Public Relations Practitioners Use of Social Media in Kuwait Organisations: Alternative Public Relations Model in Kuwait

Maryam Alsulaimi

Faculty of Computing Engineering and Media

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DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge, I confirm that the work in this thesis is my original work undertaken for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of CEM, De Montfort University. I confirm that no material of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or qualification at any other university.

ABSTRACT

The Internet has significantly altered the manner in which people communicate and this has also affected how businesses communicate with their various audiences. Public relations practitioners are among those that have been using digital media in order to achieve their communication goals. Focusing on social media, this research critically compares the use social media adopted by the public relations practitioners in Kuwaiti public institutions and private commercial institutions. The research aims to develop the public relations body of knowledge by conducting an empirical investigation of public relations practitioners' practice of social media in Kuwaiti organisations, which is a significantly understudied context.

This research employs the reputation, relationship management function and online cultivation strategy of public relations and social presence and media richness theories to develop the theoretical framework to examine the strategic communication in Kuwait. In order to investigate the role of social media in Public and private commercial institutions in Kuwait, social media semiotic analysis was used to investigate the public engagement undertaken by the organisations on social media (Instagram) between October 2017 and October 2018. This was supported by the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with public relations practitioners and managers across both private and public institutions in Kuwait.

The research findings contribute to develop historical narrative around digital media and society in Kuwait and build a culturally appropriate, alternative public relations practice model. The research aims to have a deeper impact on the public relations practitioners' practices and to contribute towards developing a social media framework that is culturally appropriate in Kuwait. The final chapter includes the discussion of an alternative model of PR for Kuwaiti practitioners, along with a discussion of practitioner and theoretical implications of the research.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The advent of the Internet has significantly changed the way people communicate and this has also impacted business communication with their various audiences (Mucan and Özeltürkay, 2014). New information technologies such as Web 2.0 to 4.0 services have introduced interactivity into the communication process and introduced distinctive elements into new media, including content creation and sharing, peer-to-peer broadcasting, and personal commentary (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Al-Kandari et al., 2019). Social media is a type of new media that has had significantly affected the manner under which businesses communicate with audiences, as it allows for the implementation of Internet-based technologies to communicate in an interactive way (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Mucan and Özeltürkay, 2014). The incorporation of social media into organisation's communication strategies has been discussed in the literature, with researchers talking about the potential of social media to make communication more symmetrical by fostering dialogue (Kent and Taylor, 2002; Duhé, 2015). More recently, researchers discussed both the benefits and limitations of using social media in organisational communication (Treem and Leonardi, 2012). There have been additional empirical examinations of the social media strategies in organisational communication (Macnamara and Zerfass, 2012; Wright and Hinson, 2017).

Whether in social media networks, Web 2.0, 3,0 or 4.0 services, applications or email, technologies continue to build in challenges to everyday work (Newman et al., 2016). Still, the capabilities of social media make it an attractive environment for users to transfer and receive information (Newman et al., 2016). Consequently, an increasing number of businesses are seeking to utilise social media in their communication, particularly in the context of audience engagement on social media, where the organisations too want to actively engage in the conversion (Chu and Kim, 2011).

Public relations practitioners have started to use digital media communication and the number of users are increasing yearly (Wright and

Hinson, 2017). Social media provides a new dynamic channel used by for public relations practitioners for communicating with audiences using both internal and external strategies (Wright and Hinson, 2017). Studies show that Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are used increasingly in the public relations industry (Al-Kandari et al., 2019). Additionally, public relations professionals are spending much of their time using digital media in their daily work (Moreno et al., 2015). New media has substantially transformed how public relations practitioners work as they now need to have a proficiency in digital tools so that they can provide their audiences with timely communication (Moreno et al., 2015).

Wang and Yang (2017) suggest that both profit and non-profit organisations are utilising social media in relating with the public. Social media enables an active dialogue between organisations and the audience. Komodromos (2016) believes that Web 2.0, Web 3.0 and social networks provide the opportunity for public relations practitioners to engage in dialogue. The role of public relations in Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 is in interacting with different audiences, including customers, stakeholders and suppliers, since they facilitate two-way interaction and give public relations practitioners the opportunity to use two-way model of engagement (Komodromos, 2016; Almeida, 2017). Public relations demands two-way communication with the audience, which means that public relations is taking on a new role in companies and institutions and this represents a huge transformation for the public relations profession (Komodromos, 2016; Almeida, 2017).

Social media has impacted public relations practice that demands greater transparency and clarity from public relations practitioners (Brown and Waddington, 2013; Wright and Hinson, 2017). For example, online reviews have been shown to influence organisations' reputation and a company with positive reviews from their customer may achieve better sales revenues (Komodromos, 2014; Chong et al., 2017). In recent years, public relations scholars have become increasingly interested in online public relations and Web 2.0, 3.0 and 4.0 technology and extensive public relations research explores how to use the new technologies for maximum benefit (Breakenridge, 2012; Duhé, 2015; Almeida, 2017). Wright and Hinson, 2017). However, there are few studies about the safety of using online public relations, while dialogic theories and ethics are still elusive subjects (Toledano and Avidar, 2016; Sebastião, Zulato and Santos, 2017). Additionally, there is no measure how to implement social media for relationship management on social media (Komodromos, 2014). Rather than studying the ethical impact or offering any critical analysis, most of the public relations research has focused on the relationship between public relations and the changes in new technology and only a few studies have examined ethical behaviour (see, Bowen, 2013; DiStaso and Botree, 2014).

