

Contemporary Media Relations: Potential of Twitter in mediating Relationships between Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists in New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists engaged in media relations is characterised by both conflict and cooperation. However, a changing media landscape raises questions about how the new communication technology developments are affecting this relationship. Using social media has had a significant impact on how the media relations is practiced today with a potential to influence future relationships between public relations practitioners and journalists. Social media not only allows for real-time two-way communication that facilitates organisational communication practice by sharing information and building dialogic relationships, but also allows organisations to become publishers and broadcasters to distribute their messages directly to audiences. Amongst the social media platforms, Twitter is primarily an information-sharing site rather than a social network. It is therefore seen to be having significant implications for the practice of media relations. The current study explores the influence of Twitter on the relationships between public relations practitioners and journalists in contemporary media relations in New Zealand. It uses transcribed data from semi-structured interviews with six public relations practitioners and seven journalists involved in health care communication.

The study shows that public relations practitioners and journalists understand and value media relations differently. Journalists describe media relations as public relations. Public relations practitioners describe it as facilitating the promotion of their organisation's interests through media. Also, public relations practitioners and journalists have different attitudes about their relationships with each other. Public relations practitioners consider their relationships with journalists positive, while journalists have a mixed opinion on their relationships with public relations practitioners.

The study shows an increase in the influence of public relations on the media during the last decade. According to journalists, this influence is becoming an impediment to carrying out their professional activities. The study attributes the increasing influence of public relations on the media to the development of a crisis in journalism. It also reports that this crisis in journalism is because of reduced resources and time and a rapid growth of new media formats, largely enabled by new communication technologies including social media. The study suggests that this crisis has affected the current practice of media relations.

The study also shows an ambiguity about the mediating role of Twitter between public relations practitioners and journalists. It shows there is an increasing influence of Twitter on journalism and public relations professions. However, both public relations practitioners and journalists do not engage with each other on Twitter while performing media relations. The public relations practitioners and journalists interviewed do not perceive any impact of Twitter on media relations, except for its help in building an initial connection with each other. They also do not see any potential shift in this trend. However, public relations practitioners and journalists acknowledge the potential of Twitter in furthering their relationship with each other, provided they use Twitter regularly to share news stories of mutual interest.

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Table 1. List of Themes and Sub-Themes.

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 university or other institution of higher learning.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Singh Bedi', with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

Daljit Singh Bedi

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Public relations (PR) is about improving the reputation of an organisation by connecting and communicating with its publics using a variety of communication channels – be it protecting the reputation of an organisation, or shaping the overall public perception of an organisation. The term ‘publics’ refers to any group of people who affects an organisation or is affected by an organisation, e.g., employees, customers, competitors, regulating agencies, and the media. A PR strategy of an organisation therefore focuses on what and how to communicate with its publics. For this purpose, as a part of a PR strategy, an organisation often uses its connections with the media, including editors, publishers, and influencers. For any communication between an organisation and the media to be effective, the relationship between the organisation and the media becomes vital. Media relations, as a part of public relations, refers to the mutually beneficial relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners (PRPs) where journalists benefit through their easy access to story ideas and sources, and PRPs benefit through media coverage for their organisation. However, during the last two decades, new media technologies have brought changes in the media landscape that have affected the way news is created and consumed. Now PRPs are creating news and delivering it to their publics directly including journalists. In turn, journalists are contacting their information sources directly without mediation by PRPs.

As an Indian PR professional and now a student of master’s in communication studies at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT), I have witnessed changes in media relations, largely influenced by new communication technologies. When I started my PR career in India about 20 years ago, PR was evaluated largely through positive media coverage. Therefore, the terms public relations and media relations were used interchangeably. PRPs were expected to form close relationships with journalists through personal interaction. Press releases and press conferences were the most common ways to developing these relationships, supported by telephone and email communication. From 2010 onwards, some organisations started using social media platforms, mainly Facebook and Twitter, to put across their key messages occasionally in a traditional one-way communication. When I moved from PR to an editorial role in 2017, there was still limited engagement between PRPs and journalists on social media as they continued to rely on personal interaction to developing their relationships.

During my coursework at AUT, I learnt about the changes in the practice of media relations. In particular, I learnt how to produce, customise and publish content on social media platforms to reach specific publics. I also became aware how Twitter users can benefit from their relationships with other users when they fulfil each other's needs. I therefore felt that Twitter may have profound implications for media relations. This sparked my interest to explore how Twitter can influence the relationships between PRPs and journalists engaged in media relations. The preliminary literature search showed that outside New Zealand there are studies on the impact of social media on the PRP-journalist relationship, out of which only a few studies focused on how Twitter influences this relationship. However, there is no New Zealand-based research on these topics, and therefore inspired this study.

This chapter now introduces the importance of media relations in PR and the influence of new communication technologies, including social media, on the PRP-journalist relationship. In particular, it focuses on the influence of Twitter on the professions of PR and journalism, and its potential impact on the PRP-journalist relationship. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Media Relations as a Key PR Function

Public relations is defined as “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics” (PRSA, n.d.). Here the term ‘publics’ encompasses any group of people who is connected with an organisation at any level, including customers, competitors, community members, employees, and regulating agencies. Public relations uses multiple channels to convey organisational messages to gain public recognition and seeks to build relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders. Media relations has been one of the most important areas of practice in PR that focuses on one key channel, the media, and seeks to build a relationship between an organisation and the media (Shaw & White, 2004). It is defined as:

...the ongoing facilitation and coordination of communication and relationships between the PRPs who seek positive recognition of their organisation among their key publics through the media and the journalists who benefit from the relationship in creating a news story (Johnston, 2020, p. 6).

Media relations is therefore considered a vital function for both PRPs and journalists in the production of news that is important to their publics. For effective media relations, it is considered important for PRPs to not only maintain regular communication with journalists but also to understand their information needs and provide them with relevant information (Zoch & Supa, 2014). This implies that to build the reputation of their organisations through

the media, PRPs are expected to maintain effective and trustworthy relationships with journalists (Supa & Zoch, 2009).

1.2 The PRP-Journalist Relationship

The relationship between PRPs and journalists lies at the heart of media relations (Supa, 2014). Many PR scholars who have examined the PRP-journalist relationship have come up with consistent findings that the two professions share a distrustful relationship where journalists assign low credibility to PRPs, while PRPs think highly of journalists (Aronoff, 1975; Kopenhaver et al., 1984; Sallot, 1990; Sallot & Johnson, 2006; Supa & Zoch, 2009; Wilson & Supa, 2013). This disconnect poses a challenge for PRPs to overcome the journalists' negative perceptions about them (Supa & Zoch, 2009). At the same time however, several studies have also reported that 40-75% of the stories in the media are PR-sourced (Gandy, 1982; Macnamara, 1993; DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Lewis et al., 2008; Macnamara, 2012). In view of the co-existence of anti-PR rhetoric with an increasing use of PR-sourced news by media, the PRP-journalist interaction has been described as a love-hate relationship (Sallot & Johnson, 2006). This PRP-journalist love-hate relationship is becoming clearer today due to an emerging crisis in journalism in terms of reduced resources and time and a rapid growth of new media formats, largely enabled by new communication technologies including social media (Macnamara, 2014).

1.3 Media Relations in the Health Care Sector

As in any other specialist area, there are deep concerns about the extent of PR influence on health news (Schwitzer, 2017). The health journalists, regardless of their professional experience in the field, rely on health experts to explain technical information mainly owing to lack of formal training coupled with the complex nature of the field and heavy workload (Arroyave, 2012). As a result, journalists report that information what health experts deemed as important, which in certain cases may bring bias and inaccuracy in the health-related information of importance to their publics. Forsyth et al. (2012) argued that health care industries use media to promote their products and services through their PR efforts, but the processes involved in the production of these stories are not transparent. In view of the increasing on-going concern about the influence of PR on news processes and lack of transparency in the news production process, new research into the relational dynamics between PRPs and journalists in the area of health care is needed (Furlan, 2015).

1.4 Impact of Technology on Media Relations

Traditionally, media relations involved PRPs to systematically distribute information about their organisation to the media. Thereafter, introduction of new media technologies brought significant changes in the way media relations is practiced - be it developing corporate websites (Kent & Taylor, 2003), establishing online press rooms enabled by emerging web technologies (Callison, 2003), or using new technologies to communicate with journalists (Duke, 2001). In 2007, a new practice of media relations called HARO (Help A Reporter Out) encouraged journalists to float their information requirements online. It therefore triggered a shift from traditional media relations where it was PRPs who reached out to journalists and not vice versa. Using HARO service, journalists could reach many information sources without any intermediaries to seek specific content for their stories, creating the new concept of 'media catching' (Waters et al., 2010, p. 249). The HARO concept built on crowdsourcing served both the journalists, who were seeking information, and the PRPs who were providers of information. HARO therefore became an indication of how new technologies could change traditional media relations (Waters et al., 2010).

New communication technologies have also enabled widespread use of different practices of producing and distributing content that have enabled PRPs to reach out to journalists and publics simultaneously. These practices include content marketing (creation of valuable content by the brand itself to elicit positive behaviour from its customers), brand journalism (use of journalistic techniques to tell an organisational story directly to its publics), and native advertising (paid practice of publishing content that bears a similarity to the news and other information that surrounds it online). This trend of creating customised content and delivering it by using a variety of communication channels including social media has resulted in a shift from mass-mediated communication to own-produced and delivered content, which is helping both PRPs and journalists to appear in conversation mode with their publics (Zerfass et al., 2016). It can therefore be argued that the core functions of media relations as developing and maintaining positive and ethical relationship with the news media are no longer sufficient. In contemporary media relations, the focus of PRPs is shifting beyond their interaction with the journalists, as they are now producing and publishing its own content in a way to target all its key publics, including journalists (Johnston & Rowny, 2018).

1.5 The Impact of Social Media on Media Relations

The use of new media technologies in PR influences how organisations can communicate and build reputation amongst their key publics, including media. Using social media allows for two-way communication that facilitates organisational communication practice not only by sharing information but also by building dialogic relationships (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Saffer et al., 2013). Social media has even allowed organisations ‘to become publishers and broadcasters directly distributing their messages to audiences’ (Macnamara, 2016, p. 123). Social media is also seen to influence the PRP-journalist relationship, as journalists use social media as a source of information, whereas PRPs use social media as a channel to disseminate information. The speed at which social media enables communication to take place allows for PRPs and journalists to establish a more personal relationship and benefit both parties (Supa, 2014). However, to facilitate two-way communication, PRPs need to monitor the information placed on social media sites and engage content producers on various forums, as journalists are regularly monitoring these sites and forums for story ideas and information (Păun, 2009).

1.6 The Impact of Twitter on Media Relations

Amongst all social media platforms, Twitter capitalises best on the relationships between its users in how they fulfil each other’s needs for their mutual benefits (Wilson & Supa, 2013). This interactivity of its users lends Twitter to stronger relationship building than the other social media platforms and thus may have profound implications for media relations (Smith, 2010). Twitter, launched in 2006, is one of the most popular social media platforms available today, with more than 186 million daily active users (Aslam, 2021). With its re-tweeting and feedback mechanism with replies, Twitter has become a key social media tool that affords organisations an optimal way of engaging in dialogic communication with their publics (Heldman et al., 2013; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Smith, 2010). There have been several studies examining the use of Twitter in the individual professions of PR and journalism. In journalism, Twitter was initially used as a marketing and research tool for newspaper websites that supplements the traditional role of journalists as investigators and providers of timely information on news events (Ahmad, 2010). Twitter has since become a convenient, cheap and effective beat for journalists in search of news and information, who are increasingly engaged in collecting information online and using it in journalism discourse (Broersma & Graham, 2013). Using Twitter in routine practices of newsgathering and live reporting is causing a shift in traditional gatekeeping and verification conventions that are typical of journalism profession (Canter, 2015). In PR, Twitter is considered an enabling space for rendering government services to the people and as a tool to enhance the reliability

of the government (Kim et al., 2015). The government departments normally use Twitter for reporting news, sharing information, providing information sources, and coordinating projects (Wigand, 2010).

While Twitter is reported to be used by both PRPs and journalists, there is little research on how it is used as a component of media relations. Wilson and Supa (2013) have found that although Twitter is considered valuable by both PRPs and journalists for fulfilling basic functions of sourcing, reporting and publishing news, “they have not yet worked out how to use the medium to engage with each other” (p. 15). Another study on media relations in health care finds Twitter as a major force behind changing relational dynamics between PRPs and journalists during the negotiation of potential medical stories, as its use promotes evasion rather than relationship development between PRPs and journalists, besides affecting newsgathering (Furlan, 2017). Journalists use Twitter to contact elite medical sources directly, rather than going through a PRP intermediary, while PRPs use Twitter to forge links directly with their publics, bypassing the journalists in their gatekeeping role. This bypassing of the process of verification and fact-checking by PRPs, necessary for reporting ‘accurate and unbiased’ health news, can have profound consequences on media relations (Furlan, 2017).

1.7 The Impact of Social Media on Media Relations in New Zealand

In New Zealand, 82% population is active as social media users (an increase of 2.8 per cent between 2020 and 2021) that puts New Zealand amongst the top 10 countries from Asia-Pacific in terms of social media penetration (Hinton, 2021). Amongst the social media platforms in New Zealand, Facebook, with its market share of 72.04%, continues to lead the social media sphere. On the other hand, Twitter, with its market share of 8.79%, is gaining traction but is not considered a phenomenon in New Zealand as it is reported in the US and elsewhere (Statcounter, 2021). These statistics show how social media has become an integral part of the lifestyle of people of New Zealand and as a result is expected to become a relevant communication channel for an organisation to communicate and build relationships with its publics. Several studies worldwide have specifically examined the impact of social media on the process of media relations, but there is little research in New Zealand, examining the impact of social media, and that too is focused on the practice of PR only. In New Zealand, for instance, one study has examined how social media influenced the relationship between public relations and advertising (Toledano, 2010), two other studies examined online media uses by PRPs (Bhargava, 2010; Martens, 2020), and another reported social media use by PRPs (Macnamara et al., 2017). However, no research examining the

impact of Twitter on the relationships between PRPs and journalists in media relations could be found in New Zealand. This lack of research on the influence of Twitter on the PRP-journalist relationship in contemporary media relations has prompted the current research to update the body of knowledge.

1.8 Purpose, Scope and Significance of the Study

As argued above, media relations is considered a vital function for both PRPs and journalists involved in the production of news, and the relationship between PRPs and journalists lies at the heart of media relations. It has also been argued that the two professions share a distrustful relationship where journalists assign low credibility to PRPs, while PRPs think highly of journalists. However, research evidence shows that 40-75% of the stories in the media are PR-sourced. This co-existence of anti-PR rhetoric with an increasing use of PR-sourced news by media, the PRP-journalist interaction has been described as a love-hate relationship. It has also been argued that although the 'love-hate' relationship between PRPs and journalists persists, enormous changes in the media landscape largely enabled by new media technologies have brought significant changes in the contemporary media relations. New communication technologies have enabled widespread use of different practices of producing and distributing content that have enabled PRPs to reach out to journalists and publics simultaneously. It is further argued that the contemporary media relations is now envisaged as an activity that has redefined the PRP-journalist relationship, with the focus of PR strategy of an organisation shifting beyond its interaction with the journalists to producing and publishing its own content in a way to target all its key publics, including journalists.

Amongst the new communication technologies, the use of social media in particular has had a significant impact on how the media relations is practiced today with the potential to influence future relationships between PRPs and journalists. Using social media not only allows for real-time two-way communication that facilitates organisational communication practice by sharing information and building dialogic relationships, but also allows organisations to become publishers and broadcasters directly distributing their messages to audiences. Out of all the social media platforms, Twitter being primarily an information-sharing site rather than a social network is seen to have significant implications for the practice of media relations. Also, it capitalises best on the relationships between its users in how they fulfil each other's needs for their mutual benefits. This interactivity of its users lends Twitter to stronger relationship building than the other social media platforms and thus may have profound implications for media relations.

There have been very few studies examining the impact of social media including Twitter on media relations, with most of these studies becoming outdated owing to the rate at which the technology has been progressing. But no research in New Zealand examining the impact of Twitter on the relationship between PRPs and journalists in media relations could be found. The purpose of the current study is therefore to generate knowledge on contemporary media relations, particularly examining the influence of Twitter on the PRP-journalist relationship in performing media relations. The study aims to investigate how PRPs and journalists involved in media relations in New Zealand perceive the influence of Twitter on their relationships with each other. It also explores the understanding of PRPs and journalists about the concept and importance of media relations and how Twitter has influenced the practice of individual professions of PR and journalism. It is intended to examine whether PRPs and journalists are taking advantage of the increased capacity provided by Twitter in enabling two-way symmetrical communication to engage directly with their publics. The scope of the study is limited to interviewing PRPs and journalists involved in health care media relations with a view to obtain valuable insights on how the interviewees perceive the concept and importance of media relations and the influence of Twitter on their relationship, how they interrelate the two, and what the trends in this research area are.

The potential benefits of this study would be a generation of new knowledge on how PRPs and journalists in New Zealand use Twitter in their individual professions and how its use can influence their relationships with each other. The findings of the study are expected to focus on the areas that may help PRPs and journalists to improve their relationships with their counterparts in the overall process of producing accurate and unbiased news. Better relational dynamics between two important players involved in the production of news could help the broader community to have access to timely, accurate, and unbiased news. For the researcher, this study conducted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Communication Studies would help in fulfilling this important requirement.

1.9 Structure of this Thesis

This chapter has introduced media relations and the influence of Twitter on the process of media relations, particularly the PRP-journalist relationship.

The next chapter on literature review provides a framework for the current study on media relations and the influence of Twitter on the dynamics of the PRP-journalist relationship. It reviews previous research on media relations, the importance of the PRP-journalist

relationship to the success of media relations, and how this relationship is influenced by technological and other changes in the media landscape. It further reviews previous research on the impact of social media, especially Twitter, on the professions of PR and journalism and the practice of media relations, and how it affects the PRP-journalist relationship. The chapter also introduces the communication theories that apply to this study, comprising systems theory, the intereffication model and the behaviour-strategic management paradigm of PR. Finally, it identifies knowledge gaps in the literature, leading to the research questions guiding the current study.

The methodology chapter outlines the research design for the current study. It presents the paradigm of constructivism epistemology and how it influences the qualitative methodology that underlies this study. A rationale for using interview method to gather data is then presented. It then outlines six standard phases of thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) used in this study as guidelines in relation to the research questions and the available data.

The results chapter presents the findings arrived from the analysis of the transcribed data obtained after interviewing 13 communication professionals engaged in health care communication. It outlines five themes and 20 sub-themes that were generated using six standard phases of thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings are then presented theme-wise.

The discussion chapter presents the significance of the study results through three perspectives, namely, PRP-journalist relationship as central to the evolving practice of media relations, use of Twitter in the professions of PR and journalism, and the influence of Twitter on the PRP-journalist relationship in performing media relations. The significance of the study results is interpreted using the theoretical framework of the study. The last section of the chapter summarises and draws conclusions from the study findings, answering the research questions. It also outlines key recommendations of the study while acknowledging its limitations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a framework for the current study on media relations and the influence of Twitter on the dynamics of the PRP-journalist relationship within public relations in New Zealand. It first outlines the previous research on media relations, the importance of the PRP-journalist relationship to the success of media relations, and how this relationship is influenced by technological and other changes in the media landscape. Then it highlights the previous research on the impact of social media, especially Twitter, on the practice of media relations and how it affects the PRP-journalist relationship. Finally, it discusses existing communication theories that apply to this study. Finally, it identifies knowledge gaps in the literature, leading to the research questions guiding the current study.

2.1 Media Relations as a Key PR Function

Public relations (PR) is defined as “the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding and excellent communication between an organisation and its publics” (PRINZ, n.d.). According to the PR Society of America (PRSA), PR is a process, which implies an open two-way model: “PR is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics” (PRSA, n.d.). Tilley (2005), a New Zealand PR researcher, states:

PR as a three-step process ensures firstly that organisations listen to and understand public expectations for reasonable behaviour, secondly that organisations’ behaviour matches those expectations, and finally that they are publicly recognised as responsible (p. 145).

She argues that in the final step of the PR process, the recognition, PRPs often work towards increasing public awareness and understanding of an organisation’s activities by exchanging information with the journalists operating in various news outlets (Tilley, 2005, p. 145).

2.2 The PRP-Journalist Relationship

Media relations is a vital function for PRPs and journalists involved in the production of news that is important to their key publics. Johnston (2020) defines media relations as:

...the ongoing facilitation and coordination of communication and relationships between the PRPs who seek positive recognition of their organisation among their key publics through the media and the journalists who benefit from the relationship in creating a news story (p. 6).

However, the journalists representing different news outlets may have different news requirements. In turn, PRPs have no control over the ultimate news outcome. So, for the PRP-journalist relationship to be effective, it is important for PRPs to not only maintain regular communication with journalists, but also understand their information needs and provide them with relevant and newsworthy information (Zoch & Supa, 2014). The major values that are considered to determine newsworthiness are: prominence, proximity, currency, timeliness, conflict, impact, human interest, or unusualness (Brighton & Foy, 2007). Therefore, as a key PR function, PRPs are expected to maintain effective and trustworthy relationships with journalists to build the reputation of their organisations through the media (Supa & Zoch, 2009). Similarly, journalists are expected to go beyond their role as gatekeepers to improve their perception as being open to the priorities of their key publics:

Journalists are expected to acknowledge that they are no longer gatekeepers...but need to listen, ask questions and be genuinely open to what our readers, listeners, and watchers tell us is important (Skoler, 2009, p. 39).

Besides achieving and managing media coverage there are other facets to media relations. Johnston (2020) argues that media relations is also involved in other PR initiatives, such as crisis management, community relations, and financial relations, where a strong working relationship with the media can smoothen practices across the range of PR initiatives. He views media relations as a 'soft' part of PR providing important access points and communications options for the PR industry as a whole (p. 6).

Since the 1960s, more than 150 research studies have examined the relationship between PRPs as sources of information and journalists as media gatekeepers (Sallot & Johnson, 2006). These studies as well as subsequent studies conducted by PR scholars have shown that journalists distrust PRPs, do not rate PRPs as equal to journalists in the process of producing news, and consider media relations as an advertising effort of an organisation (Aronoff, 1975; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver et al., 1984; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Supa & Zoch, 2009; Wilson & Supa, 2013). However, Supa and Zoch (2009) have also found that journalists hold those PRPs who interacted regularly with them in higher regard than the PRPs with whom they had less contact. At the same time, several studies have also reported that 40-75% of the stories in the media are PR-sourced (Gandy, 1982; Macnamara, 1993; DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Lewis et al., 2008; Macnamara, 2012). Sissons (2012) also reported a high reliance of journalists on PR sources in her study involving ethnography in two newsrooms in New Zealand. She argues that this also means that journalists are accepting information and do not resort to fact-checking:

Journalists are in many instances not carrying out the traditional practice of checking information. Instead, journalists appear to be replicating the material given to them by public relations professionals (Sissons, 2012, p. 274).

