships were also important for those who viewed the relationship as one of mutual dependence: "Obviously it's a relationship where it's got to work both ways, and we rely on, to a certain extent, on people letting us know what's happening within their organisation. Um, and they rely on the media to get word out about what they're doing" (participant three). However, some participants did believe there were some PR practitioners with whom it was more important to build good relationships. Participants felt this particularly applied to PR practitioners who work in specialist fields of communication rather than those who work in consumer PR.

*Trust and ethics.*

Participants tended to trust the PR practitioners with whom they have a good relationship, more than those they do not have regular contact with:

The nature of the industry is that there are some that you might deal with only occasionally, or you might encounter them out of the blue because you receive a press release, and there are others that you tend to deal with on a more regular basis. So there probably is a situation of trust built up with people that you interact with on more than just a casual one-off basis. (Participant six)

As trust and experience of working together grows, participants believe they are more likely to be helpful towards those PR practitioners:

There are ones that I deal with quite a lot and you do build up a bit of trust with and you like them personally and they're easy to deal with so you kind of um, find it easier to have kind of frank discussions and you try and help them out a bit and they try and help you. (Participant one)

Acts of trust-based helpfulness towards PR practitioners may include off-the-record conversations, warnings about negative stories and increased chances of getting stories published: "I'd be much more likely to take a press release from somebody I know and wanna [sic] help them out with it if I liked them as a person" (participant five). Former journalists, who now work as PR practitioners, were also trusted more than those who have not worked in journalism by three participants: "I tend to trust those that have been working journalists" (participant seven). This is because former journalists were viewed as more likely to understand a journalist's position and may be less guarded in their response, allowing for more open, frank discussions:

I often find that those who have been journalists tend to be more understanding of where you're coming from. And also I think [they are] maybe a little more trusting of you as well . . . people who have been journalists will understand that if they say off the record and we agree then that's it. Most journalists wouldn't break that confidence. And that you can have a discussion about something and be honest about things and we won't, you know, drop you in it. (Participant one)

For one participant it made no difference whether a PR practitioner had been a journalist in relation to trust. PR practitioners' allegiances will always rest with the organisation paying their wage. Similarly, another participant felt the opposing goals of journalists and PR practitioners will always affect the level of trust that can be achieved. "Good solid organisations" (participant seven), that is, those organisations which are seen to lack profit motives, were also trusted more than profit-driven organisations. PR practitioners working within these companies were viewed as more trustworthy because they were thought to be more "in tune" with journalists' values.

Attitudes regarding ethical behaviour in PR were relatively neutral. While some unethical behaviour is thought to occur at times in PR, it was not viewed as an intrinsically unethical profession overall. "I don't think it is a profession that particularly lends itself to unethical behaviour as a rule" (participant one). This participant also felt the perception that all PR practitioners are liars and untrustworthy is an "old-school attitude" held by some journalists (participant one). Although, some examples of dishonest behaviour were cited: "I've been blatantly lied to by PR people" (participant eight).

Unethical behaviour was seen to come down to the individual in the job, rather than as a trait of PR itself: "I think it depends on the person . . . I certainly don't go into

situations assuming that if you are from PR then you're going to be dishonest or anything" (participant one). The main reason participants felt unethical behaviour in PR occurs is because PR practitioners often shape information in the best possible light for their organisation, rather than providing straightforward, honest answers. For participants, this meant PR practitioners withhold or bury certain information: "Their job is to present a view . . . that promotes an organisation . . . sometimes that avoids or skirts around certain facts, which is in opposition to what I'm trying to do" (participant seven). Dishonesty was seen as a waste of time and as a relationship breaker, with participants classing PR practitioners who behave in this way as bad at their job:

The good ones are straightforward and honest because they know you are going to find out anyway . . . . You're just going to spoil the relationship and you're going to have to be working with them again anyway in the future and they're never going to trust you. I've had PR people lie to me but not for long and not often because anyone who is any good at the job will know that you simply can't lie because it doesn't work in your interest in the end. (Participant eight)

Despite the relatively neutral view of unethical behaviour in PR, some participants still felt unethical behaviour has a tendency to taint the whole profession: "It's a case of once bitten, twice shy quite often" (participant two). In discussing unethical behaviour, participants acknowledged it also occurs within their own industry: "Yes there are people out there . . . journalists out there that are unethical and that's not to say that everything they do is unethical but they cross the line" (participant seven).

Examples of unethical behaviour in journalism, of which participants were aware, included fellow journalists writing fictitious stories; unethical ways of getting information, such as threatening or blackmailing people; not being completely honest

about the angle of a story; changing story angles to suit a particular agenda; being asked to write about something the journalist is not personally comfortable with; and breaching a promise not to quote someone or keep information off the record.

Motivating factors for unethical behaviour in journalism included journalists wanting to “err on the side of a good story” (participant seven), bosses driving you hard, and the competitive nature of the industry.

*Toeing an organisational line.*

During the interviews, the belief that some PR practitioners are beholden to the organisation for which they work was provided by some participants:

Whether it’s an in-house PR person or somebody who has a contract with a client to do PR . . . I think they are beholden to some extent to whoever is running the show, in terms of what they are allowed to put out there. (Participant six)

At the same time, participants felt this was expected and stated whatever your role, a level of bias towards the company for which you work, will always exist: “If you go and work for somebody and they pay the wages, then they do get to say what goes” (participant three). Participants believed this was often the same for journalists: “Even media people within organisations have loyalties to their own organisations and that affects their work as well” (participant seven). This was described as “just doing the job” (participant four). Participants felt it applied to journalists in relation to being asked to write a story they are not comfortable with, or where a story is changed or dropped due to potential commercial implications for the paper:

There's been times I've been told this should be the angle for that one and you don't agree with it, but at the end of the day you know they are going to change it if you don't do it anyway. (Participant three)

*Working in partnership.*

There were mixed views when participants considered whether PR practitioners and journalists are partners in the dissemination of information. On the whole, participants were positive, agreeing the two professions can work as partners (three participants), but have different roles in that process:

They certainly are because every time that a PR practitioner gets their information into the mainstream media they succeed in doing their job. And that happens a lot, and so the media organisations are using their information and the practitioners are achieving their ends of getting it into the mainstream media. (Participant seven)

Others saw them as working in partnership or being associates: "I don't think we are ever entirely partners, but certainly there's lots of situations where we might work in partnership" (participant one). Only one participant disagreed:

Absolutely not. The role of a PR person is to get the information to me but it's not their role to get the information into the paper. I regard the PR person as the unnecessary evil sometimes to get me the information I need. (Participant eight)

*Tactical interactions: PR sins.*

When it came to tactical-level interactions, participants charged PR practitioners with a number of tactical sins, which they believe cause journalists to view PR practitioners with disdain. One of the biggest sources of frustration for participants were media

releases that lack news value. All participants stated that only a small percentage (between 5 and 20 per cent) of the media releases they receive contain newsworthy information. “I used to get a lot of stuff [come] through to me. Maybe ten per cent of it, or less, was of interest” (participant one). Because of this, some PR practitioners are viewed by participants as not understanding how to make media releases valuable or useful to journalists:

Releases get put out and they just disappear into the woodwork because there’s nothing useful in there for a journalist who’s actually looking for a news story. There’s nothing useful in there for them to actually, you know, to actually get their teeth into. (Participant six)

The failure of PR practitioners to tailor media releases to the publication they are targeting was one reason media releases were described as not useful. Lack of newsworthiness and relevance were both, therefore, cited as reasons for media release rejection:

I regularly get emails here [in the South Island] about agricultural products for sale in Hamilton. I get news advisories about a new range of Wattie’s products that’s coming up for sale next week. It’s not going to be running in my paper in a million years. (Participant eight)

At the top of the rejection list were media releases that are too promotional or commercial: “Some are blatant commercial product placement. I mean it’s hardly news” (participant four). These were regarded by participants as seeking free publicity: “In most instances you would reject that on the basis that it was an attempt to get free advertising” (participant six). Failure to provide stories that can be held until publication date, along with lack of exclusivity, was a cause of rejection particularly for those who

work in weekly publications. This was also the case for releases that were badly written, too technical or where the news factor had been buried:

Many times they are badly written and sometimes they don't get past reading the first couple of paragraphs. Because . . . any news factor is buried in gush, or echmospeak or politically correct usage of everything and we go, oh for Christ sakes, you know, throw it away. (Participant two)

Participants felt many of the problems with media releases were associated with the PR practitioner mass mailing one media release to multiple publications. "Yeah, it's like uh, we'll scramble to get as many email addresses as possible and we'll just chuck it out to them willy nilly" (participant four). Participants believed PR practitioners do not give enough thought to who should receive their information, and simply use the mass mailing technique to push "their latest crap" (participant four). "They've got a list of all media out of media directories . . . and they just mass send this stuff . . . without any thought to the market it is being sent to" (participant eight). This behaviour was described as making a journalist's work more difficult: "One thing that really slows me down in my job is that I would get two hundred emails a day, before I've even started work" (participant four).

Other tactical PR annoyances include PR practitioners who are pushy and pester journalists about the media releases they have sent: "They endlessly send little reminders, did you get, did you get, did you get, and yet, you know, it's certainly . . . not even news" (participant two). Media releases that contain missing quotes or information, such as the "who, what, where, when, why and how" (participant three), which are key questions any news story attempts to answer, as well as PR practitioners who provide spokespeople who cannot be quoted also frustrated journalists:



They'll get you someone to talk to and you'll get that person on the phone and then they'll say you can't quote me, I'm just giving you information. That's really frustrating, why would you ever front someone to a journalist who can't be quoted in the paper? As far as I'm concerned I don't even want to talk to anyone whose name I can't use and I don't understand why you would ever do that. (Participant one)

Similarly, one participant was frustrated by PR practitioners who do not fully brief potential interviewees. This often results in the interviewee not being prepared, requiring further follow-up calls. This was seen as a waste of a journalist's time. Participants also felt aggrieved by PR practitioners who say "leave it with me and don't get back" (participant two), along with those who send out media release contact information for people who are unavailable. Big email files that take a long time to download were also noted as an annoyance.

*Tactical interactions: gatekeeping.*

PR practitioners were viewed by participants as organisational gatekeepers. In this role they were regarded to obstruct a journalist's work by acting as a "bit of a firewall" (participant seven) between the journalist and the PR practitioner's organisation:

Sometimes you get people who are merely taking a gatekeeper role, when they should be providing information and that is the most frustrating thing for a journalist. When there's one person whose role it is to get the information to you, and they are just sort of taking total control of the interactive process usually by slamming the door shut in your face. (Participant two)

This was seen as especially the case when a journalist's enquiry is negative: "If the shit hits the fan with a company, the gatekeeper will be . . . extremely difficult to work with. And it will be very difficult to get something out of the company" (participant four). Participants' disdain towards gatekeepers centred on the lack of access they permit to employees. Gatekeeping was subsequently viewed as creating difficulties for journalists as it stops them from directly accessing people who can answer their questions immediately:

The first gatekeeping technique is always just don't let them get to the person, don't let them speak to them . . . there are certainly people who see that as their role and do that very effectively. There's people who come to mind immediately as being very much, not so much gates, as just walls, brick walls. And it's really frustrating.  
(Participant one)

Participants felt that lack of direct access to those who can answer questions directly impedes journalists by not allowing them to have a proper conversation, ask further questions or gain a deeper understanding of the subject:

Ideally what a journalist wants is to talk to someone who has the power to make statements and they want to have a conversation with those people and through that conversation you can develop the interview and get information to find out about as much about the story as you can and, therefore, write the story and get the best quotes. (Participant seven)

The gatekeeping process was, therefore, viewed as cumbersome and time-consuming, with participants noting that journalists often have to present a list of questions to PR practitioners. PR practitioners then seek answers from the appropriate person within their organisation and often draft the response. This is returned to

journalists once approved internally. This process was regarded as particularly prohibitive to asking follow-up questions:

Everything's got to go through them which is really time consuming for a journalist because you have to contact the PR communications person, they then have to go off and find the person, and put the questions you've given them to them, then that has to be signed off, then that has to come back, give the answer to you, and so if there's any questions that come out of the questions you can't ask that directly. (Participant three)

Gatekeeping was also noted to stretch out the information-gathering process, making the "forward planning and organisation of a newspaper that much harder because you don't have the information to work with" (participant eight). Some felt this process was used so the organisation would not have to provide any more information than absolutely necessary:

Unfortunately what happens if you go through these people, is you never get more information than the strict number of questions you put down. Now if you are putting down six questions in an email, you're more likely to ask a person, through the course of a conversation 20 to 30 questions, so you're going to get more information just through a conversation . . . . So in a way it does restrict the amount of information you get. (Participant seven)

In receiving written responses from gatekeepers, some participants felt the naturalness of a spoken quote was lost: "They'll say things in a more natural way than they would when they write them down, and so you get a more natural quote from them" (participant one). Some participants try to avoid going through PR practitioners when they can: "I just generally try to go around them" (participant five). Often, though,

they were referred back to the PR department. The only way participants could get around this was if they had strong relationships with those inside, but this took time. “If it’s a trusted source you might be able to use them and not name them . . . you have to be around for quite a long time and those sources are minimal for me at this point” (participant five). Despite these views, there was a degree of understanding among some participants regarding the need for PR practitioners to manage the flow of information in this way. This was described as due to the need for one organisational voice, as well as to protect an organisation’s image and branding:

It’s just a fact of life really, that they have to manage . . . what goes out from their organisation. If they don’t then they will make a lot of mistakes. And those mistakes can cost them a lot as far as their brand or how they’re perceived, publicly perceived. It’s important to them. (Participant seven)

*Tactical interactions: positive interactions.*

Although participants noted many frustrations with the tactical interactions they have with PR practitioners, they also noted some positive interactions. The most positive, but somewhat contradictory, view displayed by participants was that PR practitioners can be extremely helpful in facilitating journalists to do their job:

It’s when you get a good PR person, who will deal with things quickly, or as quickly as they can. If they ideally put you in touch with the key person rather than act as the middle man . . . . If you can get a good person who will do that, either put you in touch with the person you need to speak to and set that all up for you, um, or who will do a good job of getting the information, and getting it to you in a format you can actually use, there are people who can actually do that and they are godsend. (Participant three)

According to participants, directing your enquiry through a PR practitioner could, at times, be a more efficient way of working. “Sometimes it’s more efficient as well because you know who to go to, you put the questions to them and they know your deadline” (participant five), while another felt that those who ask what journalists want, rather than assuming they know, are the most helpful.

PR practitioners who take the time to tailor media releases to the target publication were also perceived well: “If it’s clear that someone has a grasp of what it is that the media will look for and has tailored their release and their information to those needs then obviously that would be well received” (participant six). Similarly, several participants were positive about PR practitioners who are willing to have an open discussion about a story or an enquiry. This was viewed as helping the journalist to better understand a situation, or to produce a story which meets the needs of both professionals. “We’re not just receiving PR material, we’re not just working on a straight this is what we have provided, this is what you get face-value kind of situation. This is where we’re in dialogue and we’re working together” (participant two).

Phone contact from PR practitioners about story ideas was also appreciated, as it enables participants to assess interest quicker than they might if it was sent by email. This approach was also viewed as providing the PR practitioner with a greater opportunity to work with the journalist to find a way to make the story work: “It’s certainly really appreciated from my perspective if somebody, you know, rings and says, or emails and says, you know is this of interest, what would make it work for you, what would you need” (participant one). For participants, other positive interactions included PR practitioners who understand the need for good photographs, along with those who understand deadlines and those who keep journalists up to date regarding

progress on an enquiry. For one participant, being able to receive free goods, such as books to review, was seen as a positive part of the relationship.

When it came to the competence of PR practitioners, most participants found it hard to generalise. Instead, most felt that as with any job, some PR practitioners are better than others at what they do:

It's individual circumstances. Sometimes they're just unnecessarily obstructive.

Other times they're too helpful for their own good. Sometimes they don't have a clue what they are doing, other times they're sharp. It's as individual as the people you are dealing with and the circumstances as well. (Participant eight)

Some also believed the organisation for which a PR practitioner works affects their ability to do their job, due to organisational constraints and internal battles over media management:

Journalists realise that it's not always the PR [practitioner's] fault . . . if a press release comes out and it is not quite what they would have wanted. Or they're after information and they don't get it. They would realise that often their hands are tied and they can't do what you want, um, and I think people do recognise that that's not a question of their own integrity or their own ability to do the job. It will cater to who they're working for and what they want. (Participant three)

### *Writing skills.*

Participants were pragmatic and relatively neutral in their views about the writing skills of PR practitioners, with the majority believing that some writing is better than others, but most is generally good:

We get some that are so cumbersome and terrible that we have a laugh about it. And then we get some that are great copy. You couldn't tell the difference between that and a journalist article written specifically for your paper. (Participant seven)

Several participants felt many media releases are well written because there are now so many journalists working as PR practitioners in New Zealand:

You know I think for the most part I'd rate them reasonably well, maybe sort of somewhere between a six and a seven. As I said I think a lot of people who end up [being] PR practitioners in New Zealand have gone through the route of being journalists . . . So on the whole I think you do have people with pretty good skills in that regard. (Participant six)

Perfectly written copy was not a priority for a couple of participants. Their view was that they would never use copy sent by PR practitioners verbatim and, therefore, did not feel it needed to be written in a news style:

There's no need for it to be written in a news style or a really punchy way. I'm just interested in the information that I get out of it. I'm never going to use it as written anyway so in fact sometimes, if it comes through and it's got like a really great punchy intro, I'm like kind of damn, now I can't use that because . . . it's on the press release, so it can't be used in the paper. (Participant one)

Instead, clear and concise writing was important so journalists do not need to trawl through lengthy releases laden full of technical jargon or superlatives: "Some of them are quite long and they are hardly likely to get looked at cause we don't have time" (participant five), and, "you get stuff that comes through that's a technical product

and . . . I'm struggling to understand it, bang, it's gone. It's in the bin straight away" (participant four).

*PR information subsidies.*

Despite the negative perceptions that exist, participants tended to view PR as a good source of information and story ideas. In this light, PR practitioners were viewed as bringing "interesting things to the table" (participant four) and assisting journalists in their work by providing a bigger selection of news:

I just see them as another tool in my toolbox . . . for story generation really, ideas. I guess any press release is a starting point to look into something wider, it's just something else coming in to consider really. (Participant five)

Several participants defended the use of PR subsidies, stating that just because it comes from PR does not mean it should not be used:

You can't just say that just because it's PR it's not worthy of being printed. And some people would say that but it's unrealistic too. I think judgement calls need to be made on each piece of information that comes in. (Participant seven)

Some PR materials were blatantly viewed by participants as an attempt to get free advertising. This was mainly limited to information subsidies provided by PR practitioners working in consumer PR or for private corporations, and was regarded as "advertising dressed as news" (participant two). "If it's council or police press releases or things like that it's quite different from big corporations wanting some free advertising" (participant five).



In using PR information subsidies, participants were adamant that journalists should never simply regurgitate information given to them by PR practitioners. This was because PR practitioners are viewed as presenting one-sided information, angled in favour of their organisation. Instead, participants insisted journalists should “do their own homework” (participant six), to ensure all angles of a story are investigated for balance and accuracy. This was illustrated by one participant who described how this should occur in practice:

Let’s say a pharmaceutical company . . . comes to you and says here, this woman who has had a miracle cure from cancer, why don’t you interview her about her experience? It may well be an amazing story of her miracle cure but you need to look into that from every other side and say did it really have anything to do with whatever this company is pushing and what’s the other possible side to it, and you know . . . make sure you that get input from people who might have a different view . . . you can take what they have given you but you’ve got to look at it critically and see what other input you need to get into it. (Participant one)

### *Reliance on PR.*

Newsroom constraints, such as shrinking budgets and resources, smaller staff numbers and deadline pressures, were seen to influence the amount of PR material used in a publication. These constraints were also described as the main reason for any reliance on PR that may exist:

We’re working in such a pared down industry now and newsrooms are all um working with far less reporters than they used to. I would say that it’s a handy source of page fillers often and I’d say that in the climate we’re in today as far as employment, especially in the recession where there were not so many ads being sold

to fill newspapers, those kind of PR communications materials [are] invaluable.