Philip and Young (2009) argued that online public relations bring new challenges and ethical issues for public relations practitioners. One of these challenges is public relations practitioners becoming publishers, a fact which carries numerous ethical duties and responsibilities for practitioners (Philip and Young, 2009). Additionally, organisations can no longer hide from their customers and clients are able to give their feedback to show their dissatisfaction (Brown, 2009). Thus, Brown (2009) highlights that social networks make public relations practice more complex, compelling practitioners to act more ethically. A practitioner needs to have a wide knowledge of ethical thinking and training courses specifically for that position but unfortunately, public relations practitioners often lack that knowledge (Philip and Young, 2009). This may be because many organisations are reactive in their approach to ethics within the context of public relations, in contrast to the recommendations in public relations texts that argue that ethics should be dealt with in a proactive fashion (Lee and Cheng, 2012). This includes limited training in ethics as it specifically relates to working within the field of public relations (Lee and Cheng, 2012), even while the changing technological context has necessitated more training around ethics (Schauster and Neill, 2017). This research investigates the issue of training along with ethical codes, which is a critical issue for dealing with ethical practice in this area as well as how to use social media effectively.

As noted above, researchers have seldom reflected on how to understand the ethics of public relations and social media (Sebastião, Zulato and Santos, 2017). In 2015, Khajeheian and Mirahmadi conducted a study on traditional media, social media, and marketing communication in public relations used by banks. Their findings showed that TV and newspapers are still the primary tools used in the banks' public relations as well as in their marketing efforts. Many public relations practitioners depend on these mediums to deliver their messages to a targeted audience and despite its wide use, social media is not widely used in some businesses as part of their public relations communication (Onay and Ozsoz, 2013; Khajeheian and Mirahmadi, 2015). For example, Hernández-Murillo, Llobet and Fuentes (2010) studied the Internet adoption of transactional websites by banks in the US (United States) and found that adopting online banking enabled banks to grow faster in the competitive environment. American banking organisations use social media to build relations and to provide an interactive online environment supported by Web 2.0 channels (Klimis, 2010). However, social media in banking remains in the early stage and a there is limited empirical evidence about the practice. There is concern regarding information privacy and the loss of control over messages and data and these kinds of security breaches could have negative implications for a bank's reputation (Stone, 2009; Klimis, 2010). Jasser (2020) is concerned that the character of social media and the bank industry could be a risky strategy toward creating a relationship with the clients.

A study by Mogaji, Farinloye and Aririguzoh (2016) examined the factors affecting consumer attitudes about bank brands utilising data from social media. Their study shows that social media has the ability to help companies in building interactive relationships with the customers. The findings present some features that shape the customers' attitudes towards the brands of banks in the UK (United Kingdom) through social media. The customers who had experienced satisfaction in service shared their approval on social media. The customers who faced a dissatisfying experience with the bank expressed their anger about the bad service to which they were exposed. Facebook allowed customers to share their thoughts and feelings, toward the bank, in a way that they could not express over the phone or in face-to-face communication. This study also highlights the importance of present ethical commitment to the public.

1.2 RESEARCH CONTEXT

The context of this research is the State of Kuwait (hereafter Kuwait), which is a very small country (17,800 square kilometres) whose location is in the Arabian Peninsula, situated in the Arabian Gulf, in the north-eastern region of the gulf peninsula (Euromonitor International, 2020). It is located between the much larger countries of Saudi Arabia and Iraq in one part of one of the driest deserts worldwide (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). It also includes several small islands, and overall, it is strategically located in the northern corner of the Gulf and this allows it to benefit from being a transhipment point for oil supplies from other Gulf countries (BBC, 2018; Euromonitor International, 2020).

The capital is Kuwait City, which has the majority of the country's population and has been transformed into a modern city in which skyscrapers and mosques are intermingled in one of the most urbanised countries globally (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). While Kuwait is geographically small, it is the second wealthiest country in the region and among the wealthiest country in the world (Euromonitor International, 2020). Almost all of the country's wealth is derived from the extraction and processing of petroleum, contributing "92% of export revenues and 90% of government income in 2018" (CIA World Factbook, 2019, np)

Kuwait has a population of approximately 4.4 million as of 2019 and this continues to grow steadily, both because of immigration and an increase in the proportion of the population being made up of women of childbearing age (15 to 49 years years) (Euromonitor International, 2020). Arabic is the native and official language of Kuwait (BBC, 2018), with English being the majority second language in the country and other languages being widely spoken stemming from the existence of a large immigrant population in the country, including Hindi, Urdu, and Persian (Farsi) (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). Majority of the Kuwaiti citizens practice Islam as their main religion, and about 75% of the immigrants are also Muslim (Ochsenwald et al., 2019).

The government is conservative, and most Kuwaiti citizens are employed by the government, explaining the increasing spending on salaries even as government spending overall has been reduced (Euromonitor International, 2020). The conservative nature of the government is reflected in the society and is consistent with other Arab countries in the Gulf region, particularly because of the influence of Islamic teachings and despite the spread of aspects of Western culture within these countries (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012). This has supported stability within the country but has also resisted social progress (Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017).

Even though Kuwait has an open political system in comparison to other Arab countries and regulation that guarantees the freedom of the press, in reality there are limitations in regard to communication expression through the media (BBC, 2018; Kraidy, 2012). In terms of new media, nowadays Internet use is remarkably high in this country, covering almost the entire population (estimated at 98% in 2017) (BBC, 2018). In line with the general restriction on traditional media, Internet sites that are considered to be politically sensitive or promoting/providing immoral content are blocked in Kuwait (BBC, 2018). Still, social media is widespread among the Kuwaiti population, with approximately 95% of the population being on social media (3.9 million people) (Times Kuwait, 2019). Young people are both the largest proportion of Kuwaiti society and the highest concentration of Internet and social media users (CIA World Factbook, 2019). This means that both public and private sector organisations have an audience of Kuwaitis on their social media. However, these organisations must understand how the cultural (and religious) context of the country affects the way in which public relations is and should be practiced, consistent with the idea that public relations is grounded in culture (Almutairi, Al Sharoufi and Dashti, 2020; Curtin and Gaither, 2007).