Based on the research evidence on the co-existence of an anti-PR rhetoric with an increasing use of PR-sourced news by media, the PRP-journalist interaction has been described as a love-hate relationship (Sallot & Johnson, 2006) and symbiotic relationship (Merkel et al., 2007; Bentele & Nothhaft, 2008; Currah, 2009). Macnamara (2014) argues that the traditional PRP-journalist love-hate relationship is becoming more evident because journalism is facing a crisis in terms of reduced resources and time and a rapid growth of new media formats, enabled by new communication technologies including social media. Several other studies have also reported the escalating influence of PR on the creation of news because of a crisis in journalism, resulting from collapsing media business models, journalists' job losses, and global growth of PR (Lewis et al., 2008; Curran, 2010; Jones, 2011), and 'democratization of media' (Siapera, 2012, p. 55), which is considered to have provided PRPs with novel means for production and distribution of content for the media.

2.3 Evolving Practice of Media Relations

The crisis in journalism as discussed above has significantly contributed to how media relations is practiced today (Macnamara, 2014). Traditionally, media relations involved PRPs to systematically distribute information about their organisations to the media. This controlled access to information at no cost or effort to the journalist was described by Gundy (1982) as information subsidy. This media relations practice of providing controlled access to information was later refined by PRPs with an aim to influence the news content, which in turn influenced the public opinion and the public agenda (Sallot & Johnson, 2006). The ability of the news media to influence the public agenda is termed as agenda-setting (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). McCombs (2004) describes agenda-setting as:

The ability to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda has come to be called the agenda-setting role of the news media...The public uses these cues from the mass media to organize their own agendas and decide which issues are important...in other words the news media set the public agenda (p. 1).

When PRPs were successful in convincing journalists to publish their information subsidies, they could accordingly influence the media agenda and public opinion about their organisations (Curtin, 1999). Sissons (2015) has provided evidence of how PRPs have manipulated the way journalists covered the subsequent news stories by way of controlling journalists' access to information sources.

In 2007, a new practice of media relations became popular with the introduction of an expert group called HARO (Help A Reporter Out) on a social network site, which encouraged journalists to float their information requirements to this service instead of PRPs pitching their stories to journalists. HARO, as an expert request service, was a formatted list of story ideas for the media sent to all its members with a request to contribute their input relevant to those story ideas. HARO's membership extended beyond PRPs and journalists to include even those who were not professional communicators and joined the group as an information source. Using HARO service, journalists were able to reach a large number of information sources without any intermediaries to seek specific content for their stories, creating the new concept of 'media catching' (Waters et al., 2010, p. 249). The HARO concept built on crowdsourcing served both the journalists, who were seeking information, and the PRPs who were providers of information. HARO therefore became an indication of how new technologies could change traditional media relations (Waters et al., 2010).

New media technologies have brought out considerable changes in the media landscape in which the core functions of media relations, outlined by Johnston in 2007 as developing and maintaining positive and ethical relationship with the news media, are no longer considered sufficient (Johnston & Rowny, 2018). The authors maintain that the way news is created and consumed today can be attributed to three key changes: alteration of traditional media, unprecedented growth of new media, and flexibility provided by mobile technology. The authors argue that these changes are believed to represent the development of a whole new media industry on the one hand and blurring of mass and interpersonal communication on the other. The contemporary media relations is therefore envisaged as an activity that has redefined the PRP-journalist relationship, with the focus of PR strategy of an organisation shifting beyond its interaction with the journalists to producing and publishing its own content in a way to target all its key publics, including journalists (Johnston & Rowny, 2018).

Several studies have reported different practices of producing and distributing content that have enabled PRPs to reach out to journalists and other key publics simultaneously. This trend of creating customised content and delivering it by using a variety of communication channels including social media is reported to have blurred boundaries between journalism, PR, marketing, and advertising (Hallahan, 2014). Hanna et al. (2011) reported that consumers were identified as becoming co-creators of the media content. Pullizi (2012) described the process of creation of valuable content by the brand itself on a regular basis to elicit positive behaviour from the customer as 'content marketing' (p. 116). Later, organisations also started producing newsworthy content by using journalistic skills aimed at

promoting their brands (Macnamara, 2014). Bull (2013) described this practice of using journalistic techniques to tell an organisational story directly to its key publics as ‘brand journalism’ (p. 1). As a form of brand journalism, blogging/micro-blogging became a popular social media enabled platform amongst PRPs in the US (Gillin, 2008; DiStaso & Bortree, 2012). Later, other social media enabled practices became popular such as social media newsrooms (Zerfass & Schramm, 2014) and the Facebook initiative ‘Instant Articles’ (Constine, 2015). Currently, organisations also use promotional avenues that involve payments for published content aimed at consumers. These are often posted as customised content on social media platforms, such as Facebook (Pulizzi, 2014). Such paid practice of publishing content that bears a similarity to the news and other information that surrounds it online is described as native advertising (Federal Trade Commission, 2015). Native advertising is a new form of online advertising that blends into its online context by mirroring the format of surrounding editorial content (Campbell & Grimm, 2018).

PRPs often consider integrating social media influencers (SMIs) in their campaigns to affect the attitudes and behaviours of their key publics (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019; Navarro et al., 2020). Dhanesh and Duthler (2019) define SMI as:

A person who, through personal branding, builds and maintains relationships with multiple followers on social media, and has the ability to inform, entertain, and potentially influence followers’ thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours (p. 3).

The SMIs, acting both as co-producers and as intermediaries of messages, affect their followers by delivering information in a way to help organisations to successfully inform and educate their publics, gain understanding and build trust (Li & Du, 2011). According to Zerfass et al. (2016), PRPs are increasingly ensuring synergy between their PR and content marketing efforts to ensure that readymade and impactful content is made available to the influencers on one end and journalists on the other with the objective of building symbiotic trust and relationships. It is argued that the changing media landscape with a shift from mass-mediated communication to own-produced and delivered content has helped both PRPs and journalists to be in conversation mode with their publics (Zerfass et al., 2016).

2.4 Media Relations in the Health Care Sector

Most health care organisations including pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, government health departments, research and development organisations, and academic institutions have PR departments that handle media relations as one of their PR functions (Riggulsford, 2013). As in any other specialist area, there are deep concerns about the extent of PR influence on health news (Schwitzer, 2017). According to Arroyave (2012), regardless of their

professional experience in the field, the health journalists rely on health experts to explain technical information mainly owing to lack of formal training coupled with the complex nature of the field and heavy workload. Journalists therefore report information that health experts deemed as important thereby preventing their publics from obtaining accurate and important health information. In a survey of health organisations working as non-profits, Cho (2006) finds that PRPs believed they have expert power in media relations as they developed close relationships with journalists as a result of their regular interaction.

However, despite the research showing evidence of PR input in health news, very few studies have examined the PRP-journalist relationship in the production of health news (Furlan, 2017). As early as 1992, a research study reported the negative effects of the influence of PR material, including video news releases often skilfully packaged by vested interests and published by journalists without the traditional process of reviewing and verification (Schwitzer, 1992). Such reporting by TV media using the video news releases prepared by health organisations without any attribution was again reported in another study (Clark & Zhou, 2015). Schwitzer laid the blame on PR news releases propagated not only by the companies with ‘questionable commercial interests’ selling herbal cures for cancer, but also by government health agencies, academicians and industry-sponsored advocacy groups (Schwitzer, 2017, p. 1). Morrell et al. (2015) have found that PRPs in health care organisations in Australia would reach journalists in various ways, which included through a media release, a social media campaign, posting on blogs, or even directly. This may be particularly important in Australia where direct-to-public communication of prescription medicine is banned, and hence ‘health news becomes a form of publicity for the health industry’ (Morrell et al., 2015, p. 598). It could be argued that health care industries use media to promote their products and services through their PR efforts, but the processes involved in the production of these stories are not transparent (Forsyth et al., 2012). Furlan (2015) suggests that in view of the ongoing concern about the influence of PR on news processes and lack of transparency in the news production process, new research into the relational dynamics between PRPs and journalists in the area of health care is needed.

2.5 The Impact of Social Media on Media Relations

The use of new media technologies in PR, including websites, blogs, e-mail, social media networks, streaming services, virtual and augmented reality have had an effect on how organisations can communicate and build their reputation amongst key publics, including mass media (Alikilic & Atabe, 2012; Allaguia & Breslow, 2016; Brionesa et al., 2011; Curtis et al., 2010; Fernando, 2011; Gabriel & Koh, 2016; Morenoa, 2015; Neill & Lee, 2016;

Wright & Hinson, 2015; Wright & Hinson, 2017). Organisations are using social media, largely to create ongoing conversations and dialogue with their audiences (Thackeray et al., 2012).

Social media allows for real-time two-way communication that facilitates organisational communication practice not only by sharing information, but also by building dialogic relationships (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Saffer et al., 2013). A recent Australian study reported that although PRPs believe that the fundamentals of good communication have not changed, they still see the potential in digital media for PR (Wolf & Archer, 2018). On the other hand, a few research studies have also demonstrated low adoption rates for social media tools amongst PRPs (Avery et al., 2010), and that the use of social media had a limited impact on organisational visibility (Yanga & Kent, 2014). Achor and Nnabuko (2019) have found that PRPs perform a dual role of 'quasi-gatekeeping' and 'quasi-gate watching' in their attempt to manage information in the social media domain (p. 21).

Social media has allowed organisations 'to become publishers and broadcasters directly distributing their messages to audiences' (Macnamara, 2016, p. 123). Hanna et al. (2011) indicate that consumers are more likely to become co-creators of messages and content, and in turn help to create organisational brands. Diga and Kelleher (2009) report that the PRPs who use social media more frequently perceive greater structural power (using information as a strategic tool), expert power, and prestige power (status through influential friends) within their organisations than the PRPs who use social media less frequently. Freberg et al. (2011) find that social media influencers are becoming an important aspect of establishing credibility for organisations. Distaso et al. (2011), exploring how PRPs approach social media and measure it, find that social media is seen as a cost-effective way to receive greater reach 'to engage in important conversations' and 'to enhance their understanding of markets, customers, competitors, and employees' (p. 327).

Social media is also seen to influence the PRP-journalist relationship, as journalists tend to use social media as a source of information, whereas PRPs use social media as a channel to disseminate information (Supa, 2014). Supa (2014) argues that the speed at which social media enables communication to take place highlights the importance of the PRP-journalist relationship and allows for PRPs and journalists to establish a more personal relationship and benefit both parties. The positive impact of social media on the PRP-journalist relationship is reported in a few other studies. For instance, Shin and Cameron (2003) find that PRPs and journalists expect that online media relations offer promise of building the PRP-journalist relationship, with both groups predicting less conflict in online source-reporter relationships.

Irons (2011) finds that, in Indiana, PRPs are more amenable to the viewpoint that new media is helping their relationship with journalists whereas journalists are neutral on positive change in their relationship with PRPs. Chelluri and Kaur (2012) find that social media has changed the long-standing dynamics of the PRP-journalist relationship, with both communities standing to benefit from the altered information exchange process. Similarly, Halls (2017), while examining the contributing factors in how technology enhances, neutralises or diminishes the PRP-journalist relationship, notes that digital innovations are impacting media relations by providing diverse and direct ways for PRPs and journalists to connect with each other.

There are minor differences between PRPs and journalists with regard to congruency in social media use, as reported in the survey conducted by Avery et al. (2010). The comparison of the use of social media and perceived importance of its tools among PRPs and journalists in her study suggests that journalists are more likely to work with the PRPs who use social media tools. Overall, PRPs and journalists appeared to understand the other's use of social media and its implications on organisations' strategic visions (Avery et al., 2010). Another study finds that PRPs do less traditional media relations, mostly attributable to downsized newsrooms and frustration with the resulting dearth of institutional knowledge, the influx of young, inexperienced reporters, and shallow stories (Bajkiewicz et al., 2011). While PRPs saw opportunities to inject unfiltered messages in media, they valued their relationships with journalists particularly with those with whom they use only social media to communicate with. The participants also indicated that social media is changing the direction of traditional media relations (Bajkiewicz et al., 2011).

Several studies have also highlighted the growth of two-way communication between PRPs and journalists and how this is influenced by the use of social media. Grunig and Hunt (1984) developed four models of PR to describe different organisational practices. The first press agent model prescribes persuasion to shape the opinions of key publics without seeking their feedback. The second public information model moves away from the manipulative tactics used in the press agent model and presents more accurate information, while still maintaining a one-way communication pattern. The third two-way asymmetrical model emphasises on creating the message based on their publics' attitudes and behaviours. Since persuasive communication is still used to benefit the organisation more than its publics, it is considered asymmetrical. In the fourth two-way symmetrical model, PRPs use communication to ensure that both an organisation and its publics benefit from the communication. Păun (2009) maintains that social media is an alternative instrument to encourage a two-way communication channel and suggests that it is necessary for PRPs to

monitor the information placed on social media sites and engage content producers on various forums as journalists are regularly monitoring these sites and forums for story ideas and information. These findings are echoed by Choa et al. (2014) who found that publics demonstrate high levels of engagement with organisational messages when two-way symmetrical communication is used, compared to public information or two-way asymmetrical communication models. Mesila (2010) suggests that the functions of media relations and social media clearly differ from each other – while media relations is used by organisations to enhance reputation and to reach broad audiences, social media is mainly used as a channel for two-way communication, discussion cultivation, and monitoring. She predicts that the PRP-journalist relationship will not disappear in the future, but rather exist as an important PR communication activity.

On the other hand, a few studies have also established that the use of social media has either no impact or negative impact on the PRP-journalist relationship. Furlan (2017), in her study on media relations in health care, reports that the use of social media is undermining the PRP-journalist source relationship rather than strengthening it. Her study findings suggest that journalists use social media to contact elite medical sources directly rather than using PR intermediaries, while PRPs forge links directly with their publics, bypassing the so-called media gatekeepers. Żbikowska (2016) warns that although social media makes the relationship between PRPs and journalists more attractive and therefore helps to establish their relationship, it does not actually build the relationship. He suggests that since social media is a place where journalistic work is published and is a source of information for editors, PRPs should focus their activities on social media more on a dialogue with a wider audience beyond the media, especially with consumers.

2.6 The Impact of Twitter on Media Relations

As outlined above, a large number of studies have examined the impact of social media on media relations and also on the PRP-journalist relationship. But only a few studies have focussed on the impact of the use of Twitter on media relations although there have been several studies examining the use of Twitter in the individual professions of PR and journalism. Twitter, launched in 2006, is one of the most popular social media platforms available today, with more than 186 million daily active users (Aslam, 2021). It is a 'microblogging' system that allows the user to send and receive short posts called tweets with more than 500 million tweets generated per day (Aslam, 2021). With its re-tweeting and feedback mechanism with replies, Twitter has become a key social media tool that affords organisations an optimal way of engaging in dialogic communication with their publics

(Heldman et al., 2013; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Smith, 2010). According to Lovejoy et al. (2012), an organisation may repost other users' tweets to share information that is relevant and useful for its followers, demonstrating its connections with other users. By using the reply function of Twitter or including the @ symbol and username of another Twitter user in their tweets, the organisations can demonstrate responsiveness and commitment to creating ongoing conversations (Lovejoy et al., 2012). Such re-tweets and replies functions are central to generating a foundation for dialogic communication and retaining an audience in the dialogic loop (Heldman et al., 2013). The other important features of Twitter, namely hyperlinks and hashtags further enhance interconnectivity on Twitter. The speed and interactivity offered by these features have rendered Twitter an effective communication tool that enables both information sharing and dialogic relationship building (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

2.6.1 Journalism on Twitter

Only four years after its launch, Twitter was already considered a useful marketing and research tool for newspaper websites that supplement the traditional role of journalists as the investigators and providers of timely information on news events (Ahmad, 2010). Twitter has since become a convenient, cheap and effective beat for journalists in search of news and information, who are increasingly engaged in collecting information online and using it in journalism discourse (Broersma & Graham, 2013). The Tweeting habits of journalists range from live reporting to organisational and personal branding and relationship building with their publics (Canter & Brookes, 2016). Barnard (2012) argues that the rise of Twitter has played a significant role in shifting the boundaries of the journalistic field and also the course of journalism as a profession. Another study by Barnard (2016) demonstrates Twitter's role in the transformation of journalistic norms, values, and means of distinction. Canter (2015) suggests that the use of Twitter in routine practices of newsgathering and live reporting is causing a shift in traditional gatekeeping and verification conventions that are typical of journalism profession. Another recent study examining the expectations of publics on journalism performance on social media vis-à-vis public perception of media bias has found that the perceptions of editorial media bias declines when people interact with journalists on Twitter (Diehl et al., 2019). This study further suggests that journalists should continue to embrace social affordances to remain engaged with their publics.

The use of Twitter by journalists to enhance their ability to engage and interact with the public was acknowledged by Twitter in its document titled, 'Twitter for Journalists: A Best Practices Guide,' (Roy, 2011). This guide contains four sections: #report, #engage, #publish

and #extra, highlighting the best practices geared towards streamlining Twitter reporting and making Twitter a more efficient journalism tool. It recommends that PRPs should pay attention to Twitter being used by journalists not only as a tool to distribute information to publics, but also as a source in creating the news.

The most frequent activity for journalists on Twitter is reading and following the public's tweets, followed by the use of Twitter for their personal life, for promotion of their news stories, and for job-related interaction activities with the public (Kim et al., 2015). The authors demonstrate that Korean journalists utilise the publics' tweets for their news stories. While examining how news organisations employed Twitter as a news source, the study by Moon and Hadley (2014) demonstrates that journalists embrace Twitter as a new channel for information gathering and those from TV frequently cite Twitter as a primary source. However, the authors argue that journalists in both TV and newspapers still doubt the reliability of online sources and mainly rely on official Twitter accounts of organisations (Moon & Hadley, 2014).

Journalists are increasingly encouraged to develop a personal brand on Twitter, which offers them an opportunity to become news and opinion hubs. According to Brems (2017), journalists struggle with choosing from being factual or opinionated, being personal or professional, or how to balance in conveying their message with engagement and promote themselves. A recent study suggests that branding is common among journalists on Twitter and it occurs at individual, organisational and institutional levels, with branding at organisational level taking priority; and that more time is spent on Twitter for sharing personal information (Molyneux et al., 2018).

Regarding the use of Twitter by journalists in reporting health news, a study finds that health journalists use Twitter mainly to monitor other communication professionals in health care and consider health experts the second most important group of sources in recognition of their role in translating complex health matters (Deprez & Van Leuven, 2018). Also, according to Molyneux and Holton (2015), health journalists are more likely to adopt new forms of practice including the use of Twitter, breaking the traditional tenets of journalism.

2.6.2 PR on Twitter

Social media platforms such as Twitter provide organisations with the ability to interact directly with their publics. Previous research has suggested that online relationship building is dependent on how an organisation uses technology to engage with its publics and how an

organisation's level of Twitter interactivity influences relationship quality (Saffer, 2013). In government organisations, Twitter is used for reporting news, sharing information, providing information sources, and coordinating projects (Wigand, 2010). Twitter is seen as an enabling space for rendering government services to the people and as a tool to enhance the reliability of the government (Kim et al., 2015). The authors report that the government service that prioritises more on transparency, participation, and communication is found to use Twitter to the maximum. Evans (2011) suggests that PRPs consider microblogging to be a valuable asset to a campaign's social media strategy and believes that Twitter enables a form of communication not offered by other social media applications. Hwang (2012) indicates that microblogging is beneficial for the development of effective personal PR by corporate leaders. A study exploring the use of Twitter for CSR communication to establish good PR finds that the use of Twitter minimises stakeholder scepticism through more dialogical and personalised interaction (Etter, 2011).

Twitter is an important source of health-related information on the Internet and provides researchers with a real-time source of public health information on a global scale (Jordan et al., 2018). Another study, exploring the benefits of the use of Twitter in improving quality and access to health care and patient satisfaction, finds that the use of Twitter enhances communication during a health crisis as it enables real-time sharing of organisational content, news, and health promotions (Gomes & Coustasse, 2015). This study also finds that the use of Twitter in the hospital setting has been more beneficial than detrimental in its ability to generate opportunities for cost savings, recruiting, communication with employees and patients, and community reach.

Organisations however do not fully employ the interactivity potential of Twitter to build mutually beneficial relationships with their stakeholders (Mamic & Almaraz, 2013). Another study examining the use of interactive features of Twitter by organisations for developing engagement has found that although the organisations engaged in health promotion and public engagement do post original tweets, they differed in the degree to which they use re-tweet and reply functions (Park et al., 2016). Lovejoy et al. (2012) have found that the large non-profit organisations in the US are not using Twitter to maximise stakeholder involvement; instead, they use it as a one-way communication channel. Another study in the US has also found that the Twitter is adopted by the local health departments as a one-way communication on personal-health topics and organisation-related information (Neiger et al., 2013). This study suggests that as the use of Twitter in health promotion moves from low engagement to medium and then high engagement, there is more potential of Twitter to help

form partnerships with audiences and involve them as program participants in creating environmental and social conditions for improved health.

2.6.3 *Media Relations on Twitter*

Twitter capitalises on the relationships between its users in how they fulfil each other's needs for their mutual benefits (Wilson & Supa, 2013). This interactivity of its users lends Twitter to stronger relationship building than the other social media platforms and thus is expected to have profound implications for media relations (Smith, 2010). This unique feature of Twitter is explained by Smith (2010) as:

Twitter is more than a message engine – it is a platform for social connection and promotion. Interactivity is a driving force of Twitter use and involvement seems dependent on technological facilitation (functional interactivity) and interdependent messaging (contingent interactivity) (p. 29).