(Participant two)

Participants also believed newsroom constraints can impact negatively on their ability to examine the PR material they receive for accuracy and balance. This was particularly the case in smaller publications, which were viewed as more openly accepting of PR material because of the constraints they work under:

I think there has been a tendency in recent years . . . possibly more in the smaller publications where you've got fewer staff . . . to pick up stuff put out by PR people just almost at face value and not to investigate to get whether they stack up, whether it's a balanced story, (Participant six)

In contrast, several participants denied a general reliance on PR material. Instead it was viewed as simply adding to and providing a wider selection of news: "It does contribute to what goes in the paper but I'm not sure I'd call it a reliance" (participant three). Several participants thought the increase in citizen journalism meant they now get many stories through members of the public and, therefore, do not need to rely on PR materials. One participant believed newsroom constraints make no difference because newspapers are shrinking in size, so there are fewer pages to fill:

Most papers . . . have also shrunk so there's less pages to fill . . . there's never any shortage of people ringing up with complaints for us to check out, or the police assaulted me, or this company didn't give me a refund for this, or what have you. So, you know, it comes out of your ears. (Participant five)

Despite this, seven of the eight participants believed they are more open and reliant on PR practitioners with specialist or technical knowledge. This was especially the case

with PR practitioners whose specialist knowledge matched the specific rounds a participant writes about. “Individual journalists are more open to PR people who specialise in particular areas. That would almost certainly equate to those whose area of specialisation corresponds with their round” (participant six). Others felt journalists who do not have a particular round also tend to rely more on PR practitioners with specialist knowledge because they help them to understand the topic better:

We tend to work across a lot of different areas and wouldn’t necessarily know that much about the area that we were writing about. You might be more reliant on a PR person to um, to give you a background and get you up to speed. (Participant one)

Another believed PR practitioners who work in specialist areas that are regular sources of news coverage, such as hospitals and police, are often relied on because they are regularly sought for “comment on an incident that’s happened, or trying to get figures and trends” (participant three). Others felt journalists are more open towards PR practitioners with specialist knowledge because they respect the knowledge they have and do not believe they would receive “rubbish” from them:

We give them possibly a little more of a hearing because there is more respect there for their specialist knowledge and also we don’t . . . have the resources here to come up with those specialist stories. And so we do need to use them. (Participant two)

#### *Reluctance to admit using PR materials.*

When asked whether journalists are reluctant to admit using PR materials, half the participants agreed: “People would hate to admit that they used PR material as the basis of stories, but you just do sometimes” (participant one). While one participant felt that reluctance to admit came down to the personality of the individual journalist, other

reasons were noted. These included embarrassment, particularly if the story read like a media release; not wanting to admit someone else has dictated or controlled the story you are writing; and because some journalists may think they are of a higher status than PR practitioners. “We think we are doing a much more valuable job than them, and . . . we don’t like to admit that we’re relying on them for, as I said, these page fillers” (participant two). Despite this, a level of agreement still existed among participants that PR can influence the media agenda. According to participants, proactive PR brings newsworthy topics to their attention. These topics are thrown into the mix when determining the content of a newspaper. If the PR story is chosen, then at a basic level it has influenced the media agenda:

The information put in front of you on a daily basis is what makes your decisions about what goes into the mix in terms of what goes into a newspaper . . . . So to that degree, yes, PR people can influence the news agenda. (Participant eight)

This was seen by one participant to be especially true at traditionally quiet news times such as Christmas, New Year and Easter. At these times PR practitioners choose to issue media releases because they know there is a news lull, making it more likely that their story will be published. Furthermore, one participant thought PR must have an influence due to the amount of money spent on public relations by companies: “You wouldn’t spend the money if you weren’t having an influence” (participant seven). Another did not believe PR practitioners have any effect on the media agenda: “It’s our discretion in terms of what goes into free editorial space. They have no sway” (participant four).

*Differences and similarities.*

While journalists were regarded to sometimes toe an organisational line, several participants still believed journalists have more autonomy than PR practitioners. “I think you do get a bit more freedom as a journalist” (participant three). Other differences noted between the role of a PR practitioner and a journalist included that PR practitioners are paid more, but have a less exciting and more commercial role than journalists, while journalists were seen as more passionate about news. The key difference however, came down to the opposing goals of both professions: “We’re working towards a different result so you’ve kind of got a different aim in mind with what you’re doing’ (participant one). This comes as a result of the PR practitioner wanting to present their organisation in a positive light, while a journalist seeks objectivity and balance. “Their work is terribly subjective and ours has to be more objective. So there’s . . . a huge difference” (participant two).

Despite the differences, participants did perceive some similarities to exist. These included PR practitioners being regarded as “journalists for their own organisation” (participant five) and that both usually enjoy writing, shaping, and communicating information in an easy-to-understand way:

A number of PR people I’ve worked with enjoy writing. That’s sort of how they got into it in the first place. That they enjoyed writing, they didn’t necessarily want to become a journalist but it might have been a role that they took on in a company they worked for because they liked that side of it. So yeah, I do think they both like trying to communicate. (Participant three)

Practitioners within both professions were deemed to be pushy, while journalists who deal with “fluffy fashion stuff or food stuff” (participant two) were viewed as similar to

consumer PR practitioners. Adding to this, several participants stated that similarities must exist because so many journalists move easily into PR: “Yes we do have a lot of similarities, and that’s why so many . . . it’s so easy to transition from one to the other” (participant seven).

*Status perceptions.*

When asked about the professional status of both professions, the overall feeling from participants was that they were not particularly bothered by status: “I would say that I’m probably not all that bothered” (participant six). Rather than viewing journalism as higher or lower, participants just viewed PR as a different job:

I don’t really view myself as having any higher status than any PR professional. I don’t really think of it in those terms . . . is a policeman of higher status than a journalist, is a nurse, is a teacher, I don’t really see as there’s any difference really. (Participant five)

A couple of participants, however, did regard journalism as higher in status than PR because they felt it to be a more noble profession. “There is a bit of nobility in what journalists do” (participant seven), because PR practitioners are “paid to say something” (participant two). Countering this, a couple of participants felt strongly that some PR practitioners do play important roles. “People . . . who do comms roles for government bodies or for public organisations . . . play a really important role in making public, information that should public” (participant one).

*Perceptions according to role, organisation and sector.*

During the interviews, several participants expressed the view that PR practitioners are different to communication practitioners. In this scenario, PR practitioners were

viewed as those who work in consumer or corporate PR. Those who work within public services such as the police, or political PR were described as communications practitioners. “It’s very hard to differentiate between, as I say, the people who are working in communications management and those who also come under the title of PR but they are pushing consumer products” (participant two). Participants viewed those who work in what they saw as communication functions, rather than consumer PR, as being more likely to assume a gatekeeping role. Consumer products were viewed as far less likely to need this type of function, compared with hospital, police or Government organisations:

You’re not going to get the gatekeeper kind of PR person when you are talking about advertising or promoting materials or consumers, but you are when it comes to perhaps asking about a sensitive health issue specific to your local hospital.

(Participant two)

Because of this, a PR practitioner’s role was seen to differ according to the organisation or sector in which they work:

Depending on what kind of job they have, they have a different role. People who . . . work for a politician are trying to promote a certain agenda, people who work for a corporate company are trying to sell the products . . . they have a job to do, but they are quite different jobs. (Participant one)

Throughout the interviews it was also evident that participants’ attitudes towards PR practitioners changed according to the sector in which a PR practitioner worked. Non-profit-making organisations such as charities or public sector organisations were regarded more favourably because of the view that some of the work they do is important to be heard:

Because they are a charity I guess we are more likely to have a sympathetic ear towards them or give them coverage, because part of what we do is to help those people at times, because the people they support are part of the community who we are there to serve. (Participant five)

*Perceptions of a career in PR.*

A key theme that emerged during the interviews was participants' perceptions of a career in PR. Seven interview participants stated they would move to a career in public relations or had applied for PR jobs in the past, while one had not ruled out a move to PR. Most participants felt if they did move into PR it would need to be to a role or an industry in which they were personally interested or passionate about:

I think I would if it was the right type of role and I think I'd probably be fairly picky about where that might be. But you know I guess that comes down to your own personal preferences and interests. (Participant six)

Other reasons participants would move included PR being viewed as an easier job: "It would be very nice to have what I might consider a cushier number and an easier job" (participant two). While, earning potential was also mentioned: "Yeah I mean I would if there was a role that suited me because I'm a father now and the earning potential is a part of it all" (participant seven). Participants believed that improvements in financial circumstances, followed by more stable hours and a less pressured job all contributed towards the view that PR offers journalists a better work/life balance, explaining why they felt so many journalists move to PR:

There's possibly the sense that you might in terms of lifestyle be better off in that you might within your PR role have more of a kind of nine-to-five, Monday-to-



Friday type of role, whereas journalists' working hours can tend to be quite unfriendly at times, especially . . . if you are working on a big story or something, or you have to put in a lot of extra hours. (Participant six)

This lifestyle was regarded as particularly important for those journalists who have a family as it would greatly improve family circumstances. "I think a lot of people, again, when they are sitting down, starting families, getting mortgages, um suddenly higher income and more regular hours would be good" (participant three). Some participants believed journalists can begin their career with an idealistic view of what journalism will be like. After time, they suggested, the novelty wears off and once held journalistic ideals may no longer fit the reality:

I think a lot of people probably start out in journalism with a really idealised view of what they are doing and that it is going to be their career for life and then naturally as people do when they get a bit older you get a bit more pragmatic, um and you start to value different things in your job and want to be a bit more secure, and maybe earn more money, or work normal hours, not work shifts, and things like that maybe become more important after a while and you forget all the prejudices you used to have about people who work in PR. (Participant one)

Adding to this, a lack of senior roles in journalism was also touted as a reason to move to PR, along with those who become jaded with their organisation or find their work increasingly repetitive. "I think after a few years and the same events start coming around it starts to get very, very tedious writing the same things, you'd be looking to do something different" (participant three). Despite these views, participants believe a level of discomfort still exists among some journalists regarding those who move into PR.

Several participants believed journalists often view those who move into PR as having sold out to journalistic standards:

There is a perception that people who have gone into PR have sold out . . . You know they've lost their journalistic integrity and that they were looking for the truth. Now they are pandering to an organisation or a company. (Participant three)

Journalists were also described as often being cynical towards and joking about those who move into PR. This cynicism was particularly perpetuated by negative feelings about the pay PR practitioners receive:

We do hear about it all the time and we joke about it. We joke about these people leaving journalism and going over to the dark side . . . we joke about them going for the easy money. I think it's partly frustration because we consider that we work really hard, I know I do, and don't get paid as much as people I know who work in the communications field. (Participant two)

Countering this, several participants stated they do not begrudge those who move into PR, even if it is for money:

People have got to make money, people have got to make a living and you know I'm not judgemental on that, if somebody's had enough of one side of the industry and want to go to the other side, good luck to them. (Participant four)

The perceived pay scale in public relations was a clear source of contention for participants. Not only did they compare journalist and PR practitioner pay scales with unprovoked regularity, but participants also stated that journalists envy, are bitter towards and joke about the salaries PR practitioners are perceived to earn: "I think we're bitter because we get paid so much less" (participant two). Others felt the move to

PR could sometimes be a hypocritical one, particularly if the journalist had made “smart alec cracks about PR people” (participant one), or had held strongly negative views:

“There might be a hypocrisy if you’ve got a person who ardently hates PR and everything it stands for and then goes into PR” (participant seven). Most participants believed that when a journalist moves to PR they never return because of the perceived better work conditions in PR. “I can’t think of anyone who’s been in PR and then gone back to journalism. Whether it’s once they’ve worked more reasonable hours and got used to being paid more you really don’t want to go back” (participant three). One participant did state that a journalist will return occasionally, although perceived it as probably being hard to do once a “decent salary” (participant one) had been earned.

Despite these reasons for a move to PR, many participants still thought journalism would be a more satisfying career than PR. Participants believed that they have more variety in their role, more control and autonomy over their work, receive higher levels of trust, are more dynamic, and feel like they achieve something of importance. In contrast PR was described as boring and stale:

On the side of PR that I’ve seen they’re either happier with a less exciting job or find different challenges in what they do. Because the ones I’ve seen, I think oh my god, I couldn’t work here. It’s so stale and boring and you’ve got to do what someone says all the time. (Participant five)

#### *Improving the relationship.*

When asked how the relationship could be improved, participants held mixed views about who should be responsible for the improvements. Half the participants believed PR practitioners and journalists should be equally responsible for improving the relationship as both benefit: “I certainly wouldn’t say the responsibility relies with PR .

.. it pays off for both sides, so it should come from both” (participant one). Others suggested improving the relationship should be the responsibility of PR practitioners due to the lack of time journalists have to spend on cultivating relationships: “It would absolutely take the PR practitioner because we just don’t have time” (participant five). It was also suggested that senior members in the organisation for which a PR practitioner works should take some responsibility in helping to improve the relationship. Here participants noted PR practitioners are often constrained in the way they can handle media situations. This was not viewed as particularly helpful, especially during negative scenarios:

If there does need to be an improvement it’s probably more likely to come from the organisation the PR person works for in terms of being prepared to listen to what their PR people are saying and to what the media people are asking. (Participant three)

Participants provided a number of practical suggestions to improve the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists. The most commonly articulated suggestion was for both sides to have a better understanding of each other’s role and a greater appreciation for where each side is coming from:

I think sometime people do forget where the other side is coming from, and this is with journalists and PR people, and that they um, sit up and think about it a little bit more sometimes it would make it easier for both sides. (Participant three)

The production of better PR materials was also suggested as a way to improve relations. This came down to PR practitioners improving their materials by ensuring they are well written, newsworthy and interesting before sending to journalists. Other suggestions included taking the time to build good relationships with good old people

skills, “more honest, open communication from both sides” (participant six) and free products: “They need to send us more goods. Bottles of wine and chocolates, stuff like that would help” (participant two). Adding to this, however, one participant suggested an individual, one-on-one approach was necessary, as a blanket approach may not be the best course of action:

I guess it’s up to the independent or the individual organisations working with each other to have their own protocol or tolerance levels. I don’t think it’s something we could say across the board this would work or that would work. (Participant two)

The fact that many PR practitioners lack journalism experience was a clear issue for some participants. “It just seems quite clear that some of them haven’t worked here and don’t know how it works and don’t know what to send to a news editor” (participant five). Lack of journalism experience was frustrating when it came to PR practitioners understanding journalist needs, such as news value, deadlines, relevance and accuracy. To improve the relationship and reduce some of their basic mistakes, it was suggested that PR practitioners should receive journalism training: “If I was the PR industry I would second their juniors to a newsroom for a day or two as part of their training process” (participant eight).

#### *Semi-structured interviews summary.*

Data from the semi-structured interviews provided a rich description of the attitudes and perceptions that those who were interviewed hold towards PR practitioners, along with an insight into the reasons why such attitudes exist. What is clear is that mixed and often conflicting attitudes exist. During the course of an interview participants regularly contradicted themselves in relation to the views they held towards PR practitioners. In

such cases they were seen to say one thing, but to act upon it in another way when it personally affected them.

There were also clear areas where attitudes were predominantly negative. Once again, this was particularly the case when those who were interviewed began talking about the tactical interactions they have with PR practitioners. Here, PR offences such as lack of news value, relevance, mass mailed media releases, and pushy behaviour were viewed with derision. Gatekeeping was also a topic of contention, with journalists claiming it makes their work more difficult and does not allow them to achieve their goals in an unmanipulated environment.

More positively, those who were interviewed did believe that relationships with PR practitioners are important, although there were mixed views about who should be responsible for developing and maintaining the relationship. Interestingly, while some believed journalism to be of a higher standing, there was not a particularly strong response to questions about status, or to unethical behaviour in PR. Instead it was noted that both industries employ individuals who act unethically.

## Discussion

Newspaper journalists in New Zealand appear to be in a state of change regarding the attitudes and perceptions they hold towards PR practitioners. Those who took part in this study often held disparate and complex attitudes towards PR practitioners and the PR industry. While negative attitudes clearly exist, neutral and pragmatic perceptions are present, along with occasional positive opinions. This chapter combines and draws upon all three data sources to discuss the overall findings, while highlighting the similarities and differences this study has in relation to literature on the topic.

### *Tactical Interactions*

In this study, the majority of negative attitudes held by newspaper journalists are caused by the actions of PR practitioners when liaising with journalists. In other words, there are specific tactics that PR practitioners use and mistakes that they make, which journalists dislike, causing them to view PR practitioners negatively. Previous studies have also found evidence of this (Adams, 2002; Curtin & Rhodenbaugh, 2001; Grabowski, 1992; Hobsbawm, 2006; Kopenhaver, 1985; Kopenhaver et al., 1984; Pomerantz, 1989; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a; White & Hobsbawm, 2007), suggesting that when PR practitioners engage with journalists, they often make basic mistakes or perform certain media relations “sins” (Grabowski, 1992) that infuriate journalists.

From a proactive media relations perspective (interactions with journalists, led by PR practitioners to encourage the publication of a certain news story idea), the tactical offences that commonly frustrated newspaper journalists in New Zealand were publicity disguised as news (82.4% per cent of survey respondents thought this), because it was seen as an attempt to get free advertising – “they’re cheekily asking newspapers for free

editorial space when they should actually be paying for advertising” (interview participant four) – and lack of newsworthiness or relevance: “[Editors are] not going to put anything in that’s not relevant or they think that’s just crap” (interview participant seven).

Mass-mailed, untargeted media releases were also despised “because it is a mass mail out . . . it just gets swiped straight away” (interview participant eight). This was because many mass-mailed media releases were often not relevant and were regarded as time-consuming for journalists to read: “I spend a lot of time, my own time, after work, culling this crap . . . people see an email address at the top of the paper and they go, I’ll hit send there” (interview participant four). While these examples provide a snapshot of the tactical PR sins looked unfavourably upon by newspaper journalists (refer to the tactical interaction subheadings within the data chapter for further specific examples), such practices caused newspaper journalists to regard PR practitioners as lacking knowledge about the media they contact or what the journalist writes about (73.9% of survey respondents thought this). This view was summed up well by one interview participant:

It’ll be some twenty-five year-old kid . . . working for a public relations agency in Auckland who’s probably never even seen say the Waiuku Post, or the Matamata Chronicle, or you know, the Wanganui Chronicle or whatever, but they send it to them anyway. They’ve got no idea what it is. (Interview participant four)

Furthermore, interview participants and survey comment respondents also held the view that because of these sins, PR practitioners must lack an understanding of journalists’ needs and, therefore, lack good media relations skills:



I find the standard of PR practitioners in New Zealand (from a media point of view anyway) to be generally low. Very few of them understand good media relations – they mis-target stories to media who would never be interested, mislead us on so-called exclusives and don't often bother to build relationships. (Survey comment respondent nine)

Given these points, it was somewhat unexpected to find that survey respondents believed that PR practitioners do understand journalistic problems such as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest and making the best use of space (44.9% thought this), highlighting the sometimes contradictory nature of findings in this study.

From a reactive media relations perspective (PR practitioners responding to journalists' enquiries), newspaper journalists viewed PR practitioners who obstruct their access to company officials with particular disdain – a finding that agrees with others (Charron, 1989; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver, 1985; White & Hobsbawm, 2007). In this study, a significant percentage of survey respondents (76.4%) charged PR practitioners with being obstructionists. For newspaper journalists this act was clearly regarded as “the most frustrating thing for a journalist” (interview participant two) because of the negative impact it can have on a journalist's work. Newspaper journalists particularly disliked gatekeeping because it creates a stilted, time-consuming way of working, which can limit their questions and the responses they receive, and can impede their understanding of a situation:

There is an abundance of PR people that exist in almost every company and organisation these days acting as gatekeepers to the people you need to talk to. For example, if you want to speak to a bank manager in Palmerston North you have to first contact the PR person of the bank who will be based in Auck[land] or

Wellington and know nothing of what you are asking. They then get the info from the bank manager you require, filter it and send it back to you. It is incredibly frustrating not to be able to talk to people directly and an example of how the PR industry attempts to manipulate the news media. (Survey comment respondent 19)

At a basic level, it appears these tactical offences frustrate journalists because they have an actual impact on them being able to do their job and deliver what is expected of them. If you scratch a little deeper, frustrations towards these PR sins may also arise from the extent to which a newspaper journalist upholds the traditional ideals of journalism. Belz et al. (1989) state that these ideals traditionally include “accuracy, fairness, objectivity, balance, and informativeness”, adding that journalism does not involve “withholding information, keeping a hidden agenda, making ethical compromises, [or] advocating a particular agenda” (p. 131). This was supported by interview participants: “As a journalist, one of your most important functions is to ensure that the information you present to the public is balanced and impartial” (interview participant six).

Public relations, on the other hand, is a more subjective industry where PR practitioners act as “responsible advocates for organisations and clients”, providing a “voice for the ideas, facts and viewpoints” of those they represent (Public Relations Institute of New Zealand, 2008). This means PR practitioners select, shape and present their ideas, information and news in order to present their organisation or client in the best possible light. White and Hobsbawm (2007) suggest that when PR practitioners select the information they intend to communicate to journalists, they do so in the same way lawyers would select information to present a client in court. That process involves selecting information that will present a strong argument or a favourable impression. This approach conflicts with the traditional ideals of journalism:

Their objective is obviously and quite literally to get whatever they are publicising into the paper in the best light possible. Whereas our objective is to tell a story and to get the facts across to the reader and the two things are not necessarily one and the same. (Interview participant eight)

This suggests that the more strongly a newspaper journalist tries to uphold journalistic ideals such as truth-seeking and objectivity, the more likely there will be conflict when the two sides interact. Sterne (2010) made a similar suggestion, although he believes the journalistic ideal of objectivity is a myth:

At a philosophical level the more strongly media insist on maintaining the myth of objective reporting, the more the friction increases. News editors in particular, believe they have a right to information and when public relations practitioners are perceived to be standing in their way they are despised. (p. 24)

Taking the specific example of gatekeeping, newspaper journalists' ideals are challenged by the way PR practitioners control the flow of information in and out of the organisation. Rather than allowing an employee to present an unedited version of the truth, PR practitioners control the communication process. In doing so, they shape the message presented to the journalist, so it portrays the organisation in the best light possible. This leads some newspaper journalists to believe PR practitioners are withholding information: "I do see their role as wholly to protect and promote their organisations, not to give the best, most accurate, most informative information to readers" (survey comment respondent 22). This whole process, therefore, inhibits a newspaper journalist's ability to obtain an objective version of the truth.