Existing research indicates that a culturally-appropriate model of public relations has to take account of the purpose of communication in Kuwait and other Arab countries (Almutairi, Al Sharoufi and Dashti, 2020), and this understanding has been used to identify why public relations has been ineffective in these countries to date and how public relations in Arab countries can be most effective (Al-Kandari et al., 2019; Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017;

Grunig, 2017; Vujnovic and Kruckeber, 2005). However, there is limited research in this area and such as culturally appropriate model of public relations (Almutairi, Al Sharoufi and Dashti, 2020), and the impact of social media, that would be useful in the Kuwaiti context has not yet been develop, and this is the focus of this research.

1.3 RESEARCH RATIONALE

Social media can positively affect the work done by public relations practitioners, with studies showing the effectiveness of this practice. For example, social media enables practitioners' to engage with the audiences in dialogue if they choose so (Bonsón and Flores, 2012). The rapid growth of technologies and the Web introduced new challenges to public relations (Phillips and Young, 2009), and ethics in the new digital media and public relations practice remain underexplored (Toledano and Wolland, 2011). Social media is still new, and it presents an attractive environment for business to engage with their audiences (Yen et al., 2015). However, Valentini (2015) argues that the online environment is a fake environment and a place of unethical practices. Customers do want to shield themselves from persuasive online messages. L'Etang, Lugo-Ocando and Ahmad (2011) argue that the public relations profession faces many ethical dilemmas. There is a debate about the impact on public relations practitioners' ethics of new technology and studies are needed to clarify the role of public relations and to show the risks to public relations practice.

Consequently, there is a need to study public relations and social media use in various contexts. Among them are the contexts of public and private sectors. Businesses can be classified in diverse ways, and one of them is pointing out whether they belong to the public or private sector; that is, whether they are run by the government or individuals. The primary reason for investigating these two contexts is that they are different, which means that it makes sense to potentially contrast them and determine the ways in which public relations and social media use differ in them (Al-Jenaibi, 2014b; Al-Shohaib et al., 2010). In particular, the general aim of public and private sectors differs; the former exists to provide services to the population, and the latter's main goal is the making of profit, which affects every aspect of their functioning, including the use of public relations in them (Al-Shohaib et al., 2010). In general, the sector of public relations is an interesting parameter that is worth investigating to see how public relations function in different circumstances.

In addition to that, the differences between public and private sectors vary by country. As an example, Al-Shohaib et al. (2010) point out that in Saudi Arabia, the management and decision-making of public sector organsations is more authoritarian and traditional, which might affect the implementation of technology. In fact, the authors suggest that the adoption of the Internet has been more active in Saudi private sector as a result, which has consequences for the use of social media. Thus, the cultural specifics of the named contexts are crucial for social media use in public relations. There have been some attempts to investigate public relations in public and private sectors, but the research covered countries other than Kuwait (Al-Jenaibi, 2014b; Al-Shohaib et al., 2010). Which means that the context of Kuwait should also be considered.

There is a need to examine the practice of public relations in Kuwait. As a public relations practitioner in a public institution, the researcher is aware of the issues involved. The public relations department uses digital media in its daily work. However, the public relations practitioners have received no training or guidance in using the new communication technologies, nor any training in public relations using social media. Practitioners cannot define themselves, cannot answer questions and do not have the power to respond. There is no formal guidance on appropriate or acceptable behaviour on digital platforms. Commercial institutions like banks are using modern social media, however, it is unknown if their employees have the training needed to deal with online public relations challenges. These include identity issues, how to respond to rude customers and what to do with dissatisfied customers who criticise the bank online and damage its reputation.

This raises questions about what (if any) guidelines exist, what kind of social media and ethics training public relations practitioners have received, if the organisations have their public relations code of conduct and if the practitioners are aware of it. Additionally, it brings up the most pertinent question if the practitioners follow any code that reflects on their work. Any misconduct on social media risks reputation damage and can eventually lead to compromised customer trust.

On the positive side, there is an advantage in that the public relations practitioner will be monitoring and observing all the time; they cannot allow others to manipulate their customers (Brown, 2009). Toledano and Walland (2011) propose that the ethical issues facing public relations practitioners are about transparency. Concerns such as losing control of messages and time distribution are growing as social media expands. public relations practitioners may never have full control over all the information that flows into and out of the organisation. Hackers can attack an organisation’s social media accounts and write improper comments and messages that reflect on a bank’s reputation (Klimis, 2010). Thus, public relations practitioners using social media must be active all the time, creating dialogues and observing and controlling messages (Waddington, 2015). This study will ask whether public relations practitioners in banks are equipped to handle these challenges. Public relations practitioners have issues with what is right and what is wrong to do online. This was rare in offline media; however, these concerns have become daily issues with online media (Toledano and Walland, 2011).

There have been calls for more empirical research in the use of social media by public relations professionals in various regions worldwide because more knowledge is needed about how social media is used professionally in public relations globally (Moreno et al., 2015). In this research, the focus is on Kuwait, which is using social media in public relations in organisations in both public and private sectors and social media has been shown to provide a huge opportunity for both government and non-public sectors to improve their communication (Bashir and Aldaihani, 2017; Bashir, 2019).There is very limited up-to-date research on public relations in Kuwait and even more limited work looking specifically on the using social media as a tool in public relations (Bashir and Aldaihani, 2017; Al-Kandari et al., 2019; Bashir, 2019). This limited work does not offer a consensus on a comprehensive framework of the use of social media in public relations, how this affects relationship management, and whether it is undertaken ethically.