Both PRPs and journalists use Twitter, but there is little research on how it is used as a component of media relations. Wilson and Supa (2013) find that although Twitter is considered valuable by both PRPs and journalists for fulfilling basic functions of sourcing, reporting and publishing news, they 'have not yet worked out how to use the medium' to engage with each other (p. 15). Twitter has been seen to flatten the sports hierarchy and can be considered the most influential social media platform in sports, according to a study on the impact of Twitter on sports media relations by Gibbs and Haynes (2013). They also argue that the introduction of social media, like Twitter, into sports communications has disrupted the traditional methods of sports media relations as the use of Twitter has enabled the sports teams to communicate directly with fans without gatekeepers like the media or the sports communications department of the team. Another study finds Twitter as a major force behind changing relational dynamics between PRPs and journalists during the negotiation of potential medical stories, as its use promotes evasion rather than relationship development between PRPs and journalists, besides affecting newsgathering (Furlan, 2017). She argues that Twitter is the preferred social media tool for a majority of PRPs and journalists in Australia where journalists use Twitter to contact elite medical sources directly, rather than going through a PRP intermediary, while PRPs use Twitter to forge links directly with their publics, thereby bypassing the journalists in their gatekeeping role. She concludes that bypassing the process of verification and fact-checking, necessary for reporting 'accurate and unbiased' health news, has profound consequences on media relations.

2.7 Status of Research on the Impact of Social Media on Media Relations in New Zealand

In New Zealand, 82% population is active on social media (an increase of 2.8% between 2020 and 2021) which puts New Zealand amongst the top ten countries from Asia-Pacific in terms of social media penetration (Hinton, 2021). These statistics show that social media has become an integral part of the lifestyle of people of New Zealand, and as a result, it is expected to become a relevant communication channel for an organisation to communicate and build relationships with its publics. Several studies world-wide have specifically examined the impact of social media on the process of media relations, but there is little research in New Zealand examining the impact of social media on media relations. For instance, one study has examined how social media influenced the relationship between public relations and advertising (Toledano, 2010), other two studies examined online media uses by PRPs (Bhargava, 2010; Martens, 2020), and another reported social media use by PRPs (Macnamara et al., 2017). Also, a few studies have explored the relationship between PRPs and journalists in New Zealand (Tilley & Hollings, 2008; Sterne, 2010; Callard, 2011; Sissons, 2015), but no research examining the impact of Twitter on the relationships between PRPs and journalists in New Zealand could be found.

2.8 Theoretical Framework of the Study

One of the main theoretical bases of PR discipline is provided by systems theory drawing parallel between systems and how communication is practiced. The systems theory, originally proposed in the 1940s by the biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy and first applied to PR by Cutlip and Center in 1952, is a useful way to understand the relationship between an organisation and its publics, as well as the role of PR in an organisation (Broom & Sha, 2009). Systems theory as a paradigm through which to view PR first became popular in the late 1970s and 1980s when PR scholars Grunig and Hunt (1984), Allen and Nager (1984), and Pavlik (1987) used systems perspective in their PR work.

According to systems theory, all biological entities, commercial organisations, or social institutions are part of a system, which comprises three main elements: an organisation or organism, its environment, and its goals (Roach, 2006). He argues that when the environment changes, the system registers that change and responds either by adjusting to the environment or by changing the environment. Pavlik (1987) discussed this theme of interconnectedness of organisation and its environment by referring to a system as merely not a collection of unrelated parts

but an integrated whole where every part is inter-dependent and a change in a part causes change throughout the system. According to Toth (1992), organisations must concern themselves with the environment to survive by keeping focus on the means (rather than the ends) to achieving the ends, such as input (identifying a problem with incoming information), throughput (processing of information received), and output (response of an organisation). According to Roche (2016), two words relate to the systems theory in PR and serve as the common denominator in all communications: crisis (indicating chaos) and consensus (indicating an agreement). The author argues that every communication must fall on one or the other side of the communications-crisis scale moving an organisation towards a consensus or a crisis. When the environment changes, the system registers the change and responds either by adjusting to the environment or by changing the environment - if the adjustment is successful consensus is maintained, and if not, crisis is reached. Based on its ability to recognise and adapt to a change, the system either survives or expires. Roche (2016) maintains that systems theory is understood in PR in terms of an organisation interacting with its publics to survive and prosper. The author argues that it is the responsibility of PRPs to evaluate and respond to the environment to help move an organisation towards consensus and away from crisis. In this context, PRPs are expected to elicit feedback from their publics and make necessary adjustments to keep an organisation on track with its environment (Roche, 2016).

The application of systems theory to PR suggests the importance of PRPs to monitor all the messages about the organisation, which implies that the relationships with publics including journalists should be a two-way open system, with the organisation listening to its publics and able to use the feedback from its publics to adapt itself to the changing environment for growth (Broom & Sha, 2009). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Grunig and Hunt (1984) proposed four models of communication: publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models. The publicity model describes PR as an activity to obtain favourable publicity with a primary purpose of propaganda. The public information model focuses on persuading the public. Both these models are not only one-way but are also asymmetrical as they attempt to change the public and not the organisation. The authors argue that PRPs using asymmetrical models of communication effectively operate as if they are in a closed system, primarily designed to influence the environment rather than allowing the environment to influence the organisation. The two-way asymmetric model uses research to moderate messages to make them more effective but not to initiate change. On the other hand, the two-way symmetrical model proposes that organisations should be as willing to change as their publics because of communication. According to Toth (1992), the foundation of Grunig's two-way symmetrical

model of communications lies in two-way communication between an organisation and its publics to resolve conflict and promote mutual understanding and respect. Toth (1992) argues that Grunig's two-way symmetrical model is related to systems theory as, to maintain consensus, it is important for an organisation to not only communicate with its environment but also prioritise on receiving feedback. Later, drawing upon systems theory, Grunig's excellence theory also emphasised on the importance of open system and two-way symmetrical communication for an 'excellent' PR approach aimed at building relationships between organisations and their publics to achieve organisational goals (Grunig, 2006, p. 160). However, Gregory (2000) points out weaknesses in employing open systems in PR. She argues that communication in two-way symmetrical PR is seen to be dominated by organisations. She then further argues that, in two-way symmetrical PR, the communication planning becomes over-focused on the immediate effects of communication rather than its strategic long-term impact.

There are varying scholarly views on the nature of the relationship between organisations and their publics (referred to as organisation-public relationship) in different professions. According to PR scholars Grunig and Huang (2000), there are four indicators of successful interpersonal relationships that also apply to the organisation-public relationships. These are: *control mutuality*, i.e., the degree to which parties agree on who has the power to influence one another; *Trust*, i.e., the level of confidence of one party to open oneself to another; *Satisfaction*, i.e., the extent to which one party believes that the other party's behaviours are positive in a relationship; and *Commitment*, i.e., the extent to which one party believes that it is worthy to spend energy to maintain the relationship. According to Hon and Grunig (1999), there is another (fifth) pair of relationship indicators, i.e., exchange vs. communal relationships, which defines PR relationships as different from other public relationships. In an exchange relationship, one party gives benefit to the other because it expects to receive comparable benefits from the other party. In a communal relationship, both parties provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other without getting anything in return. Hon and Grunig (1999) believe that PRPs add value to an organisation by developing communal relationships with publics that distinguishes PR from similar professions such as marketing. Hon and Grunig (1999) argue that the above five relationship indicators can be applied to regular interaction between PRPs and journalists:

Good relationships with reporters are ones in which both feel they have some degree of control over the reporting of the organization—neither party is in control to the exclusion of the other. Both parties trust each other to help them do their job; indeed, they have a communal relationship so each helps the other even though they may get nothing in return. They are committed to making the relationship

between the organization and the media work. The bottom line is that they are satisfied with the relationship (p. 24).

Good relationship between PRPs and journalists lies at the heart of media relations in which both parties can influence the production of news (Supa, 2014). This interconnectedness of PR and journalism has been explained by German scholars Bentele, Liebert and Seeling (1997) in their intereffication model. The name 'intereffication' originates from the Latin word 'efficare' which means making something possible. According to Bentele (2005), this model assumes that the PRP-journalist relationship is characterised by the mutual influence and dependence of PR and journalism. The author argues that neither PR nor journalism would function properly without the existence of the other, as the communication output of one profession is possible only with the willingness of the other profession to cooperate and contribute towards its effectiveness in meeting the desired objectives. According to this model, the ability of PRPs and journalists to influence each other and their willingness to adapt themselves to their changing circumstances are fundamentals of the PRP-journalist relationship (Bentele & Nothhaft, 2008). These two fundamentals, referred to as induction and adaptation, operate along three dimensions: PRPs making messages relevant to their target media outlet (called object dimension), PRPs timing their work to meet editorial deadlines (called temporal dimension), and PRPs adapting to the way journalists work (called psycho-social dimension) (Bentele & Nothhaft, 2008). The model further suggests that induction and adaptation processes also occur at three levels, comprising individuals acting (micro-level), PR and media organisations (meso-level), and entire systems of PR and journalism (macro-level) (Wehmeier, 2008). Bentele and Nothhaft (2008) however argue that the mutually enabling processes of induction and adaptation rely on expectations and experience and therefore no symmetry or balance can be expected in these processes as they can vary in their strength in both PR and journalism. They therefore state that although the intereffication model provides a theoretical basis for the studies, it is for the empirical investigation to find as to what extent and how PRPs can influence journalists and vice versa. The research above suggests that the PRP-journalist relationship in media relations can be described as symbiotic relationship. This description of the PRP-journalist relationship is taken as the starting point of this study which is aimed to examine the mutual influence and dependence of PRPs and journalists in media relations.

The research above also suggests that the PRP-journalist relationship is dynamic and prone to changes in the media landscape. According to Grunig (2009), people are less constrained by the information made available by organisations through traditional media as digital technologies have enabled everyone, including journalists, to seek information from several

sources simultaneously. Grunig (2009) maintains that the traditional practice of PR in managing messaging activities like publicity, media relations, and media effects can be explained by the symbolic-interpretive paradigm. In this paradigm, PR activities buffer an organisation from its stakeholders. Grunig (2009) argues that PR can take full advantage of digital media only if it is practiced under the behavioural-strategic management paradigm. In this paradigm, PR acts as a bridging activity to build relationships with stakeholders, with emphasis on two-way symmetrical communication to facilitate dialogue between management and publics. Grunig (2009) states that digital media with its 'dialogical, interactive, relational, and global properties' favours the use of the behavioural-strategic management paradigm in PR (p. 6). Although Grunig does not explicitly mention social media, he mentions blogs and microblogs (platforms of social media) as forms of digital media that are appropriate for communication programmes to cultivate relationships with publics (Grunig, 2009). In view of the above argument that social media augments the practice of the behavioural-strategic management paradigm in PR rather than the symbolic interpretive paradigm practiced in the traditional media relations, it could be inferred that the use of social media would also affect media relations.

There are also research findings that contest the viability of two-way symmetrical communication emphasised in the behavioural-strategic management paradigm in PR. According to Macnamara (2009), 'key areas of PR practice remain grounded in a control paradigm focused on one-way, top-down monologue' (p. 11). Macnamara (2016) argues that corporate communication is mostly one-way as he raises questions about the extent to which organisations are willing to listen to those who wish to engage with them. According to Huang and Yang (2015), many organisations do not take advantage of the increased capacity provided by digital media to engage directly with their publics as they believe there are risks associated with the use of social media that may lead to unpredictable outcomes. Coombs and Holladay (2015) state that mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics are not possible as there can never be a personal relationship with an organisation. They argue that while social media has enabled organisations and their publics to act as both receivers and senders, the organisations do not have necessary resources to cultivate and maintain relationships with everyone on social media wishing to engage with them.

The research above has suggested an impact of social media on the PRP-journalist relationship. Amongst other social media platforms, Twitter capitalises on the relationships between its users in how they fulfil each other's needs for their mutual benefit. This interactivity of its users lends Twitter to stronger relationship building than the other social

media platforms and thus is considered to have implications for media relations (Smith, 2010). This study therefore aims to examine whether the use of Twitter, with its interactivity features enabling two-way symmetrical communication amongst its users, has influenced the PRP-journalist relationship in the context of contemporary media relations in New Zealand.

2.9 Research Questions

The research above demonstrates that media relations is a vital function for both PRPs and journalists involved in the production of news. The research also demonstrates that although the 'love-hate' relationship between PRPs and journalists persists, enormous changes in the media landscape largely enabled by new media technologies have brought significant changes in the contemporary media relations. Particularly, the use of social media has had an impact on how the media relations is practiced today with a potential to influence future relationships between PRPs and journalists. Out of all the social media platforms, Twitter being primarily an information-sharing site rather than a social network is seen to have significant implications for the practice of media relations.

Overall, the research referred to in this chapter has argued that the use of Twitter by both PRPs and journalists has influenced media relations mainly in the way the information is sourced, reported and published. The use of Twitter has provided journalists a functional autonomy in newsgathering with direct access to their sources otherwise guarded by PRPs. On the other hand, PRPs have access to new channels that allow them to communicate directly with their publics, bypassing the process of fact-checking and verification by journalists. This emerging trend has implications on the PRP-journalist relationship, as it could promote 'evasion' rather than 'connection' (Furlan, 2017, p. 11). This tendency of evasion on the part of both PRPs and journalists while using Twitter in media relations function where there is no filter to screen what is published can ultimately affect the quality of news in terms of accuracy and bias. However, there is limited research in exploring the impact of the use of Twitter resulting in changing relationships between PRPs and journalists involved in the production of news in New Zealand. Hence, this research is an attempt to contribute to the universe of knowledge on contemporary media relations by finding answers to the undermentioned research questions.

1. How does the use of Twitter influence the relationship between PRPs and journalists in the context of contemporary media relations in New Zealand?

To find answer to the above research question, it is considered important to first examine how the interviewees understand the concept of media relations and value the importance of

the PRP-journalist relationship to the success of media relations. It is also considered important to examine how the PRP-journalist relationship is influenced by technological and other changes in the media landscape, including the impact of social media. Keeping this in view, it is envisaged to find answer to the overarching research question by examining the viewpoints of the interviewees on the following sub-questions:

- 1a. How do PRPs and journalists view media relations and their relationship with each other in the context of the evolving practice of media relations in New Zealand?
- 1b. How do PRPs and journalists view the potential of Twitter in influencing the practice of PR and journalism in New Zealand?
- 1c. How do PRPs and journalists view the potential of Twitter in influencing their relationship with each other while performing media relations in New Zealand?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The current study aims to discover how the use of Twitter influences the relationship between PRPs and journalists in the context of contemporary media relations in New Zealand. For this purpose, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the use of Twitter influence the relationship between PRPs and journalists in the context of contemporary media relations in New Zealand?
 - 1a. How do PRPs and journalists view media relations and their relationship with each other in the context of the evolving practice of media relations in New Zealand?
 - 1b. How do PRPs and journalists view the potential of Twitter in influencing the practice of PR and journalism in New Zealand?
 - 1c. How do PRPs and journalists view the potential of Twitter in influencing their relationship with each other while performing media relations in New Zealand?

The use of Twitter has an influence on the workplace practice of both public relations practitioners (PRPs) and journalists. Today, because of the real-time advantage offered by Twitter, everyone can report an event online quicker than the traditional news outlets. Moreover, the use of Twitter has provided journalists a functional autonomy in news gathering, with direct access to their sources otherwise guarded by PRPs. The PRPs have access to new channels that allow them to address their publics, bypassing the journalists. This emerging trend is expected to influence the relationship between PRPs and journalists. From the research above, it is clear that many studies have focused on how PRPs and journalists are using Twitter, but there is limited research on how they are using it in relation to each other. This study aims to find out the potential of Twitter in influencing the PRP-journalist relationship involved in media relations in New Zealand. The questions being addressed aim to examine the views of PRPs and journalists on the potential of Twitter on media relations and how it can influence their attitudes towards each other.

This chapter outlines the research design for the current study. It presents the paradigm of constructivism epistemology and how it influences the qualitative methodology that underlies this study. A rationale for using interview method to gather data is then presented.

It then outlines six standard phases of thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) used in this study as guidelines in relation to the research questions and the available data.

3.1 Constructivist Epistemology

The selection of research methodology depends on a paradigm that guides the research activity, which includes ontology (beliefs about the nature of reality), epistemology (the theory of knowledge that informs the research), and methodology (how that knowledge may be gained) (Sarantakos, 2012). There are two broad epistemological positions: positivism and interpretivism-constructivism. The positivist perspective maintains that reliable knowledge is based on direct observation of natural phenomenon through empirical means (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). On the other hand, an interpretivist-constructivist perspective sees the phenomenon as it is constructed, interpreted, and experienced by people in their interactions with each other and with wider social systems (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Maxwell, 2006). Similarly, there are two contrasting positions for ontological considerations in research: objectivism (that assumes there is an independent reality) and constructivism (that assumes that reality is the product of social processes) (Neuman, 2003). Positivist researchers consider that knowledge exists and must be studied using objective ways, with the research findings represented quantitatively in numbers that speak for themselves. On the other hand, interpretivist-constructivist researchers see reality and meaning making as socially constructed where people make their own sense of social realities, with the research findings represented qualitatively using words to describe the reality (Mutch, 2013). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), interpretivist-constructivist perspective tends to understand (not to predict) and acquire new knowledge through social interaction, with the researcher influencing the research at all stages – from collection of data to its interpretation. The authors argue that the individuals construct meaning over time and experience and the researcher's goal is to "make sense or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (p. 3). In view of the discussion above, interpretivism-constructivism was used as the underlying epistemology for this study.

3.2 Qualitative Methodology

Methodology is a research strategy that translates ontological and epistemological principles into guidelines that show how research is to be conducted (Sarantakos, 2012). The author argues that the positivist research paradigm, with its objectivist ontology and empiricist epistemology, uses quantitative methodology where emphasis is on measuring variables and

testing hypotheses that are linked to causal explanations. In contrast, interpretative-constructive research paradigm, with its constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, uses qualitative methodology where emphasis is on understanding the complexities of the world through participants' experiences. The qualitative research methodology is therefore considered as treating people as research participants rather than as objects of research (Sarantakos, 2012). According to Tuli (2010), the positivist ontology (claiming single objective reality studied without any perspective of the researcher) and the positivist epistemology (advocating the detachment of the knower from things to be known) guide quantitative methodology. On the other hand, the constructivist ontology (claiming socially constructed reality studied contextually) and the constructivist epistemology (advocating active involvement of the researcher in the things to be known) guide qualitative methodology. In turn, the qualitative methodology enables flexible research design where the researcher enjoys unlimited freedom of movement between the steps of research (Tuli, 2010).

Qualitative research is based on the belief that “knowledge is constructed by people as they seek meaning of an activity, experience or phenomenon” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 23). The authors argue that researchers conduct a qualitative study to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences. Van Maanen (1979) defines qualitative research as:

...an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world (p. 520).

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), four characteristics are key to understanding the nature of qualitative research: (i) focus on how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences; (ii) researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; (iii) inductive process, i.e., researchers gather data to build hypotheses or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses; and (iv) rich description characterising the end product. Marshall and Rossman (2014) state that the strength of qualitative research lies in its emphasis on the importance of understanding of the world through first-hand experience of participants by encouraging them to speak freely about a phenomenon that the participant has experienced.

In contrast, quantitative research inhibits valuable data by imposing “a limited worldview on the subjects” (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 101). The authors argue that laboratories or questionnaires used in quantitative research have become ‘artifacts’ that interfere with natural sentiments and behaviours. Also, the questionnaires do not ensure much-acclaimed

purpose of objectivity as in most cases the participants are aware of what the researchers are looking for and try to meet their expectations (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 101).

According to the PR scholar Macnamara (2016), a large number of studies on the PRP-journalist relationship based on quantitative surveys have suffered from further limitations in that the bias and distortion often found in self-reporting becomes significant in the complex 'love-hate' relationship between PRPs and journalists. Furthermore, experienced PRPs have been found to be reluctant to respond to survey questionnaires and therefore there is need for in-depth, purposively targeted qualitative research to study the complex PRP-journalist relationship (Macnamara, 2016). Since this research seeks views of PRPs and journalists around the concept of media relations, their relationship with each other, and the possible influence of Twitter on their relationship in media relations, a qualitative approach to methodology was undertaken in the current study.

3.3 Interviewing as a Method of Data Collection

The use of qualitative methodology guides the research to employ observation (case studies, ethnographies, and qualitative action research), interview, and group discussion (focus groups) for data collection (Tuli, 2010). The aim of this study is to examine the views of PRPs and journalists about the concept of media relations, their relationship with each other, and the possible influence of Twitter on their relationship in media relations. It was therefore decided to directly approach them considering that the meanings and experiences can be studied well by interviewing the professionals (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002). According to Marshall and Rossman (2014), any study focusing on 'individual lived experiences' typically relies on an in-depth interview strategy (p. 102). Interviewing is well known to help "derive interpretations and understand the meaning of respondents' experiences and life worlds" (Warren, 2002, p. 83). According to Patton (2015), when using an interview, the researcher wants to find out what is 'in and on someone else's mind' (p. 426). He further explains:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. . . We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (Patton, 2015, p. 426).

The research area determining the potential of Twitter in influencing relational dynamics between PRPs and journalists is relatively new. Interviewing was therefore chosen as the data collection method in this research with a viewpoint that it would help to find out how

the understanding of the concept of media relations by PRPs and journalists and the influence of Twitter on their relationship with each are being perceived by the interviewees, how they inter-relate the two, and what the trends are in this research area. Furthermore, the use of interviewing as a data collection method linked well with the epistemological approach of constructivism, which asserts that social phenomena are produced and revised through social interaction.

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews used in any research process are usually of three types that are distinguished from each other based on freedom and flexibility available to the researcher when asking questions from the respondents (Weerakkody, 2009). On one end of the flexibility continuum is the structured survey interview where the formulation and order of the questions are predetermined. At the other end is unstructured or informal interview where there are no pre-set structures/procedures. Somewhere in the middle of the flexibility continuum is the semi-structured interview, where the researcher has the flexibility to add another question or change the wording or the order of the question to further explore or clarify any interesting point raised by the respondent. This research used semi-structured interview for data collection with a view to allow flexibility to respond not only to the situation at hand, but also to the emerging view of the respondent, and to any new ideas on the research area.

The key to get good data from interview is to ask relevant questions preferably as per the themes identified on the basis of the theoretical framework of the research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002). The underlying theoretical framework for this research suggested that the PRP-journalist relationship could be best explained by intereffication model (Bentele, 2005), which assumes that the PRP-journalist relationship is characterised by the mutual influence and dependence of PR and journalism. According to this model, the success of media relations function is determined by the ability of PRPs and journalists to influence each other and their willingness to adapt themselves to their changing circumstances (Bentele & Nothhaft, 2008). While the intereffication model provided a theoretical basis for this research, the current study attempted to empirically examine the mutual influence and dependence of PRPs and journalists while performing media relations.