The finding that tactical PR sins are the biggest source of outright negativity for newspaper journalists is important. Firstly, these negative attitudes are clearly based on

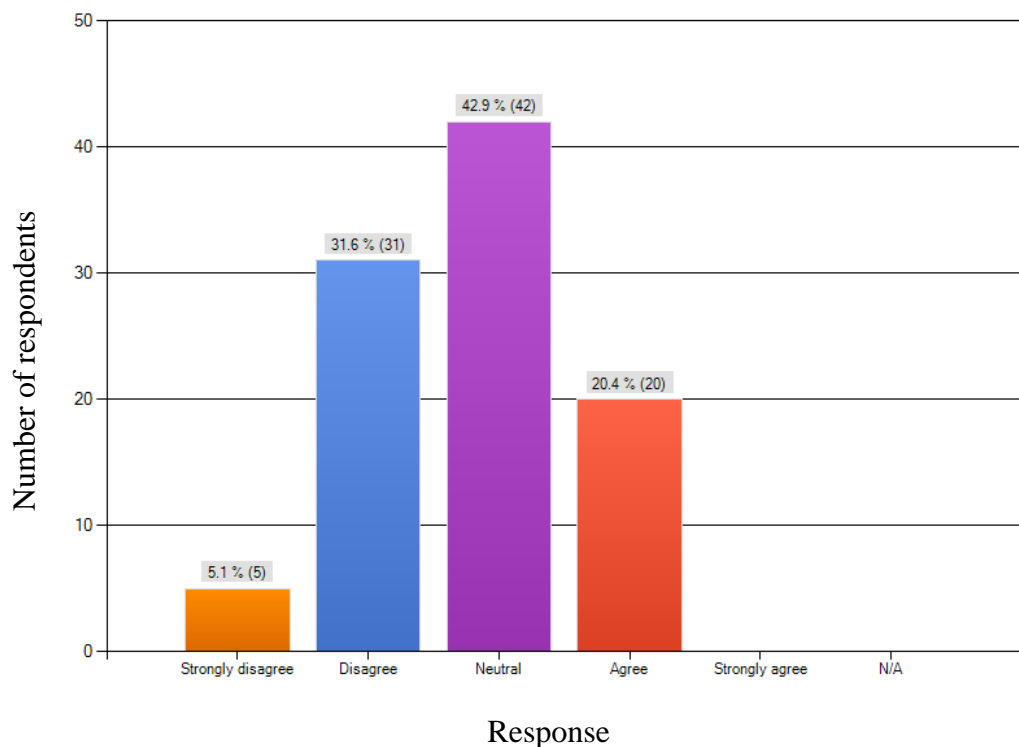
concrete, personal experiences that newspaper journalists have had with PR practitioners. It also suggests PR practitioners in New Zealand are, therefore, responsible for a large part of the negativity bestowed upon them by newspaper journalists. This implies there is a pressing need for some PR practitioners to improve their efforts. This latter point is important because unfortunately for the PR industry, newspaper journalists (76.9% of survey respondents) believe that offences such as lack of news value, overt persistence or dishonesty taint the whole PR industry. These findings support previous research (Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sterne, 2010; Tilley & Hollings, 2008), which found that journalists' individual experiences with PR practitioners influence their perceptions of PR practitioners as a whole.

One final point to make about the tactical interactions between PR practitioners and journalists is that the PR practitioners commonly charged with carrying out media relations tactics are often juniors. In-house PR managers are usually responsible for the strategic PR functions, while junior executives are usually responsible for conducting tactical-level work. The same also applies in PR agencies, coupled with the added fact that clients pay more per hour for senior PR practitioners and less for juniors. This means it is not so cost effective for clients to pay for a senior PR practitioner to pitch story ideas or media releases to journalists. Instead, juniors are, therefore, usually tasked with the tactical legwork of media relations. As one interview participant suggested, those commonly responsible for liaising with journalists are also those who may have the least experience of working with journalists. Could this have an impact on the quality of interactions with journalists and, therefore, affect journalists' attitudes? Almost certainly:

It's a sell job and it's the young person at the coalface of the public relations agency having to phone the grumpy news editor on a deadline. That kid . . . wouldn't have a clue what an editor's like on a production afternoon. (Interview participant four)

### *Perceptions of Helpfulness*

Newspaper journalists in New Zealand hold mixed and conflicting attitudes about the helpfulness of PR practitioners. Firstly, as demonstrated in Figure 4, there was a mixed spread of responses to the statement “PR practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news”. The significant number of newspaper journalists who opted for a neutral response suggests many newspaper journalists are undecided, or have had mixed experiences with PR practitioners and, therefore, feel they cannot categorically answer one way or another.



*Figure 4.* Responses to the survey statement: PR practitioners help journalists to obtain accurate, complete and timely news.

If we take the example of obstruction, it can clearly be seen that there are times when PR practitioners are regarded as a hindrance to newspaper journalists. At the same time, it has been demonstrated through the survey and interview findings that there are times when PR practitioners are clearly of help to newspaper journalists. For example, newspaper journalists felt they depend on newsworthy PR material to help them fulfil their role (54.4% survey respondents thought this) and that PR practitioners are helpful when they get newspaper journalists the information they want, or when they set up interviews and carry out other background legwork for the journalist:

I was one of the journalists that went one year to cover the commonwealth games.

And there was a PR company that essentially worked with the commonwealth games committee and were basically running the media events around the teams. So when it was a question of various components of a team being announced and that sort of thing, that was part of their role to make sure the media knew it was happening and to help set up media interview opportunities, you know, press conferences, so from that point of view it certainly is a big help, because otherwise you are chasing all these things on your own and obviously they are enabling media in a sense by creating those opportunities. (Interview participant six)

In such cases, PR practitioners were described as “worth their weight in gold” (survey comment respondent 30) and “godsend” (interview participant three) by several newspaper journalists who felt PR practitioners can be a great assistance to their work. This is tempered by the simultaneous view that PR practitioners are also regarded as a hindrance: “There are some people who are very helpful and who actually do the best to facilitate what you’re doing”, while there are “people who definitely do see their role as stopping us from getting anything, stopping us from talking to any of their staff” (interview participant one). This implies that newspaper journalists regard PR

practitioners who are helpful towards them to be good at their job. However, when PR practitioners are unable to facilitate a journalist's request they are regarded as bad at their job:

Sometimes the person concerned at the PR end knows what they are doing and how to do their job properly; they'll actually be of use to a journalist. Sometimes they are just unnecessarily obstructive and actually make the job difficult and end up making their own job harder in the process. (Interview participant eight)

This assumes PR practitioners are there to serve the journalist rather than the organisation for which the PR practitioner works: "the role of a PR person is to get the information to me" (interview participant eight). The media, through journalists, are just one vehicle, albeit an important one, for PR practitioners to communicate messages to their target audiences. They are not the sole focus of a PR practitioner's role, and even if they were, the PR practitioner is there to serve their own organisation first and foremost. This means a PR practitioner will not always be able to facilitate the journalist in the way the journalist desires.

Moving forward from the help versus hindrance and good versus bad dichotomies, it may not be particularly outrageous to suggest that if newspaper journalists do not get what they want from PR practitioners there will likely be antagonism and negativity in the relationship. This view was certainly proposed by one interview participant who stated that "unless they tell you what you want to know you're in an almost adversarial role with them" (interview participant two). Such a view is supported by Ryan and Martinson's (1988) theory that negative interactions breed negative perceptions, and by Sterne (2010) who suggested that "media are inclined to be more positive towards public relations practitioners when they behave in a way which aligns with their

interests and are more negative when they do not” (p. 23). This view also supports the good versus bad theory found in this study.

### *Information Subsidies*

When examining journalists’ attitudes towards PR information subsidies (media releases, news story ideas, media statements) from each of the three data sets (survey, survey comments and interviews) it was clear that the views, as a whole, were somewhat contradictory. The quantitative survey data that focused on the supply of PR information subsidies to newspaper journalists were, for the most part, more negative in tone than either the interview findings or the qualitative survey comments. Furthermore, there was a clear contradiction among survey responses. On the one hand, newspaper journalists believed that they do depend on newsworthy PR material to help them fulfil their role (54.4% thought this). On the other, they believed PR practitioners are not necessary to the production of the daily newspaper (51.1% thought this), do not carry out work for the newspaper that would otherwise go undone (49% thought this), and do not work as extended newspaper staff (75.5% thought this).

In contrast, interview and survey comment respondents were more positive. Here it was predominantly viewed as a useful source of information and ideas for story generation, particularly when journalists faced newsroom pressures such as tight deadlines. “Coming from a hard news background I have found PR people . . . helpful in providing crucial interviews with people or information when I needed it on demanding deadlines” (survey comment respondent 11). But journalists were, however, explicit that any use of PR material should never simply be regurgitated. Instead, it should always be checked for accuracy and balanced:



There's no need to be anti PR because it's up to the reporter to establish whether a press release is a story or not by independently verifying facts, or merely using the press release as a starting point for further inquiry. As far as I'm concerned, if a journalist fails to do this, that's their problem for being lazy . . . I welcome any press releases. I can just hit delete if it's too commercial and if it isn't, then I have been given a news idea. I never just print it as fact, I will make inquiries with every aspect of the story to make sure I have the best angle. (Survey comment respondent 11)

Overall, these findings are contradictory. On the one hand some journalists feel they have a dependence on newsworthy PR material to help them fulfil their job. On the other, the survey results also suggested journalists believe they can perform their job just as well without PR practitioners, a view backed up by several interview participants and survey comment respondents: "I could do my job almost as well without any assistance from PR" (survey comment respondent 15). This was because news was also obtained from other sources, including from members of the public.

There was also a clear attitude that any dependence on PR information subsidies is due to the economic climate of news production (53.3% thought this), specifically due to inadequate levels of staff and other resources (61.2% thought this): "with staffing levels as they are PR is now necessary to fill newspapers" (survey comment respondent three). However, the very nature and wording of these survey statements means journalists are alluding to the fact that, contrary to them being able to do their job just as well without PR practitioners, PR practitioners are now necessary to the production of a newspaper and do provide journalists with stories that would otherwise not be covered. This was also suggested by one interview participant who stated, "I think most people in the media would say that press releases are used more than they admit" (interview

participant seven). The view that PR practitioners assist the news production process is not new. Walters et al. (1994) have previously stated that:

No news medium has enough people or hours to cover the big news of the day, let alone the routine activities of numerous public agencies or private institutions, even though those activities may have long lasting effects upon the readers' lives. It falls, then, to the public relations staff to disseminate information about such activities to reporters and to assist the journalists with stories they uncover. (p. 346)

It is, therefore, not particularly surprising that this may also apply in a New Zealand context, with 41.2 per cent of survey respondents believing PR practitioners and journalists are partners in the dissemination of information. Such a view was supported by interview participants: "They have different roles in that process, but I think they are partners to some extent" (interview participant six).

Newspaper journalists in New Zealand are obviously conflicted about their use of PR material. To some extent it seems there may be a slight reluctance to admit to a dependence on PR, based upon the fact that it challenges journalistic ideologies. However, despite any reluctance to admit using PR material, it can clearly be seen from their response to the survey statement "PR is a parasite to the press" that newspaper journalists do not believe the relationship is purely one-sided, where PR practitioners are the only ones to benefit. Instead, 44.6 per cent of newspaper journalists were neutral in their response to this, suggesting they were undecided or saw both sides of the argument; while a further 34.8 per cent disagreed. This suggests it is acknowledged by journalists that a level of mutual advantage and dependence exists between the two sides. This finding was certainly supported during the interviews: "both, in some ways, rely on the other to enable them to do their job properly" (interview participant six).

Newspaper journalists were clear, however, that many PR materials are viewed as an attempt to gain free advertising (75% interview respondents). This was particularly the case when the materials were from consumer PR practitioners or from other profit-driven corporations: “If it’s council or police press releases . . . it’s quite different from big corporations wanting some free advertising” (interview participant five). This suggests that when a journalist perceives there to be a profit-driven motive behind the PR subsidy they are more likely to view it as an attempt to gain free advertising – “if they’ve got a product, pay for advertising” (interview participant four) – than when it is from an organisation that lacks profit-driven motives. “We’re slightly more cynical about the corporate motives than we would be say for a non-profit organisation” (interview participant seven).

Disdain towards PR practitioners’ attempts to obtain free advertising may also be connected to a sense of protection towards the journalist’s newspaper, from both a quality-assurance and an economic perspective. This is because PR material is often seen as damaging to the editorial content of their newspaper: “I don’t want our readers to pick up, look at a story and think this is full of guff and move on” (interview participant seven). This view was supported by the quantitative survey data where journalists believed the abundance of PR material has not caused an increase in the quality of reporting (65.7% thought this). Attempts to obtain free advertising may also be regarded by journalists as having an impact on the economic wellbeing of their newspaper:

They’re wanting free editorial space and not buying advertising space in newspapers. Meanwhile they’re going and advertising those products on behalf of those clients somewhere else. So they’re getting free stuff from papers like us, and other news media that isn’t giving them anything is getting their advertising spend . . . news is

value, you know, our product. We put our newspaper through a letterbox twice a week, free for people . . . that news service has a value, but if advertisers walk away ultimately, we will die. (Interview participant four)

Such findings align with those of Curtin (1999) who found PR information subsidies are not necessarily judged by the level of news contained within them, but rather by the motives of the organisation behind it, suggesting that those with profit motives are viewed as an economic drain by journalists. Lack of profit motive may, as Sallot and Johnson (2006a) have suggested, lead newspaper journalists to view such PR information subsidies more favourably, potentially because journalists may regard them as more beneficial to society and because they may receive a feel-good factor from them. Given the attitudes demonstrated by New Zealand newspaper journalists regarding profit-driven PR materials, it is pertinent to suggest a similar attitude may exist in the New Zealand source-reporter relationship: “I think you are always less trusting of commercial organisations because their motives are, quite simply, profit-driven” (interview participant seven).

### *Status Perceptions*

While many newspaper journalists in New Zealand tend to believe that journalism is higher in status than PR, possibly because they believe it is a more noble, valuable industry, there was still a relatively high percentage of newspaper journalists who opted for a neutral response (31.4% of survey respondents) to the statement “public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism”. There were also some (16.7%) who believed it to be equal in status. This point is noteworthy because it indicates that although newspaper journalists in New Zealand commonly see themselves as higher in status; it is not a completely widespread attitude.

The percentage of neutral responses to the statement about status may indicate that many newspaper journalists are undecided as to whether journalism is higher or lower in status, or that status simply does not bother them. It is important to consider here what may be causing some of the ambivalence towards status. Newsrooms, not just in New Zealand, but around the world are typically being required to do more with less (Davis, 2000; Lewis et al., 2008), particularly during recent tough economic times. Because of this, it is pertinent to suggest that commercially driven journalism may erode a journalist's ability to uphold traditional journalistic values. Findings from this study indicate that newsroom constraints impact on a journalist's ability to spend time investigating stories, seeking balancing view points, or checking stories for accuracy. All of these factors pose a challenge to maintaining journalistic values:

I think there has been a tendency in recent years, I think in some publications, possibly more in the smaller publications where you've got fewer staff . . . to pick up stuff put out by PR people just almost at face value and not to investigate to get whether they stack up, whether it's a balanced story. (Interview participant six)

And:

The deadline pressure is just too great to go back and check everything that, particularly if you've got it from a reliable source, or an official source, in a press release, a lot of the times you will be told just rely on the press release, don't go back and check all the details that they've given you in their release. (Interview participant one)

These factors are likely to impact on a journalist's ability to perform what is regarded as the traditional role of a journalist, which also suggests that traditional journalistic standards are being eroded. A former editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, Eric

Beecher, is also of the view that commercial pressures undoubtedly impact the role and values of journalism:

Almost all the key decisions being made about journalism . . . particularly newspaper journalism . . . now revolve around cutting costs. No matter how it's dressed up, that is the agenda, and anyone who tries to cling on to the traditional approach to journalism is going to be disappointed. (Beecher, cited in Philp, 2007, p. 3)

If this is the case, it is clear that this could have a significant impact on the way newspaper journalists feel about their own industry. Ambivalence revealed by this study about whether PR is equal in status to journalism may, therefore, indicate an erosion in journalists' own perceptions about the worth of their profession. If the constraints that many newspaper journalists now work under mean they are unable to uphold their traditional journalistic values, it may cause them not to distinguish themselves so highly in comparison to PR.

#### *Ethical Behaviour and Professional Integrity in PR and Journalism*

Newspaper journalists believe unethical behaviour can occur in PR and that journalists are slightly more honest than PR practitioners because of the objective versus subjective nature of their roles. However, newspaper journalists still do not view PR as an inherently unethical profession overall. While nearly 46 per cent of newspaper journalists did not believe that "PR practitioners are typically frank and honest", nearly the same percentage (44.9%) opted for a neutral response to the same statement. A further 9.2 per cent felt that the statement was true. Survey respondents were also predominantly neutral (52% thought this) about whether PR practitioners can be trusted, along with 25.5 per cent who thought that they can be trusted. Neutral was also the

preferred response for 71.4 per cent of respondents who answered the statement “PR practitioners are of good sense, good will and good moral character”.

These responses demonstrate that newspaper journalists are either undecided regarding their attitudes towards these statements or more likely, do not believe they can make a blanket judgement about ethical behaviour in PR either way. It is also possible that there may be an element of newspaper journalists not wanting the “pot to call the kettle black” when it comes to unethical behaviour, particularly given the findings in this study that newspaper journalists readily admitted that unethical practices occur in journalism. Neutral responses may also indicate that journalists believe ethical and upright behaviour is more of an individual personality-related trait than a specific professional trait. This view was certainly presented by interview participants who suggested newspaper journalists are reluctant to generalise about unethical behaviour in PR: “I don’t go into situations assuming that if you are from PR then you’re going to be dishonest or anything” (interview respondent one). Instead they appeared pragmatic, believing that unethical behaviour probably occurs in most professions and, as with any group of people there are always some individuals who are more ethical than others:

I don’t think you can make any generalisations. It’s like any profession. There are people who are very good at what they do, and so you do trust them and do have a lot of respect for what they do. And there others who completely ruin that for people. So yeah I don’t think it would be fair to tar anyone with the same brush. (Interview participant three)

A particularly noteworthy finding of this research was that newspaper journalists were extremely forthcoming in describing unethical behaviour in journalism, not just in PR. This was very interesting because previous literature (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003;

Sterne, 2010; White & Hobsbawm, 2007) suggests journalists often deny that unethical behaviour occurs in journalism. In particular, Sterne (2010, p. 25) states that New Zealand journalists “overlook” the fact that unethical behaviour occurs in journalism. This study argues against this supposition.

Firstly, this study takes the view that newspaper journalists are realistic about the occurrence of unethical behaviour in journalism and are willing to admit it does occur. This was evidenced by the large majority of quantitative survey respondents (73%) who admitted that some journalists use unethical means and go to extraordinary lengths to get their story. Furthermore, interview participants also spoke of the fact that some journalists act in an unethical way: “[journalism] like every walk of society [has] people within it that are unethical” (interview participant seven). Many interview participants were also particularly forthcoming in providing examples of the type of unethical behaviour that can occur. One interview participant summed up the typical examples well: “threatening someone or blackmailing someone . . . or perhaps not being entirely truthful in their approach to the person as to what they were hoping to get from a story” (interview participant seven). Adding to this, the majority of quantitative survey respondents (61.5%) believed that some journalists embellish an otherwise less-than-exciting story as a way to attract readers and increase sales and profit margins for their organisation. Potential driving forces behind some journalists’ unethical behaviour were also offered. These were summed up by one newspaper journalist who did not personally approve:

It’s a competitive industry and if you’re . . . trying to make sure that you get something that the opposition doesn’t, I can see how you might be tempted to cut corners. Either from your own competitive streak or because your bosses are driving you hard. The example that I’ve always come back to about this type of thing is . . .



the man who was involved in the Jayson Blair type situation where he'd sit making up stories. . . . I can understand how the reporter might have felt the need to just write the story the boss wanted just to get the boss off his back. So that's another possible motivating factor why people might cut corners and behave unethically, [in an] undesirable way, you know, because they simply feel driven to deliver what their bosses are looking for. (Interview participant eight)

Newspaper journalists apparent readiness to openly admit to unethical behaviour during this research may, again, indicate a shift in the idealistic moral self-perceptions that journalists hold about their own profession. Could the reality of the current media environment again, be a possible explanation for this shift in perceptions? Or could the commercial realities of news production, as interview participant eight suggested above, cause greater levels of unethical behaviour to occur? Furthermore, is there a link between journalists' increasingly pragmatic views about unethical behaviour in journalism and the perceptions they have towards their own industry's status. It could be that the reality of not-so-moral behaviour of journalists, prompted by the economic and commercial pressures of their organisation, is leading them to reassess their attitudes towards their own status, thus providing a further explanation for their apparent growing ambivalence towards their own status.

In their historical study of the hostility that journalists hold towards PR practitioners, DeLorme and Fedler (2003) charged journalists with being hypocritical in their views of PR. This was particularly the case when it came to unethical behaviour: "early reporters and editors were no great paragons of virtue. Rather, many engaged in the very practices (e.g. faking) that they condemned when conducted by PR practitioners" (p. 109). The willingness by newspaper journalists in this study to admit to unethical behaviour in

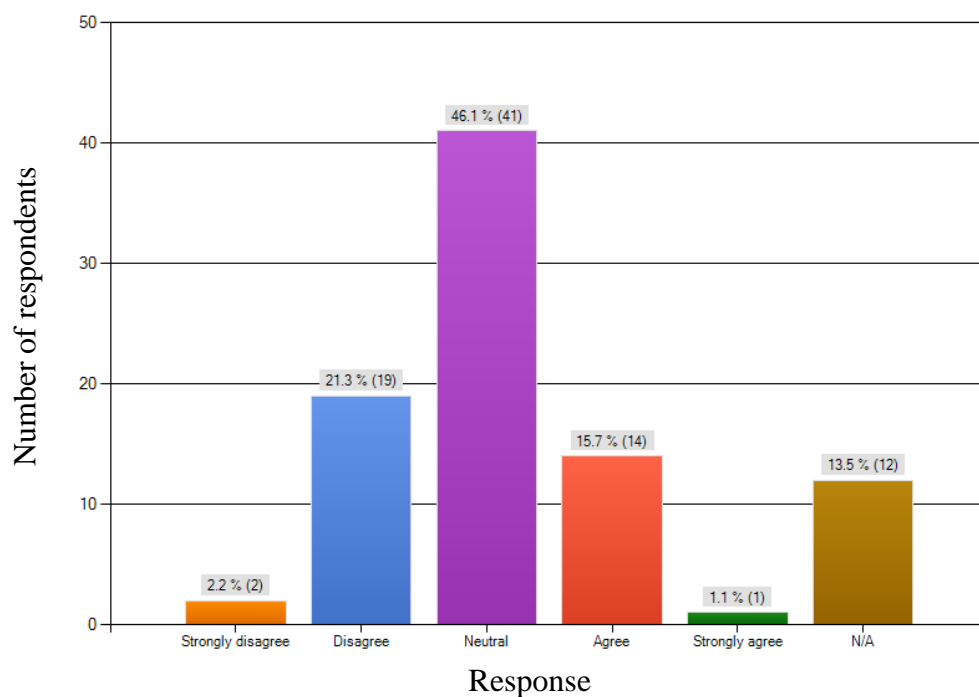
journalism could, therefore, suggest there may also be a downward shift in the level of hypocrisy in their attitudes towards PR practitioners.