This research seeks to address this issue, contributing on the limited research on social media, public relations, and ethics in Kuwait which is a Middle Eastern country that has been using public relations to greater degree as a tool for organisational communication (Bashir and Aldaihani, 2017). This research will also be good for practitioners as it can provide recommendations as it relates to ethics, training and codes of conduct, which are important for public relations to be undertaken most effectively (Toledano and Wolland, 2011; Theaker and Yaxley, 2017).

1.4 AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research is to critically examine public relations practitioners' use of social media in the public and private sectors, seeking to investigate the role of social media as a part of the public relations toolkit within the specific context of Kuwait.

Objectives:

1. To investigate the way in which public and private commercial organisations in Kuwait engage with their audiences on social media.
2. To critically examine the impact of the Kuwaiti cultural context on public relations practitioner's use of social media; and
3. To critically examine social media use in public relations and whether this tool is used differently in government and private commercial public relations practice in Kuwait.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How and to what extent do public relations practitioners in Kuwait's public and private commercial sectors use social media?

2. Are there significant differences in the use of social media between public and private commercial sectors in Kuwait?
3. Does the cultural context of Kuwait affect public relations practitioner's use of social media and if so, how?
4. Does the use of social media by public relations practitioners affect their organisation-public relationship management strategies and if so, how?

1.6 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

Only a small number of studies has put under examination public relations practice and social media critically to find the challenges, issues and implications of social media for public relations practitioners and this is particularly the case in Kuwait and other Middle Eastern countries (Bashir and Aldaihani, 2017; Al-Kandari et al., 2019). There is also limited research into the ethics of using social media for public relations that can provide guidance for public relations practitioners. Without a theoretical framework, practitioners cannot know if they are significantly improving their practice (Sebastião, Zulato and Santos, 2017). This research contributes of knowledge being one of only a few published studies about the practice of public relations in Kuwait examining both the private and public sectors (see Bashir and Aldaihani, 2017; Bashir, 2019). Second, this research contributes to the knowledge about non-western practices of public relations and is particularly useful in the context of Arab countries, due to limited research on public relations (Bashir, 2019; Dhanesh and Duthler, 2019). Specifically, this research seeks to increase knowledge and understanding of non-western public relations, focusing on the role of social media in strategic public relations based on Kuwait, as a critical case study in the Arab world. This study seeks to explore the public relations use of social media as new trend and how it may have affected the public relations roles and practice in Kuwait, providing a rich and contextual understanding of how public relations is undertaken in the Arab world.

As previously highlighted, there are limited studies in Kuwait about public relations and social media. Thus, a key goal of this research is to expand the body of knowledge as it relates to public relations in Kuwait specifically and the Middle east more generally. This research also provides information about the applicability of various widely distributed public relations principles to the Kuwaiti context. This research therefore helps both researchers and practitioners to understand how public relations is understood and practiced and reveal factors underlying these practices, including cultural factors.

Third, in addition to contributing to this very limited literature pool, this research also compares public relations practice in Kuwait private and public institutions, and this offer comparative information about how social media and public relations operates across these contexts. As it relates to the private sector, the study focuses on the banking sector, which is an important economic sector in Kuwait (CIA World Factbook, 2019). This industry is made up of 23 banks, 11 of which are local to Kuwait and the remainder are global brands (Domat, 2020). They dominate the financial sector in Kuwait and performed well even in the face of declining oil prices, with Kuwait's Vision 2030 providing them with opportunities for growth as they serve as key partners in ongoing infrastructure investment projects (Domat, 2020).This research also focuses on public institutions in Kuwait as non-commercial institutions. The public sector in Kuwait is large as the government employs approximately 85% of Kuwaitis and spends over 18% of its GDP on wages (IMF, 2018). Overall, by undertaking empirical research on public relations in Kuwait, this study contributes to both research and practice that is not based on a Western context (Bashir, 2019). This research also contributes the literature by providing a benchmark for future researchers by providing data on social media and public relations in Kuwait specifically and the Middle East more generally.

Fourth, there is a preponderance of research that has used Facebook and Twitter for examining the use of social media in public relations and this research contributes to the literature by using Instagram as a social media of focus, which is also more contextually important since Instagram is the favourite social media in Kuwait (Al-Kandari et al., 2019). Instagram is also the social media platform that young people spend the most time on, indicating the importance of this platform for the future (Alhabash and Ma, 2017). Finally, the study contributes to the literature by providing an alternative model of public relations in Kuwait using social media for both private and public organisations. The research findings aim to have a deeper impact on the public relations practitioners' practices and to contribute towards developing a social media model that is culturally appropriate in Kuwait.

1.7 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

This research takes a novel approach in examining the practice of public relations, providing an understanding of it from a non-western perspective in order to develop a culturally appropriate model of public relations in Kuwait. Digital media has hugely contributed to the overall communication ecosystem at a global level. Previous research suggests that the use of digital media is affected by cultural influences (Ebrahim, 2017). This thesis attempts to investigate those influences on the practice of public relations from the Kuwaiti perspective.

1.8 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

The rest of the dissertation has seven chapters. Chapter 2 presents a detailed discussion of the Kuwaiti context to provide the background information needed to understand the current situation in the country, especially as it relates to digital culture, social media, and public relations. Chapter 3 contains the Literature Review, which reviews the academic literature on models of public relations, the impact of culture on public relations, and the practice of public relations in Arab countries, as well as social media and how it interacts with public relations practice. This chapter also presents the Theoretical Framework from which five propositions are developed to guide the empirical portion of the research. Chapter 4 is the Research Design and Methodology by outlining in detail and justifying the research methodology that supports the empirical investigation of this research issue. Chapter 5 presents the results from the semiotic analysis of the social media data and Chapter 6 presents the results from the thematic analysis of the interviews. Chapter 7 presents the Discussion of both sets of results and Chapter 8 ends the dissertation by presenting the Conclusions, including a discussion of public relations as it relates to Kuwaiti practitioners and a discussion of implications for research and practice.