Also, the behavioural-strategic management paradigm in PR suggests that social media with its inherent ability to facilitate two-way symmetrical communication may influence media relations. Amongst social media platforms, Twitter capitalises on the relationships between its users in how they fulfil each other's needs for their mutual benefit (Wilson & Supa,

2013). This interactivity of its users lends Twitter to stronger relationship building than the other social media platforms and thus is considered to have implications for media relations (Smith, 2010). This study therefore also examined whether the interactivity feature of Twitter enabling two-way symmetrical communication amongst its users has influenced the PRP-journalist relationship in media relations.

Accordingly, this research used an interview schedule that focuses on exploring the viewpoints of the interviewees around four major topics, namely, media relations today, changes in media relations, potential of Twitter, and future of media relations (The interview schedule for PRPs and journalists is attached as Appendices B1 and B2, respectively). In addition to the introductory questions, each of these four topics had a few supporting questions. The order of the questions was so decided that it provides flexibility with some questions that can be left out when the interviewee covers the issue under some other question and some additional questions that can be asked wherever felt necessary. The major topics covered during the interviews were:

Media relations today. The aim of this topic was to set an appropriate context for the interview to find out how the concept of media relations is understood by the interviewees - whether it is mostly related to the relationship with their counterparts or seen in a broader context. Their viewpoints on why they feel it is necessary or not and also if it is influenced by personal relationship with their counterparts are the areas of interest in this first topic.

The change in media relations. The focus of this topic was to get viewpoints of the interviewees on how the new communication technologies have changed the practice of media relations in the last decade (approximately the time period when the use of social media including Twitter had matured in organisational communication). What specific developments are the respondents able to elaborate upon to support their viewpoint?

The potential of Twitter. Under this topic, information was sought on the experiences or perceptions of the interviewees (depending upon their extent of the use of Twitter) on the function of Twitter for organisational communication? What kind of values does it bring to their own profession as also in the context of media relations? How does it help in building relationship with their counterparts in the other profession?

The future of media relations. Under this final topic, the interviewees were encouraged to predict the nature of organisational communication by the end of the next decade.

Particularly, the information was sought on the potential of Twitter vis-à-vis their own profession and more so in the context of media relations.

3.3.2 Limitations of Interview Method affecting Data Collection

Using interviews as the method for finding answers to the research questions in this research has inherent limitations. Two key aspects of the interviewer-interviewee relationship, namely, the interviewer and the social context are considered to potentially undermine the effectiveness of the interview method (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The authors argue that the interviewer by virtue of his or her personal characteristics, personal values or beliefs, and/or other factors including stereotyping, misinterpreting, and presumptions about the interviewee based solely on the interviewee's outward appearance may negatively influence an interviewee's response. The second key area of concern with the interview method is related to the broader social context of the interviewer-interviewee relationship, characterised by the possibility of 'a one-way dialogue' whereby 'the interviewer rules the interview' (Kvale, 2006, p. 484). Having been aware of the above-identified limitations of the interview method, the researcher took them into account when conducting interviews and analysing the data. In conducting interviews, the researcher attempted at all times to remain as neutral as possible. The researcher also attempted to remain neutral during analysis and interpretation of 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 is strictly limited.

3.3.3 Interviewing vs Other Qualitative Data Collection Methods

The strengths of using interviewing as a data collection method in this research, as highlighted above, clearly outweigh the use of other major data collection methods guided by qualitative methodology, namely, focus groups and observation studies. A focus group is an interview with a group of people with knowledge of a given topic. According to Hennink (2014),

...the unique characteristic of focus group research is the interactive discussion through which data are generated...participants share their views, hear the views of others, and perhaps refine their own views in light of what they have heard (pp. 2-3).

"Focus groups work best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives – but don't" (Macnaghten & Myers 2004, p. 65). Focus groups are therefore not appropriate for discussing sensitive, personal topics in the presence of others. So, one reason

for not using the focus group method was that this research seeks the opinion of interviewees in a situation where each interviewee could feel safe and relaxed in dealing with one person rather than a group. Secondly, it was logistically difficult to coordinate 13 individuals from two different professions having complex relationships to share their opinions freely on a single platform.

Observations in qualitative research, involving case studies, ethnographies, and qualitative action research studies, take place in a setting where a phenomenon of interest occurs naturally, and the resulting observation data represent a first-hand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than second-hand account obtained through an interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Observations are about ‘what people are doing’ rather than what they are thinking (Silverman, 2014, p. 230), and are conducted by participating in people’s natural setting over a long period (Gray, 2018). The observations approach was therefore not followed as this study was aimed to seek the opinion of the interviewees and was not focused on their work settings. The observations approach was also not feasible because of a short duration of the study.

3.4 Sampling Procedure

Selecting the unit of analysis – the sample – involved choosing whom to interview. There are two basic types of sampling: probability and nonprobability sampling. Probability sampling allows the researcher to generalise study results from the sample to the population from where the sample is drawn. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), since generalisation is not a goal of qualitative research probabilistic sampling is not justifiable in qualitative research: “Nonprobability sampling is the method of choice for most qualitative research” (p. 96). According to Honigmann (1982), non-probability sampling methods are “logical as long as the fieldworker expects mainly to use his data not to answer question like ‘how much’ and ‘how often’ but to solve qualitative problems, such as discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking occurrences” (p. 84). The most common form of nonprobability sampling is purposeful sampling, which is extensively used in qualitative research for selection of information-rich cases whose study is considered to help best answer the research questions (Patton, 2015):

...the logic and power of qualitative purposeful sampling derives from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of specific cases: information-rich cases. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling (p. 53).

This study used purposeful nonprobability sampling method for selection of participants with the overlying criterion that PRPs and journalists involved in media relations are experienced enough to share their perceptions about trends in media relations and the influence of Twitter on their relationship with each other.

The sample of this study comprised 13 communication professionals, six of which were PRPs working in PR departments of health organisations in New Zealand. The other seven participants were the journalists reporting on health issues for their respective news media outlets in New Zealand. All 13 participants were engaged in media relations, as one of their core areas of operation, responsible for production of health news in New Zealand and had adopted Twitter as one of the channels of communication. The knowledge shared by the participants was expected to present a picture of the research topic which is closer to reality. The population of the research was earlier studied by surfing relevant sources online, particularly the websites of the organisations and their social accounts. The participants were then shortlisted based on the researcher's personal assessment of their suitability according to the above-identified criteria for the sample. The size of the sample was considered sufficient as the saturation point of information reached during the process of data collection.

3.5 The Interview Process

The selected participants were contacted by e-mail giving them the response time of two weeks. To ensure that an informed consent was obtained from the participants, relevant details on the study including the matter pertaining to voluntary nature of their participation, benefits of the research to the participant, researcher and the community, minimisation of risk, and confidentiality of the participants were sent to all the participants in the form of information sheet on the study (Appendix B3). The participants were also explained that the information resulting from the interview will be used for academic purpose only. The consent of the participants was taken in writing on the prescribed consent form (Appendix B4). Both the information sheet and the consent form used for this purpose were earlier approved by the AUT Ethics Committee. Some of the potential interviewees contacted in the first stage refused to be interviewed on the common ground that they did not use Twitter in their communication activity and as a result would not be able to offer useful insights for the study. These interviewees were followed up with another request for their participation in the study based on further clarification provided to them that it was not significant for them to be an active user of Twitter as the interviews were simply to understand their views on the potential of Twitter in influencing media relations. However, a few other communication professionals who shared the target characteristics of those who refused to be interviewed

were substituted into the sample in the second round of approaches to the potential participants by suitably revising the content of the invite.

Before conducting formal interviews with the participants, test interviews were conducted with the researcher's peers from the School of Communication Studies at AUT University, one majoring in the area of public relations and another in journalism. The objective of the test interviews was to be certain about the duration of the interview and to check whether the questions were understood in their proper context. Based on the feedback received from the test interviews necessary adjustments were made to the interview schedule, including removing ambiguity in one question that was not clearly understood by the peers and deleting one question the scope of which overlapped with another.

The interviews with the sample were conducted during October-November 2020 taking into consideration the availability of the interviewees before the Christmas holidays. This scheduling of interviews also gave the researcher an opportunity to optimally use the holiday break to undertake data analysis work within the prescheduled timeframe of the study. Each interview was conducted on a one-on-one basis in person or over Zoom, which lasted for about 25 minutes. Before the start of interview, each participant was first reminded about the purpose of the research, the exact role of the interviewee, and obligation of the researcher to protect the confidentiality of the participant. At the end of the interview, all the interviewees were asked whether they would like to receive the findings of the study. The emphasis of the interviews was kept around the communication activities related to media relations and the potential of Twitter in these activities as well as on the meanings and interpretations behind these activities. The interviews were conducted in neutral tone, and maximum opportunity was given to the participants to speak, without allowing for any personal bias on the part of the researcher. This approach helped meet the requirement of neutrality in interviewing, "it is commonly supposed that the interviewer should be neutral toward interviewee and topic" (Dexter, 1956, p. 153).

Protecting confidentiality of the interviewees is important in any qualitative research as a means, not only to protect their privacy but also to build trust and rapport with them, and to maintain the integrity of the research process (Baez, 2002). As a requirement of the informed consent obtained from all interviewees, the researcher agreed to handle research data to ensure that the identities of interviewees and information obtained from them would not be improperly divulged. The researcher appropriately addressed the issue of confidentiality at the time of data collection. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and were stored with names like 'Interview PR one' through to 'Interview PR six' and 'Interview J

one' through 'Interview J seven'. The digital files were then directly entered into a voice-recognition software application on the password-protected researcher's personal computer to facilitate transcription. After the transcription, the transcribed data was checked against the audio recording manually to ensure that no inaccuracies had crept in during the process of transcription. After the file transfer, all the interview files were deleted from the digital recorder. Each transcript file was named as 'Interview PR one transcript' through to 'Interview PR six transcript' and 'Interview J one transcript' through 'Interview J seven transcript'. No identifying data was attributed to any file during the entire process of recording, transcribing and storage of the interview/transcription files.

3.6 AUT Ethics Committee Approval

A fundamental ethical requirement of research is that it is scientifically sound, leads to tangible results, and is carried out by a researcher with a desired level of training and supervision (Richards & Schwartz, 2002). The authors argue that due consideration of important ethical concerns in a qualitative research, namely, confidentiality and informed consent is crucial to maintain balance between the potential risks and benefits of research. The research plan for this study was evaluated by the AUT Ethics Committee (AUTECH) to ensure that the concerns related to confidentiality and informed consent were met besides ensuring compatibility of research with University policies, regulations and code of ethics. The Committee reviewed the process of recruitment of participants to ensure their equitable selection, based on adequately informed consent. The ethics application specifically required details on the steps incorporated in the research process to ensure minimisation of risk to the participants and to the university and maintenance of privacy and confidentiality of the participants throughout the research process and beyond. Due diligence was ensured by the researcher in completing the ethics application form following the University guidelines and incorporating the inputs received from two AUT workshops attended by the researcher, namely, *Ethical Principles in the Design of Your Research* and *Fine Tuning your Ethics Application Draft*. The AUTECH ethics approval for the study was attained on 04 September 2020 (Appendix A). The data collection process was initiated only after the receipt of ethics approval.

3.7 Analysing Results

The use of qualitative methodology guides the research to employ non-numerical data analysis technique (Tuli, 2010). Data analysis – bringing order, structure and interpretation to collected data – was therefore planned to search for general statements about relationships

and underlying themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). To understand how the use of Twitter influences the relationship between PRPs and journalists in the context of contemporary media relations, thematic analysis was used in this study as it helped to identify and interpret reoccurring thoughts, experiences, feelings and meanings. Thematic analysis approach was used to analyse interviews mainly because of its ability to assist with the identification and analysis of concepts, patterns and themes embedded within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is “a method of systematically identifying organising and offering insights into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set....in relation to the particular topic and research question being explored (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). Another reason for using thematic analysis approach was its flexibility in that its operational guidelines can be adapted to suit the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A major advantage of thematic analysis approach is that it works well with the constructivist epistemology of this study where meanings and experiences are expected to be in a constant state of being produced and reproduced within groups. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the research epistemology guides as to how data can be interpreted, and meanings can be theorised. The authors argue that thematic analysis approach “seeks to theorise the sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided (p. 85)”

The thematic analysis used in this research applied the six standard phases recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006): Familiarising with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. These phases were used in this study as guidelines in relation to the research question and the available data. In each phase, an attempt was made to group the data into manageable chunks and bring meanings to the words of the interviewees (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The first phase of familiarising with data involved organisation of the typescripts by appropriately logging them using a software application. The typescripts were read several times with a purpose to get familiar with the data and also to identify emerging ideas. The process also involved making notes to highlight in general how the data was related to make sense of the participants experiences, their assumptions in interpreting their experiences through their statements, for use as memory aids and triggers for the next phases involving coding and analysis.

The second phase of generating initial codes as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2012) involved systematic analysis of data through coding whereby “codes identify and provide a label for a feature of the data that is potentially relevant to the research question” (p. 61). During the coding process any string of data – a single word through to a sentence or a

paragraph - that was considered relevant to the research question was coded. The text was read carefully until the next potentially relevant excerpt was identified and coded. The process was repeated through each data item and then the entire data set. Once coding was complete, all data excerpts with the same code were collated for all codes and for all interview transcripts. This entire coding exercise was reviewed to ensure relevance and consistency of the codes that in certain instances required generation of new codes for the new meaning patterns discovered during review.

The third phase of searching for themes involved reviewing the coded data to identify the unifying features amongst codes and clustering them together to describe a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A theme “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Several ways were taken to combine codes and generate relevant themes. Also, relationships amongst the themes were defined to help unfold an overall story about the data. Thereafter, a thematic map was generated outlining the various identified themes along with the data extracts relevant to each of them to help in the review of potential themes. The data analysis software application NVivo was used to mainly assist in coding, clustering, and writing analytic memos. The researcher initially attended a full-day workshop at AUT University on *NVivo Core Skills for Students* to get familiar with this application and also to draw on its strengths to help in mechanical and management aspects of data analysis for this research. Later, the researcher also attended a 10-day online programme facilitated by AUT University titled, *Research Accelerator*, covering various aspects of qualitative research including the use of NVivo software.

The fourth phase of reviewing potential themes involved quality checking whereby the developing themes were checked against the collated extracts of data to explore whether each theme was in consonance with its data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Accordingly, some codes were discarded, and a few others were relocated under different themes. In a few other cases, the boundaries of the themes were adjusted to enable them to capture the data more meaningfully. This exercise helped in constructing a coherent set of themes that were in consonance with their coded data extracts. This was followed by another review of the themes with an objective to identify the set of themes that captured the most important and relevant elements and overall tone of the data in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The fifth phase of defining and naming the themes involved defining themes to bring out clear focus, scope and purpose of the theme that directly addressed the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This phase also involved selecting extracts to help illustrate the analytic points, each with a narrative on what about it is interesting and how it is connected to the broader research question. This process of telling an analytic narrative around each selected data extract was carried out across all the themes. Also, the identified themes were so named to ensure that each name is informative, concise and catchy. In total, five themes were defined and named out of a large number of codes that were generated. The list of the themes constructed for this research is given in Table 1, whereas the list of the codes generated for this research is attached as Appendix C.

In the sixth phase of finalising and reporting of analysis, the thematised research data was analysed based on the research questions and the theoretical aspects of the research, including the definitions of media relations by Johnston (2020).

3.8 Summary

This study aims to find out how the use of Twitter influences the relationship between PRPs and journalists in the context of contemporary media relations. The research methodology used for the study as outlined in this chapter was based on a paradigm that includes ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Constructivism was used as the underlying epistemology in this study which tends to understand (not to predict) and acquire new knowledge through social interaction with an objective of interpreting a phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them. Similarly, the study used constructivism for ontological considerations, and also for the reason that the study sees reality and meaning making as socially constructed where people make their own sense of social realities. The constructivist ontology and the constructivist epistemology guided qualitative methodology for this study that enables flexible research design where the researcher enjoys unlimited freedom of movement between the steps of research. The use of qualitative methodology in turn guided the study to employ interview method for data collection amongst others including observation (case studies, ethnographies, and qualitative action research) and group discussion (focus groups) for data collection. Interviewing was chosen as the data collection method in this study as it not only allowed an understanding of the experiences of the interviewees but also linked well with the epistemological approach of constructivism followed in this study, which asserts that social phenomena are produced and revised through social interaction. As a final step of the research methodology, the study used thematic analysis as a non-numeric data analysis technique to understand the attitudes of

PRPs and journalists towards each other and the potential of Twitter in influencing their relational dynamics, as this technique helps to identify and interpret reoccurring thoughts, experiences, feelings and meanings of the interviewees.

This research used semi-structured interviews with information-rich subjects as a way to gather a rich collection of qualitative data. The sample comprised 13 communication professionals engaged in media relations activity, six of which were PRPs and the other seven of which were journalists. The interviews were conducted in neutral settings and its proceedings were recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis allowed themes to emerge from the data as against limiting the potential of the data by analysing it on the basis of existing framework of themes. Relevant extracts were selected to help illustrate the analytic points each with a narrative connecting it to the broader research question. The themes thus generated formed the basis of generation of major findings of this research.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings arrived from the analysis of the transcribed data obtained after interviewing 13 communication professionals engaged in health care communication. It outlines five themes and 20 sub-themes that were generated using six standard phases of thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings are then presented theme-wise. An introductory context is given at the beginning of the chapter to restate the research problem and research questions.

The current study seeks to discover answers to the following research questions:

1. How does the use of Twitter influence the relationship between PRPs and journalists in the context of contemporary media relations in New Zealand?
 - 1a. How do PRPs and journalists view media relations and their relationship with each other in the context of the evolving practice of media relations in New Zealand?
 - 1b. How do PRPs and journalists view the potential of Twitter in influencing the practice of PR and journalism in New Zealand?
 - 1c. How do PRPs and journalists view the potential of Twitter in influencing their relationship with each other while performing media relations in New Zealand?

Media relations refer to the relationship developed by an organisation with journalists, while PR extends that relationship beyond the media to the general public (Johnston, 2020). Media relations is about establishing professional relationships with the news media, understanding practices of this profession, and using it as a launching pad for all PR initiatives, including issues and crisis management and community and financial relations as well as for achieving media coverage. As a result, a strong working relationship with the members of the media is expected to translate into smoother practices across the range of PR activities and functions (Johnston, 2020). Therefore, the interviews in this study focused on seeking the views of PRPs and journalists on their understanding of media relations and the influence of Twitter on the evolving practice of media relations, particularly the PRP-journalist relationship.

As explained in the previous chapter on methodology, thematic analysis was used in this study for data analysis to understand the attitudes of PRPs and journalists towards each other and the potential of Twitter in influencing their relational dynamics. The procedure involved the following six standard phases of thematic analysis advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarising with data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing potential themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report.

In the first phase of thematic analysis, i.e., familiarising with data, the transcribed data was formatted and imported into NVivo - the software used for creating and organising the codes. The typescripts were read several times to identify emerging ideas. The process also involved making notes to highlight how the data was related to the interviewees' experiences and their assumptions in interpreting their experiences. These notes were later used as memory aids for the next phases involving coding and analysis.

The second phase of generating initial codes began with coding of data using NVivo. The coding exercise used in this study combined deductive and inductive approaches by deductively starting with a set of already identified codes and then inductively creating new codes and their iterations while sifting through the interview data. This structural coding approach was used as a first-round coding method, whereby each interview transcript was read through and relevant extracts of the data were coded under the following four research topics (earlier used in the interview schedule) to break a large set of semi-structured data into smaller units of data for analysis (Saldana, 2009):

1. Concept of media relations
2. Evolving practice of media relations
3. Influence of Twitter on the practice of journalism and public relations
4. Influence of Twitter on PRP-journalist relationship in the context of media relations.

For example, the extract where an interviewee was speaking about the concept of media relations and matters related to the concept of media relations was coded under the code, 'concept of media relations'. The other extracts of the transcript where the interviewee may

not have been directly answering this topic but saying something relevant to the topic were also coded there.

As a next step in this second phase, the extracts coded under each of the above codes were further reviewed and coded, creating two to five sub-codes for each code. For example, all the extracts under the code, 'concept of media relations', were split and placed under the following sub-codes:

- 1.1 Understanding the concept of media relations
- 1.2 Importance attributed to media relations
- 1.3 Methods followed to perform media relations
- 1.4 Communication channels used to perform media relations
- 1.5 Perception of importance of PRP-journalist relationship in media relations.

These sub-codes, reflecting the factors affecting the outcome of media relations function, were put under the code on 'concept of media relations'. This exercise was repeated for the remaining three codes. Overall, this second phase of analysis resulted in creation and grouping of sub-codes into several categories, with each category holding a group of sub-codes pertaining to a code.

In the third phase of analysis, searching for themes, the coded data was reviewed to identify the unifying features amongst codes and sub-codes and to cluster them to describe a meaningful pattern in the data as a basis for themes. These developing themes were checked against the collated extracts of data to explore whether each theme truly represents its data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Some new codes were generated, and a few others were relocated to finally construct a set of potential themes that truly reflected the message of their coded data extracts. For example, the category on 'Influence of Twitter' was split into two categories: 'Influence of Twitter on the Practice of Journalism' and 'Influence of Twitter on the Practice of Public Relations' and their corresponding codes were relocated. Also, a new category of codes was created: 'Impact of Twitter on PRP-Journalist Relationship'. Another code, 'Quotes' was created to cover important statements of the interviewees for later use to illustrate the results. The final codebook generated through NVivo is given as Appendix C.

In the fourth phase of analysis, reviewing of potential themes, the themes identified in the third phase were reviewed. The process meant that each theme builds on the

previous one and had a clear scope and purpose. In the fifth phase, the themes were named for clarity. In all, five themes and 20 sub-themes were generated (Table 1).

Table 1. List of Themes and Sub-Themes.

Serial No.	Themes	Sub-Themes
1.	PRP-Journalist Relationship critical to the success of Media Relations	1.1 Understanding the Concept of Media Relations 1.2 Importance of Media Relations 1.3 Media Relations Methods 1.4 Communication Channels used in Media Relations 1.5 Perception of Interviewees on their Relationship with Counterparts
2.	Evolving Practice of Media Relations	2.1 Changes in Media Relations 2.2 Future of Media Relations 2.3. Trends in Sourcing of Information 2.4. Trends in Delivery of Information 2.5. Bypassing the Established Channel of Communication
3.	Influence of Twitter on the Practice of Journalism	3.1 Perception of Journalists about as a Social Media Tool 3.2 Use of Twitter by Journalists in their Professional Role 3.3 Use of Twitter in Journalism Profession in General 3.4 Perception of PRPs on the Use of Twitter in Journalism Profession
4.	Influence of Twitter on the Practice of PR	4.1 Perception of PRPs about Twitter as a Social Media Tool 4.2 Use of Twitter by PRPs in their Professional Role 4.3 Use of Twitter in PR Profession in General 4.4 Perception of Journalists on the Use of Twitter in PR Profession
5.	Influence of Twitter on the PRP-Journalist Relationship in the context of media relations	5.1 Perception of Interviewees on the Potential of Twitter to Influence Relationship with their Counterparts in performing Media Relations Function 5.2 Perception of Interviewees on the Future Potential of Twitter to influence Relationship with their Counterparts in performing Media Relations Function

In the sixth phase of analysis, producing the report, the themes and sub-themes listed in Table 1 were used to construct the final narrative. The results of the study are presented below under themes, beginning with value of media relations through the evolution of media relations and leading to the use of Twitter in media relations. Each theme has a number of sub-themes. The codes that describe each sub-theme are tabulated under each sub-theme. Quotes are used to illustrate the results. The results under each theme/sub-theme is concluded to create a finding.