### *Prejudice in Journalism Education*

In line with previous studies (Cline, 1982; Kopenhaver, 1985; Shaw & White, 2004; Wright, 2005) there is a distinct possibility that some journalism students in New Zealand may develop negative perceptions about PR practitioners during their journalism education. Three survey statements in this study focused on the impact that journalism education has on the perceptions journalists hold towards PR practitioners. These were: Journalism text books perpetuate negative stereotypes about PR, journalism educators are intent on perpetuating negative stereotypes about PR, and journalists are conditioned during formal education to have negative attitudes towards PR practitioners.

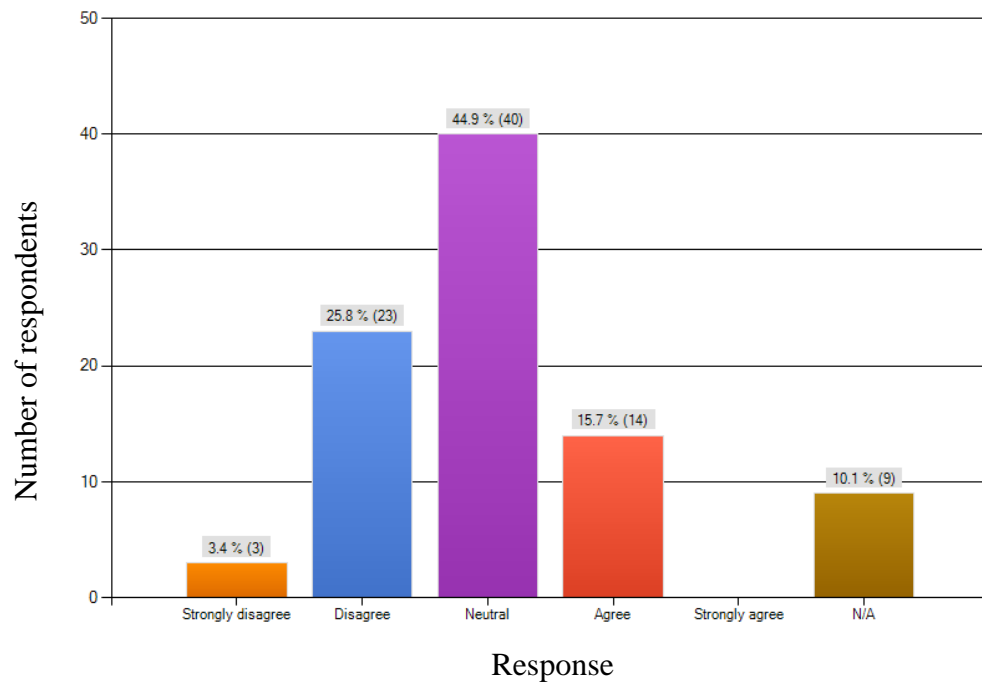
As shown in Figures 5, 6, and 7, the most frequent response to each statement was neutral, indicating the possibility that a number of newspaper journalists are unsure whether this is true. The survey also showed that there were many newspaper journalists who did believe that negative attitudes towards PR practitioners may initially be developed during journalism education. Furthermore, qualitative survey comments and interview data suggested some journalism educators refer to PR as the dark side: “I think tutors play on the common perceived mutual dislike between journalism and ‘the dark side’ but it is done as humour, rather than trying to turn students against it” (survey comment respondent 25) and, “PR is described in some journalism schools as being the dark side” (interview participant seven).

Such findings should be of concern to the PR industry because it signals that the relationship may start out on an unequal footing, putting PR practitioners at a disadvantage no matter how good their media relations skills. Furthermore, it may cause an unnecessary bias against PR material, regardless of the news value contained within it, causing journalists to dismiss important news stories and information that would be valuable to their readers.

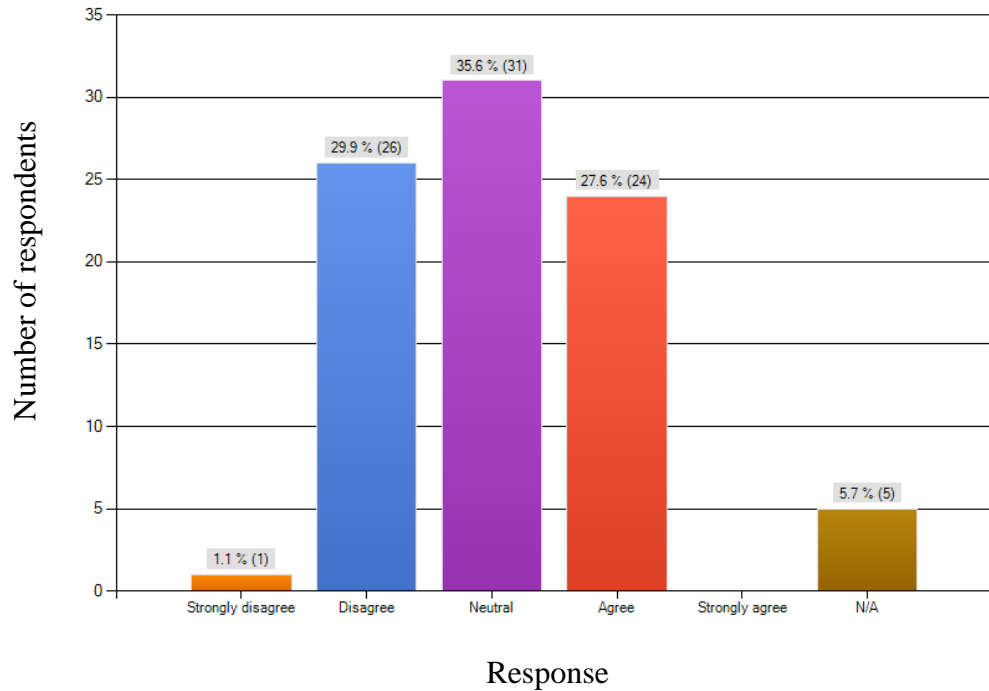


*Figure 5.* Responses to the survey statement: Journalism text books perpetuate negative stereotypes about PR.

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*Figure 6.* Responses to the survey statement: Journalism educators are intent on perpetuating negative stereotypes about PR.



*Figure 7.* Responses to the survey statement: Journalists are conditioned during formal education to have negative attitudes towards PR practitioners.

*Perceptions of a Career in PR for Newspaper Journalists*

This study found that PR practitioners are categorically viewed by newspaper journalists in New Zealand as having better pay and working conditions. Such a finding supports the work of others (Fedler et al., 1988; Nayman et al., 1977; Olson, 1989; Sallot & Johnson, 2006b) and was evidenced not only through the substantial number of quantitative survey respondents (77%) who believed this to be true, but also by interview participants who regularly referred to the better pay and work/life balance PR practitioners are perceived to have:

Working for a daily newspaper you've got deadlines constantly, fairly high pressure, particularly if people have got families and things that they want to get home at a certain time of night for then a nine-to-five job is going to look an awful lot more attractive . . . . But for a lot of people I think it is a matter of the pay rates as much as anything. (Interview participant three)

However, even though interview participants believed newspaper journalists move to a career in PR for a better work/life balance, consisting of better pay and hours, less stress and improved family circumstances, more newspaper journalists said they would not consider a career move to PR than those who would. A large number also remained neutral on this, which suggests they are undecided or have not ruled out a move in the future. In comparison, all interview participants said they would consider a move to PR at some point in their career, or for one, had at least not ruled out a move.

Given the resounding response from interview participants, and the compelling and historically repetitive reasons why a journalist might move into PR, it was interesting that so few newspaper journalists in the survey agreed they would consider a move. One possible explanation is while newspaper journalists recognise the perceived financial

and work/life benefits of a career in PR, it does not necessarily mean they believe PR provides a more satisfying career. Instead it could be argued that newspaper journalists believe journalism provides the more satisfying career out of the two professions, in terms of the actual work performed, rather than work conditions – a view suggested by five interview participants. “I haven’t got out of journalism and got into PR because I actually like the feeling that I’m achieving something, even on a weekly basis, rather than simply selling washing machines or whatever” (interview participant eight). It is also pertinent to suggest that just because a newspaper journalist would consider a move into PR it does not mean they will relinquish their ties to wanting a satisfying career. Rather, it could be argued that job satisfaction for those considering a move might be equally as important. Cries of, “it would need to be for something I was passionate about. And something that I cared about” (interview participant five) were espoused by many of the interview participants.

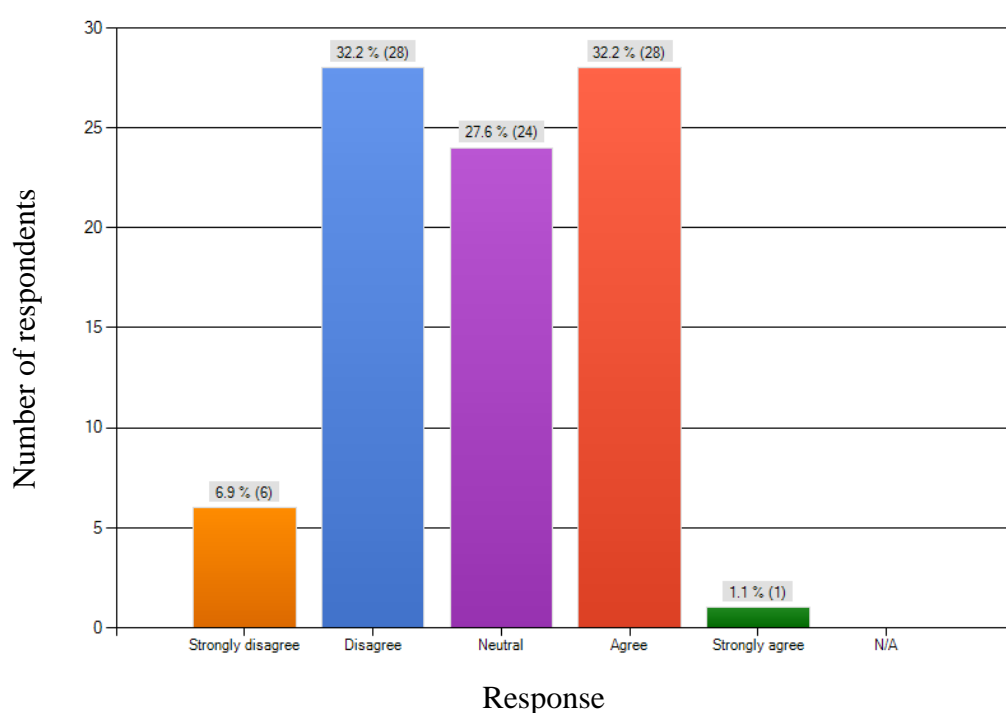
Despite the strong values orientation of newspaper journalists and the fact so many felt they would not move into PR, it was interesting to see that newspaper journalists are not overtly judgemental towards colleagues who switch to a career in PR. It may be difficult for many newspaper journalists to begrudge others who move into PR for wanting a better work/life balance, even if it conflicts with their own personal values. This does not mean that there was a complete lack of negative judgement towards those who move to PR. In fact there is still an obvious level of discomfort, although this could be more likely to come from the more staunch supporters of journalistic ideals, which Sterne (2010) believes is now a mythical premise.

Interview participants also suggested that after a certain period of time some journalists may become jaded with the pressures and realities of a modern newsroom. The ideals they began their career with may begin to dwindle, resulting in them

becoming “disillusioned” and “dissatisfied” (Fedler et al., 1988, p. 20). According to Olson (1989), this is because there is a disparity between the anticipated job satisfaction and the reality of the job satisfaction. This may, therefore, cause some newspaper journalists to reassess their job, potentially creating more pragmatic attitudes towards PR and lessening the prejudices they may once have held towards it.

Given the propensity for journalists to move into PR, it was suggested by interview participants that similarities must exist between the two professions for journalists to make the transition into PR so easily. This view is supported by Nayman et al. (1977) who stated that the similar skill-sets of the two professions means it is a logical step for journalists to move into PR if they become dissatisfied with their career in journalism. On the whole, however, newspaper journalists in New Zealand were certainly mixed in their attitudes regarding any similarities, as demonstrated in Figure 8. Given that some newspaper journalists agree there are similarities and some are undecided, could it be that those who disagree feel it would tarnish the ideological stance of journalism to equate it in any way with PR?

When discussing the workplace conditions and pay that PR practitioners receive, it was clear a level of antagonism exists in relation to the pay differentials between the two industries. Some studies (Jempson, 2005; Sallot & Johnson, 2006b) have suggested journalists are resentful of the fact that PR practitioners are perceived to earn more. In this study, a substantial percentage of newspaper journalists (77% of survey respondents) believed that PR practitioners are paid more than journalists. This was also commonly echoed by interview participants and the survey comment respondents. In many cases the interview participants and survey comment respondents communicated their perceptions about pay in a way that implied a level of resentment towards it:



*Figure 8.* Responses to the survey statement: PR practitioners and journalists have striking similarities and often work to achieve similar goals.

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What irks journalists is that the pay scale in journalism is downright mean. We work harder for less. We can't keep good young staff because the green fields of PR inevitably attract them about the time they want to start paying a mortgage. (Survey comment respondent 22)

Further evidence in this study of an attitude of resentment towards PR pay was evident through the choice of words used to describe it. These included the words “bitter”, “envious”, “envy” and “frustration”:

- “We’re all terribly envious because we know those people get paid more than we do and we think we’re doing a more valuable job” (interview participant two).



- “It’s partly envy because there is that economic knowledge that they are earning more than you” (interview participant eight).
- “There’s been big money paid to probably overrated and overpaid PR agents” (interview participant four).
- “I think we’re bitter because we get paid so much less” (interview participant one).

It is perplexing that journalists have ill-feeling towards PR practitioners about the pay they may receive, given they are two separate industries and given the often self-professed altruistic standpoint of journalists. This standpoint was expressed well by one survey respondent who left a comment at the end of the survey that he or she did not get into journalism for money, rather they wanted a career in journalism because he or she “wanted to do something that might make a difference” (survey comment respondent 16). If this was really the case, why would journalists resent the pay that PR practitioners receive? Yes, journalists may believe PR practitioners are paid to promote the wares of others (Andersen, 2007), which is true. But it does not explain why they would be jealous about the fact that PR practitioners get paid more. The fact that money was cited by interview participants as a prime reason why journalists move into PR suggests they may not be as altruistic as is often made out.

Altruism aside, jealousy about pay may be to do with the fact that newspaper journalists in New Zealand seem to perceive that they work harder than PR practitioners and, that overall in this study, there was the view that journalism is slightly higher in status than PR, a view also expressed by previous literature (Jeffers, 1977; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sterne, 2010). This may, therefore, account for an element of the antipathy that newspaper journalists in New Zealand direct towards PR practitioners, because they may feel that they deserve to be paid more.

*Sector, Organisation and Role Influence Journalists' Attitudes*

A particularly interesting finding of this study was that newspaper journalists' attitudes towards PR practitioners appear to be influenced by and change according to the sector and organisation in which a PR practitioner works – a suggestion also made by Len-Rios et al. (2009). PR practitioners working for profit-driven organisations are clearly viewed differently to those working in non-profit organisations, including public service organisations: “I personally do think there is a difference between those sectors and I think there's a great difference too with how journalists view them” (interview participant two). This finding was important for several reasons. Firstly, some PR practitioners are viewed by newspaper journalists as having an important role to play in society: “There are people out there who are doing more noble work in PR” (survey comment respondent 10). This applied in the main to those who work in charitable organisations, or those in an information-based role where they are required to communicate matters of importance to the public: “We deal with a lot of Government organisations as well and they do a lot of good work” (interview participant seven). On the flip side of this, some PR practitioners are viewed as selling-out, that is, they are regarded as simply engaged in helping their organisation to sell something by attempting to gain free advertising for the companies they represent.

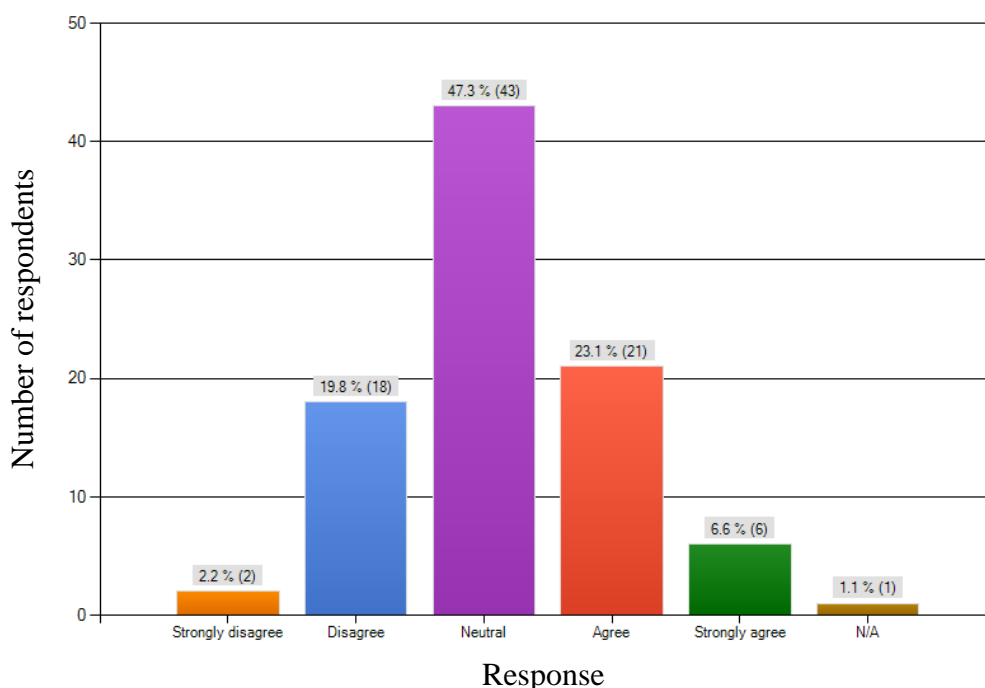
Secondly, this suggests PR practitioners who are perceived by newspaper journalists to work for altruistic organisations may be more viewed slightly more favourably because they are not seen to be driven by profit-motives – a finding supported by others (Curtin, 1999; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). It may also be partly due to the fact that newspaper journalists believe PR practitioners who work for non-profit organisations are more appreciative of the publicity they receive (55% thought this) – suggesting a thank-you may go a long way. It may also be conceived that newspaper journalists may

feel that their own values align more closely with PR practitioners who work for organisations which lack a profit motive, causing newspaper journalists to view them more favourably: “I think their motives are more in tune with what we are trying to put in the paper” (interview participant seven). This could well be because, as Aronoff (1975), states:

Journalists are more likely to trust information received from sources perceived to hold values and beliefs similar to their own, and that public relations sources will be credible to the extent that journalists perceive similarity between the values of practitioners and themselves. (p. 47)

In comparison, those seen to peddle products are more likely to be regarded by newspaper journalists as less altruistic, less likely to hold similar values, as well as being a drain on the economic wellbeing of a newspaper. Sallot and Johnson (2006a) claimed that journalists in the United States of America often regard PR practitioners who work for organisations that lack a profit motive as more ethical than those who do not. Interestingly, however, the findings of this study did not wholly agree with Sallot and Johnson’s (2006a) premise. Instead, newspaper journalists in New Zealand were clearly undecided about whether this is true or not, as demonstrated in Figure 9.

If we also consider that a significant percentage of newspaper journalists (75.8%) believed they are more open and less negative towards PR practitioners who work in specialist, technical fields of knowledge rather than consumer PR, it can be seen that there is a big difference in the way New Zealand newspaper journalists view consumer PR practitioners when compared to other types of PR practitioners.



*Figure 9.* Responses to the survey statement: PR practitioners who work in non-profit organisations are more ethical than those who do not.

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This means that some PR practitioners in New Zealand may be at a disadvantage in their relationship with newspaper journalists, simply because of the type of organisation for which they work. In some cases the mere mention by the PR practitioner of the organisation for which they work may be enough to switch the journalist off before the conversation has even begun.

Essentially, these points may suggest that no matter how good a consumer PR practitioner is at their job, or how well they facilitate newspaper journalists, they are always likely to be slightly marred by the type of PR that they perform: “PR people in any sector other than consumer related PR are given more time” (industry statement respondent 29). This was also reflected in the finding that when newspaper journalists were asked whether there are some industries where PR is more necessary than others

(which 69.6% believed to be true), the only two responses (as demonstrated earlier in Table 2) that could be considered consumer PR oriented were celebrity PR and entertainment PR. In fact, on two occasions respondents claimed that anything other than consumer PR could be regarded as necessary.