CHAPTER 2: THE KUWAITI CONTEXT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a discussion of the State of Kuwait so as to provide the background information needed to understand the current situation in the country, especially as it relates to digital culture, social media, and public relations. This is an important chapter in this research based on the understanding that cultural and historical context affect public relations practice and thus it is necessary to contextualise Kuwaiti public relations practice in order to study it (Almutairi, Al Sharoufi and Dashti, 2020). The first part of the chapter focuses on providing information of about Kuwait's geography, language, religion, economic and political situation, and culture, while the second part of the chapter focuses on digital culture, social media, and public relations within Kuwait, specifically outlining how Kuwait's socio-cultural background affects these issues.

In this chapter, information to support the discussion is drawn from literature that discusses Kuwait specifically as well as other Arab countries such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia. This is supported by Al-Kandari and Gaither (2011), who examined public relations within the Arab 'culture' and argued that this negates having to examine these issues geographically. In this research, the term Arab is used to include "black and white, Christian and Muslim, those living in the Middle East and diaspora who share linguistic, traditional, religious and cultural Arab influences (Al-Kandari and Gaither, 2011). Still, there is a focus on Muslim Arabs within this research since this is the majority religion within Kuwait, as discussed below (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). Additionally, the extent to which the articles used draw on data from Kuwait or Arab countries as a whole is noted throughout the chapter.

2.2 ABOUT KUWAIT

As noted in the Introduction, Kuwait is a very small country in the Arabian Peninsula surrounded by much larger countries (Iraq and Saudi Arabia) (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). Kuwait has a population of approximately 4.4 million as of 2019 and Kuwaiti life expectancy is high (females 77 years, males 75 years)

CIA World Factbook, 2019; Euromonitor International, 2020). The population is projected to reach 5.1 million by 2030 although fertility has been decreasing because the number of women of childbearing age (15 to 49 years years) has increased significantly (Euromonitor International, 2020). This is linked to the fact that Kuwait's population is young, as about a quarter are under the age of 15, and about 40% of the population is under the age of 25 (CIA World Factbook, 2019; Ochsenwald et al., 2019). Still, the median age was 36.8 years in 2019, which is higher than the average median age in the Gulf region (Euromonitor International, 2020).

Like other Gulf States, a large proportion of Kuwait's population is made up of foreigners, and even though the governments in the region have been seeking to decrease the number of foreign workers, Kuwaitis are still a minority in the country, making up only about one-third of the population (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). In contrast, expatriates make up about two-thirds of the population in Kuwait, coming primarily from South and Southeast Asia and other Arab states (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). Immigration continues to be a highly volatile and political issue in the region, and has fluctuated in Kuwait over the last decade, although it is projected that about 20,000 immigrants will settle in the country each year over the medium term (Euromonitor International, 2020). According to Bhatt (2020), around 70% of Kuwait's population constitutes expatriates, either working there or seeking citizenship through legal means or marriage. These immigrants do not have the economic or political rights that citizens have, and these rights are reserved for Kuwaiti that can prove Kuwaiti ancestry dating before 1920 (Ochsenwald et al., 2019).

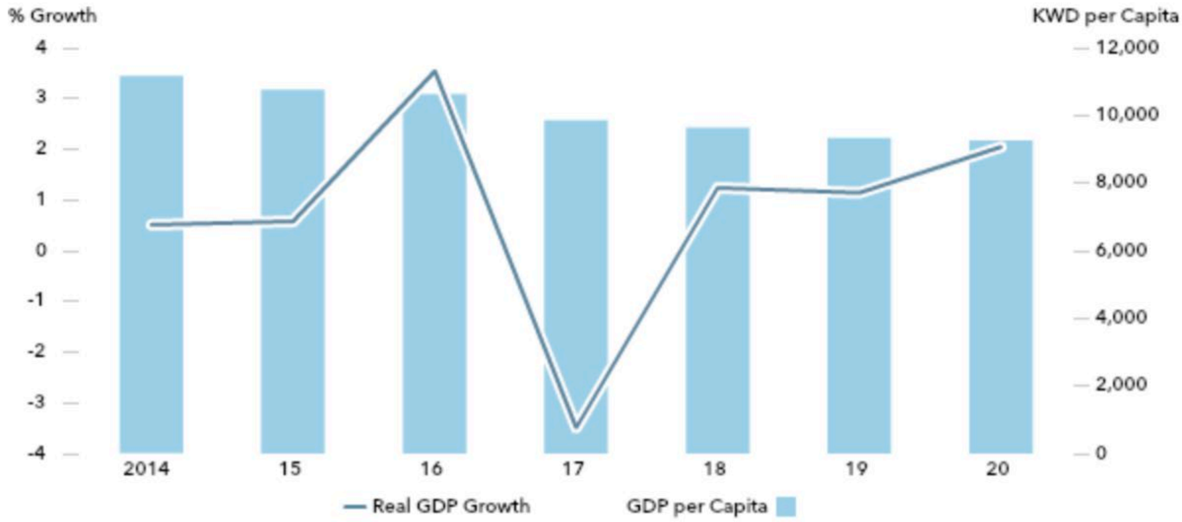
Arabic is the native and official language of Kuwait (BBC, 2018), and specifically, Kuwaitis speak a dialect of Gulf Arabic although school children learn Modern Standard Arabic (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). Public schools in Kuwait also teach English, which is the majority second language in the country, although other languages are also widely spoken due to the significant immigrant population, including Hindi, Urdu, and Persian (Farsi) (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). In terms of religion, Kuwaiti citizens are almost totally Muslims (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). Of these Muslims, most are Sunni Muslims while approximately a third are Shīiee Muslims (BBC, 2018). For the total population (including immigrants), it is estimated that about 75% of the population is Muslim and there is also a significant minority of Christians (about 18%) and others religious groups like Hindus (CIA World Factbook, 2019).