4.1 Theme 1. PRP-Journalist Relationship critical to the Success of Media Relations

This theme covers the study results that reflect the message of their coded extracts on the critical role played by the PRP-journalist relationship in the success of media relations. The results are presented below under five sub-themes.

4.1.1 Sub-Theme 1.1. Understanding the Concept of Media Relations

The interviewees' views on media relations are an important indicator of the strength of the PRP-journalist relationship (Johnston, 2020). This sub-theme highlights views of the interviewees on media relations (The description of the code that makes up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Media relations	The perspective of the interviewees on media relations, how they identify the function in their day-to-day activities.	13	20

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The interviewees were asked about their views on media relations. Six journalists described media relations as PR where PRPs provide them with information to promote their organisation, such as their products, services, or corporate matters. The journalists stated that they do not publish stories only on the basis of the information provided by PRPs, but claimed to carry out research to uncover the truth behind that information, e.g., they highlighted the difference between a press release and the news published thereof:

The whole purpose of a public relations person is to promote something, whereas a journalist role is to uncover the truth and shed light on issues, but to do it in a balanced way. You are getting two sides of the story. So often when I get a press release, I am not just going to write my news straight off the release, I am going to the other side and see what they have to say about it and do my own research (J 4).

We cover very little of what is pitched to us. If it does not have a sound news basis, there has to be something pretty new or cutting edge or breaking away from norm about it (J 3).

On the other hand, PRPs stated that media relations focuses on fostering good relationships with the media, giving relevant information to journalists and managing media interest to protect the reputation of their organisation in a transparent manner, e.g.,

Media relations is literally relating with the media in a positive way with an understanding that the media have a job to do as much as I have a job to do and giving informed information to them (PR 3).

Finding 1: PRPs and journalists understand media relations differently. Journalists define media relations as public relations where PRPs approach journalists to promote their organisations. Journalists do not see it as a relationship-building exercise. Conversely, PRPs describe media relations as fostering a connection with journalists to facilitate promotion of their organisation through the media.

4.1.2 Sub-Theme 1.2. Importance of Media Relations

This sub-theme highlights the importance the interviewees attach to media relations, mainly in terms of knowing their counterparts well and helping them as people with specific interests and needs (The description of the codes that make up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Importance of media relations	How much importance the interviewees attach to the media relations vis-a-vis their work obligations.	13	16
Contradictory perception	Interviewees consider media relations as helpful and also a barrier in the process of communication, at the same time.	1	1
Frequency of contact with counterparts	Average number of times the interviewees contact their counterparts during media relations.	13	19
Negative perception	Interviewees view media relations as undermining their process of communication.	2	4
Positive perception	Interviewees view media relations as important in their process of communication.	9	9

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The interviewees were asked about the importance of nurturing the practice of media relations in performing their professional role. Two journalists stated that media relations was useful to get a quick response to their information requests and to get leads. They said that press releases (when professionally written) could be turned into news stories. Three journalists stated that PRPs limit their access to information, or put a spin on the information they need, and therefore inhibits them in carrying out their journalistic role, e.g.,

Oh God, sometimes I feel [media relations] is a source of frustration for me, more than help.... In recent years, I see public relations practitioners are getting in the way of me being able to do my job (J 5).

According to one investigative health journalist, his investigative journalism stories do not start with PRPs; he would reach out to them only after he had developed the story, usually for a response. Another journalist had a mixed opinion about media relations:

It has a pretty fundamental importance to my job, I would say. For my stories I have to seek comment from government agencies and that process can be frustrating at times (J 6).

Conversely, all PRPs maintained that media relations was important in their work:

We work quite hard to improve our media relations (PR 1).

Media relations is extremely important; on a scale of 1 to 10, it is 10 (PR 3).

It is really important rather to have relationships with people so we can help them when they are coming to us seeking expert opinion (PR 4).

Finding 2: PRPs and journalists value media relations differently. While all PRPs consider media relations as important in their work, journalists have a mixed opinion about its importance, with some journalists stating it as an impediment to their professional activities.

4.1.3 Sub-Theme 1.3. Media Relations Methods

This sub-theme highlights the media relations methods preferred by the interviewees (The description of the codes that make up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Media relations methods	Main methods such as press releases, media events, interviews used by the interviewees during media relations.	12	21
Building connections	PRPs building contact book of journalists; Journalists building contact	3	3

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
	book of direct sources of information including those other than PRPs.		
Interviewing	PRPs arranging interviews of journalists with their sources of information; Journalists interviewing their sources either directly or through PRPs.	6	6
Media events	PRPs organising media events to unfold stories; Journalists attending media events to get inputs for their stories.	5	5
Press releases	PRPs unfolding their stories by way of press releases and media pitches; Journalists developing their stories based on press releases and media pitches.	10	11

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The interviewees were asked to list the media relations methods used by them, such as press releases, interviews, personal interaction, and events. Nine interviewees, including three journalists and six PRPs rated press release as a common method used for media relations. However, three of them preferred that PRPs pitch stories to the media professionals on exclusive basis and help them further develop their stories, e.g.,

I am doing a more sort of exclusive and rely less on press release (J 6).

Getting exclusive stories is always a preference for journalists (PR 1).

Six interviewees, including three journalists and three PRPs stated that journalists need to interview the information source for a story they are writing and that PRPs can facilitate these interviews, showing that interviewing is another commonly used media relations method:

If I am going to write a news article, it would move pretty fast from media relations to a direct interview with the subject expert that they [PRPs] would arrange for me (J 7).

Three journalists stated that they resent the preference of PRPs responding to the questions of journalists by email instead of granting interviews with their information sources, e.g.,

I will ring up and I will say I am writing a story and I need to talk to this person about this and then they will say, oh, can you put that in an email.... Sometimes they want to know the exact questions before the interview, which from my perspective is not good news gathering process (J 5).

Two journalists and one PRP preferred building contacts and direct interaction with their counterparts for media relations:

It is good if you can have contacts who you can call directly and side-step the PR team, because the PR team will want to put spin on it (J 1).

Journalism is about trust and personal connections, as you are asking people to share their stories and you are entrusted to tell their stories (J 3).

Although one journalist and two PRPs stated that media events are often held to launch a product or a campaign, another journalist and one PRP stated that media events are no longer preferred as a media relations method:

It is not events, anymore (J 7).

Finding 3: PRPs and journalists differ in their preference as to how the information is delivered for news. Journalists prefer exclusive news stories to attending events or the stories released simultaneously to all media. PRPs recognise the growing preference of journalists for exclusive stories, but they continue to use traditional methods of press releases and also avoid facilitating journalists' access to spokespeople.

4.1.4 Sub-Theme 1.4. Communication Channels used in Media Relations

This sub-theme highlights information on the communication channels used by the interviewees, with a view to bring out their preferences for use of social media including Twitter in media relations (The description of the codes that make up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Communication channels for media relations	Main communication channels used by the interviewees during media relations.	12	16
Emails	Interviewees use emails for day-to-day interaction with their counterparts during media relations.	13	15
In-person meetings	Interviewees prefer to meet their counterparts in person during media relations.	2	2
Mobile calls and messages	Interviewees use mobile for direct contact with the counterparts, either by way of phone calls or SMS/WhatsApp messages during media relations.	9	10
Online and social media	Interviewees use online and social media channels during media relations, including signing up for newsletters.	8	9
Twitter	Interviewees use Twitter as a social media channel during media relations.	4	4

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The interviewees were asked to list the communication channels used by them in media relations. All interviewees stated that they use email for communication with their counterparts for bulk of their communication:

Email is 90% of it and it is very easy to contact them by email. Just fire off an email with your questions and usually the whole communication is done that way (J 1).

Four journalists and five PRPs stated that they also use phone/texting, particularly in instances related to sharing off-the-record information and seeking extension of deadlines. This was considered by the interviewees as a “warmer way of doing it” (PR 1). Another PRP stated:

Although they prefer to meet people in person, but not much face-to-face interactions are happening these days (PR 2).

Six journalists and two PRPs stated that online and social media is emerging as the preferred channel of communication in making an initial connection or initiating story ideas, e.g.,

Signing up to newsletters like that from the Science Media Center, they are really great for contacts or finding experts and particular fields we are looking for (J 4).

These interviewees mentioned Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and/or Instagram as the social media platforms being used by them, with two of them stating that the organisations in New Zealand have more public interface on Facebook than Twitter. All these interviewees also stated that they do not engage on social media with their counterparts:

I wouldn't say we do any kind of media relations specifically using social media, but we do have a presence on LinkedIn and Twitter that can help us to be part of a conversation (PR 2).

Of all the interviewees, only one journalist said that she follows the organisation of her core interest on Twitter.

Finding 4: Although both PRPs and journalists consider social media as an emerging communication channel, particularly for initial connections or initiating a story, they consider email as the preferred method of communication, with phone/texting as the second most used method in media relations.

4.1.5 Sub-Theme 1.5. Perception of Interviewees on their Relationship with Counterparts

This sub-theme highlights the perception of interviewees on their relationship with counterparts in media relations (The description of the codes that make up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
PRP-journalist relationship	Perception of the interviewees on relationship with their counterparts.	13	22
Mixed relationship	Interviewees have mixed feelings about their relationship with counterparts.	6	10
Nature of relationship	PRP-journalist relationship considered by the interviewees as personal, professional, or both.	13	13
Negative relationship	Interviewees have negative feelings about relationship with their counterparts.	1	1
Positive relationship	Interviewees have positive feelings about relationship with their counterparts.	8	8

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The interviewees were asked about their perception on their relationship with their counterparts in media relations and also about the nature of their relationship. Three journalists rated their relationship with PRPs as friendly, with one of them stating that her relationship is better with those PRPs she had known longer or who had previously been a journalist, e.g.,

Some [PRPs] are much better than others. I think often you can tell the public relations people that have been journalists and have that understanding of our job and the constraints that we work with (J 4).

Four journalists stated that though they get frustrated when they do not get information in time and/or in the desired format, they do realise the importance of relationship with PRPs:

It is a love-hate relationship (J 4).

It can be frustrating for journalists when we don't get a response in a timely fashion. Obviously, we have deadlines and if the information hasn't arrived on time, we get a little frustrated and that can lead to problems. But generally speaking, I find them to be pretty good and if you send them a deadline and say I need this information by Wednesday lunchtime, they will come back by that time.... It is actually important to try and keep up a good relationship with them and keep them happy and on side with you, because otherwise it will make your life miserable by not helping (J 1).

All PRPs stated that it is important for them to maintain good relationships with journalists and that they work hard to develop positive relationships with them. Two of them stated that the extent of their relationship with journalists varies with the level of trust built up between them over time and/or the competence level of the journalists, e.g.,

For some it would be a very good working relationship where the trust has been built up.... And I would also say that there are different levels of journalists as well. So, there are some journalists I would say don't have the strategic view that other journalists would have (PR 3).

However, three PRPs stated that their relationships suffer when it becomes difficult to meet the needs of the journalists due to organisational constraints, e.g.,

I wouldn't say it is pretty good. I would rather like to call it bitter and one reason could be because our organisation is quite conservative, and a little bit gun-shy with media. Oh no, we can't talk to media.... I am trying working to dispel that sort of myth (PR 2).

I worked hard in building some very positive relationships, but the media at times can get a bit frustrated with us because for example our reputation has to come second to our commitment to our patients.... So, I think sometimes I am putting up a wall and we do try to explain this and have a conversation, but you know they can still feel frustrated (PR 1).

One PRP stated that the journalist turnover affected their relationship building:

...huge turnover of health journalists as detrimental to building positive relationships (PR 4).

Finding 5: All PRPs consider their relationships with journalists as positive, constructive, or strong, whereas journalists have a mixed opinion on their relationships with PRPs.

Journalists have positive relationship with those PRPs with whom they have known for a while or those who had previously been journalists.

4.2 Theme 2. Evolving Practice of Media Relations

This theme covers the study results that reflect the message of the coded extracts on how the changes in the practice of media relations particularly the ways the information/news is sourced and delivered are influencing the PRP-journalist relationship. The results are presented below under five sub-themes.

4.2.1 Sub-Theme 2.1. Changes in Media Relations

Over the last decade, the media landscape has seen a shift from mass-mediated communication to own-produced and delivered content. In this changing media landscape, the core functions of media relations as developing and maintaining a positive and ethical relationship with the news media are no longer sufficient to sum up the total media role (Johnston & Rowny, 2018). This sub-theme highlights the perception of interviewees on the difference in media relations function as they performed it a decade back and as they perform it now (The description of the codes that make up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References*
Changes in media relations	Interviewees detailing the difference in media relations function as they performed it 10 years back and as they perform it now.	13	24
Changing PRP-journalist relational dynamics	Impact of changing media relations practice on the relational dynamics between PRPs and Journalists.	1	1
Crisis in Journalism	Crisis in journalism profession, in terms of reduced resources and time, increase in media formats, etc.	3	5
Increasing PR intervention	Exponential growth of PR influencing the flow and nature of information.	5	8
Harder access to information sources	PR intervention inhibiting access to the sources of information.	5	5
Role of new communication technologies	Role of new communication technologies in the evolving concept of media relations.	12	16

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The interviewees were asked to give their views on how the practice of media relations has changed during the last decade. Four journalists stated that there was an increase in the influence of PRPs on the information flow to journalists. These journalists also stated that this PR influence creates difficulty to access information and get quality information, as it is becoming harder to directly access their information sources, e.g.,

They [PRPs] have more control now and they have stricter media guidelines for staff. So, you have to deal with them more than perhaps you might have had to in the past (J 7).

Earlier, there weren't as many people as possible working in PR and so it was easier to just get to the person, I want to talk to...without having to sometimes even go through someone else. ... as soon as I must go through someone else, it just takes longer You know it is so annoying (J 5).

It is less common now to be granted an actual interview with someone from an official organisation (J 6).

This contention of journalists was also supported by a PRP who after having spent more than 20 years as a health reporter has now been working as a PRP for the last three years:

I used to be able to speak directly to staff, and [PR people] discourage this and so you usually must go through a communications person such as myself before you can directly access the staff. Today, we still have journalists reaching directly our staff and I will speak to them, sorry you need to go through our communications team. Yeah, I think it is different, it has changed (PR 4).

One journalist complained of getting sanitised information:

A lot of what we get is sanitised information because when you used to directly call these experts, you would get a really honest comment like a candid quote..., but now... emails are approved ... by the boss person (J 1).

Two journalists and one PRP stated that the growing PR influence on news content is owing to limited resources, time limitations and high turnover of journalists:

It's... going to get more lopsided as there are going to be fewer journalists having to do more work ...the power will shift even more to PR people...to sort of massage their answers (J 6).

All the interviewees talked about changes in the way the news is produced today:

The way we are producing news now is different. Well, it is much more times faster. We turn information around, put it on multiple platforms. We do live reporting immediately from the scene. From different locations we can get pictures directly. We feed everything back, so the pace of news and the way we report is different (J 3).

Two PRPs stated how the changes in news production have brought hardships on media professionals:

Today, look at 24-hour news cycle, you have to update and refresh always 24 by 7, it is crazy (PR 2).

Another PRP referring to the comments of a journalist known to her said,

Back in the day, you would only have to file one story, but nowadays you have to file three, four, five, six or seven times and you have to do it through different media (PR 3).

When asked about the role of new technologies in media relations, all interviewees stated that the new technologies have played a significant role in the way the news is produced and consumed:

The communication tools we use today have revolutionised journalism and made it much better and easier (J 1).

All the interviewees mentioned how online and social media facilitates the access to both people and information and the delivery of information/news to many publics, simultaneously. One journalist stated the critical role played by new technologies in the reporting and delivery of news during the COVID-19 restrictions:

During COVID, we would have been unable to get a lot of news to hear if we haven't been able to do online reporting (J 3).

One journalist and one PRP stated that they do not see significant changes in media relations:

It is not a whole lot different. Even 10 years ago I would have to email questions.... The basic way a journalist today finds a story and pulls a story together is essentially the same as when I started 10 years ago (J 6).

I don't think that a lot has actually changed that matters (PR 5).

Finding 6: Journalists find that the increasing influence of PR industry on information, as a significant change in media relations over the last one decade, has limited their access to quality information.

Finding 7: Journalists and PRPs referred to the existence of a crisis in journalism, owing to reduced resources and time, high turnover of journalists, and/or increasing pressure of a 24x7 news production and its different formats.

4.2.2 Sub-Theme 2.2. Future of Media Relations

This sub-theme highlights the views of the interviewees on future developments in media relations, particularly in the attitudes towards their counterparts and the role of new communication technologies, including online and social media in media relations (The description of the code that makes up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Future of media relations	Important developments predicted by the interviewees in the future of media relations.	13	16

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

In the background of changes witnessed in the practice of media relations during the last decade, the interviewees were also asked to predict the future of media relations. All

interviewees, with the exception of one journalist, are of the view that media relations will evolve with communication becoming more digital, dominated by social media:

Everything is becoming more and more digital. I can foresee that it is going to increase, so if you want to be a part of conversations you need to be in that space (PR 2).

One journalist stated that people will distrust and therefore move away from social media.

The other media relations developments predicted by the interviewees include: “more in-depth investigative journalism” (PR 6), “looking to do videos more” (PR 4), “more and more demand for figures and data” (PR 1), and “flourishing of independent news outlets with niche audience” (PR 5). Three journalists stated that the current crisis in journalism will deepen, pressurising the media further. One journalist stated that the trust and credibility of the media would remain.

Finding 8: The practice of media relations will use more digital communication, especially social media.

4.2.3 Sub-Theme 2.3. Trends in Sourcing of Information

This sub-theme highlights the diverse ways information is sourced by the interviewees that may also reflect on the relationship with their counterparts (The description of the code that makes up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Trends in sourcing information	Numerous ways in which the information is currently sourced by the interviewees.	13	19

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The interviewees were asked to highlight current practices in sourcing of their information. All interviewees stated that there is substantial use of online and social media in sourcing information by both journalists and PRPs:

Traditionally if you want to source your information, when I started 12 years ago, you are going to council meetings, you are calling sources, you are reading through documents you know all the traditional ways that you would find stories in journalism. Now, of course, I actually do use social media for these things (J 4).

Journalists find out a lot more because of social media, and in this fast-paced environment they might need things more quickly because they want to be the first to break a story (PR 1).

One journalist stated that the basic practice of sourcing information has remained the same but the tools being used for this purpose have changed:

The process of researching information hasn't really changed. It is just that the tools are different (J 2).

Five PRPs stated that they rely on relationships with their colleagues across their organisations for sourcing information:

There are just good old usual basic personal relationships developed by our media team with staff from the University to encourage them to tell us about the work that they are doing (PR 4).

Finding 9: Both PRPs and journalists are increasingly using online and social media for sourcing information/news.

4.2.4 Sub-Theme 2.4. Trends in Delivery of Information

This sub-theme highlights responses of the interviewees on trends in delivery of information (The description of the code that makes up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Trends in delivering information	Numerous ways in which the information/news is currently delivered by the interviewees.	13	17

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The interviewees were asked about their current practice of delivering information/news. All interviewees stated that they are using multiple media platforms, including websites, online publications, and social media platforms, e.g.,

Organisations now use a number of different mediums to tell their stories than they previously used in the past (PR 4).

Five journalists stated that they are now using social media to break their stories or to share them for maximising their engagement with publics. Four PRPs stressed the continued use of e-mails as a predominant way of delivering their content:

We are expected to promote our stories on social media, engage around those stories (J 5).

This [delivery of content] is quite different...email is for us still probably the most relevant (PR 6).

Finding 10: Both PRPs and journalists use multiple media platforms for delivering information, with journalists preferring social media while PRPs relying more on emails.

4.2.5 Sub-Theme 2.5. *Bypassing the Established Channel of Communication in Media Relations*

The practice of PRPs and journalists in bypassing their counterparts in the communication process is largely enabled by the use of new communication technologies. This sub-theme highlights the perception of interviewees on this practice of media relations (The description of the code that makes up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Bypassing the channel	Perception of the interviewees on the practice of their counterparts bypassing their channel in the overall process of communication.	13	23

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The interviewees were asked to give their views on the current practice of their counterparts bypassing them in the process of production of news. Five journalists stated that this is creating an information bias:

I think it will affect the quality of the understanding in general on these things...there is no check over something coming directly... consumers just reading it and believing it is without anyone saying hang on a minute, there are some other things you need to know here.... It is kind of credibility check when it is directly promotional material and then it is just a heap of that. It is unfortunately not the quality of the news, but the quality of the understanding...what people believe or don't believe, or choose to acknowledge it as true (J 2).

One journalist stated that the practice of PRPs directly reaching out to their publics bypasses the process of verification and fact checking and the information may turn into fake news:

The danger is when the information goes straight to the public from government, it can be just kind of propaganda. It is not true. It hasn't been vet yet, so the biggest concern is that people just believe what they are told.... All this... is helping to create fake news (J 1).

Three journalists expressed concern about how people believe such information. These journalists hoped that the media could retain its trust amongst the people as the only channel to get factual information:

I still think that most people do put faith in the mainstream media over someone who is just sort of writing some stuff on their Facebook page (J 5).

All PRPs stated that they are guided by a media policy whereby it is mandatory to route all media queries through the communication team and that this policy helps in giving an informed view of an issue. Three of these PRPs stated that the journalists who are new to the profession realise the value of a PRP in facilitating right information in a right way at right time. Three PRPs expressed their concern that information being sourced by journalists directly from their colleagues working in different departments of their organisation may not be holistic and accurate:

Sometimes [the staff] will use media as their own tool to get something done...they use it as a bargaining chip (PR 2).