Newspaper journalists in New Zealand also seem to regard PR practitioners as individuals who work for private corporations, particularly those responsible for consumer PR. Individuals who work for non-profit, public-oriented organisations tended to be classed as communication practitioners:

There is this whole separate breed called communications managers and . . . they are working with the official bureaucracies . . . we would have a little more to do with them than we would say the PR person who's sending out advertising dressed as news. (Interview participant two)

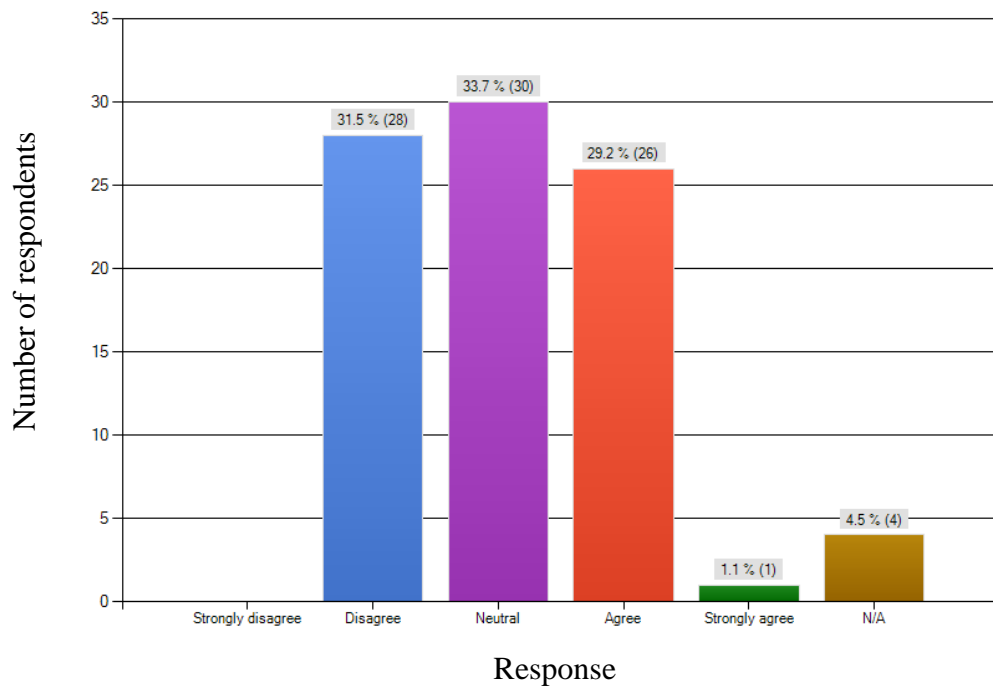
Taking these points into account, newspaper journalists may equate PR and PR practitioners as being less altruistic and dealing with more trivial, non-essential subject matters than those classed as communications practitioners. Such a view is supported by the fact that some newspaper journalists believed those who work as communication practitioners are more likely to perform a gatekeeping role. This was because the type of organisation where a communications practitioner works was regarded as more likely to require the management of sensitive issues: "You're not going to get the gatekeeper kind of PR person when you are talking about . . . promoting materials or consumers, but you are when it comes to perhaps asking about a sensitive health issue" (interview participant two).

Looking at the top five sectors where PR practitioners are regarded by newspaper journalists in this study as being more necessary than others, it would certainly be fair to say that these sectors often deal with complex and/or sensitive topics:

1. Health
2. Science
3. Government
4. Police
5. Technical or specialist fields.

However, even though newspaper journalists in New Zealand appear to hold a slightly more negative bias towards consumer PR practitioners, as well as those working for a profit-driven organisation, it is not to say that their relationship with those perceived to be communications practitioners is always smooth. Instead, the very practitioners they regard as being more altruistic, or who deal with more sensitive topics, are also the ones who are often required to act as gatekeepers for their organisation. Clearly then, given the disdain newspaper journalists have towards gatekeeping, the relationship with PR practitioners who are working within these fields, is still likely, at times, to be combative: “Police can be some of the most combative comms people to deal with” (interview participant one).

Interestingly, even though the health sector was cited as the number one industry where PR practitioners are necessary, it did not mean that newspaper journalists in New Zealand are automatically more accepting or supportive of health PR practitioners’ information subsidies (as demonstrated in Figure 10).



*Figure 10.* Responses to the survey statement: Journalists are generally more supportive and accepting of news stories suggested to them by health sector PR practitioners.

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Instead, newspaper journalists were broadly undecided as to whether they are more supportive and accepting of news stories suggested to them by health PR practitioners. This suggests that when newspaper journalists talk about sectors where PR practitioners are more necessary or are relied upon more, it is perhaps more likely to be because the PR practitioner is able to help a journalist better understand a topic that they are tasked with writing but may know little about:

If you are dealing with a PR person in a specialist area who has specialist knowledge you are going to lean on them a lot more . . . if I'm doing a piece about computing which I understand nothing about I'm more likely to lean on a PR person who knows something about the subject than I am about having to worry about talking to a member of the Highlanders Rugby Team. I understand rugby; I can happily converse

about it at a decent level without having to need a PR person to tell me what a number eight forward does. (Interview participant eight)

It may also be because a particular sector corresponds with a journalist's specific round, which means they automatically come into contact and rely on those PR practitioners for information more than others:

A lot depends on the publication and what kind of news you cover . . . in terms of police and hospitals and places like that which you do have to contact regularly for stories whether it be for comment on an incident that's happened or trying to get figures and trends and things that are going on in the community. (Interview participant five)

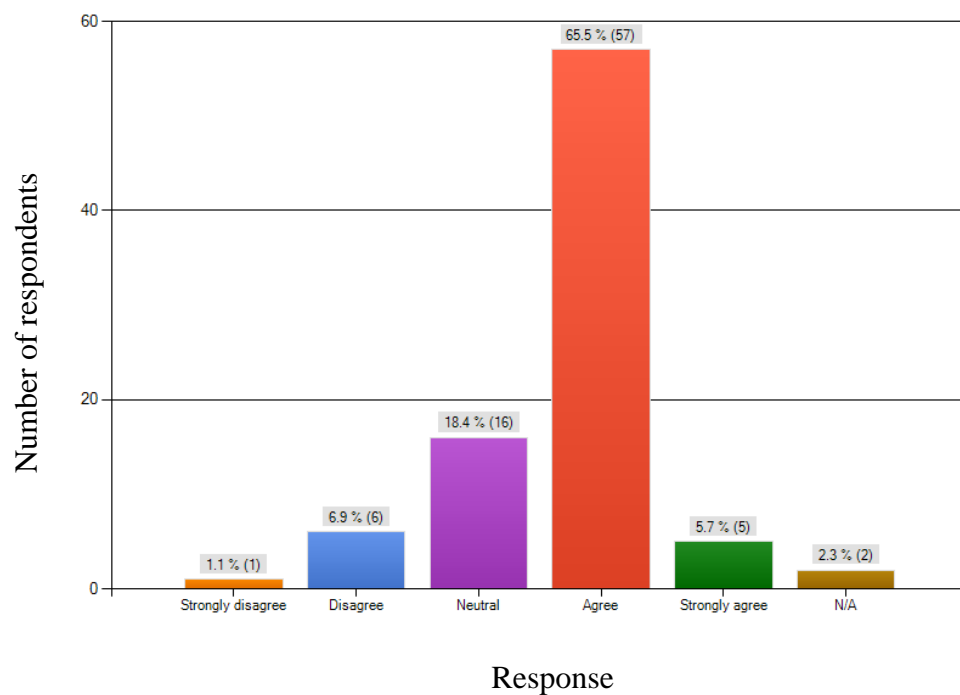
#### *An Element of Neutrality*

While there is obviously a level of antagonism in the relationship, findings also indicate that neutral attitudes exist. This suggests that newspaper journalists are, at times, undecided about the attitudes that they hold towards PR practitioners. This level of indecision may also be part responsible for the often contradictory nature of the findings. Although, in some cases, it is clear that a level of pragmatism may exist on the part of newspaper journalists, particularly in relation to status and ethical behaviour.

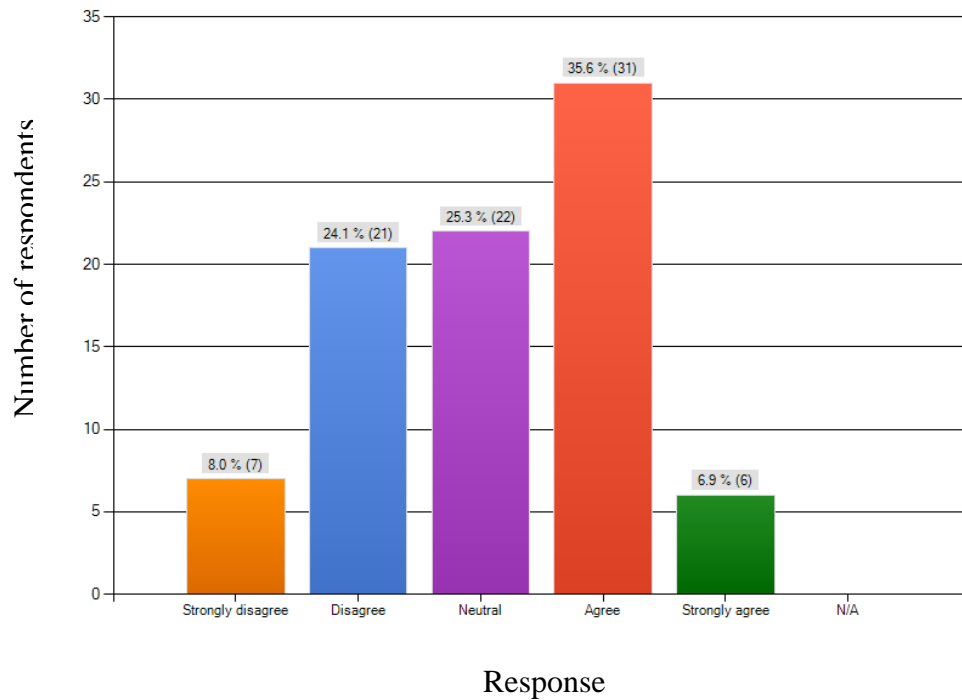
While newspaper journalists expressed the view that PR practitioners are generally viewed as errand boys for whoever hires them (59.2% survey respondents), this was almost certainly negated by the fact that newspaper journalists believe this is the case for any employee of any organisation, including themselves: "You have to be loyal to your employer, that's the way it works" (interview participant eight). This further



highlights the fact that journalists also perform their work in the best interests of their organisation (see Figures 11 and 12). The PR practitioners as “errand boys” statement has been used in previous studies, but this study suggests that when it is presented on its own it is somewhat misleading and creates a more negative perception towards public relations than should be accounted for. Bearing this in mind, newspaper journalists were cognisant that organisational constraints may affect or limit a PR practitioner’s ability to respond to their enquiry in the way the journalist may require: “A lot of them are really constrained by the organisation they work for and even if they are bending over backwards to try and work together they might not be able to give any information out” (interview participant three).



*Figure 11.* Responses to the survey statement: PR practitioners and journalists are both beholden to the organisation for which they work.



*Figure 12.* Responses to the survey statement: Journalists select from information in the interests of their employing organisations.

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This suggests there is a hospitable level of understanding towards the position in which PR practitioners are placed when they act as the middleman between a journalist and an organisation. It also implies that newspaper journalists recognise that it is not always a PR practitioner's fault if they cannot facilitate a journalist's request in the way the journalist requires. This abstract, hospitable understanding, however, actually conflicts with the attitudes newspaper journalists hold when they are personally confronted by a PR practitioner who cannot facilitate their request in the way they want. In such a situation, PR practitioners are instead regarded as bad at their job. From a theoretical perspective, this suggests that journalists' abstract proclamations about PR practitioners do not always match the proclamations they make when assessing their up-close interactions with them.

### *Abstract and Up-Close Attitudes*

Previous studies suggest that two schools of thought exist when it comes to the attitudes that journalists hold towards PR practitioners from an abstract, impersonal position, versus an up-close, personal position. Tilley and Hollings (2008) claimed that contrary to international evidence, journalists in New Zealand tend to “tolerate [PR practitioners] in the abstract and dislike up close” (p. 16). Sterne (2010), however, found that New Zealand journalists tend to align more closely with international research (Anderson & Lowrey, 2007; Jeffers, 1977; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a), which found that journalists tend to like PR practitioners up-close and dislike at a distance.

This study argues that a hybrid combination of both schools of thought actually exists among newspaper journalists in New Zealand, with no clear-cut leaning either way. This provides further support for the notion that newspaper journalists in New Zealand, as individuals and as a group, are highly conflicted in their attitudes towards PR practitioners. This is demonstrated by the fact that on the one hand, there is clear evidence that newspaper journalists in New Zealand regard PR practitioners whom they know and have regular contact with more highly than they do of the field of PR as a whole. This was not only evidenced by 82 per cent of the newspaper journalists who took part in the survey, but also by interview participants who felt that the majority of PR practitioners that they dealt with were fine: “I think the PR practitioners that get on the phone to me they’re very polite, they’re very nice. They know what they’re doing” (interview participant four).

At the same time some newspaper journalists also felt more favourable towards PR practitioners who have a journalism background (67.8% survey respondents), because

they may be more understanding towards a journalist's needs: "Those who have been journalists tend to be more understanding of where you're coming from" (interview participant one). Newspaper journalists also felt that they trust the PR practitioners who they regularly work with more than those they deal with on an irregular basis, because they have often built-up a relationship with them: "There probably is a situation of trust built up with people that you interact with on more than just a casual one off basis" (interview participant six). Furthermore, comments about PR being regarded as the dark side, spin, a waste of time and the perception that journalists would be better off without PR, also supported the notion that journalists hold negative views towards PR in the abstract.

On the other hand, there was evidence to support Tilley and Hollings' (2008) claim that newspaper journalists tolerate PR in the abstract but dislike up-close. This was primarily witnessed in relation to the concrete negative personal experiences that newspaper journalists in New Zealand declare they have had with individual PR practitioners. These negative personal experiences, which often stem from the tactical sins that they charge PR practitioners with regularly making, have been found by this study to be one of the biggest sources of frustration for journalists.

Adding to the evidence that supports Tilley and Hollings (2008), there were specific examples in this study where journalists seemed to hold pragmatic attitudes towards PR practitioners from a distance, but held a negative view of the same thing when they were personally confronted by the actual practice or action. For example, while some were practical about the need for PR departments – "some journalists can be ruthless so it makes sense to have someone experienced in charge of communications" (survey comment respondent 13) – it did not mean they were happy or impartial when they

personally had to interact with a PR department. In fact, most despised the PR gatekeeping function of having to route enquiries through PR practitioners.

Such an assessment suggests that while journalists may see the need for PR (a favourable abstract view), they do not consider that they should be subjected to its rules and regulations, or dictated to by those working within it. When it appears a PR practitioner exerts more power or control in the relationship than the journalist, for example by stopping access, specifying story angles, or failing to provide the information requested, journalists are likely to view them negatively because they do not consider that they should be controlled by external forces. This demonstrates an attempt by the journalist to try and uphold traditional journalistic ideals: “I guess people don’t want to think that they’re letting someone else dictate what we do in the paper, and that we are being controlled by someone from outside of the organisation. We like to think we are independent” (interview participant one).

Given the evidence for both schools of thought, newspaper journalists clearly hold mixed and often conflicting views about PR practitioners. These are driven by a number of complex factors including their own individual experiences of PR practitioners and the values journalists hold regarding their own role. It is difficult to see how a blanket assertion about whether PR and its practitioners are tolerated more in the abstract or up-close can, therefore, be made one way or another. It is, however, important to note the significance of the view that newspaper journalists hold more favourable attitudes towards PR practitioners whom they know and with whom they have regular contact. Having good, trustworthy relationships with individual practitioners is likely to have a positive impact on interactions (Aronoff, 1975; Curtin, 1999). Newspaper journalists in this study felt that good, trustworthy relationships help to decrease levels of antagonism because both sides may be more open to each other’s suggestions or enquiries.

Furthermore, they believed they are more likely to assist PR practitioners with whom they have such relationships, through off-the-record discussions or by publishing their stories:

There are ones that I deal with quite a lot and you do build up a bit of trust with and you like them personally and they're easy to deal with so you find it easier to have, kind of, frank discussions and you try and help them out a bit and they try and help you. Situations where for instance I might just give them a heads up that that we're going to be taking a really strong angle on a story . . . I might just give them a little heads up . . . that it's going to be a quite a big story. (Interview participant one)

Interestingly, despite the view that PR practitioners could potentially benefit from developing good relationships with newspaper journalists, for example by receiving more favourable attitudes towards their information subsidies (Aronoff, 1975; Curtin, 1999), many journalists (42.5%) who took part in the quantitative survey felt PR practitioners often do not take the time to build relationships with them, or remained neutral in their response, indicating there could be room for improvement by PR practitioners. Good relationships are important to journalists and despite the pressures they face in their job they do not always believe it is the sole responsibility of the PR practitioner to develop relationships. Instead both were suggested to be responsible, as both ultimately benefit. Given this seems like a common-sense approach, which could lead to increased success for PR practitioners and their organisation or client, the response from journalists that PR practitioners often do not take the time to build relationships with them is perplexing.

*Comparison of Survey Data with Aronoff (1975) and Kopenhaver et al. (1984)*

The first 25 survey statements used in this study were replicated from a study conducted by Aronoff (1975). It was not possible, however, to compare all 25 statements from both studies because the report of Aronoff's study did not present the data for every statement. Where it was possible to compare data some indicated that over time there may have been a warming towards PR practitioners, whereas some suggested that there might be an increased chilliness (see Table 3).

Kopenhaver et al. (1984) also replicated Aronoff's (1975) survey. Interestingly, Kopenhaver et al. chose to analyse their survey by working out the mean average response, which makes it difficult to provide a true and direct comparison of their data with the data from this study. What can be seen is that the overall tones of journalists' attitudes (positive, negative or neutral) in both studies correspond for 17 out of the 25 survey statements. Eight statements did not elicit the same overall attitude tone. These eight statements can be viewed in Table 4 for comparative purposes. The full comparison of findings between Kopenhaver et al. (1984) and this study can be found in Appendix F.

When comparing the findings of this study with Aronoff (1975) and Kopenhaver et al. (1984) it appears newspaper journalists in this study are less positive towards the perceived helpfulness of PR practitioners. Compared with journalists in 1975, New Zealand newspaper journalists were less positive about whether PR practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news; whether PR practitioners are necessary to the production of the daily newspaper; and whether PR practitioners do work for the newspaper that would otherwise go undone. Similarly, journalists in 1984 also appeared more positive towards PR practitioners in relation to their helpfulness.

Table 3

*A Comparison of the Survey Data from Aronoff (1975) and this Study*

<b>Survey statement</b>	<b>Aronoff (1975)</b>	<b>This study</b>
PR practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news	48% agreed	20.4% agreed Less positive
PR practitioners are necessary to the production of the daily newspaper	40% agreed	23.9% agreed Less positive
PR practitioners do work for the newspaper that would otherwise go undone	46% agreed	22.6% agreed Less positive
PR and the press are partners in the dissemination of information	59% agreed	41.2% agreed Less positive
PR practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial uneventful happening	87% agreed	62.7% agreed More positive
PR practitioners often act as obstructionists	84% agreed	76.4% agreed More positive
PR is a profession equal in status to journalism	72% disagreed	50.9% disagreed More positive



Table 4

*Eight Points of Difference: A Comparison of Survey Data from Kopenhaver et al. (1984) and this Study*

Survey statement	Kopenhaver et al. (1984)	This study
PR and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.	Neutral 3.9 mean average	In agreement 41.2% respondents agreed or strongly agreed.
	Neutral attitude	Positive attitude
The public relations practitioner does work for the newspaper that would otherwise go undone.	In agreement. 3.8 mean average – only just agreed	Disagreed 49% respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed
	Positive attitude	Negative attitude
Public relations practitioners are really just errand boys for whoever hires them.	Neutral 4.1 mean average	In agreement 59.2% respondents agreed or strongly agreed
	Neutral attitude	Negative attitude
Public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will and good moral character.	In agreement 3.4 mean average	Neutral 71.4% respondents neutral
	Positive attitude	Neutral attitude
It is a shame that because of inadequate staff and resource levels, the press must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.	Disagree 4.4 mean average	In agreement 61.2% respondents agreed or strongly agreed
	Positive attitude	Negative attitude
You can't trust public relations practitioners.	Disagree 4.5 mean average	Neutral 52% respondents neutral
	Positive attitude	Neutral attitude
Journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle.	Disagree 4.6 mean average	In agreement 45.9% respondents agreed or strongly agreed
	Positive attitude	Negative attitude
Public relations is a parasite to the press.	Disagree 5 mean average	Neutral 44.6% respondents neutral
	Positive attitude	Neutral attitude

They not only felt PR practitioners do work for the newspaper that would otherwise go undone, but also somewhat unsurprisingly, did not feel it was a shame that they had to depend on PR material. In the New Zealand context today, journalists clearly hold opposite feelings to this.

This comparison suggests that despite the changing media landscape, newspaper journalists in New Zealand may be more conflicted about their reliance on PR material than their 1975 and 1984 American counterparts. Given that several decades have lapsed and that the media landscape has changed dramatically over this time, perhaps newspaper journalists in 1975 and 1984 faced less pressure to rely on PR material than journalists today. This may mean that if they were not pressured into using it so much, they may have slightly more positive views about it. These findings were interesting because based on the pressures newspaper journalists seem to face today in relation to newsroom constraints, you would think there would be slightly more willingness by newspaper journalists to admit to the assistance that PR practitioners can provide in helping them to fulfil their job.