2.3 KUWAIT'S ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION

While Kuwait is geographically small, it is a wealthy country as a result of its large oil and reserves natural gas, accounting for approximately a tenth of the proven oil reserves globally (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). It is among the wealthiest in the region and has one of the highest per capita disposable incomes globally at approximately US$18,259 (KWD5,544) in 2019, as shown in Figure 1(Euromonitor International, 2020). This is expected to increase by approximately 5% in 2020 and by an average annual rate of 2.6% from 2020 to 2030 (Euromonitor International, 2020). Almost all of the country's wealth is derived directly or indirectly from the extraction and processing of petroleum, which has led to its dramatic economic development since the 1970s when oil began being exploited (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). In 2018, petroleum and petroleum-derived products contribute "92% of export revenues and 90% of government income" (CIA World Factbook, 2019, np), making it one of the least diversified in the entire Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) region in spite of the Kuwaiti government seeking to diversify away from this industry (Euromonitor International, 2020).

Figure 1: Kuwait's' Real GDP Growth and Per Capita GDP, 2014-2020

(Euromonitor International, 2020, p1)



The other economic sectors including manufacturing (7.3% of GDP), agriculture, retail, and tourism still account for a limited portion of the economy (Euromonitor International, 2020). Nonetheless, the need for diversification was underscored by the significant fall in oil prices in 2014 that caused oil revenues and thus, Kuwaiti GDP, to fall sharply (BBC, 2018). This led to Kuwait's first budget deficit in a decade in 2015 that grew to 16.5% of GDP in 2016 and spurred the government to reduce its high subsidies to consumers for water, electricity, and fuel (CIA World Factbook, 2019). However, this has led to push back from the public, and overall efforts to reform the economy have seen limited success with the government continuing to account for 75% of GDP (Euromonitor International, 2020). This has also been attributed to the rising political tensions among major political factions that are akin to political parties in the National Assembly (Parliament) (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). It should be noted however, that there are no political parties in Kuwait by law (Ochsenwald et al., 2019).

Kuwait has only one legislative body (the National Assembly) within its constitutional monarchy and it is these legislators that make up the government (Euromonitor International, 2020) and have a significant role in Kuwaiti decision-making (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012). The most recently installed Emir is Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah (Aljazeera, 2020), and the Cabinet is controlled by the ruling family (Al-Sabah), who have supported Kuwait's pro-Western stance and enabled cautious reform (BBC, 2018). However, there are calls for more radical reforms from ‘opposition’ members in the Assembly (Euromonitor International, 2020). Still, Kuwait continues to be an “oasis” of peace and safety within the Middle East, which is generally turbulent (Ochsenwald et al., 2019).

The government is generally conservative and accounts for the majority of the GDP. It provides significant material benefits for Kuwaiti citizens by way of subsidies, employment, and so on (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). In fact, the vast majority of Kuwaitis are employed by the government (approximately 74% of citizens), a lot of them within education but only a limited number within the oil industry (CIA World Factbook, 2019). For this reason, approximately a third of the Kuwaiti government’s revenues are spent on salaries; this has been the case over the last several decades, as the government became the biggest employer and oil reserves were commercially developed and in fact became the major income earner (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). Finally, the conservative nature of the government and the society has supported stability within the country but has also resisted social progress. An illustrative example is women’s suffrage, which was resisted for many years and it was only in 1999 that the Emir decreed that Kuwaiti women should be able to vote and stand for election (Euromonitor International, 2020). Still, it was only in 2005 women got the right to vote and in 2006 were actually able to vote in municipal and parliamentary elections as a result of opposition from religious and cultural actors (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012).

2.4 KUWAITI CULTURE

2.4.1 Cultural and Emotional Intelligence in Kuwaiti Society

In general terms, Kuwait is characterised as a culturally conservative country, consistent with other Arab countries in the Gulf region, particularly because of the influence of Islamic teachings and despite the spread of aspects of Western culture within these countries (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012). According to Ochsenwald et al. (2019), Islamic fundamentalism re-emerged in the Middle East in the 1970s and 1980s and led to a re-focus on traditional conservative customs. For example, the increasing number of women currently wearing the ḥijāb (or veil), as compared to previous decades women are now being called on to dress more demurely in public (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). This is supported by research indicating that Kuwaiti culture continues to embrace traditionalism and resist change (Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017). The permeation of the Arab-Islamic heritage on daily life in Kuwait has a particular impact on females as they generally have fewer freedoms than males, although the conservative culture affects how both men and women operate within the society (Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017).

In terms of cultural awareness, acceptance, and general levels of CQ, Sharif (2012) explains Kuwait has higher-than-average scores, explained in part by the high number of migrants working and living in the country. According to Bhatt (2020), CQ plays an important part in marketing, brand image, and connecting to various cultural groups in Kuwait because of the fact that the country's population has a significant portion of foreign labourers, with the majority coming from India and the Philippines. These people play an important part in domestic consumption of goods and services, making domestic brands reliant on CQ in order to make their efforts more attractive in comparison to others (Bhatt, 2020). The researcher points out the major differences between Kuwaiti, Indian, and Filipino cultures, especially considering their religious and societal hierarchies (Bhatt, 2020). Aldaihani and Ali (2019) concur with Bhatt's (2020) conclusions and highlight the importance of using CQ and EQ to bridge the gap between different cultural groups when marketing one's services to them and engaging in relationship-building, as exemplified by Islamic Banking in Kuwait. This service is based on Islamic principles, which may not appeal to the entirety of the country's population due to differences in religious confessionalism (Aldaihani and Ali, 2019). At the same time, Aldaihani and Ali (2019) point out that successful public relations efforts involve finding common ground and transcending differences, using similarities to generate a positive emotional response from Kuwaiti customers.