Finding 11: Both PRPs and journalists acknowledge that their counterparts bypass them in the overall process of communication and are concerned that this practice is creating bias and inaccuracy in the news. All PRPs acknowledge that a media policy in their organisations discourages the practice of journalists bypassing the communications team and directly accessing other information sources.

4.3 Theme 3. Influence of Twitter on the Practice of Journalism

This theme covers the study results that reflect the message of their coded extracts on the influence of Twitter on the practice of journalism and also on the extent of use of Twitter by the journalist interviewees. The results are presented below under four sub-themes.

4.3.1 Sub-Theme 3.1. Perception of Journalists on Twitter as a Social Media Tool

This sub-theme highlights the perception of journalists on Twitter as a social media tool (The description of the code that makes up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Journalists' perception of Twitter as a social media tool	Perception of journalists on Twitter as a social media platform.	5	8

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

All journalists were asked to give their views on the nature of Twitter as a social media platform. The journalists described Twitter as “aggressive” (J 2), “brutal” and “partisan” (J3), “platform to spark debate” (J 4), “distraction” (J 5), and “a bit tiring and snaky” (J 6). One journalist described Twitter as a social media platform that facilitates immediate

communication, propagates discussion, and acts as a global source of information. Five journalists stated that although they have a Twitter account, they do not use it at a personal level.

4.3.2 Sub-Theme 3.2. Use of Twitter by Journalists in their Professional Role

This sub-theme highlights the extent of the use of Twitter by journalists to also understand the use of Twitter in media relations (The description of the code that makes up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Journalist's use of Twitter at organisational level	Use of Twitter by journalists while performing their professional role.	7	7

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded.

All journalists were asked about the use of Twitter in their professional role. All of them stated that they do use Twitter in their professional role:

That is actually useful for contacting people you know to refer sources for information, or you know to find people that you are looking for (J 2).

I follow a lot of news, so I follow issues that are happening both here and around the world (J 3).

Often by just re-tweeting stories or re-tweeting other people's stories that I think have value (J 4).

One journalist stated that Twitter has become important in optimising journalistic outcomes:

I pretty much use it for journalism, yeah. I think if I wasn't a journalist, I don't think I would be on Twitter (J 5).

4.3.3 Sub-Theme 3.3. Use of Twitter in Journalism Profession in General

This sub-theme highlights the views of journalists on how Twitter is used in the profession of journalism (The description of the codes that make up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Twitter in journalism	Perception of Journalists on the use of Twitter in their profession in general.	7	11
Future of the use of Twitter	Perception of journalists on the future of the use of Twitter in their professions in general.	6	6

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The journalists were asked about the use of Twitter in the profession of journalism. All journalists stated that Twitter has attained a special place in journalism and is used either as a news feed or to promote news stories, particularly for breaking news. Two journalists talked about the trend where individual journalists are using Twitter to build their own profiles, e.g.,

These days they talk about having a brand, sort of becoming a known name, so good way of doing that is to build up a profile on Twitter. People know you; they hopefully know they can trust you and it might encourage them to come to you with the story in the future (J 1).

One journalist stated that Twitter has promoted the concept of citizen journalism, going beyond the concept of paid employees, wherein everyone can report or share stories through Twitter. Another journalist said that Twitter in New Zealand is developing more as a platform for interaction between journalists and politicians than interactions with the rest of the country.

While responding to the question on the use of Twitter in journalism in the near future, four journalists stated that they were not sure of its potential. While one journalist maintained that it would continue to be used the way it is being used now, another journalist expressed doubt on it lasting for 10 more years.

4.3.4 Sub-Theme 3.4. *Perception of PRPs on the Use of Twitter in Journalism Profession*

This sub-theme highlights the perception of PRPs on the use of Twitter by journalists engaged in media relations (The description of the code that makes up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Perception of PRPs on Twitter use by journalists	Perception of PRPs on the use of Twitter by journalists engaged in media relations.	6	8

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

All PRPs were asked about how they view the use of Twitter in journalism. They stated that Twitter is used increasingly by journalists. However, five of them stated that Twitter is used by journalists to promote their individual interests: “bullying” (PR 1), “serving their individual purpose” (PR 2), “throwing a bomb” (PR 3), “searching negative stories” (PR 4), and “putting inflammatory headlines” (PR 6).

Finding 12: Journalists are increasingly using Twitter for their professional activities but refrain from active engagement with their stakeholders, as they view it as an aggressive medium. PRPs acknowledge more use of Twitter by journalists to meet their individual interests than to engage with PRPs.

4.4 Theme 4. Influence of Twitter on the Practice of PR

This theme covers the study results that reflect the message of their coded extracts on the influence of Twitter on the practice of PR and also on the extent of use of Twitter by the PRP interviewees. The results are presented below under four sub-themes.

4.4.1 Sub-Theme 4.1. Perception of PRPs on Twitter as a Social Media Tool

This sub-theme highlights the perception of PRPs on Twitter as a social media tool (The description of the code that makes up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
PRPs' perception of Twitter as a social media tool	Perception of PRPs on Twitter as a social media platform.	6	8

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

All PRPs were asked to give their views on the nature of Twitter as a social media platform. Only three PRPs responded to this question and described Twitter as: “bullying” (PR 1), “brutal” and “minefield” (PR 2), and “echo chamber and vitriol” (PR 6). All of them stated that they are conscious of the vitriolic nature of Twitter and use it to watch for the latest happenings but not to interact with others at personal level.

4.4.2 Sub-Theme 4.2. Use of Twitter by PRPs in their Professional Role

This sub-theme highlights the extent of the use of Twitter by PRPs in their professional role to understand the proportionate use of Twitter in media relations (The description of the code that makes up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
PRPs' use of Twitter at organisational level	Use of Twitter by PRPs while performing their professional role.	6	11

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

All PRPs were asked about the use of Twitter in their professional role. Although all PRPs have an organisational account on Twitter, only three of them use it to announce important developments of their organisations. They do not use Twitter to engage with their publics. Two PRPs tend to use Facebook and LinkedIn more than Twitter, e.g.,

Twitter is a great place to follow journalists and the organisations, but in terms of talking about your own PR work, LinkedIn is probably a more widely used platform (PR 5).

One PRP stated that her organisation does not focus on social media due to the non-availability of the staff dedicated for this purpose. Another PRP mentioned that she used Twitter significantly while serving as a journalist, but not in her current role as a PRP.

4.4.3 Sub-Theme 4.3. Use of Twitter in PR Profession in General

This sub-theme highlights the views of PRPs on how Twitter is used in their profession (The description of the codes that make up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Twitter in PR	Perception of PRPs on the use of Twitter in their profession in general.	6	7
Future of the use of Twitter	Perception of PRPs on the future of the use of Twitter in their profession in general.	5	5

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The PRPs were asked about the use of Twitter in PR profession. Five PRPs stated that Twitter is used in the PR industry to “build relationships” (PR 2), “put across organisations’ views on different issues” (PR 3), “promote organisations’ developments” (PR 4), “follow journalists and other organisations” (PR 5), and/or “launch new products/services” (PR 6).

While responding to the question on the potential of Twitter in PR, four PRPs stated that they expect the use of Twitter to increase with time, e.g.,

It is a challenge for the social media companies to provide the right kind of product that people want to use safely, and so it may be that we are not using Twitter at this time because we deserve a more useful channel that we want to use (PR 2).

Two others stated that they are not sure about its future.

4.4.4 Sub-Theme 4.4. Perception of Journalists on the Use of Twitter in PR Profession

This sub-theme highlights the perception of journalists about the use of Twitter by the PRPs engaged in media relations (The description of the code that makes up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Perception of journalists on Twitter use by PRPs	Perception of journalists on the use of Twitter by PRPs engaged in media relations.	7	9

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

All journalists were asked about how they view the use of Twitter in PR profession. Five journalists stated that PRPs do not engage with them on Twitter, although they may tweet their messages for the public:

I don't think there would be many journalists who would see a PR person tweet something and then contact them to write about it (J 6).

They can tweet whatever they want. But if they want news coverage, they come to us (J 3).

One journalist stated that the tendency of PRPs to communicate on Twitter is only to cut the journalist out of the equation, avoiding the process of verification and fact checking.

Finding 13: PRPs are sparingly using Twitter for their professional activities and refrain from active engagement with their stakeholders on Twitter because of its vitriolic nature. Journalists acknowledge that PRPs do not engage with them for media relations, with one of them stating that the occasional use of Twitter by PRPs is only to bypass the channel of verification provided by journalists.

4.5 Theme 5. Influence of Twitter on PRP-Journalist Relationship in the context of Media Relations

This theme covers the study results that reflect the message of their coded extracts on the influence of Twitter on the PRP-journalist relationship while performing media relations. The results are presented below under two sub-themes.

4.5.1 Sub-Theme 5.1. *Perception of Interviewees on the Potential of Twitter to Influence Relationship with their Counterparts in performing Media Relations*

This sub-theme highlights the perception of interviewees on the potential of Twitter to influence relationships with their counterparts in media relations (The description of the codes that make up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Impact of Twitter on media relations function	Perception of the interviewees on the impact of the use of Twitter on media relations.	13	20
Leveraging Twitter for PRP-Journalist relationship	Perception of the interviewees on how the use of Twitter can help promote relationship with their counterparts.	12	14
Twitter promoting evasion than connection	Use of Twitter in communication promotes evasion than connection amongst PRPs and journalists.	1	2

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The interviewees were first asked about their views on the impact of Twitter on media relations. All journalists stated that the use of Twitter does not have any significant impact on media relations. One journalist mentioned this may be due to the small user base of Twitter in New Zealand. One journalist considers it useful only in providing a channel for initiating contact with their counterparts. Two journalists stated that they are interested in taking up exclusive stories and if the story is already announced on Twitter, they are no longer interested in taking it forward. One journalist stated that the use of Twitter in media relations is more useful for PRPs:

They can see what we are interested in and then they might be able to bring us up (J 6).

Putting a tweet allows them [PRPs] to cut the journalist out of the equation altogether (J 1).

On the other hand, four PRPs stated a negative impact of the use of Twitter on media relations function, given the nature of this medium:

...where the bullying can happen quite quickly (PR 1).

It is more of a risk for an organisation, I feel (PR 4).

All these PRPs maintained that they are better off doing media relations using email or phone to communicate with journalists.

The interviewees were also asked about their perception of the use of Twitter in building their relationship with counterparts. All the interviewees stated that it helps in quickly building their connection by sharing stories of mutual trust, e.g.,

It is just a quick way of connecting with people.... If you share that person's tweet as well, you are gaining sort of a relationship with them (J 1).

It definitely helps with relationships if you are liking and re-tweeting somebody's tweets then you are going to have a more positive view of them... It is important that I am on Twitter. It is less media relations, but more relations with people who I rely on in the health sector (J 7).

(The relationship) works if you can re-tweet their stories and support their stories and back them up (PR 6).

Two PRPs stated that if they are active on Twitter, it can help build rapport with the journalists as most of them are known to frequent Twitter looking for story ideas, e.g.,

We should be using it (Twitter), given that journalists use Twitter (PR 4).

4.5.2 Sub-Theme 5.2. *Perception of Interviewees on the Potential of Twitter to influence Relationship with their Counterparts in Performing Media Relations*

This sub-theme highlights the perception of the interviewees on the potential of the use of Twitter in building relationships with their counterparts as a part of the media relations (The description of the code that makes up this sub-theme is given below).

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Future of leveraging Twitter for PRP-journalist relationship	Perception of the interviewees on the future of the use of Twitter in building relationship with their counterparts.	10	10

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

The interviewees were asked about the potential of Twitter in influencing relationship with their counterparts in performing media relations. Six journalists do not see it growing. Only one journalist stated that the use of Twitter by PRPs can help them to be more aware of the core interests of journalists.

Three PRPs stated that Twitter cannot beat the old-fashioned way of building one-to-one relationships:

You pick up the phone and say would you be interested in talking about my organisation, and if the journalists actually want a story, they will meet you and if you can give a story that only they get, that is how you build a relationship with them (PR 6).

However, one PRP stated that the use of Twitter can help to reach a wider audience by better understanding the needs of the journalists who are using Twitter on a regular basis. The remaining two PRPs stated that they do not foresee any change in the impact of Twitter on the PRP-journalist relationship.

Finding 14: Both PRPs and journalists do not believe that Twitter has an impact on media relations, except that it can help in building connections. The interviewees were positive about the impact of Twitter on building relationships with their counterparts, particularly when they share or re-tweet the stories of mutual interest on Twitter. Both PRPs and journalists do not see any major change in the potential of Twitter to influence the PRP-journalist relationship in media relations.

4.6 Summary

The key findings of the research have provided answers to all the research questions outlined in the beginning of this chapter:

Definition and Importance of Media Relations

The results of this study show that both PRPs and journalists understand and value media relations differently. While all PRPs consider media relations as important in their work, journalists have a mixed opinion about its importance, with some journalists stating it as an impediment to their professional activities. Journalists consider that the PR industry has had an increasing influence on information flow over the last decade and has created difficulties in accessing quality information.

The PRP-Journalist Relationship

The results show that all PRPs consider their relationship with journalists as positive, constructive, or strong, whereas journalists have a mixed opinion on their relationship with PRPs.

Potential of Twitter in performing Media Relations

The results show that journalists are increasingly using Twitter as opposed to PRPs who are sparingly using Twitter. However, both PRPs and journalists refrain from active engagement with their counterparts on Twitter as they view it as an aggressive and vitriolic medium.

Potential of Twitter in influencing the PRP-Journalist Relationship

The results show that both PRPs and journalists do not see that Twitter has an impact on media relations, except for its help in building connections. However, both PRPs and journalists acknowledge the potential of Twitter to help build relationships with their counterparts particularly in such cases where PRPs and journalists use Twitter to regularly share stories of their mutual interest.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter begins by restating the purpose of the study and providing brief answers to each of the three research questions based on the results. The next section describes how the answers to each research question are supported by the study, with the discussion further broadened by describing how the results are related to the evidence from previously published studies. The results are then interpreted to highlight their relevance and importance to the research area being addressed by each research question. The last section of the chapter summarises and draws conclusions from the major findings of this study, answering the research questions, and outlines key recommendations of the study while acknowledging its limitations.

The research studies conducted outside New Zealand have reported how the changes in media landscape during the 2000s have had a significant impact on the practice of media relations, particularly the PRP-journalist relationship. These studies have also showed how the use of social media by both PRPs and journalists has influenced contemporary media relations mainly in the way the information is sourced, reported and published (Supa, 2014). A study conducted by a PR scholar Furlan (2017) in Australia has shown that the use of Twitter provides journalists with a functional autonomy in newsgathering, with direct access to their sources otherwise guarded by PRPs. For PRPs, the use of Twitter enables them to address their publics, bypassing the process of fact-checking and verification by journalists (Furlan, 2017). The author argues that this emerging trend has implications for the PRP-journalist relationship, as it could promote ‘evasion’ rather than ‘connection’ (Furlan, 2017, p. 11). This tendency of evasion by both PRPs and journalists while using Twitter in media relations where there is no filter to screen what is published can ultimately affect the quality of health news in terms of accuracy and bias. However, no study on the influence of Twitter on the PRP-journalist in media relations could be found in New Zealand. Hence, the current study is an attempt to contribute to the universe of knowledge on contemporary media relations by finding answers to the following research questions:

1. How does the use of Twitter influence the relationship between PRPs and journalists in the context of contemporary media relations in New Zealand?
 - 1a. How do PRPs and journalists view media relations and their relationship with each other in the context of the evolving practice of media relations in New Zealand?

- 1b. How do PRPs and journalists view the potential of Twitter in influencing the practice of PR and journalism in New Zealand?
- 1c. How do PRPs and journalists view the potential of Twitter in influencing their relationship with each other while performing media relations in New Zealand?

The study results have provided answers to the above-listed research questions that are summarised here. The results show that PRPs and journalists understand and value media relations differently. While all PRPs consider media relations to be important in their work, journalists have a mixed opinion about its importance. Some journalists state that media relations is an impediment to their professional activities. The journalists also maintain that the influence of PR industry on information flow has increased over the last decade, which has created difficulties in accessing quality information. The findings regarding the PRP-journalist relationship show that PRPs consider their relationships with journalists as positive or strong, whereas journalists have a mixed opinion on their relationships with PRPs. The study results on the potential of Twitter in performing media relations show that journalists use Twitter more frequently than PRPs. However, PRPs and journalists state that they refrain from active engagement with their counterparts on Twitter, as they view it as an aggressive/vitriolic medium. The results on the potential of Twitter in influencing media relations, particularly the PRP-journalist relationship, indicate that PRPs and journalists do not perceive any impact of Twitter on media relations, except that it can help in building initial connection. However, they expressed positive perception about the potential of Twitter on building relationships with their counterparts, particularly in such cases where PRPs and journalists use Twitter regularly to share stories of their mutual interest.

The following section uses the study results to answer each research question within the theoretical framework underlying this study. The study results are explored further, drawing on associate studies to build on existing theories.

5.1 Research Question 1a. How do PRPs and journalists view media relations and their relationship with each other in the context of the evolving practice of media relations in New Zealand?

5.1.1 *Understanding the Concept of Media Relations*

The finding on the participants' understanding of media relations shows that PRPs and journalists understand media relations differently. Journalists describe media relations as PR. This is in line with the findings of an earlier study on media relations in 1975, which argued that journalists related the media relations efforts of PRPs to the advertising efforts of an organisation (Aronoff, 1975). This description of media relations as PR is also found in several later studies (Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhagen et al., 1984; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Supa & Zoch, 2009; Wilson & Supa, 2013). This perception of journalists is further amplified in this study when journalists emphasised maintaining their autonomy in the production of unbiased news by saying that they do their independent research in sourcing the news directly or validating the news received through PRPs before publishing it. Journalists also acknowledge the role played by PRPs in providing information for the news or validating news compiled by journalists themselves. The PRPs describe media relations as a way to foster a connection with journalists to facilitate promotion of their organisation's interests through media. The PRPs' understanding of media relations is in line with the definition of media relations: "the ongoing facilitation and coordination of communication and relationships between an individual, group or organization and the media" (Johnston, 2020, p. 6). The PRPs' understanding of their role in the overall process of media relations is reflected in the statement made by one PRP:

Media relations is literally relating with the media in a positive way with an understanding that the media have a job to do as much as I have a job to do and giving informed information to them (PR 3).

5.1.2 *Importance of Media Relations*

The findings on the importance of media relations show that PRPs and journalists value media relations differently. The PRPs consider media relations important in their work. This is consistent with the finding of Supa and Zoch (2009) that PRPs maintain an effective relationship with journalists to help their organisations in establishing credibility amongst their key publics through the media. The journalists in this study have a mixed opinion about the importance of media relations. Some journalists state that media relations is an impediment to their professional activities. This finding supports earlier studies where journalists accuse PRPs of being obstacles to them and their information sources (Callard, 2011; Tilley & Hollings, 2008). On the positive side, journalists credit media relations in helping them to get regular information leads. However, they also maintain that they do not publish stories based only on the information from PRPs and instead they research to uncover the truth. This finding on the importance of media relations highlights the distinct role of PRPs and journalists as two important components of a media relations process,

wherein PRPs provide information to journalists as a part of their mandate to ensure that their organisations are recognised as responsible by their stakeholders. It is then the responsibility of journalists to check the facts and verify the claims made by PRPs before publishing it through their media outlets.

5.1.3 Media Relations Methods

The study results show that journalists prefer to work on exclusive stories rather than refer to the press releases that PRPs still use as a media relations method. The basic reason for PRPs to continue with the practice of issuing general press releases can be attributed to their natural inclination to make as much information available to as many people at a time. But most journalists would not want to write about something that has been already covered, as they get exposure to being the one to break a magnificent piece of news. An exclusive story by a key journalist often gets promoted through top channels and cited by all major media. Exclusive news is therefore beneficial for both sides: journalists releasing high-quality content before anyone else and PRPs getting publicity in media channels of their choice.

The study results identify interviewing as the second most commonly used media relations method by journalists who, while developing their stories based on the leads provided by PRPs, prefer to reach out directly to their information sources rather than PRPs as intermediaries. The journalists claim they resent the practice of PRPs responding to their queries by email instead of granting one-to-one interviews with their information sources. They also claim that, as a part of their media policy, organisations are often directing their staff to not directly interact with media. The existence of this practice has been acknowledged by PRPs in this study also.

The study results also show PRPs and journalists rarely use social media as a media relations method. While PRPs continue to rely on traditional practices of sourcing and delivering information mainly using email, journalists are now trying to adopt online and social media for sourcing information and use multiple media platforms for delivering information. These findings contradict both Wright and Hinson's (2015) study that PRPs believe social media is changing the way PR is practiced and Johnston and Rowny's (2018) study that contemporary media relations is an opportunity for PRPs to manage their content using different communication channels. Equally, the study results are not in line with Zerfass et al. (2016) who suggested that social media has enabled PRPs to have more power over the information published and can even manage the information without mediation by journalists. The PRPs interviewed in this study did not mention that they were following the practice of their own-produced content for direct delivery to their publics.

5.1.4 Perception of Interviewees on their Relationship with Counterparts

The study results show that all the PRPs interviewed consider their relationship with journalists as positive or strong. However, journalists have a mixed opinion on their relationship with PRPs. This builds on 40 years of earlier studies (Aronoff, 1975; Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver et al., 1984; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Supa & Zoch, 2009; Wilson & Supa, 2013). Journalists in this study are disdainful of the PRPs who obstruct their access to their information sources – also found in earlier studies (Jeffers, 1977; Kopenhaver et al., 1984). Journalists in this study claim that the increasing influence of PRPs on information flow impedes them in upholding the basic tenets of journalism aimed at ensuring objectivity and maintaining balance while reporting news. This is in line with the general contention of the basic tenets of journalism, which suggests that journalists trying to uphold the basic tenets of journalism will find some level of conflict while interacting with PRPs. PRPs in this study acknowledge the possibility of conflict in their relationship with journalists, mainly because of organisational constraints which more often require PRPs to avoid the media as far as possible or present information favourable to their organisation.

The study results also show that journalists have a positive relationship with those PRPs whom they have known for a while or those who had previously been journalists, a finding consistent with the previous research (Supa & Zoch, 2009) which reported that journalists hold those PRPs with whom they worked with regularly in higher regard than those whom they did not know. The PRPs interviewed also believe that their relationship with journalists suffers due to a high level of journalist turnover. This may be because PRPs with a background in the media or having dealt with journalists for a long period understand the pressures of an editorial newsroom, including inboxes overflowing with pitches and need to produce multiple stories with tight deadlines for multiple platforms.