There was also an interesting disparity between the responses received about the statement “PR practitioners and journalists carry on a running battle”. Those in 1984 did not believe this to be true, whereas today it seems there is more agreement by journalists that the two sides are engaged in an often antagonistic relationship. This could be explained in two different ways. Either newspaper journalists in New Zealand view their relationship with PR practitioners more negatively than their colleagues in America in 1984, or, as this study has already suggested, they are simply more realistic about the opposing nature of the two roles and the conflict that such opposition can bring. Given the acknowledgement of this conflict, New Zealand journalists were still

more positive than those who took part in the study by Kopenhaver et al. (1984) about journalists and PR practitioners being partners in the dissemination of information.

The findings from Kopenhaver et al. (1984) also appeared to show that journalists were slightly more positive overall towards PR practitioners in relation to their trustworthiness and personal characteristics, such as having good sense or being of good moral character. That is not to say that newspaper journalists in this study were negative in this regard towards PR practitioners, rather they were neutral in their overall attitude. This suggests they are either more undecided than their American colleagues of 27 years ago, or that they are more unwilling to make blanket judgements about the personal characteristics of PR practitioners as they do not want to either tar all PR practitioners with the same brush, or to give more credit than may be due.

In some areas it also appears there has been a warming in attitudes since 1975. Of particular interest was the fact that newspaper journalists in this study appear to have a less marked attitude about the status of PR practitioners compared with journalists. In Aronoff (1975), 72 per cent disagreed that the two professions are equal in status. In this study, a significantly smaller percentage of newspaper journalists (50.9%) disagreed that the two professions are equal in status.

As discussed earlier, the fact journalists in this study are less negative about professional status than their counterparts in 1975, could be related to the view that traditional journalistic ideals have, over the years, been challenged by a dramatically changing media landscape, which may have eroded journalists' perceptions about their own role and industry. Furthermore, in comparison to journalists in 1975, this study found that a smaller percentage of journalists believe PR practitioners are likely to deceive them about trivial uneventful happenings (24.3% fewer thought this) and that

PR practitioners often act as obstructionists (7.6% fewer thought this). This is interesting given frustration about gatekeeping and obstruction remains a key complaint of newspaper journalists today.

### *Discussion Summary*

This chapter has demonstrated that the attitudes and perceptions of newspaper journalists towards PR practitioners are often conflicting and by no means simple. In the main, attitudes appear to be predominantly negative, a finding that echoes the work of others (Aronoff, 1975; DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Jeffers, 1977; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a; Sterne, 2010; Tilley & Hollings, 2008; White & Hobsbawm, 2007). However, there were some surprising results that differed significantly to previous international and New Zealand based studies; namely that newspaper journalists who took part in this study openly admitted that unethical behaviour does occur in journalism, not just in PR. This, tied with the fact that newspaper journalists in New Zealand believe both industries are beholden to their employers, seems to be paving the way for a softening in the attitudes of newspaper journalists towards PR practitioners.

The finding that many of the negative attitudes that journalists hold towards PR practitioners are derived from the media relations sins of PR practitioners, such as lack of news value or obstruction, suggests that individual-level interactions between a journalist and a PR practitioner play a key role in attitude formation. Such a view is not new (Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sterne, 2010). However, this study suggests that given the animosity that can arise from individual-level interactions, the tendency for previous studies to generalise that journalists prefer PR practitioners up-close, may be somewhat misguided.

Data from this study suggests that newspaper journalists are conflicted about the helpfulness of PR practitioners and the material that they provide, even if it can help them out of a tight spot. In such cases PR practitioners were classed as a help and a hindrance, and newspaper journalists demonstrated an element of reluctance when admitting to their use of PR materials. Such use, however, was regarded as slightly more acceptable when it could be blamed on newsroom constraints.

Prejudice in journalism education towards PR practitioners is a previously unexplored concept within a New Zealand context. Findings suggest it is distinctly possible that some journalism educators in New Zealand may perpetuate negativity about PR practitioners to their students, highlighting the possibility that negative attitudes may be developed prior to journalists entering the workforce. When it comes to discussions about career, more newspaper journalists said they would not move to PR than those who would, primarily due to perceptions that journalism offers more satisfying work. Despite this, PR was regarded to pay more and to provide a better work/life balance.

Further compounding the complex nature of journalists' attitudes was the finding that newspaper journalists hold different attitudes towards PR practitioners depending on the sector or organisation for which a PR practitioner works. This is also a predominantly unexplored topic within a New Zealand context. This study, therefore, presents not only an updated account of the attitudes and perceptions that newspaper journalists hold towards PR practitioners in New Zealand, but it further extends the New Zealand knowledge base on the topic. The following chapter takes the key discussions raised in this chapter and from them draws the conclusions of this study.

## Conclusions

This study set out to discover what attitudes and perceptions New Zealand newspaper journalists hold towards PR practitioners and why these opinions exist. While many findings within this study support the work of others, there are several key areas where it presents new findings, particularly within a New Zealand context.

The following chapter presents the core conclusions of this study, and discusses the implications for New Zealand newspaper journalists, PR practitioners and their wider industries. It also makes several recommendations for both professions, as well as recommendations for future research. Lastly, this chapter highlights the potential limitations of this study.

### *Negative Attitudes Are Common, but not Omnipresent*

Newspaper journalists in New Zealand hold generally negative attitudes towards PR practitioners. This study, therefore, supports the findings of previous research, both in New Zealand (Sterne, 2010) and overseas (Aronoff, 1975; Jeffers, 1977; Lucarelli, 1993; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a; Shin & Cameron, 2004; White & Hobsbawm, 2007), which also found negative attitudes to be widespread among journalists. While negativity remains the predominant attitude among newspaper journalists in New Zealand, this study found evidence of a warming in attitudes towards PR practitioners in some areas of the relationship, which it argues may be driven by difficulties in upholding traditional journalistic ideals.

This study also concludes there are certain components of the relationship where the attitudes of newspaper journalists towards PR practitioners have remained unchanged over a prolonged period of time. Over decades, research has repeatedly demonstrated

that PR practitioners are responsible for a number of media relations sins that frustrate and antagonise journalists (Adams, 2002; Aronoff, 1975; Charron, 1989; Grabowski, 1992; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver, 1985; Pomerantz, 1989; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). This study agrees and argues that PR practitioners who commit these sins are to blame for a large proportion of the negative attitudes that newspaper journalists in New Zealand hold towards them.

### *A Strained Co-Existence*

A decade into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the relationship between newspaper journalists and PR practitioners in New Zealand, is best characterised as one of strained co-existence. While there is acknowledgement that both sides need to engage with each other to help each fulfil its role, this study concludes New Zealand newspaper journalists and PR practitioners do not always exist together peacefully. The finding that antagonism exists in the relationship between New Zealand newspaper journalists and PR practitioners differs to Neijens and Smit (2006) who found that antagonism no longer exists in the relationship between Dutch PR practitioners and journalists. Instead, this study closely aligns with the findings of multiple other studies (Belz et al., 1989; DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Pomerantz, 1989; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Shin & Cameron, 2004) who all found conflict and antagonism to be present.

Just as Tilley and Hollings (2008) found, this study argues that newspaper journalists' attitudes towards PR practitioners in New Zealand are deeply conflicted. At times, newspaper journalists in this study expressed highly contradictory attitudes at both an individual level and as a group. For example, many newspaper journalists felt they depend on newsworthy PR material to help them fulfil their role. At the same time, they also said they believed PR practitioners are not necessary to the production of the newspaper, despite stating that any dependence on PR is due to newsroom constraints.

On an individual level, newspaper journalists were personally conflicted about their attitudes towards PR practitioners and often held multiple, disparate views, such as regarding them as a help and a hindrance, or stating on the one hand that they usually try to go around PR practitioners:

I just generally try to go around them, just because I would rather get to the people on the ground, so if I can get an interview with a person that they are quoting in a story I'll try and do that . . . but generally I'm able to get to the people I want to.  
(Interview participant five)

On the other hand they often contradicted themselves: "I'd go to the PR team because most of the time the policies in place are so stringent that they say call the PR person, go through the proper channels" (interview participant five). These conflicted findings indicate journalists are at odds with themselves and plagued by the feelings they have towards PR practitioners.

Given the historical tendency of journalists to harbour negative attitudes towards PR practitioners, an element of coerciveness may, in part, be responsible for the formation of some attitudes that newspaper journalists hold. That is, some newspaper journalists in New Zealand, particularly younger journalists, may feel pressured (directly or indirectly) to feel or display particular attitudes towards PR practitioners based on those held by their older, more experienced counterparts in higher positions. There could be instances where journalists may hold positive attitudes towards PR practitioners, but feel that to get ahead or to be taken seriously they have to replicate the attitudes and perceptions of others within their newsroom. Such coerciveness has already been highlighted by this study to occur within journalism education, so it seems logical it may also occur in the newsroom environment.



Such coerciveness may also indicate the possibility that a self-perpetuating cycle of negativity towards PR practitioners is being promoted within journalism. That is, journalism educators, who generally speaking have usually worked in a newsroom, promote negative attitudes about PR to their students. Students go into the workplace harbouring an element of negativity towards PR, which is further compounded by negative attitudes within their work environment. In time, some of these journalists may become journalism educators, and the cycle of self-perpetuated negativity continues. These points indicate an interesting area for future research, exploring whether journalists in New Zealand newsrooms are coerced into viewing PR practitioners in a certain way, and if so, how it occurs and to what extent.

The contradictory nature of the findings demonstrated that newspaper journalists often said one thing about PR practitioners from an abstract position, but held a dissonant view of the same thing when it personally affected them. For example, it was claimed by several interview participants that journalists understand that organisational constraints can impact on how a PR practitioner responds to a journalist's enquiry. This highlighted the perception that journalists acknowledge it may not always be the fault of the PR practitioner if they do not receive the information they require. In practice, however, journalists clearly disliked it when the information they required was not forthcoming. Any understanding of organisational constraints tended to go out the window and it was PR practitioner, rather than the organisation's decision makers, who was viewed negatively.

Contrary to international and New Zealand research, which claims that journalists either tend to tolerate PR more in the abstract (Tilley & Hollings, 2008) or up-close (Cameron et al., 1997), this study found little favouritism one way or the other. Instead, this study found that New Zealand newspaper journalists were just as conflicted in their

views towards PR from an abstract perspective as they were in their views about it up-close. In saying that, what was conclusive was that this study agreed with the work of others (Anderson & Lowrey, 2007; Jeffers, 1977; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a) that newspaper journalists clearly value the relationships they have built with the individual PR practitioners with whom they deal on a regular basis. This study argues, however, that this does not mean that newspaper journalists prefer or tolerate all PR practitioners from an individual, up-close perspective. This is clearly not the case given the multiple examples of negative one-on-one interactions newspaper journalists profess to have had with individual PR practitioners. What is clear is that it is crucial for PR practitioners to build good solid relationships with the newspaper journalists they regularly need to contact. To do so will not only help to build more harmonious relations between the two sides, but PR practitioners may receive more favourable responses.

Given that a multitude of previous research highlights the fact that journalists develop negative attitudes as a result of the one-on-one interactions they have with PR practitioners (Adams, 2002; Aronoff, 1975; Charron, 1989; DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Grabowski, 1992; Hobsbawm, 2006; Jeffers, 1975; Kopenhaver, 1985; Pomerantz, 1989; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a), it has to be considered that previous research may not have attributed enough weight to these one-on-one negative interactions when weighing up whether PR is viewed more favourably up-close or from an abstract perspective.

### *Three Key Sources of Frustration Exist*

In New Zealand, newspaper journalists' frustrations with PR practitioners are borne out of three key areas. The first and most obvious is based upon relatively simplistic grounds – the sins of PR practitioners. The other key sources of frustration are more

complex in nature. These are derived from the divergent agendas of both industries and the economic pressures of the newsroom, both of which challenge a journalist's ability to uphold traditional journalistic ideologies.

*The sins of PR practitioners.*

The sins of PR are the most superficial source of frustration for newspaper journalists. Frustration is caused by the basic mistakes PR practitioners make, and some of the specific tactics they use during their interactions with journalists. These mistakes and tactics annoy journalists because they are regarded as less than satisfactory in meeting journalists' needs. For example, lack of news value, lack of relevance, calling on deadline, mass mailing and lack of access to spokespeople. The journalist is, therefore, left feeling irritated by these specific wrongdoings.

Negative attitudes in this regard are based on the concrete personal experiences newspaper journalists have had with individual PR practitioners. The problem is that negative experiences can and do taint journalists wider perceptions and attitudes towards PR practitioners – a finding that aligns with others (Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sterne, 2010; Tilley & Hollings, 2008). This study, therefore, takes the opinion that if a newspaper journalist in New Zealand experiences repeatedly negative interactions with individual PR practitioners, they are more likely to view PR practitioners negatively. Conversely, mainly positive interactions with PR practitioners may lead to more favourable impressions of PR practitioners as a whole (Ryan & Martinson, 1988).

This finding is important to PR practitioners and also to the wider PR industry. Firstly, it highlights the fact that PR practitioners are certainly not free of blame when it comes to the negative assertions directed towards them by newspaper journalists. Given media relations is an important function of public relations (Grabowski, 2002) these

findings should be of concern to the PR industry, particularly when it is being let down by the hands of its own practitioners. Ironic, considering PR practitioners are usually tasked with building and maintaining good will, positive images and protecting reputations – the very thing they do not appear to be capable of doing for their own industry. More optimistically, PR practitioners should take the view that if they are responsible for these negative perceptions, then they also have the ability to change their actions to improve perceptions, a view also espoused by Sterne (2010). The New Zealand PR industry and its practitioners would be wise to heed the points raised by newspaper journalists in this study, using the findings as a guide to not only improve their efforts, but to improve relations overall. To do so would surely only prove beneficial to all.

The fact that junior PR practitioners are often at the coalface of interactions with newspaper journalists could also prove to be an opportunity for the PR industry to step up and invest time in upskilling junior members so they take forward an improved approach to media relations throughout their career. Over time this would hopefully create a whole new breed of more journalist-focused media relations operators, minimising the level of antagonism caused in the relationship by PR practitioners. Although it does have to be acknowledged that the often opposing agendas of each side means that antagonism in the relationship is unlikely to ever be truly eradicated.

While this study provides practical examples of the sins that newspaper journalists believe PR practitioners commit, it is not the first study to do so. Nor is it the first to suggest PR practitioners would be wise to pay attention to and remedy their wrongdoings. Undoubtedly it will not be the last. Negative attitudes towards the sins of PR practitioners have been documented consistently over many decades (Adams, 2002; Aronoff, 1975; Charron, 1989; DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Grabowski, 1992;

Hobsbawm, 2006; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver, 1985; Pomerantz, 1989; Ryan & Martinson, 1988; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a). This study takes the view that this component of the relationship is locked in a stalemate until PR practitioners realise and act upon the potential they hold within their hands to improve the relationship. Given these sins are still being committed after decades of research that has highlighted ways for PR practitioners to improve their interactions with journalists, it is unlikely the PR industry will heed this advice and actually put it into practice. This means that the frustration and antagonism newspaper journalists feel about this component of their relationship with PR practitioners is unlikely to abate any time soon.

*The divergent agendas of both industries.*

It is clear from the findings of this study that negative attitudes and perceptions about PR practitioners are also borne out of the opposing nature of the two industries. In this study, there was evidence that PR practitioners and newspaper journalists bring conflict to the table because of the differences they often have in relation to their goals and values. Journalists are traditionally regarded as truth seekers, holding a strong desire to maintain independence and objectivity. Public relations, however, is traditionally viewed as a subjective profession, in which PR practitioners seek to promote their organisation or client in the best light possible. The negative attitudes that newspaper journalists hold towards PR practitioners are, therefore, created by the level of conflict each side has towards the goals, needs and values that are brought to the table (Shin & Cameron, 2004; Sterne, 2010). Newspaper journalists repeatedly commented that this was the case: “There’s always a friction because our objectives are never the same” (interview participant eight).

While the clash of opposing agendas is unmistakably responsible for an element of antagonism in the relationship and many of the negative attitudes that journalists hold

towards PR practitioners, it does not cause trouble to the extent where they are unable to work together. In this sense, Shin and Cameron's (2005, p. 319) term "cooperative antagonism" is a pertinent way to characterise this component of the relationship, within a New Zealand context. This expression refers to a working relationship whereby two parties that hold differing views or who disagree are still, at the least, usually able to work together.

*Economic pressures in the newsroom.*

This study argues that economic pressures in the newsroom perpetuate journalists' negativity towards PR practitioners. This study found that in a New Zealand context, economic newsroom constraints are impacting on a journalist's ability to uphold the traditional ideals of journalism. In particular, these constraints affect the attitudes that newspaper journalists hold towards their use of PR materials, as well as their resentment towards the pay PR practitioners receive.

In New Zealand, two international media companies (Fairfax and APN) hold a "near duopoly" of most print media (Rosenberg, 2008, p. 1). Newsrooms around the world are typically being required to do more with less (Davis, 2000; Lewis et al., 2008), particularly during recent tough economic times. As newsroom staff and resource levels have dwindled in New Zealand (New Zealand Journalists Training Organisation, 2009), newspaper journalists' use of PR material has been affected. This was evidenced by responses to several survey statements (see Table 5).

While journalists acknowledge PR information subsidies can be useful to their work, it does not mean they are wholly comfortable using them. This creates negativity towards PR practitioners because newsroom constraints will, at times, force them into a situation where they have little choice other than to use PR materials.

Table 5

*Three Survey Statements and Responses that Indicate Newspaper Journalists' Use of PR Materials Are Influenced By Newsroom Constraints*

<b>Survey statement</b>	<b>Response</b>
It is a shame that because of inadequate staff and resource levels, the press must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.	61.2% of respondents were in agreement.  21.4% of respondents opted for a neutral response.
Journalists depend on newsworthy public relations material to help them fulfil their role.	54.4% of respondents were in agreement.  18.5% of respondents opted for a neutral response.
The dependence of journalists on PR is due to the economic climate of news production.	53.3% of respondents were in agreement.  18.5% of respondents opted for a neutral response.

This causes conflict for journalists on several levels as it not only takes away their control and independence in the news selection process, but it also challenges the journalistic ideals of objective reporting due to the subjective nature of PR materials. These factors mean that newspaper journalists are caught in a web of self-conflict where they wrestle internally with the requirement to use PR material versus their wish to uphold journalistic ideals.

Furthermore, this study found that some newspaper journalists in New Zealand are, at times, reluctant to admit using PR information subsidies, “I think most people in the media would say that press releases are used more than they admit” (interview participant seven). This is because they begrudge and feel ashamed of the fact they have to use such materials:

There are certainly times when a press release gets, as I say, turned around and put into a story but I think most journalists would be quite reluctant to, you know, they’d be happy for that to go in the paper as a filler story or whatever but they’d be quite reluctant to have a story like that go out with their by-line on it. (Interview participant six)

This perspective aligns with Hobsbawm (2006) who believes journalists’ attitudes towards PR practitioners are similar to the attitudes that regular punters may hold towards their prostitutes – they rely on them, but are ashamed and resentful of their dependence. This study, therefore, concludes that some of the negativity newspaper journalists hold towards PR practitioners is likely to be borne out of dissatisfaction towards the way their own industry is eroding traditional journalistic standards, which drives them to work in a way that conflicts with their own professional values. It will be interesting to see whether the closure of the New Zealand Press Association (NZPA) in August 2011 will increase the use of PR information studies further, and if so, what impact this may have on newspaper journalists’ attitudes towards such materials. In a couple of years’ time it would be worthwhile to study the impact that the closure of the NZPA has had on New Zealand newspaper journalism, including whether it has had an impact on journalists’ use of PR materials.

Sterne (2010) and Tilley and Hollings (2008) stated that workplace conditions, including environmental factors such as newsroom constraints, may negatively affect a



journalist's relationship with PR practitioners. Tilley and Hollings (2008) assert that journalists may displace their frustrations with their own workplace and managerial conditions into a negative stance towards PR. This study agrees that journalists may displace such frustrations into a negative stance towards PR. However, it does not wholly subscribe to this view. Instead, it takes the perspective that widespread displacement of frustration is not apparent. Rather, there are specific components of the relationship where displacement of frustration exists, primarily in relation to PR information subsidies, but also in relation to resentment about the pay that PR practitioners receive.

Newspaper journalists in this study felt strongly about the higher levels of pay PR practitioners are perceived to earn, believing newspaper journalists work harder and deserve to be paid more. Given newspaper journalists' awareness of newsroom constraints, it is unlikely they would complain directly to management about their lower levels of pay in comparison to PR. Instead, this study believes that they are more likely to displace the dissatisfaction they have about their own pay into a negative stance towards PR practitioners by suggesting that they are unworthy of the pay they receive. Further research into Tilley and Hollings' (2008) displacement theory would be a useful addition to the literature that exists about the perceptions of journalists towards PR practitioners in New Zealand.

#### *Erosion of Standards May Soften Some Attitudes*

While the erosion of journalistic standards is sad for journalism, it is not wholly negative for PR. Indeed, this study concludes that the erosion of journalistic standards due to newsroom constraints has, in some cases, caused a softening of attitudes towards PR practitioners. There are three significant areas in this study – status, ethics and toeing an organisational line – where newspaper journalists in New Zealand are more

ambivalent and pragmatic in their attitudes towards PR practitioners than previous literature indicates (Aronoff, 1975; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver et al., 1984; White & Hobsbawm, 2007). The nature of these three areas strongly indicates that for even a slight softening in attitudes to occur, newspaper journalists must be personally conflicted about whether the idealistic view of journalism matches the reality.