In terms of EQ, Kuwaiti society is classified as having high levels of emotional expression, relatively low (compared to the rest of the world) emotional control and increased cultural acceptance of other traditions and cultures (Sharif, 2012). The high levels of emotional expression in this country are explained by the natural character of the people as well as that of countries adjacent to it, with other nations in the GCC as well as the greater Middle Eastern sphere of influence expressing similar qualities (Sharif, 2012). These findings are, in part, supported by Muhammad (2014), who found similarities in emotional behaviour between Kuwait, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, while noting that emotional control in Kuwait is somewhat higher than in the other two, with Egyptians showing the least emotional restraint.

Bagnied et al.'s (2016) findings regarding the importance of EQ in managing social groups, engaging in public relations, and effective content management are, in part, supported by Muhammad (2014), who found that Kuwaiti audiences, as well as those in adjacent Arab countries (such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt) have a higher emotional response to what they perceive as organisational support. To continue the subject of utilisation of EQ and CQ by Kuwaiti businesses and companies when managing customer groups and generating brand loyalty, the demands for better catering, emotional leadership, and relationship-building are found in the areas where competition is high, and standards of service are somewhat homogenised. Al-Wugayan (2019) highlights the importance of such in the Kuwaiti banking industry as a whole. Due to a large presence of domestic and foreign banks in the region to provide domestic and international transactions, the perceptions of service from one organisation to another have become blurred (Al-Wugayan, 2019). In such a situation, where changing providers is easy and customers have significant pull, creating brand loyalty and a strong sense of emotional connection to the company and brand is essential for survival (Al-Wugayan, 2019). The researcher indicates high demand for public relations managers with high levels of both EQ and CQ in order to better address these concerns (Al-Wugayan, 2019). These findings share many similarities with Aldaihani and Ali (2019), who indicated that the emphasis on cultural transcendence and emotional involvement came as a means of competing in a strategically important region.

Finally, due to the heterogeneity that is present in Kuwait, failing to integrate EQ and CQ into public relations practice can have significant negative impact on the relationship between organisations and the multicultural audiences. As such, perceptions of inauthentic content among consumers in Kuwait have resulted in grave consequences for organisations (Leonidou et al., 2019).

2.4.2 Kuwait's Communication Culture

Like other Arabic cultures, Kuwait has a high-context communication culture (Aladwani, 2013) and therefore their communication behaviours are less direct in addressing the topic of dialogue (Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008). Indeed, De Los Santos et al. (2007, p361) note that "[t]he Arabic language is one of the richest languages in both context and code… Arabs are more conscious of their language than any people in the world." In high-context cultures like Kuwait, it is expected that small and interrelated groups to be formed, since groups can actually rely on each other for support, while it may be difficult to gain support and assistance out of these groups (Croucher et al., 2012). The reason for this is that these cultures are characterised by a greater collective orientation (Almutairi, Al Sharoufi and Dashti, 2020). Indeed, research indicates that members of high-context cultures are more likely to be socially oriented, place greater emphasis in avoiding confrontation and find it harder to deal with new situations (Kim, Pan and Park, 1998).

2.4.3 Kuwait's Cultural Values

Beyond communication, Kuwait's culture can be further analysed by using Hofstede's (1980) cultural variables, which is one of the most influential models of cultural differences among countries. Data is available for Kuwait on Hofstede's (1980) original (and core) four dimensions used to characterise cultural differences between countries: (1) power distance, (2) individualism/collectivism, (3) masculinity/femininity, and (4) uncertainty avoidance. Kuwait's culture as characterised by these dimensions are presented in Figure 2. Each dimension is discussed briefly below.

First, power distance refers to “the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 2011, p9). Kuwait has been classified as high-power distance based on its score on this dimension, which is above the global average (Hofstede Insights, 2019). In high power distance countries, the population accepts that there is a hierarchy in society that is manifested in many different areas, including school, work, and home, and everyone has a place in the hierarchy without the need for specific legitimisation or justification of this position (Hofstede, 2011). This includes respect for the elderly and a high value placed on authority figures such as teachers and government officials (Chun et al., 2015), seen in the general prevalence of autocratic governments based on co-optation as seen in Kuwait (Hofstede, 2011).

Second, individualism/collectivism refers to the degree that interdependence is maintained among a country’s members (Hofstede, 2001) and in general refers to the extent to which people function as groups (Hofstede, 2011). With a score of 25, Kuwait is classified as a collectivistic society, which means that “birth onwards [people] are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) that continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty, and oppose other in-groups” (Hofstede, 2011, p11). This is seen in Arab societies like Kuwait, where success is determined by what individuals achieve for the family, rather than being judged based on individual accomplishments (Kalliny et al., 2011). In line with this, Feghali (1997) reported that social life in Arab countries relies on mutual interdependence and collectivism, and Chun et al. (2015) highlight the close long-term commitment to the group in Arab countries, the importance of loyalty, and the value placed on taking responsibility for in-group members.