The study results also suggest that journalists have a mixed perception about their relationships with PRPs. Journalists express frustration when PRPs do not respond to their information needs in time and/or limit their direct access to a source of information. They consider PRPs a valuable source of information, a finding that builds on previous studies suggesting 40-75% of media is PR-sourced (Gandy, 1982; Macnamara, 1993; DeLorme & Fedler, 2003; Lewis, 2008; Macnamara, 2012). Several other studies have acknowledged this phenomenon of the increase in PR-sourced news as an anti-PR rhetoric by media and described it as a love-hate relationship (Sallot & Johnson, 2006) and symbiotic relationship (Merkel et al., 2007; Bentele & Nothhaft, 2008; Curran, 2009).

The study found that journalists believe that there has been an exponential increase in the influence of PRPs on the media as a major change in the practice of media relations during the last decade, making it harder for journalists to access their information sources directly. Journalists also believe that this inhibits them in not only accessing information but also in getting quality information and therefore affects the PRP-journalist relationship. Both PRPs and journalists believe that the increasing PR influence is because of the development of a crisis in journalism owing to reduced resources and time, high turnover of journalists, and/or increasing pressure of a 24x7 news production and its different formats. The interviewees believe that the use of new technologies has changed the way the news is produced and delivered today which has brought hardships on media professionals, including journalists, editors, and production staff. This finding builds on the study of Macnamara (2014) linking PRP-journalist love-hate relationship to a crisis in journalism. Several other studies have also linked the escalating influence of PR in restricting the access of quality information to journalists because of a crisis in journalism (Lewis et al., 2008; Curran, 2010; Jones, 2011).

5.1.5 Communication Channels used in Media Relations

The study suggests that email is the preferred method of communication in media relations, while social media has recently gained attention amongst journalists for building initial connections or starting a story. The PRPs and journalists claim they do not engage on social media with their counterparts. Instead, as the second preferred method of communication, they use phone/texting as they consider it ‘a warmer way’ of interaction with their counterparts in media relations, more so in the instances related to sharing off-the-record information and seeking extension of deadlines. This finding is consistent with previous research by Zbikowska (2016) who found that social media does not play a decisive role in building the PRP-journalist relationship but can facilitate collaboration with journalists. The interviewees mentioned Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and/or Instagram as the social media platforms being used by them, with two of them stating that the organisations in New Zealand have more public interface on Facebook than Twitter.

5.1.6 Bypassing the Established Channel of Communication

The study results indicate that PRPs and journalists acknowledge that their counterparts bypass them. Journalists claim to access their sources of information directly and PRPs admit to delivering their messages directly to their publics without the mediation of journalists. The journalists interviewed believe that the practice of PRPs reaching out directly to their publics bypasses the process of verification and fact checking and often results in biased or fake news. Journalists say that they feared that the outcome of such news

can be disastrous and hope that traditional media can continue to be trusted as the channel for factual information. However, PRPs also share the need for factual information and claim that journalists seeking information directly from their sources can lead to inaccuracies in reporting and that the PRP intervention provides an informed view of an issue. All PRPs acknowledge that their organisation consciously discourages journalists from bypassing PRPs and directly accessing other information sources in the organisation. Their organisations make it mandatory for all media queries to be routed through the communication team. The practice of PRPs and journalists bypassing their counterparts in the production of news as reported in this study is consistent with Furlan's (2017) study that showed journalists use social media to contact elite medical sources directly rather than using PR intermediaries, while PRPs forge links directly with their publics bypassing journalists.

5.1.7 Future of Media Relations

The interviewees in this study argue that the practice of media relations will use more digital communication, especially social media, within the next decade. This finding builds on a study by Thackeray et al. (2012), which shows that organisations are increasingly using social media to create ongoing conversations and dialogue with their audience. This is consistent with a study reporting that PRPs are positive about the potential of digital media for PR (Wolf & Archer, 2018). Digital communications, often referred to as any exchange of data transmitted in a digital form, is already becoming fundamental to any communication strategy as it offers an organisation to interact directly with its publics often in real time in innovative engaging ways (Sloman, 2019). The way emerging digital communication media is influencing the consumption of news poses challenges for both PRPs and journalists in terms of their skills, knowledge and work practices. Today, the news accessed via digital news channels aided by social media, online news platforms, and search engines has already surpassed traditional news channels, which has caused a shift from mass communication to personalised and customised news consumption (Haim et al., 2018). While personalisation refers to a digital process that involves searching, sorting and recommending news content tailored to the interests of individual users, customisation refers to the modification of sources, delivery and frequency of digital news for individual consumption. This contemporary media environment with its 24-seven news cycle has introduced challenges to journalistic quality, as the reporting of reliable facts is increasingly replaced with less reliable information to push the content in the fast-paced online environment (Karlsson et al., 2017). The challenges faced by PRPs while embracing digital communication technologies include ability to produce content instantaneously with required level of accuracy and having

the technology and the skills required to manage delivery of the content directly to publics (James, 2007).

The study results also predict a few other developments in media relations. One such development relates to the proliferation of news outlets, predicting that each outlet will have a focused niche audience. Niche publications are already a big business (Peters, 2017). These publications may attract smaller audiences than traditional news outlets, but they cover practically every area of interest to the niche audience. Because of their narrow focus, these niche publications employ subject-matter experts who catch news titbits missed by traditional news outlets and provide deeper insights. Such narrowcasting has been further enabled by the use of digital communications as it allows publics to engage with the content specific to their needs and interest as against that offered by traditional news outlets (Pophal, 2019). General assignment reporters, who gain from the in-depth reporting offered by such niche sites in the news of their interest, often treat all niche areas of coverage as a beat (Peters, 2017). Another trend predicted by the interviewees, i.e., more in-depth investigative journalism has greater implication on media relations as all investigative reporting mostly stems from a journalist's initiative rather than by the material supplied by a PRP (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, n.d.). In the words of British writer George Orwell, "journalism is printing what someone else does not want printed, everything else is public relations". Investigative journalism is characterised by long in-depth research conducted by a journalist with an aim to expose matters of public interest. One journalist interviewee points out that his investigative stories do not start with a PRP supplying the material, but he approaches a PRP only after completing a story to get the organisation's viewpoints. More investigative stories in future would therefore mean less dependence of journalists on PRPs. The other predictions on the future of media relations made by the interviewees are related to the content of the news published, including inclusion of more and more videos, figures, and data. This may have implications for PRPs to supplement their information consciously with relevant videos and figures, in order to remain relevant to journalists.

5.1.8 The Results from Theoretical Perspective

The study results show that the concept of media relations has a varying meaning amongst PRPs and journalists in that PRPs and journalists understand and value media relations differently. These findings on understanding the concept of media relations and those on the importance perceived by PRPs and journalists in their professions form a basis to examine how PRPs and journalists view media relations and their relationship with each other in the evolving practice of media relations. The results also show that all the PRPs interviewed

consider their relationship with journalists as positive or strong, whereas the journalists interviewed have a mixed opinion on their relationship with PRPs. Clearly, these findings lend support to the intereffication model that shows mutuality between PR and journalism through induction (ability to influence) and adaptation (willingness to adapt) (Bentele, 2005). This model assumes that neither PR nor journalism would function properly without the existence of the other, as the communication output of one profession is possible only on the willingness of the other profession to cooperate and contribute towards its effectiveness in meeting the desired objectives. Also, according to Bentele and Nothhaft (2008), the mutually enabling processes of induction and adaptation processes can vary in their strength in both PR and journalism depending upon expectations and experience of the participating actors. This theoretical framework also explains the finding that shows journalists have a positive relationship with those PRPs whom they have known for a while or those who had been journalists. The PRPs interviewed also believe that their relationship with journalists suffer due to high level of journalist turnover.

When asked about the future of media relations, all the interviewees mention increasing use of digital communication, especially social media. The increase in the use of social media as a part of media relations in the future can be described as broadening of the concept of media relations because of the involvement of more channels in the organisational communication process than just traditional media. This may imply that in the future, with frequent use of social media in the organisational communication process, the concept of media relations will describe the communication processes with all kinds of media and not just with the journalists. This possible shift in the concept of media relations may also transfer the emphasis from the PRP-journalist relationship to the relationship with all their stakeholders. It can therefore be concluded that the postulation of the systems theory that a change in one set of relationships could affect other relationships, creating problems and opportunities for one another, is supported by the results of the study.

5.2 Research Question 1b. How do PRPs and journalists view the potential of Twitter in influencing the practice of PR and journalism in New Zealand?

5.2.1 Use of Twitter in Journalism Profession

The study results on the potential of Twitter in influencing the practice of journalism show that journalists use Twitter frequently, but they refrain from active engagement with their counterparts on Twitter as they view it as an aggressive medium. The interviewees believe Twitter is increasingly recognised in journalism for use as a news feed or to promote news

stories, particularly for breaking news. Twitter has become a key requirement in journalism is echoed in the words of a journalist interviewed, "... I think if I wasn't a journalist, I don't think I would be on Twitter" (J 5). The frequent use of Twitter by journalists is consistent with previous studies (Ahmad, 2010; Barnard, 2012; Broersma & Graham, 2013; Canter, 2015; Barnard, 2016; Canter & Brookes, 2016; McGregor & Molyneux, 2020). Of these studies, Canter (2015) and Barnard (2016) even showed Twitter's role in the transformation of journalistic norms. The journalists however could not predict changes in the influence of Twitter on journalism in a decade from now as they believe that the aggressive nature of the medium makes it difficult to predict its acceptance in the times to come.

The study results show that PRPs acknowledge the increasing use of Twitter in journalism, but they believe Twitter is used by journalists more to promote their own interests to attract a greater audience rather than to engage with PRPs. The journalists acknowledged that the use of Twitter helps them to build their own profiles. This finding builds on research that found personal branding was one of the tweeting habits of journalists (Canter & Brookes, 2016). Another previous study also reported that journalists are increasingly encouraged to develop a personal brand on Twitter as it gives them an opportunity to attract more audiences and become news and opinion hubs (Brems, 2017). Molyneux et al. (2018) argue that branding is common among journalists on Twitter, primarily at their personal and organisation levels with organisational branding taking priority. The results of the current study reporting the use of Twitter by journalists for personal branding may imply that Twitter can be used by journalists as an excellent platform for building relationships with their publics as it helps them to "construct an image on social media by carefully curating the information that is connected to them" (Brems, 2017, p. 446). However, the study results suggest that in New Zealand, Twitter is used by journalists more as a platform for interaction with politicians rather than with the rest of the country.

The study results also show that the use of Twitter has helped in promoting the practice of citizen journalism. Citizen journalism has been defined as an activity in which ordinary citizens generate non-professional content on breaking events or to the news (Allan & Thorsen, 2009). The underlying principle of citizen journalism is that ordinary people, not professional journalists, can be the main creators and distributors of news (Min, 2016). Citizen journalism has been a well-researched topic with extensive debate on its impact on traditional journalism, with several studies stating that it presents both challenges and opportunity for traditional journalism (Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Allan, 2015; Barnes, 2012; Zeng et al., 2019). The study finding that Twitter promotes the practice of citizen journalism can therefore have an implication on the practice of journalism in New Zealand.

5.2.2 Use of Twitter in PR Profession

The study results on the potential of Twitter in influencing the practice of PR show that PRPs use Twitter sparingly and refrain from active engagement with their counterparts on Twitter, as they view it as a vitriolic medium. This perception of PRPs that they do not engage with journalists on Twitter was also acknowledged by the journalists interviewed who went a step beyond in stating that the occasional use of Twitter by PRPs is only to bypass the channel of verification provided by journalists. The finding that PRPs sparingly use Twitter contradicts the results of previous studies, which showed that PRPs believe an organisation's level of interaction with Twitter influences the quality of PR (Wigand, 2010; Evans, 2011; Hwang, 2012; Kim et al., 2015). The finding that PRPs do not engage with their counterparts on Twitter is however consistent with previous studies which reported that PRPs mostly use Twitter as a one-way communication channel (Lovejoy et al., 2012; Mamic & Almaraz, 2013; Park et al., 2016). The study results showing that Twitter is used more in journalism than in PR is echoed in the statement of one PRP interviewed who mentioned that she used Twitter significantly while serving as a journalist, but not in her current role as a PRP. The PRPs, in contrast with journalists, see growth in the influence of Twitter on PR in a decade from now, particularly in their activities aimed at promoting organisations developments, following and building relationships with their stakeholders, and launching new products/services of their organisations.

5.2.3 The Results from Theoretical Perspective

The study results show that although there is an increasing influence of Twitter on the practice of both journalism and PR, the communication professionals engaged in these two professions do not engage with each other while performing media relations. The study results also show that Twitter is used in journalism much more than PR. According to the behavioural-strategic management paradigm in PR, the underlying theoretical framework for this study, people are less constrained by the information made available by organisations through traditional media as digital technologies like Twitter have enabled everyone, including journalists, to seek information from several sources simultaneously. To take full advantage of digital media, Grunig (2009) argues that it is important that PR is practiced under the behavioural-strategic management paradigm where PR as a bridging activity builds relationships with stakeholders, with emphasis on two-way symmetrical communication to facilitate dialogue between management and publics. Grunig's belief that digital media advances the behavioural-strategic management approach is not supported by this study. Social media platforms like Twitter provide an alternative instrument to

encourage a two-way communication channel and therefore it is necessary for PRPs to monitor the information placed on social media sites and engage content producers on various forums as journalists are regularly monitoring these sites and forums for story ideas and information (Păun, 2009). In social media, people are more resistant to unidirectional messaging, so both professions may lose their publics when they disregard the rules of communication in social media environments that enables and demands a two-way symmetric communication. However, the study results point out that both PRPs and journalists are using Twitter in the same way they used traditional media. Twitter is used to dump information, with PRPs' emphasis on messages, publicity and media effects and journalists' emphasis on building their individual brands. While the use of Twitter with its interactive features was expected to force the communication in PR and journalism towards the two-way symmetrical model, the study results show that communication between PRPs and journalists in media relations can at best be described by Grunig's public information or two-way asymmetrical model of PR. This approach of PRPs and journalists with focus on messages and publicity to influence how their publics interpret them rather than engagement with their publics giving them a voice in their decisions lend its support to the interpretative management paradigm rather than the behavioural-strategic management paradigm in PR. The practice followed in PR and journalism buffers their organisation from its publics rather than providing a bridge to their organisation by giving weight to the voice of its publics.

5.3 Research Question 1c. How do PRPs and journalists view the potential of Twitter in influencing their relationship with each other while performing media relations in New Zealand?

The study results show that both PRPs and journalists do not view any impact of Twitter on media relations, as they do not engage with their counterparts on Twitter. Although both PRPs and journalists show that they are not using Twitter substantially in their work schedule, they recognise the benefits of Twitter as an information-sharing platform. The interviewees, however, believe Twitter can help in building initial connections and sharing stories of mutual interest. They also do not see any major shift in the current trend of the influence of Twitter on the PRP-journalist relationship in media relations. The study results build on the previous study by Wilson and Supa (2013) who found that although Twitter is considered valuable by both PRPs and journalists for fulfilling basic functions of sourcing, reporting and publishing news, they have not used the medium to engage with each other. Additional evidence comes from a key study on the impact of Twitter on sports media relations, which also reported a one-way format of communication by the sports teams on their website (Gibbs & Haynes, 2013).

The results show that Twitter has an impact on the PRP-journalist relationship. The PRPs interviewed acknowledge journalists are using Twitter more to meet their individual interests than to engage with them. Journalists acknowledge that PRPs do not engage with them on Twitter for media relations, with one of them stating that the occasional use of Twitter by PRPs is only to bypass the channel of verification provided by journalists. Both PRPs and journalists view the practice whereby the communication professionals involved in media relations bypass each other with PRPs reaching out directly to their publics and journalists directly accessing their information sources as a new normal in media relations. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that the use of Twitter by both PRPs and journalists promotes evasion rather than relationship development (Furlan, 2017). According to Furlan (2017), journalists are using Twitter to get news directly from the information source rather than from PRPs (second-hand news), whereas PRPs use Twitter to forge direct links with their publics, bypassing the process of verification and fact-checking, which is changing relational dynamics between PRPs and journalists.

5.3.1 The Results from Theoretical Perspective

The study shows that both PRPs and journalists use Twitter for traditional unidirectional messaging and not with a purpose to engage with each other in media relations. Also, both have negative perceptions of the purpose of the use of Twitter by their counterparts while performing media relations. Applying intereffication model, the underlying theoretical framework for this study, it can be concluded that such use of Twitter by PRPs and journalists can undermine their relationship with each other. The intereffication model shows mutuality between PR and journalism through induction (ability to influence) and adaptation (willingness to adapt) (Bentele, 2005). This model assumes that neither PR nor journalism would function properly without the existence of the other, as the communication output of one profession is possible only on the willingness of the other profession to cooperate and contribute towards its effectiveness in meeting the desired objectives. The perception of journalists on the use of Twitter by PRPs to bypass them and avoid the process of verification and fact-checking would mean that journalists no longer have any influence on the process of information flow from an organisation to its publics. Similarly, the affordances provided by Twitter to journalists to access their information sources directly without the mediation of PRPs could be seen to affect PRPs' perception of a lack of influence on what and how news gets published. Such perception of PRPs and journalists upsets the balance between the mutually enabling process of induction and adaptation responsible for maintaining the PRP-journalist relationship. Also, according to Bentele

and Nothhaft (2008), the mutually enabling processes of induction and adaptation processes can vary in their strength in both PR and journalism depending upon expectations and experience of the participants. The negative perception of PRPs that journalists are using Twitter to promote their individual interests rather than to engage with them impinges on their expectations from journalists. According to the intereffication model, this perception, negatively affecting the strength of the two mutually enabling processes of induction and adaptation, can be detrimental to the PRP-journalist relationship.

5.4 Conclusions

This section draws conclusions from the major findings of the study, answering the research questions. Overall, the study findings explained how PRPs and journalists understand the concept and importance of media relations as it has evolved over the last one decade and how the use of Twitter has influenced their role in performing media relations, especially the relationship between PRPs and journalists.

A major finding of the study is that PRPs and journalists understand and value media relations differently. Journalists describe media relations as public relations. The PRPs describe media relations as a way to foster a connection with journalists to facilitate promotion of their organisation's interests through media. This highlights PRPs and journalists as two important components of the media relations process, where PRPs provide information to journalists as a part of their mandate to ensure that their organisations are recognised as responsible by their stakeholders. It is then the responsibility of journalists to check the facts and verify the claims made by PRPs before publishing it through their media outlets. These findings can be explained well by the intereffication model, the underlying theoretical model for this study, that shows mutuality between PR and journalism through induction (ability to influence) and adaptation (willingness to adapt) (Bentele, 2005). This model assumes that neither PR nor journalism would function properly without the existence of the other, as the communication output of one profession is possible only on the willingness of the other profession to cooperate and contribute towards its effectiveness in meeting the desired objectives.

Another important finding of this research is that PRPs and journalists do not share the same attitudes about their relationships with each other. All PRPs consider their relationships with journalists as positive or strong, whereas journalists have a mixed opinion on their relationship with PRPs. For example, journalists admit to having a positive relationship with those PRPs whom they have known for a while or those who have been journalists. PRPs believe their relationship with journalists suffers owing to a high level of journalist turnover.

The results also confirm the increasing influence of PR on media due to a crisis in journalism. The study results suggest that the crisis in journalism has affected the current practice of media relations, as was also argued in a previous study by Macnamara (2014). These findings also lend support to the intereffication model that considers that the mutually enabling processes of induction and adaptation processes can vary in their strength in both PR and journalism depending on expectations and experience of the participants (Bentele & Nothhaft, 2008).

The finding on the future of media relations shows an increase in using digital communication, described in this study as a broadening of the concept of media relations owing to more communication channels. This shift in the concept of media relations - dealing with all kinds of media and not just with the journalists - may also shift emphasis from the PRP-journalist relationship to the relationship with all their stakeholders. As postulated in the systems theory, a change in one set of relationships could affect other relationships, and this could create problems and opportunities for both PRPs and journalists as also identified in this study. The findings on the future of media relations perhaps point towards a likely scenario where PRPs and journalists gain necessary skills to produce different material for different media channels, e.g., writing texts in news formats and writing stories for a blog, editing videos and uploading them online, and engaging in two-way communication via social media. It is likely that the use of social media would enable the organisations to have more control over the information published about it. Depending upon the capacity of an organisation to handle a diversity of emerging media channels, one might even envisage an organisation taking over the role of the media by itself.

The study results show that although there is an increasing influence of Twitter on the practice of both journalism and PR, PRPs and journalists do not engage with each other during media relations. The study results also show that Twitter is used in journalism much more than PR. As per the behavioural-strategic management paradigm of PR, the use of Twitter with its interactive features is expected to force the communication in PR and journalism towards the two-way symmetrical model. However, the study results show that communication between PRPs and journalists in media relations can be described by Grunig's public information or two-way asymmetrical model of PR. This study finding suggesting the focus of PRPs and journalists on messages to influence how their publics interpret them rather than engagement with their publics giving them a voice in their decisions lends its support to the interpretative management paradigm rather than the behavioural-strategic management paradigm in PR. The finding on the practice of one-way

communication by PRPs and journalists in their respective professions buffers their organisation from their publics rather than providing a bridge to their organisation by giving weightage to the voice of its publics. It is therefore concluded that Grunig's statement about digital media advancing the behavioural-strategic management approach is not supported by this study.

The study results provide insights from journalists and PRPs on the current and future use of Twitter within the journalism and PR industry. These insights might be used by PRPs to position the use of Twitter suitably in their media strategy, particularly by following journalists on Twitter, re-tweeting their stories, and providing useful leads to developing stories of individual interest of journalists. These efforts are likely to contribute to the profile development of journalists and therefore may help in building and/or furthering the PRP-journalist relationship. The study results also provide information regarding how PR industry uses Twitter in their media strategy and how these efforts will develop. The findings seem to have pointed towards the need for PRPs to employ full interactivity potential of Twitter to build mutually beneficial relationships with their counterparts, particularly calling attention to some key interactivity features of Twitter.

The study results also show that both PRPs and journalists do not view any impact of Twitter on media relations, except for its help in building initial connections. However, the interviewees expressed that Twitter has the potential of building relationships with their counterparts, provided both PRPs and journalists regularly engage with their counterparts, particularly by sharing stories of mutual interest on Twitter. The interviewees also do not see any major shift in the trend of the influence of Twitter on PRP-journalist relationship while performing media relations soon. The results show that Twitter provides affordances that enable journalists to find their own information and news angles and disregard PRPs intervention in the process of news production. Journalists believe that Twitter has enabled PRPs to reach their publics directly and thus avoid the process of fact-checking and verification by journalists. Such perception of PRPs and journalists upsets the balance between the mutually enabling process of induction and adaptation responsible for maintaining the PRP-journalist relationship. The intereffication model therefore provides a theoretical basis to the finding that the use of Twitter has the potential to undermine the PRP-journalist relationship.