In the case of ethics, toeing an organisational line and status, this study argues that the reality of their own environment is causing newspaper journalists to be more realistic about their own behaviour when they compare it to that of PR practitioners. For newspaper journalists in this study, unethical behaviour and toeing an organisational line occurs just as much in journalism as it does in PR. This finding is significant and important for several reasons. Firstly, the fact that newspaper journalists in this study openly and extensively admitted that unethical behaviour occurs in journalism is extremely noteworthy because unethical behaviour is typically denied by journalists (DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Sterne, 2010; White and Hobsbawm, 2007). This study, therefore, argues that not only have newspaper journalists' attitudes about their own profession softened, but there has been an important shift in the level of hypocrisy that has previously been held by newspaper journalists towards PR practitioners.

Secondly, pressures borne out of newsroom constraints may not only drive some journalists to act unethically, but they may also reduce the level of independence that a journalist has within their role. Such a position, however, does not sit comfortably with traditional journalistic ideals. By recognising and acknowledging these factors journalists are, therefore, unable to so strongly defend the traditional moral standpoint of journalism. It is, therefore, argued by this study that such a shift in journalists' attitudes towards their own profession has led to some softening in the way they regard their own status when compared with PR. If they do not regard themselves so highly in

terms of ethical behaviour and independence, it is more difficult for them to take the moral high ground over PR practitioners.

### *Positive Attitudes Exist*

Although many attitudes within this study are predominantly negative in tone or even ambivalent, positive attitudes towards PR practitioners do exist. Most positive attitudes, however, are tempered somewhat by negative co-existent attitudes. Some PR practitioners are regarded by newspaper journalists as being helpful to their work by facilitating, without any problems, their request. In such circumstances PR practitioners are regarded as godsend and good at their job. The more helpful a PR practitioner, the better they are perceived to be at their job, resulting in the newspaper journalist holding a more favourable impression of them. This is because in such situations the PR practitioner is regarded as being of use to the journalist, rather than being an obstruction. Such a view, however, paves the way for those who are perceived as unhelpful to also be perceived as bad at their job. This suggests newspaper journalists in New Zealand believe PR practitioners are there to serve them and do not fully understand or appreciate the wider role of a PR practitioner within an organisational context, a view also found by (Sterne, 2010).

Despite any reticence towards the use of PR information subsidies, there are some newspaper journalists who clearly view PR practitioners as another tool for generating story ideas, which is seen as particularly useful when working to demanding deadlines. Again, however, praise is never lavished upon PR practitioners, no matter how deserving, without a resounding “but”. These journalists were quick to point out that use of such subsidies should always be balanced and verified, demonstrating that a sceptical attitude exists towards the subjective nature of PR.

### *PR Offers Better Employment Conditions but Less Satisfying Work*

A career in PR is not an agreeable option to many newspaper journalists in this study, primarily because they regard it as a less satisfying career than journalism. Employment conditions, such as hours and pay, are perceived to be much better in PR, a reason why many do choose to move. However, personal and altruistic values do still have a part to play. When considering a move into PR journalists preferred to believe it would have to be for something they classed as worthwhile, for example a non-profit oriented role, which suggests PR is regarded by journalists to have some valuable roles.

If the economic pressures facing newsrooms continue, it will be interesting to see whether newspaper journalists' attitudes towards a career move into PR will soften over the next decade. Some research to explore this premise, conducted at pertinent intervals over the next decade would be useful. An increased willingness to shift into a career in PR may well indicate increased dissatisfaction with the reality of working as a newspaper journalist. Furthermore, it may provide evidence for a further softening of attitudes towards PR if more journalists are willing to consider it as a career option.

This study only examined the perceptions that newspaper journalists had about a potential career in PR. It would certainly be extremely worthwhile to conduct a survey and/or interviews with former journalists who are now working within PR, to determine whether the perceptions journalists have towards a career in PR align with the actual reality. Such research would provide further guidance regarding the reasons why journalists shift professions, which may prove useful to the journalism industry.

### *Journalists' Attitudes Vary by Sector and Organisation Type*

Newspaper journalists' attitudes change according to the sector and organisational type in which the PR practitioner works. Previous international literature (Anderson &

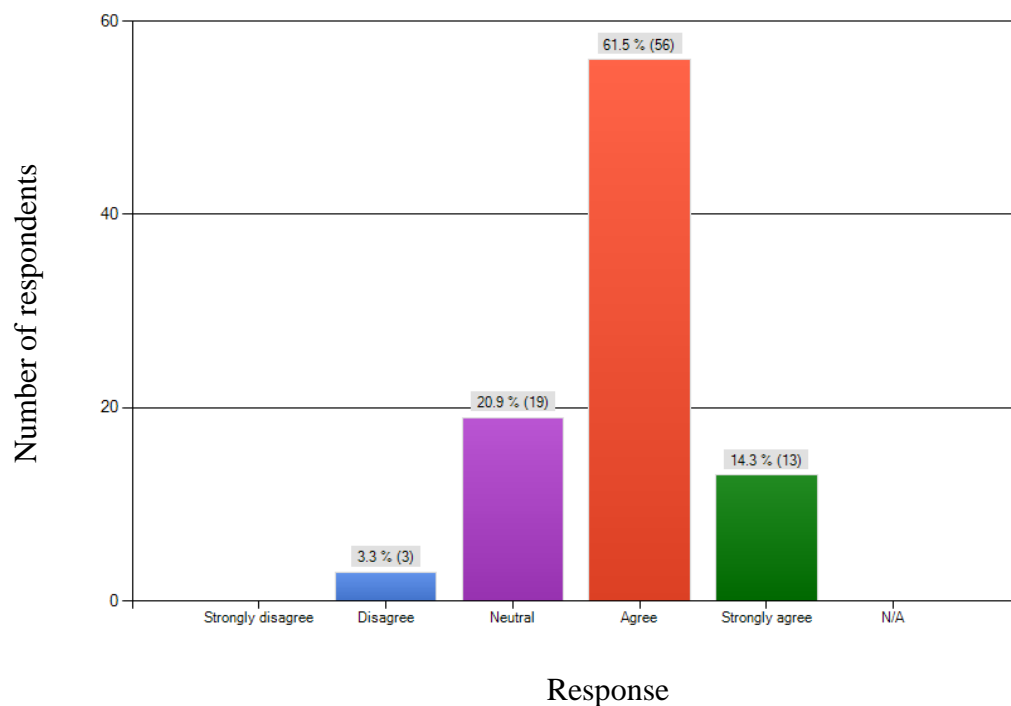
Lowry, 2007; Ankney & Curtin, 2002; Cho & Cameron, 2007; Len-Rios et al., 2009; Sallot & Johnson, 2006a; Turk, 1986) has also indicated that this may occur. A key focus of this study was to determine whether this was true in New Zealand and to explore why attitudes should vary if they do. To the best of this researcher's knowledge, this concept has not previously been explored within a New Zealand context.

PR practitioners working for non-profit organisations are viewed by newspaper journalists in New Zealand far more favourably than those who work for profit-driven organisations. This is because newspaper journalists are likely to feel that their values align more closely with those who work for organisations that lack a profit-motive. In New Zealand, however, lack of profit-motive does not automatically generate more favourable perceptions about the ethical status of PR practitioners – a view that disagrees with Sallot and Johnson (2006a).

Practitioners who work in consumer PR are viewed by newspaper journalists in New Zealand with particular derision (see Figure 13), because they are not deemed to perform a worthwhile role. Furthermore, newspaper journalists believe consumer PR practitioners in particular have an impact on the economic wellbeing of the newspaper, by attempting to get free publicity for products that should be advertised. This was particularly the case among smaller free community newspapers that rely on advertising. Consumer PR practitioners are, therefore, more likely to encounter negativity from newspaper journalists in New Zealand.

Continuing this theme, the title PR practitioner is regarded by newspaper journalists as being for those who work in consumer PR. Those who work in non-profit, service oriented roles are regarded as communications practitioners. This highlights an important distinction between the two types of practitioners in newspaper journalists' minds. PR is primarily regarded by newspaper journalists in New Zealand as seeking

publicity and free advertising. Communications practitioners are regarded as having a more important, serious role to perform, although it should not be automatically presumed that relations with communications practitioners will be smooth due to such a perception. This distinction of terms is important for the PR industry because it highlights the view that the term public relations continues to harbour negative connotations of one-way, publicity-seeking propaganda. This is somewhat ironic given the PR industry is responsible for developing and maintaining favourable images and reputations for others (Moloney, 2006).



*Figure 13.* Responses to the survey statement: Journalists are more open and less negative towards PR practitioners who work in specialist, technical fields of knowledge rather than consumer PR.

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Health, science, Government and the police are the top three sectors regarded by newspaper journalists as requiring PR practitioners. Contrary to research (Corbett & Mori, 1999; Len Rios et al., 2009) this study concludes that just because PR

practitioners working for specialist sectors such as health and science are viewed more favourably than consumer PR, it does not automatically increase acceptance of their PR materials. Any reliance on specialist PR practitioners is likely to be tied to the view that such practitioners are more able to help a journalist understand a complex subject, or because their subject area matches a journalist's particular round.

### *Prejudice in Education*

As indicated earlier, this study draws the worrying conclusion that some journalism educators in New Zealand negatively influence the attitudes of their students towards PR practitioners. Such a view supports the work of others overseas (Cline, 1982; Kopenhaver, 1985; Shaw & White, 2004, Wright, 2005). Regardless of the number of educators who do it, or whether it occurs humorously, consciously, or unconsciously, any indication that it occurs should be worrisome for the PR industry. In practice it means that before some journalists even begin their career, they may have a negative predetermination towards PR practitioners. This does not allow the relationship to begin on neutral ground, damaging it before it even starts. This study is not trying to suggest that journalism educators should not discuss the PR industry or PR subsidies with students – that is certainly not the case. Public relations should be discussed with future journalists, as should the importance of balancing PR material – PR does after all often provide a biased viewpoint. But given their influential position, it is surely important for educators' attitudes, personal biases and beliefs about PR to be kept out of the discussion, so at the very least students can begin their journalism career and make their own judgements based on their own experiences.

It would, however, be interesting to survey journalism students throughout New Zealand to determine the extent to which this occurs in practice today. Similarly, it would be useful to interview a selection of journalism educators from New Zealand

journalism schools to determine what attitudes and perceptions they hold towards PR. It may then also be pertinent to observe a number of these journalism educators teaching, to determine whether they communicate such attitudes to students.

### *Routes to Improving the Relationship*

Newspaper journalists and PR practitioners bring their own set of faults and troubles to the relationship, all of which cause newspaper journalists to view PR practitioners negatively. Given both professions are responsible for the antagonism and both receive benefits, efforts to improve the relationship should be made by both sides. The view that PR practitioners should heed the advice from newspaper journalists in this study and take more responsibility for their faults has already been espoused in this chapter. If acted upon, this could be the single biggest determinant in improving the relationship. Senior PR practitioners have a responsibility to mentor good habits among juniors. Likewise, PR educators also have a responsibility to ensure the skills and practices they bestow upon their students from a media relations perspective well and truly align with journalists' needs.

Newspaper journalists in this study recognised it is not always the fault of the PR practitioner when they are unable to respond to the journalist in the way that was required. PR practitioners who face repeated organisational constraints when interacting with newspaper journalists may be wise to improve senior organisational members understanding about media relations as well as about journalists' needs. Such an approach would aim to reduce reticence and improve responses when faced with proactive or reactive media situations, thus aiming to improve interactions with journalists.



Improving the attitudes of newspaper journalists and the relationship between the two sides also comes down to improving each profession's understanding of each other's role. Contrary to the belief of New Zealand newspaper journalists that the prime function of PR is to get free advertising for their organisation or client (75% survey respondents thought this) the PR industry is responsible for a far wider variety of functions, including employee and member relations, community relations, public affairs and government relations, financial PR, fundraising and public communication campaigns (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Developing an improved understanding about each other's profession could include PR students being required to complete an introduction to news reporting module (74.1% survey respondents thought this). Likewise, journalism students would benefit from a basic introduction to PR module during their study (60.6% survey respondents thought this). It does have to be acknowledged that some communication schools within New Zealand universities already provide such opportunities. Furthermore, placement programmes where PR students and junior PR practitioners are seconded for a day or two to newsrooms to learn from the field would be useful; although it may be impractical for newsrooms to facilitate this given the pressures they face. Former journalists who now work in public relations, therefore, provide a hugely valuable resource to those PR practitioners who work alongside them. PR practitioners would do well to learn from them at any opportunity.

### *Conclusions Summary*

This study sought to determine what attitudes and perceptions newspaper journalists hold towards PR practitioners in New Zealand and why. While negative attitudes are predominant, they are by no means the only tone of attitude that exists. Indeed, a warming of attitudes by newspaper journalists towards PR practitioners is evident, but

not because of any positive behaviour on the part of PR practitioners to improve relations. Instead, it is because newspaper journalists' own industry is somewhat at odds with itself, making it difficult for newspaper journalists to uphold and maintain their traditional moral high-ground over PR practitioners.

PR practitioners are directly responsible for a large portion of the negativity in the relationship due to the media relations sins they commit. As such they also hold the power to improve some of the negativity in the relationship. But history shows us the PR industry and its practitioners will likely do little to remedy their wrongdoings to improve relations with newspaper journalists. This is a shame, considering it would help to develop more productive and beneficial interactions.

Trust and good relationships are clearly key factors in establishing favourable attitudes. If newspaper journalists do not believe they have a good relationship with a PR practitioner, they are less likely to trust that practitioner. Without it, relationships will likely be more difficult and the PR practitioner may not be as successful at achieving their objective as those who do take the time to build positive working relationships with journalists.

Newspaper journalists' attitudes are also influenced by the traditionally opposing agendas of each profession, which dictates that a level of antagonism will often exist as the two sides tussle to achieve their particular goals. Economic pressures on the newsroom also affect newspaper journalists' attitudes by increasing the amount of PR they are required to use. On the one hand newspaper journalists view PR information subsidies favourably, believing they help them to fulfil their role. On the other, they seem to dislike any implication that PR practitioners are now important to the news production process, despite acknowledging that any reliance is due to the pressures they face within their own work environment.

Attitudes towards PR practitioners vary according to the sector and organisation in which a PR practitioner works. Those working for profit-driven organisations are viewed more cynically by newspaper journalists, whereas those working for organisations that lack a profit motive are viewed more favourably. Such a distinction suggests some PR practitioners are immediately at a disadvantage simply because of the organisation for which they work. Although, if journalism students are beginning their careers with negative attitudes and perceptions already ingrained, it is clear that there is more than one way for the relationship to begin on an uneven footing.

The attitudes and perceptions that newspaper journalists hold towards PR practitioners in New Zealand are rarely one-dimensional or easily explainable. Rather, they are often complex and conflicting. Further compounding this is the fact that many attitudes are long-standing and deep-rooted, all of which undoubtedly make such attitudes and perceptions more difficult to change.

### *Limitations and Delimitations*

This section highlights the potential limitations of the research and the extent to which they may have impacted upon this study.

#### *Limitations: Quantitative online survey.*

Data for this study were collected using a Likert-scale survey, which elicited responses from 103 newspaper journalists in New Zealand. The use of a Likert-scale posed a couple of potential limitations to the collection of data. Firstly, as Albaum (1997) states, the rating structure in Likert-scales may cause respondents to rate their responses with “leniency” (p. 334), that is, to rate their response to a statement too high or too low. Furthermore, central tendency may also be an issue in Likert-scale surveys, where respondents opt for the central rating because of their reluctance to provide

“extreme” scores. In the case of this study the central tendency was neutral. Both leniency and central tendency, therefore, have the potential ability to skew survey results, so it is important to note that such an occurrence could have taken place in this study.

*Limitations: Semi-structured interviews.*

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with a relatively small number of newspaper journalists. The decision to interview eight working newspaper journalists was made due to time and resource constraints. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and took an average of seven hours to transcribe. The researcher also found it more difficult than expected to find newspaper journalists who were willing to participate in an interview. This may have been for several reasons including perceptions about anonymity, length of interview time, as well as the unpredictable nature of journalism, which meant it was difficult for journalists to guarantee their availability at a given date and time. That said, the researcher still believes eight semi-structured interviews with elite participants is a very respectable number, particularly as it was not the only method of data collection for this study.

The relatively small but elite group of interview participants means that while the data gathered were extremely rich and valuable in helping to explain the attitudes that newspaper journalists hold towards PR practitioners, they are not truly generalisable to a wider population. It should, however, be mentioned that based on the similarities that the interview data have with previous literature on the topic, it is more than likely other newspaper journalists in New Zealand would hold similar attitudes. Such a view is also attested to by Marshall and Rossman (1999) who believe that if a researcher can identify similarities and links between their project and existing theory, it is possible to show that the findings of the study are likely to have wider significance. In saying that, care

was still taken when analysing interview data and drawing conclusions not to give more weight to the interview findings than warranted (Garson, 2002).

Where possible, interviews were conducted face-to-face. Because this study deliberately chose to interview participants from a number of publications in a variety of locations throughout New Zealand, it was not possible due to time and resource constraints to conduct all on a face-to-face basis. As a result the decision to conduct some interviews by telephone was made. While conducting interviews by telephone proved to be a convenient solution, it does mean that not all participants were subject to the same face-to-face interview conditions, which may have posed some limitations to the collection of data.

According to Saunders et al. (2000) building a face-to-face, personal rapport with an interview participant assists the researcher in developing a level of trust with them. Furthermore, face-to-face interviews provide the researcher with the ability to engage in further exploratory discussion by using the non-verbal, behavioural cues that the interviewee provides as they talk. Such visual cues are lost during a telephone interview and it may be difficult to develop complex lines of questioning or to determine which lines of questioning should be pursued further.

Saunders et al. (2000) also believe interviews conducted by telephone are likely to be slightly shorter in length as participants may be less willing to give as much of their time over the phone as they would when in a face-to-face situation. The researcher certainly felt more pressured by time when conducting interviews by phone, although most phone interviews in this study still took an average of one hour, roughly the same as face-to-face interviews.

In conducting interviews, the researcher attempted at all times to remain as neutral as possible. The researcher also attempted to remain neutral when analysing and interpreting the data. This was to ensure as far as possible that the researcher did not impose interviewer bias onto the interview participants, or to bias the interpretation of the findings to suit the researcher's own pre-existing beliefs or opinions. It is, therefore, hoped that any potential bias was strictly limited.

#### *Delimitations.*

A delimitation of this study that the researcher believes is important to note is in relation to the collection of demographic data of survey participants. Demographic data were collected as part of the survey in order to cross-tabulate responses to determine whether attitudes and perceptions of newspaper journalists vary according to age, gender, publication or position in the newsroom. Once data from the survey, including survey comments, and the interviews had been collected it was clear to see that the wealth of data produced was too large in scope for a research project of this size. The researcher, therefore, made the decision not to cross-tabulate findings according to demographic data, but to focus on the overall perceptions of newspaper journalists as a whole.

Such a decision, however, means that the survey data collected for this research still offers a rich source of untapped information that could provide further insight into the attitudes towards PR practitioners in New Zealand. For example, do younger journalists hold more favourable attitudes towards PR practitioners than older newspaper journalists? Further exploration utilising this data would, therefore, be pertinent to this topic of study and would provide further New Zealand first insights into the relationship.

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## Appendix A

Table A1

*Online Survey Issued to Participants*

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Demographic data

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you worked as a journalist? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you work for a national or regional daily, or community newspaper? \_\_\_\_\_

For each question below, highlight the box that best matches your attitude on the issue.