Although both PRPs and journalists show that they are not using Twitter substantially in their work schedule, they recognise the benefits of Twitter as an information-sharing platform. It is therefore possible that as the use of Twitter grows within each profession,

there will be a corresponding increase in the use of Twitter by PRPs and journalists in communication with each other as a regular part of media relations.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

A key limitation of the current study centres on the researcher's finding during the research process that both PRPs and journalists in the health care sector in New Zealand are not using Twitter, or are using it sparingly. As a result, many PRPs and journalists did not agree to take part in this research as they were not active users of Twitter. This reflects on the use of Twitter by communication professionals involved in media relations in New Zealand. However, previous research shows that Twitter is used by PRPs and journalists for media relations in other countries. This finding on the minimal use of Twitter by PRPs and journalists in New Zealand means that this study has become a baseline for further research in this area. The current study originally was aimed to carry out interviews and content analysis of the interviewees' tweets. But this second data collection method could not be undertaken as most of the participants expressed their reluctance for analysis of their tweets on the ground that they normally tweet on personal matters only. The triangulation of data therefore could not be attempted that otherwise would have helped not only to cross-validate data but also to capture different dimensions of the study.

Originally, all interviews were scheduled to be conducted face-to-face. However, because of COVID-19 restrictions, only two interviews could be conducted face-to-face and the rest (11 interviews) were conducted over Zoom. While interviewing over Zoom proved viable, but that not all interviewees were subject to face-to-face interview conditions may have posed some limitations to the collection of data. Face-to-face interview has an advantage in facilitating the use of visual aids and detection of social cues and body language. It is considered a 'gold standard' in terms of validity and rigour, as it helps the interviewer to gain a deeper insight to specific answers through meaningful discussion and deducing the validity of each response (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006, p. 390). Also, there is limited research on the differences between different interviewing techniques used in the same research project (Opdenakker, 2006). However, researchers have also reported that online video platforms like Zoom have enabled synchronous mediated interviews that offer many of the advantages associated with face-to-face interviews (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Hanna, 2012). Deakin and Wakefield (2014) have argued that synchronous online interviewing is a useful supplement or replacement for face-to-face interviews.

The study was designed to focus specifically on media relations concerning health news in New Zealand. For this reason, only those PRPs and journalists who were involved in health care communication were chosen as part of the research sample. However, no specific input was received from the interviewees when they were asked to talk specifically about media relations concerning health news as different from media relations concerning other fields. Although all the interviewees were engaged in health care communication, this sampling did not lead to any apparent benefit in this research. This elite group of interview participants chosen because of nonprobability sampling also meant that although it led to rich data that helped in effectively capturing the perception of the interviewees on the influence of Twitter on PRP-journalist relationship, the findings are not truly generalisable to a wider population.

A delimitation of this study is in relation to the collection of demographic data of survey participants on the years of experience, the position held, and their individual role amongst various communication activities handled by their organisations. This data was collected to cross-tabulate responses to determine whether the perception of the interviewees varies according to their experience, position, or individual role in their organisation. However, during analysis of data it was clear that the wealth of data produced was too large in scope for a study of this size and the focus was kept only on analysing the perception of the interviewees. However, this untapped information could provide further insight into the PRP-journalist relationship, e.g., whether more experienced interviewees hold less favourable attitudes towards their counterparts.

5.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could address the limitations of this study. For instance, it may include quantitative methodology to increase reliability, which may further lead to theory building in the field. Further research with a focus on evaluating the long-term effects of the impact of Twitter on the PRP-journalist relationship can help to determine whether the opinions expressed by the interviewees in this research are representative. Both PRPs and journalists stated that the use of Twitter has no major impact on media relations. This scenario may change with time, and the researcher recommends future research to evaluate the impact of Twitter on media relations. Proper understanding of how PRPs and journalists can best use Twitter in practicing media relations is expected to influence the PRP-journalist relationship positively.

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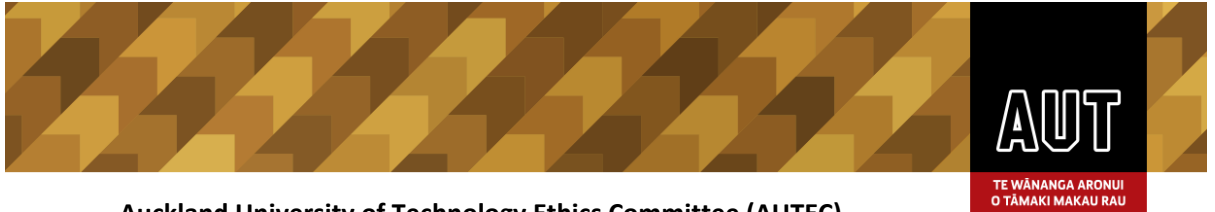
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PRESENTED AT THE 2ND TOROA CONFERENCE 2020, 19-20
NOVEMBER, AUT UNIVERSITY

APPENDIX A: ETHICS APPROVAL



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

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4 September 2020

Averill Gordon
Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Averill

Ethics Application: **20/262 Examining Contemporary Media Relations: Impact of Twitter on Relational Dynamics between Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists in production of Health News in New Zealand during COVID-19 Pandemic.**

We advise you that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) has **approved** your ethics application at its meeting of 31 August 2020.

This approval is for three years, expiring 31 August 2023.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: pwd8273@autuni.ac.nz

APPENDIX B1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS

Introductory Questions

How long you have worked in the field of public relations?

How long you have worked in your current organisation?

What communication activities are being handled in your organisation?

What is your individual role in the organisation?

Media Relations Today

What does the term 'media relations' mean for you?

How do you feel about its importance in your organisation?

What main methods (press releases, media events, interviews...) your organisation uses for media relations?

What main communication channels (e-mail, social media (twitter)) your organisation uses for media relations?

How often are you in contact with journalists?

How would you describe your relations with them?

Would you describe these relationships as personal or are they purely professional?

Change in Media Relations

If you wanted to exchange information with journalists as a part of media relations function about 10-15 years ago, how you did it then and how you do it now?

What according to you is the role of new communication technologies in media relations?

Can you elaborate on the trends in sourcing information for news?

Can you elaborate on the trends in delivering information as news?

How according to you the trend whereby journalists source information directly from the primary source of information instead from a PR professional like you can affect the quality of 'health' news particularly with regard to its accuracy?

The Role of Twitter

How do you use Twitter at personal level?

How and to what extent do you use Twitter at organisational level while performing your role as a PR professional?

How do you think the Twitter is being used in PR profession in general?

How do you perceive the extent of the use of Twitter by journalists in providing quality health information?

What do you think is (can be) the impact of the use of Twitter particularly on the media relations activity of your organisation?

How do you feel you can best leverage Twitter when attempting to form/maintain/further your personal and/or professional relationships with journalists?

How do you think that Twitter helps (can help) in promoting a dialogue with your key publics?

Future of Media Relations

What changes or developments do you predict in the future of media relations?

What do you see as the future of the use of Twitter in PR in general?

What do you see as the future of the use of Twitter in building relationship with the journalists— Be it personal or professional?

APPENDIX B2: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR JOURNALISTS

Introductory Questions

How long you have worked in the field of journalism?

How long you have worked in your current news outlet?

What communicative activities are being handled in your news outlet?

What is your individual role in the news outlet?

Media Relations Today

What does the term 'media relations' mean for you?

How do you feel about its importance in your work?

How much time you spend on handling media relations or sources of information in your news outlet?

What main methods (press releases, media events, interviews...) you normally get involved in for media relations?

What main media channels (e-mail, social media (twitter)) you normally use for media relations?

How often are you in contact with PR professionals in various organisations?

How would you describe your relationship with them?

Would you describe these relationships as personal or are they purely professional?

The Change in Media Relations

If you wanted to source information from various organisations as a part of media relations function about 10-15 years ago, how you did it then and how you do it now?

What according to you is the role of new communication technologies in media relations?

Can you elaborate on the journalism trends in sourcing news?

Can you elaborate on the journalism trends in delivering news?

How according to you the current trend whereby PR professionals disseminate information directly to its publics instead of routing it through journalists like you can affect the quality of health news particularly with regard to its bias?

The Role of Twitter

How do you use Twitter at personal level?

How do you use Twitter while performing your role as a journalist?

How do you think the Twitter is being used in journalism profession in general?

How do you perceive the extent of the use of Twitter by PR professionals in providing quality health information?

What do you think is (can be) the impact of the use of Twitter particularly on your media relations activity?

How do you feel you can best leverage Twitter when attempting to form/maintain/ further your personal and/or professional relationships with PR professionals?

How do you think that Twitter helps (can help) to engage in promoting dialogue with key publics, including PR professionals?

Future of Media Relations

What changes or developments do you predict in the future of media relations?

What do you see as the future of the use of Twitter in journalism profession in general?

What do you see as the future of the use of Twitter in building relationship with PR Professionals – be it personal or professional?

APPENDIX B3: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

15 September 2020

Project Title

Examining Contemporary Media Relations: Potential of Twitter in changing Relational Dynamics between Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists for Health News.

An Invitation

I am in the final year of Master of Communication Studies at AUT University, currently involved in thesis work, in partial fulfilment of the degree. As a part of research, I will be conducting interviews to increase our understanding of the potential of Twitter in changing relational dynamics between public relations practitioners and journalists in production of health news. As a seasoned media professional, you are in an ideal position to give valuable information on this subject from your own perspective.

I take this opportunity to invite you to participate in my research work and share your experiences, perceptions and opinions on this research area in one face-to-face 30-minute interview with me. The questions will focus on the potential of Twitter on your outcome in your profession and as a part of the traditional media relations function as also your personal and professional relationships with your counterparts in the other profession.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and the findings could lead to a greater understanding of potential of Twitter in changing relational dynamics between public relations practitioners and journalists, which is considered to have implications on the production of accurate and unbiased health news.

Please take time to read the contents of this information sheet carefully before you decide about whether or not you would like to participate in this study.

What is the purpose of this research?

There is a strong potential of Twitter in public relations and journalism in facilitating communication not only with the counterparts engaged in media relations, but also directly with their publics. It is therefore important for both public relations practitioners and journalists to realise how Twitter is used by their counterparts and how they can effectively use this social media platform to create mutually beneficial relationships for producing accurate and unbiased health news. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, there has been exponential increase in the already voracious appetite of the residents of New Zealand to seek health news. This has simultaneously presented greater challenge in preventing proliferation of 'fake' health news on social media sites, including Twitter with no filter to

screen what is published. However, there is limited research in exploring the potential of Twitter in changing relational dynamics between public relations practitioners and journalists involved in the production of health news. Hence, this research is aimed to fill this gap that is considered to have implications on the production of accurate and unbiased health news.

Besides the thesis to be submitted to the AUT University, the findings of this research may also be used for academic publications and presentations related to this research work.

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

The research has been designed to interview 3-5 Auckland-based participants from each of the two professions of public relations and journalism. The public relations practitioners identified are seasoned professionals working in the public relations departments of medical-health companies and engaged in media relations, as one of their core areas of operation. The Journalists identified are the seasoned media professionals reporting on medical-health issues for their respective news media outlets.

You have been identified as one of the participants perfectly meeting the above-mentioned criteria and having strong commitment and passion for the profession.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Once you have made a decision about your participation in this research, you need to sign the Consent Form attached herewith.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

This research uses interviews as a method of data collection. One 15-20 minute interview will be conducted over zoom or in person and will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcript will then be examined to ensure that all of the important information has been captured. The transcript will not contain any information about you that would allow you to be identified. The access to the transcript will be restricted to me and my supervisor only. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. Please note that your responses, identifying information, and other names mentioned would be kept confidential. Only major lines of thought that emerge from the interviews will be used to describe important findings.

The above findings will be used by me for completion of thesis and any other academic publication and presentation related to this research work.

A summary of the results of the data will be made available to you via e-mail.

What are the benefits?

Benefits to the participants. The findings of the research are expected to focus on the areas that may help both the public relations practitioners and the journalists to improve relationship with their counterparts in the overall process of producing accurate and unbiased health news.

Benefits to the wider community. Better relational dynamics between two important players involved in the production of health news would help the community to have access to 'timely', 'accurate', and 'unbiased' health news.

Benefits to the researcher. The research being done in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Communication Studies would help me in fulfilling the requirement and upgrade my skills in research work.

How will my privacy be protected?

As already mentioned above, any information collected from you as a result of interview will be kept confidential, and access to this information will be restricted to me and my supervisor only. Your name and details of your answers will not be disclosed. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded and typed as a transcript. The transcript will then be examined to ensure that all of the important information has been captured. The transcript will not contain any information about you that would allow you to be identified. Again, the access to the transcript will be restricted to me and my supervisor. Your employers will not see your specific responses. Some of your comments may be included as a finding of the study, but these will be kept anonymous.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

You will need to spare your valuable time for a 15-20-minute interview with me.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

A period of up to 15 days will be given to you to respond to this invitation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You will be able to see the summary of the findings of the research.

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

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the research supervisor,

Dr Averill Gordon, averill.gordon@aut.ac.nz, 021 575 064.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTC, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

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

Researcher Contact Details:

Daljit Singh Bedi, bedids@yahoo.com, 021 0840 3350

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Averill Gordon, averill.gordon@aut.ac.nz, 021 575 064

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 04 September 2020, AUTC Reference number 20/262.

APPENDIX B4: CONSENT FORM



Consent Form

Project title: Examining Contemporary Media Relations: Potential of Twitter in changing Relational Dynamics between Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists for Health News.

Project Supervisor: Dr Averill Gordon

Researcher: Daljit Singh Bedi

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 15 September 2020.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 04 September 2020 AUTEK Reference number 20/262.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

APPENDIX C: CODEBOOK GENERATED THROUGH NVIVO

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Evolving practice of media relations	The perception of interviewees on various aspects related to evolution in the practice of media relations	13	101
Bypassing the channel	Perception of respondents on the practice of their counterparts bypassing their channel in the overall process of communication	13	23
Changes in media relations	Respondents detailing the difference in media relations function as they performed it 10 years back and as they perform it now.	13	24
Changing PRP-journalist relational dynamics	The impact of changing media relations practice on the relational dynamics between PRPs and journalists.	1	1
Crisis in journalism	Crisis in journalism profession, in terms of reduced resources and time, and increase in media formats.	3	5
Increasing PR intervention	Exponential growth of PR influencing the flow and nature of information.	5	8
Harder access to information sources	PR intervention inhibiting access to the sources of information.	5	5
Role of new communication technologies	Role of new communication technologies in the evolving concept of media relations.	12	16
Future of media relations	Important developments predicted by respondents in the future of media relations.	13	16
Trends in delivering information	Various ways in which the information/news is currently delivered by the respondents.	13	17
Trends in sourcing information	Various ways the information is currently sourced by the respondents.	13	19
Impact of Twitter on PRP-journalist relationship	Perception of respondents on the potential (both existing and future) of Twitter to influence relationship with their counterparts in performing media relations.	13	46
Future of leveraging Twitter for PRP-journalist relationship	Perception of respondents on the future of the use of Twitter in building relationship with their counterparts.	10	10
Impact of Twitter on media relations	Perceptions of respondents on the impact of the use of Twitter on media relations.	13	20

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
Leveraging Twitter for PRP-journalist relationship	Perception of respondents on how the use of Twitter can help promote relationship with their counterparts.	12	14
Twitter promoting evasion than connection	Use of Twitter in communication promotes evasion than connection amongst PRPs and journalists.	1	2
Perception of journalists on the influence of Twitter on journalism	How do journalists view the use of Twitter is influencing the practice of journalism?	11	40
Journalists perception of Twitter as a social media tool	Perception of journalists on Twitter as a social media platform.	5	8
Dialogic function of Twitter	Perception of journalists on the role of Twitter in promoting dialogue with their stakeholders, particularly the PRPs.	6	7
Journalist's use of Twitter at organisational level	Use of Twitter by journalists while performing their organisational role.	7	7
Journalists use of Twitter at personal level	Use of Twitter by journalists at personal level.	7	7
Perception of PRPs on Twitter use by journalists	Perception of PRPs regarding the use of Twitter by journalists engaged in media relations function.	6	8
Twitter in journalism	Journalists' perception on the use of Twitter in their profession in general.	7	11
Future of the use of Twitter	Perception of journalists on the future of the use of Twitter in their professions in general.	6	6
Perception of PRPs on the influence of Twitter on PR	How do PRPs view the use of Twitter can influence the practice of public relations.	12	47
Perception of journalists on Twitter use by PRPs	Perception of journalists regarding the use of Twitter by PRPs engaged in media relations function.	7	9
PRPs' perception of Twitter as a social media tool	Perception of PRPs on Twitter as a social media platform.	6	8
Dialogic function of Twitter	Perception of PRPs on the role of Twitter in promoting dialogue with their stakeholders, particularly journalists.	6	6
PRPs' use of Twitter at organisational level	Use of Twitter by PRPs while performing their organisational role.	6	11
PRPs' use of Twitter at personal level	Use of Twitter by PRPs at personal level.	6	7
Twitter in PR	PRPs perception on the use of Twitter in	6	7

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
	their profession in general.		
Future of the use of Twitter	Perception of PRPs on the future of the use of Twitter in their profession in general.	5	5
PRP-journalist relationship as an important component of media relations	An overarching theme encompassing several sub-themes related to the importance of PRP-journalist relationship to the concept of media relations.	13	134
Communication channels for media relations	Main communication channels used by respondents in performing media relations.	12	16
Emails	Respondents use emails for day-to-day interaction with their counterparts in performing media relations.	13	15
In-person meetings	Respondents prefer to meet their counterparts in person to perform media relations.	2	2
Mobile calls and messages	Respondents use mobile for direct contact with the counterparts, either by way of phone calls or SMS/WhatsApp messages to perform media relations.	9	10
Online and social media	Respondents use online and social media channels to perform media relations, including signing up for newsletters.	8	9
Twitter	Perception of the use of Twitter as a social media channel in media relations.	4	4
Importance of media relations	How much importance the respondents attach to media relations vis-a-vis their work obligations.	13	16
Contradictory perception	Respondent consider media relations as helpful and also a barrier in the process of communication, at the same time	1	1
Frequency of contact with counterparts	Average number of times the respondents contact their counterparts in performing media relations.	13	19
Negative perception	Respondents regard media relations as undermining their process of communication.	2	4
Positive perception	Respondents view media relations as important in their process of communication.	9	9
Media relations	The perspective of respondents on media relations, how they identify the function in their day-to-day activities.	13	20
Media relations methods	Main methods like press releases, media	12	21

Code	Description of the Code	Files*	References**
	events, and interviews use by the respondents in performing media relations.		
Building connections	PRPs building contact book of journalists; Journalists building contact book of direct sources of information including those other than PRPs.	3	3
Interviewing	PRPs arranging interviews of journalists with their sources of information; Journalists interviewing their sources either directly or through PRPs.	6	6
Media events	PRPs organising media events to unfold stories; Journalists attending media events to get inputs for their stories	5	5
Press releases	PRPs unfolding their stories by way of press releases and media pitches; Journalists developing their stories based on press releases and media pitches.	10	11
PRP-journalist relationship	Perception of respondents on relationship with their counterparts.	13	22
Mixed relationship	Respondents have mixed feelings about their relationship with counterparts.	6	10
Nature of relationship	PRP-journalist relationship considered by the respondents as personal, organisational, or both.	13	13
Negative relationship	Respondents have negative feelings about relationship with their counterparts.	1	1
Positive relationship	Respondents have positive feelings about relationship with their counterparts.	8	8
Quotes	Interesting extracts that are expected to add value to the narratives in support of themes/findings.	13	50

* Number of interviewees; ** Number of extracts coded

APPENDIX D : OTHER RESEARCH OUTPUTS – ABSTRACT OF THE PAPER PRESENTED AT THE 2ND TOROA CONFERENCE 2020, 19-20 NOVEMBER, AUT UNIVERSITY

Contemporary Media Relations: Potential of Twitter in mediating Relationships between healthcare Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists

*Daljit Singh Bedi & Averill Gordon
School of Communication Studies, AUT University*

Abstract

Public relations professionals and journalists have a complex and ambiguous relationship, characterised by both conflict and cooperation. However, a changing media landscape raises questions about how the new communication technology developments are affecting this 'love-hate' public relations professional-journalist relationship. Current research reports that the increasing influence of Twitter is changing the contemporary communication practice of public relations professionals and journalists. The research also suggests ambiguity about the mediating role of Twitter between practitioners and journalists. Journalists are seen to use Twitter to contact their sources directly rather than using public relations practitioners, while public relations professionals liaise directly with their publics, bypassing the so-called 'media gatekeepers.'

It is argued that this emerging trend not only affects the process of newsgathering by journalists, but also the relationship with their public relations sources. This change in the relational dynamics can have profound consequences on media relations, particularly in the health care sector, as bypassing the process of fact checking can lead to uncertainty in the development of health news. However, there is limited research in how Twitter is influencing relationships between public relations professionals and journalists involved in health news in New Zealand. And hence the research question, 'How healthcare public relations professionals and journalists in New Zealand view the complexity of Twitter in the mediation of health news, as a part of the evolving practice of media relations.'

This study sits within the theoretical framework of social information processing theory and uses semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection, analysed through thematic content analysis. The data type is transcribed text from interviews of 12 media professionals based in New Zealand. Out of these, half are public relations practitioners involved in health care communication and half are health journalists. Semi-structured interviews are conducted in person or over Zoom. The interview questions focus on how the participants view contemporary media relations and how the role of Twitter could influence their professional outcomes.

The preliminary findings indicate that although the participants had personal Twitter accounts, they are ambiguous about the emerging value of Twitter in their professional work. Despite communication being more direct and accessible through Twitter, it is still not used as a mediating tool. Journalists use Twitter in a limited way for accessing information and tend not to rely on it for credible information. Furthermore, they do not see it as a media

relations activity where they can engage with public relations practitioners. Conversely, public relations practitioners use Twitter to communicate their messages directly to their publics as well as to journalists. However, they also view Twitter as a way to develop relationships with journalists.

The interim observations made during the process of data collection also reveal the volatility, uncertainty and complexity of the changing face of media relations. Similar to previous studies on the conflicting public relations professional-journalist relationship, these observations indicate that although the journalists continue to use the information from public relations professionals for developing their stories, they do not recognise that media relations, or their interaction with public relations professionals is important, unlike the public relations practitioners who view media relations as intrinsic to their profession.

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