Statement		Scale				
1.	Public relations and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
2.	Public relations practitioners are basically competitors with the advertising departments of newspapers rather than collaborators with the news staff.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
3.	Public relations practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
4.	Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
5.	Public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be talking to.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
6.	Public relations practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo-events and phony phrases that confuse public issues.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
7.	The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by public relations practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
8.	Public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
9.	The public relations practitioner does work for the newspaper that would otherwise go undone.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree



10.	Public relations practitioners too often try <i>to</i> deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial, uneventful happening.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
11.	The public relations practitioner serves as an extension of the newspaper staff, covering the organisation for which he is responsible.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
12.	Public relations practitioners are really just errand boys for whoever hires them.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
13.	Public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will and good moral character.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
14.	It is a shame that because of inadequate staff and resource levels, the press must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
15.	Public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest and making the best use of space.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
16.	You can't trust public relations practitioners.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
17.	Journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
18.	Public relations practitioners are typically frank and honest.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
19.	The impact of public relations makes it harder and harder for the average citizen to know when he is being sold a bill of goods.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
20.	Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
21.	Public relations practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
22.	Public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of the daily newspaper as we know it.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
23.	Public relations is a parasite to the press.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
24.	Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value and public interest.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
25.	The prime function of public relations practitioners is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
26.	Public relations can and does influence the media agenda	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
27.	Journalists depend on newsworthy public relations material to help them fulfill their role.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
28.	The dependence of journalists on PR is due to the economic climate of news production.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
29.	PR practitioners have poor writing skills	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

30. PR practitioners often do not know the media that they are contacting or what the journalist writes about	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
31. PR practitioners who waste journalists' time with trivialities of no news value and who are dishonest or overly persistent taint the whole PR profession.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
32. PR practitioners are paid more than journalists and have a better working environment.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
33. I would consider moving into a career in public relations in the future.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
34. Journalists who have moved into PR have 'sold-out'.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
35. Journalists are more open and less negative towards PR practitioners who work in specialist, technical fields of knowledge rather than consumer related PR.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
36. There are some industries where PR practitioners are more necessary than others.					
36a If so, please indicate which industries for which you believe this to be true	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
37. PR practitioners who work for not-for-profit organisations are more ethical than those working in other sectors.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
38. PR practitioners working for non-profit organisations are more appreciative of the publicity they get than those working in other sectors.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
39. Journalists rely more on PR practitioners working in the fields of health and science due to the complexity of the topic.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
40. Journalists are generally more supportive and accepting of news stories suggested to them by health sector PR practitioners.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
41. Journalists regard PR practitioners who they know and have regular contact with more highly than they do of the field of public relations as a whole.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
42. PR practitioners are wholly responsible for the antagonism that exists between themselves and journalists.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
43. Good relationships with PR practitioners are important, but PR practitioners are responsible for improving the relationship.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
44. PR practitioners usually take the time to build relationships with reporters.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
45. Both PR practitioners and journalists lack awareness and understanding of each other's roles and profession.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

46. Journalists are conditioned during formal education to have negative attitudes towards PR practitioners.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
47. Journalists may get on better with PR practitioners if the journalism education curriculum incorporated an introduction to public relations.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
48. Journalism educators are intent on perpetuating negative stereotypes about public relations to their students	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
49. PR practitioners may get on better with journalists if the public relations education curriculum incorporated an introduction to news reporting.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
50. Journalism text books perpetuate negative stereotypes about public relations.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
51. Journalists select from information in the interests of their employing organisations.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
52. Some journalists use unethical means and go to extraordinary lengths to get their story.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
53. Some journalists embellish an otherwise less than exciting story as a way to attract readers and increase sales and profit margins for their organisation.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
54. PR practitioners and journalists are both beholden to the organisation for which they work.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
55. PR practitioners and journalists have striking similarities and often work to achieve similar goals, such as generating awareness about issues of public importance.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
56. I view PR practitioners with a journalism background more favourably than those PR practitioners who don't.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

## Appendix B

### *Semi-Structured Interview Questions*

1. Can you explain your view of the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists?
2. Is there antagonism in the relationship? Why and how does it occur?
3. What has your own experience of PR practitioners been like?
4. What do you believe to be the role of a PR practitioner? What do you think the role entails?
5. How do you feel about PR practitioners?
6. In the survey I recently conducted, many journalists stated that PR practitioners and the press are partners in the dissemination of information. How do you feel about that? Do you see the press and PR practitioners as partners? Why might that be?
7. What are your views on the role of PR practitioners as gatekeepers of the people you need to speak to? How does it make you feel? Do you have some examples?
8. Do you believe that PR practitioners are simply errand boys for whoever hires them? Why do you believe this? Is this the case for most employees of an organisation?
9. As a journalist is there an organisational line that you have to toe, whether spoken or unspoken? How does this impact on your work?
10. In your experience have you found PR practitioners to be a help or a hindrance in your role as a journalist and why? Can you give some examples?
11. Do you think the reliance on PR generated material or story ideas is increasing? Why do you think this might be? How do you feel about it?

12. Do you think there is a reluctance among journalists to admit to a reliance on PR material? Why might this be?
13. In your experience when it comes to media releases, what percentage of the daily releases you receive are newsworthy?
14. For what reasons do you reject news releases or story ideas from PR practitioners?
15. In your experience how would you rate the news writing skills of PR practitioners? (On a scale of one to ten – ten being the highest). Why?
16. Do you have any pet hates when it comes to your interactions with PR practitioners?
17. Do you have any particular likes when it comes to your interactions with PR practitioners?
18. Are there PR practitioners who you trust more than others? Why?
19. What are your perceptions about the integrity and honesty of PR practitioners?
20. My survey results seem to indicate that when it came to making judgements about PR practitioners that could be perceived as more personal, for example whether PR practitioners are trustworthy, honest, or of good moral character, respondents seemed to opt for more neutral responses. Why do you think this might be?
21. Responses to the statement some journalists use unethical means and go to extraordinary lengths to get their story was overwhelmingly agreed to by journalists in my survey. Why do you think this is?
22. In the survey I conducted, many respondents felt that PR is not equal in status to journalism. Why do you think journalists would say this? How do you feel about it?
23. How do you perceive a career in PR in relation to job quality and satisfaction?
24. Would you consider a career move into PR? Why?
25. Why do you think so many journalists move into PR during their career?

26. Do you think it is strange that there is a negative view of public relations yet so many journalists move into PR during their career?
27. Do you have any particular views on journalists moving into PR? What are these views and why?
28. Can you comment on the view that journalists are more open towards PR practitioners in specialised areas because of the lack of specialist and in-depth knowledge that journalists often have in relation to the subjects they write about.
29. Would you say there are certain types of PR practitioners who you may rely on more than others in the course of your work? Who might these be and why?
30. What similarities do you believe PR practitioners and journalists have?
31. Do you think that deep down journalists and PR practitioners may have more similarities than journalists may want to admit?
32. What differences do you believe that PR practitioners and journalists have?
33. Do you think it is important for PR practitioners and journalists to have good relationships?
34. Survey data indicated a strong leaning towards PR practitioners being responsible for improving the relationship. Why do you think this might be?
35. How do you think relationships between PR practitioners and journalists could be improved, if indeed you believe this to be the case?

## Appendix C

Table A2

*Data Extract Codes Developed During the Thematic Content Analysis of the Qualitative Survey Comments*

Theme and code	Definition
<b>Relationship condition - RS</b>	
RS/RS.STR	Relationship viewed as strained
RS/CO.EX	Relationship one of co-existence
RS/RS.BLD	Building relationships
<b>Professional integrity – PI</b>	
PI/TR	Truth in PR and journalism
PI/MOR	Morality in PR and journalism
PI/PR.DS	PR as ‘dark side’
<b>Information subsidy – IS</b>	
IS/PR.USE	PR useful
IS/PR.UNEC	PR unnecessary
IS/PR.NEC	PR necessary
IS/DEP	Dependence on PR
IS/J.BAL	Journalist balancing subsidy information
IS/LAZ.J	Lazy journalism
<b>Skills and experience – SE</b>	
SE/LUJN	PRPs lack understanding of journalist needs
SE/LJE	PRPs lack journalism education
SE/J.MOV.PR	Journalists moving to PR
<b>Tactical interaction – TI</b>	
TI/DBS	Interaction with PRPs varies according to the sector in which PRPs work
TI/SBTO	Some PRPs better than others at job
TI/GK	Gatekeeping by PRPs
TI/GK.LAP	Lack of access to people journalist wants to speak to
TI/GK.TIM	Gatekeeping time consuming process for journalists
TI/GK.EMQ	Emailed questions and responses
TI/GK.OBST	Obstruction, blocking and stalling journalist requests

## Appendix D

Table A3

*Key Themes That Emerged During the Thematic Content Analysis of the Qualitative Survey Comments*

Theme	Definition
Professional integrity	Focuses on truth, honesty and morality within PR and journalism.
Relationship condition	Journalist perspectives of the relationship between themselves and PR practitioners at a higher, broader level and in connection with relationship building.
Information subsidy	Focuses on the dynamics of public relations materials being used by journalists as information subsidies.
Skills and experience	Highlights the views of journalists regarding the experience and skill levels of PR practitioners in relation to journalism and journalist needs.
Tactical interaction	Experiences and perceptions related to the daily tactical engagement between journalists and PR practitioners.



## Appendix E

Table A4

*Data Extract Codes Developed During the Thematic Content Analysis of the  
Semi-Structured Interview Data*

<b>CODE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>RELATIONSHIP PERCEPTIONS</b>	<b>THEME</b>
GRI	Respondent believes that good relationships between journalists and PR practitioners are important
<b>Neutral views of PR</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
NOPART	Respondent does not believe that PR practitioners and journalists are partners
<b>Negative views of PR</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
PNOPR	Respondent would prefer it if there was no PR or PR practitioners
PRDS	Respondent describes PR as the dark side
PRVSPIN	Respondent believes that PR is spin
PRWT	PR is viewed as a waste of time
PUSH	Respondent believes that PR practitioners are pushy
<b>Positive views of PR</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
RSOK	Respondent perceives the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists to be OK
MD	Relationship is one of mutual dependence
PART	Respondent believes that PR practitioners and journalists are partners
<b>Antagonism</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
ANT	Respondent believes that there is antagonism in the relationship

ANT/DNA	Respondent believes that the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists does not need to be antagonistic
ANT/DG	Antagonism caused by different goals/objectives of PR practitioners and journalists
ANT/EIL	Antagonism in the relationship exists on an individual level. Comes down to the individual rather than as a matter of course
ANT/TS	Tone of the journalist story or enquiry affects the level of antagonism present (e.g. negative story causes more difficulties than positive)
ANT/RIV	Respondent believes that professional rivalry exists in the relationship causing antagonism
ANT/TS	Respondent believes that the antagonism in the relationship varies depending on the tone of the story or enquiry
<b>DIFFERENTIATED BY SECTOR</b>	<b>THEME</b>
DBS	Differentiated by sector. Respondent specifies different views towards PR practitioners working in different sectors.
RVAS	Role of a PR practitioner varies according to the sector in which they work
PRDTC	Respondent believes that PR practitioners are different to communications practitioners
RPRSK	Respondents rely on / are more open towards PR practitioners who work in specialist areas
<b>PR AS INFORMATION SUBSIDY</b>	<b>THEME</b>
PRGS	PR is a good source of story ideas/information

JBFPR	Just because the story idea is from PR it does not mean that it should not be used
PRFAD	Respondent views PR as free advertising
JBAL	Respondent believes it is important to investigate and balance information given to them by PR practitioners
<b>Media agenda</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
PRIMA	PR influences the media agenda
NOPRIMA	PR does not influence the media agenda
<b>Reliance on PR</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
NCAPRU	Newsroom constraints (resources, staffing levels, time etc) affect use of PR
NOREL	Respondent does not believe that journalists rely on PR materials
MIX	Respondent believes that PR is just part of the journalism mix now
RPRSK	Respondents rely on PR practitioners who work in specialist areas
RELJJ	Junior journalists are more reliant on PR
NSREL	Respondent is not sure if journalists have a reliance on PR
<b>Reluctance to admit using PR</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
RAD	Respondent believes that journalists are reluctant to admit using PR
NORAD	Respondent does not believe that there is a reluctance to admit using PR materials
<b>TACTICAL INTERACTION</b>	<b>THEME</b>
SBTO	Some PR practitioners are better than others at their job
IB	Journalists believe that PR practitioners have internal battles within their organisation to get people to speak and are often constrained in what they can say by those in higher positions

<b>Tactical sins</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
LNW	Lack of news worthiness
LNW/REL	Lack of news worthiness – relevance
MRC	Media release contacts should be listed and available
BFF	Journalists find big email files from PR practitioners frustrating
MM	Mass mailing by PR practitioners. As opposed to targeted communication with journalists
NPIF	Journalists dislike it when PR practitioners do not adequately pass on information or brief spokespeople in regard to journalist enquiries
SPCQ	Journalists find it frustrating speaking to people who cannot be quoted
NAQF	Respondent finds it frustrating when PR practitioner does not answer their questions
DMIF	Respondent finds it frustrating when PR practitioners get defensive about missing information in their media releases
<b>Media release rejection</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
MRR	Media releases are rejected
<b>Tactical pleasures</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
ODSG	Journalists like PR practitioners who are open to discussing stories / enquiries to assist the journalist's knowledge and to find the best way to facilitate their enquiry
UDG	Journalists like it when PR practitioners have an understanding of journalist deadlines

PRG	Journalists like it when PR practitioners give them progress reports on the status of their enquiries
UPG	Journalists believe that it is good for PR practitioners to have an understanding of photos
FPG	Respondent likes receiving free products
PRHFJ	PR practitioners are seen as helpful when facilitating journalists
TTP	Tailoring to publications
ACSI	Journalists appreciate contact from PR practitioners about story ideas
<b>Gatekeeping</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
GK/TIM	Gatekeeping – time consuming process
GK/WR	Gatekeeping – written questions, responses and quotes
GK/WSPM	Gatekeeping - written statements are used as a protective measure
GK/OB	Gatekeeping – obstruction
GK/AP	Gatekeeping – access to people
PRHO	PR practitioners are viewed as being helpful overall
<b>WRITING SKILLS</b>	<b>THEME</b>
WSNI	PR practitioners writing skills are not perceived as an issue for journalists
MRWW	Journalists perceive that most media releases written by PR practitioners are well written
SWBTO	Some PR writing is better than others
WSP	PR practitioners writing skills are problematic
<b>TRUST</b>	<b>THEME</b>
TST/DT	Respondent does not trust PR practitioners

TST/BRS	Respondent trusts PR practitioners who they have built relationships with more than others
TST/FJ	Respondent trusts former journalists who are now working as PR practitioners more than those who have not been journalists (or not)
TST/OGIT	Opposing goals of journalist and PR practitioners impacts on truth telling / trust
<b>ETHICS, HONESTY AND INTEGRITY</b>	<b>THEME</b>
ETH/UB	Unethical behaviour can occur in PR and journalism
ETH/DI	Ethical behaviour depends on the individual rather than down to the profession that they work in
ETH/PRNPU	PR practitioners do not lend themselves to unethical behaviour particularly
ETH/NAU	Respondent has not acted unethically personally
ETH/SJU	Some journalists act unethically
ETH/SPRU	Some PR practitioners act unethically
ETH/UTP	Unethical behaviour by PR practitioners or journalists taints the whole profession
ETH/PRU	Respondent believes that PR practitioners are unethical
ETH/HON	Honesty in PR
<b>PR AND JOURNALISM ROLES</b>	<b>THEME</b>
<b>Description role PR</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
PRO	PR proactive role
REACT	PR reactive role
<b>Similarities</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
SIMS	Similarities between PR practitioners and journalists

<b>Differences</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
DIFS	Differences between PR practitioners and journalists
DIF/DA	Journalists and PR practitioners have different agendas
DIF/AP	Journalists and PR practitioners have different approval processes
DIF/SVO	Difference between journalists and PR practitioners is down to the subjective versus objective nature of their roles
<b>Status perceptions</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
STS/H	Respondent believes that journalists have a higher status than PR practitioners
STS/DJ	Status differs on the type of PR role you have. Some have higher status than others
STS/N	Respondent does not believe that the status of PR practitioners is higher or lower than journalists
STS/NPR	Respondent believes that some PR practitioners are doing more noble work than others, and that their status is higher
STS/PAY	Respondents believe the status of journalists is higher because they believe that PR practitioners are being paid to say/sell something
<b>Toeing organisational lines</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
PRTOL	Respondent believes that PR practitioners toe an organisational line
JTOLNE	Journalist has not experienced pressure to toe an organisational line
JTOL	Journalists toe organisational line
JTOLCR	Journalists toeing organisational line related to commercial realities

<b>IMPROVING THE RELATIONSHIP</b>	<b>THEME</b>
IR/RPR	Respondent believes that improving the relationship is the responsibility of PR practitioners
IR/IA	Respondent believes that improving the relationship is an individual/organisational thing rather than a one size fits all approach
IR/FP	Respondent believes that free products will help to improve the relationship
IR/BM	Respondent believes that better materials from PR practitioners will help to improve the relationship
IR/RO	Improving the relationship is the responsibility of the organisation for which a PR practitioner works
IR/BRS	Respondent believes that improving the relationship comes down to building good relationships
IR/HOC	The relationship can be improved through honest, open communication
IR/PBM	Respondent believes that PR practitioners could improve the relationship by producing better materials
IR/RB	Respondent believes that improving the relationship is the responsibility of both professions
IR/UEOR	Respondent believes that to improve the relationship PR practitioners and journalists need to understand each other's role / position
<b>CAREER IN PR</b>	<b>THEME</b>
BAP	Bitterness about the perception the PR pays more than journalism



WWPR	Respondent would work in PR
WNWPR	Respondent would not work in PR
NROWPR	Respondent has not ruled out working in PR
SJNM	Some journalists would never move into PR
<b>Journalists who have moved to PR</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
JMPRSO	Respondent believes that journalists who move into PR have sold out
BTJMPR	Respondent demonstrates bitterness towards journalists who move into PR
DBJMPR	Respondent does not begrudge journalists who choose to move into PR
JMPRH	Some journalists who move into PR are hypocritical
SJRJ	Some journalists return to journalism
JDR	Respondent believes that journalists do not tend to return to journalism once they have moved to PR
JMPRWC	Some journalists move into PR for better work / lifestyle conditions
<b>Job satisfaction for journalists</b>	<b>Sub theme</b>
JPMS	Journalism is perceived as more satisfying than PR
JSP	Journalism has senior positions
SRPRS	Some roles in PR are perceived as satisfying
<b>SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE</b>	<b>THEME</b>
LJE	Respondent believes that PR practitioners lack journalism experience or education
UJN	Respondent believes that PR practitioners need to understand journalist needs

EXJBTPR	Respondent believes that ex journalists working as PR practitioners are better than PR practitioners at the job
	122 codes

## Appendix F

Table A5

*A Comparison of the Data From Kopenhaver et al. (1984) and This Study*

Statement	Kopenhaver et al. (1984)	This study
PR and the press are partners in the dissemination of information.	Neutral 3.9 mean average	In agreement 41.2% respondents agreed or strongly agreed.
	Neutral attitude	Positive attitude
PR practitioners are basically competitors with the advertising departments of newspapers rather than collaborators with the news staff.	Disagreed 4.3 mean average – only just in disagreement Positive attitude	Disagreed 40.2% respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed) Positive attitude
PR practitioners too frequently insist on promoting products, services and other activities which do not legitimately deserve promotion.	In agreement 2.6 mean average Negative attitude	In agreement 75.5% respondents agreed or strongly agreed Negative attitude
Public relations is a profession equal in status to journalism.	Disagreed 4.8 mean average Negative attitude	Disagreed 50.9% respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed Negative attitude

Public relations practitioners often act as obstructionists, keeping reporters from the people they really should be talking to.	In agreement 3.1 mean average  Negative attitude	In agreement 76.4% respondents agreed or strongly agreed  Negative attitude
Public relations practitioners have cluttered our channels of communication with pseudo-events and phony phrases that confuse public issues.	In agreement 3.5 mean average  Negative attitude	In agreement 78.5% respondents agreed or strongly agreed  Negative attitude
The abundance of free and easily obtainable information provided by public relations practitioners has caused an increase in the quality of reporting.	Disagreed 4.2 mean average – only just in disagreement  Negative attitude	Disagreed 65.7% respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed  Negative attitude
Public relations material is usually publicity disguised as news.	In agreement 2.8 mean average  Negative attitude	In agreement 82.4% respondents agreed or strongly agreed  Negative attitude
The public relations practitioner does work for the newspaper that would otherwise go undone.	In agreement. 3.8 mean average – only just agreed  Positive attitude	Disagreed 49% respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed  Negative attitude

Public relations practitioners too often try to deceive the press by attaching too much importance to a trivial, uneventful happening.	In agreement 3.2 mean average  Negative attitude	In agreement 62.7% respondents agreed or strongly agreed  Negative attitude
The public relations practitioner serves as an extension of the newspaper staff, covering the organisation for which he is responsible.	Disagree 4.9 mean average  Negative attitude	Disagree 75.5% respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed  Negative attitude
Public relations practitioners are really just errand boys for whoever hires them.	Neutral 4.1 mean average  Neutral attitude	In agreement 59.2% respondents agreed or strongly agreed  Negative attitude
Public relations practitioners are people of good sense, good will and good moral character.	In agreement 3.4 mean average  Positive attitude	Neutral 71.4% respondents neutral  Neutral attitude
It is a shame that because of inadequate staff and resource levels, the press must depend on information provided by public relations practitioners.	Disagree 4.4 mean average  Positive attitude	In agreement 61.2% respondents agreed or strongly agreed  Negative attitude

Public relations practitioners understand such journalistic problems as meeting deadlines, attracting reader interest and making the best use of space.	In agreement 3.8 mean average – only just in agreement  Positive attitude	In agreement 44.9% respondents agree or strongly agree  Positive attitude
You can't trust public relations practitioners.	Disagree 4.5 mean average  Positive attitude	Neutral 52% respondents neutral  Neutral attitude
Journalists and public relations practitioners carry on a running battle.	Disagree 4.6 mean average  Positive attitude	In agreement 45.9% respondents agreed or strongly agreed  Negative attitude
Public relations practitioners are typically frank and honest.	Disagree 4.7 mean average  Negative attitude	Disagree 45.9% respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed  Negative attitude
The impact of public relations makes it harder and harder for the average citizen to know when he is being sold a bill of goods.	In agreement 3.4 mean average  Negative attitude	In agreement 62.3% respondents agree or strongly agree  Negative attitude
Public relations practitioners help reporters obtain accurate, complete and timely news.	Neutral 3.9 mean average  Neutral attitude	Neutral 42.9% respondents neutral  Neutral attitude

Public relations practitioners frequently use a shield of words for practices which are not in the public interest.	In agreement 3.5 mean average  Negative attitude	In agreement 51.5% respondents agreed or strongly agreed  Negative attitude
Public relations practitioners are necessary to the production of the daily newspaper as we know it.	Disagree 4.4 mean average  Negative attitude	Disagree 51.1% respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed  Negative attitude
Public relations is a parasite to the press.	Disagree 5 mean average  Positive attitude	Neutral 44.6% respondents neutral  Neutral attitude
Public relations practitioners typically issue news releases or statements on matters of genuine news value and public interest.	Disagree 4.2 mean average  Negative attitude	Disagree 44.5% respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed  Negative attitude
The prime function of public relations practitioners is to get free advertising space for the companies and institutions they represent.	In agreement 3.6 mean average  Negative attitude	In agreement 75% respondents either disagree or strongly disagree  Negative attitude