Figure 2 : Kuwait’s’ Ranking on Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions

(Hofstede Insights, 2019, np)

Similarly, Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan (2017) note that collectivism has strong influence on those in the Kuwaiti society and Almutairi, Al Sharoufi and Dashti (2020, p. 5) argue that "members of Kuwaiti society are primarily concerned with the needs of the groups to which they belong, and they consequently tend to view 'self' as entrenched in group relationships." The level of collectivism in the society affects the individual's communication style, as identified in the section above, specifically "the interpretation of the message in a collectivist society is often dependent on the context such as tone of voice and body language" (De Los Santos et al., 2007, p361). Thus, Kuwait's collectivist orientation is seen in the high-context communication culture, as well as in other ways (Aladwani, 2013).

This is also related to the fact that Kuwait has a paternalistic culture in which those in authority take on an obligation to provide protection to the public (as subordinates), expecting deference and loyalty in return (Jackson, 2016; Pellegrini and Scandura, 2008). This is supported by discussion in Section 3.3 regarding the welfare state in Kuwait in which the government is obligated to provide a wide range of benefits to citizens including employment (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). The state is overseen by the 'father of the people' (the Emir) in the same way that the household is overseen by the father or older male kin (Almutairi, Al Sharoufi and Dashti, 2020; Onley and Khalaf, 2006). This kind of obligatory relationship, described by Aycan (2006, p453) as the "duality between control and care," is a feature of Hofstede's collectivism dimension of culture (Jackson, 2016). The type of unequal relationship present in a paternalistic culture is also something that would be acceptable in a high-power distance culture such as Kuwait, compared to low power distance countries (Aycan, 2006; Jackson, 2016).

Third, masculinity/femininity can be defined simply as "the distribution of values between the genders," with 'assertive' values being classified as masculine and 'caring' values being classified as feminine (Hofstede, 2011, p12). With a score of 40, Kuwait is classified as a relatively feminine society, which is one in which the focus is on' working to live' (rather than 'living to work') and high quality of life (Hofstede, 2001). This is seen clearly in the employment of Kuwaitis by the state at high incomes regardless of skill level (Shah, 2012) and the subsidisation of many costs by the state as previously discussed. Kuwaiti citizens are often unwilling to take jobs that they see as below them (largely in the private sector), further supporting the focus on quality of life in this country (Shah, 2012). Additionally, the feminine value of caring for people is also supported by the collectivist in-group culture that emphasises support of others, including the government support for Kuwaiti citizens (Chun et al., 2015). In the case of Kuwait and other Arab countries, however, there is more discussion needed in relation to this dimension, since there are also elements of a more masculine culture in which (1) the traditional female gender roles of taking care of the house and family are supported by both culture and policy (Chun et al., 2015), (2) few women are in elected positions, and (3) there are moralistic attitudes about sex and sexuality (Hofstede, 2011).

Finally, uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which a society "programmes its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations" (Hofstede, 2011, p10). With a score of 80, Kuwait is classified as high uncertainty avoidance, and this is seen in the attempts in this country "to minimise the possibility of such [novel and unknown] situations by strict behavioural codes, laws and rules, disapproval of deviant opinions, and a belief in absolute Truth" (Hofstede, 2011, p10). Thus, people in these countries generally prefer strict laws, safety, and certainty by way of strict religious beliefs

(Lamoreaux and Morling, 2012). This is also seen in greater intolerance for unorthodox or deviant beliefs, ideas, and behaviour, and change and innovation is often resisted (Hofstede, 2001; Chun et al., 2015).

2.4.4 Religion's Impact on Culture in Kuwait

Finally, another important way to understand the cultural values of Kuwait is to examine these values through the lens of religion. As highlighted above, not all Kuwaitis are Muslim, however, they are the majority of the population and therefore researchers have often focused on Muslim Kuwaitis (see, for example, Al-Kandari and Gaither, 2011). The way in which religion underpins the values identified above was also highlighted in the results from research by Gaither and Al-Kandari (2014), in which they analysed the websites of the three largest Islamic banks in Kuwait and isolate six Islamic value orientations: respect for religious authority, affinity with the past, attachment to the idea of 'eternal life,' fatalism, communal kinship, and spirituality, and idealism. This shows that Islam is an example of a religion that focuses on ultimate truths and grand theories, which is linked to higher levels of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2011).

2.5 DIGITAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN KUWAIT

Kuwait has one of the most open political systems in the region and this reflected in the "'feisty' press and robust legislature" (Kraidy, 2012, p.178). However, there are limits on the freedom of the media regardless of the guarantee in the constitution that the press has its freedom (BBC, 2018). There are many restrictions on the media, and particularly criticism of the emir and the government and any content that is deemed to be insulting Islam is criminalised (BBC, 2018; Ochsenwald et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the Kuwaiti media is still among the freest in the region, in line with the more open political system in which Kuwaiti citizens have a greater number of civil and political rights and freedoms than other those in other Middle Eastern countries (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012; Kraidy, 2012). There are both state-supported and private media houses in Kuwait and the Ministry of Information is in charge of both the radio and television stations run by the government (Ochsenwald et al., 2019).

In terms of new media, nowadays the use of the Internet is very high in Kuwait, covering almost the entire population (estimated at 98% in 2017) (BBC, 2018). As a result, Kuwait is now one of the countries with the most consumers of digital media (Ebrahim, 2017). In line with the general restriction on traditional media, Internet sites that are deemed to be politically sensitive or promoting/providing immoral content are blocked in Kuwait (BBC, 2018). Social media is particularly widespread among the population, with approximately 95% of the population being on social media (3.9 million people) (Times Kuwait, 2019). These social media users use their mobile a lot, which is consistent with the high subscription to mobile networks in the country (176%) (Times Kuwait, 2019). Importantly, the influence of Kuwait socio-cultural factors is apparent in the breakdown of how the social media sites are used, with men dominating the use of Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram (62%-75%) and only Snapchat (among the largest social networking sites) having a majority of female users (55%) (Times Kuwait, 2019).

As previously highlighted, young people are the largest part of Kuwaiti society and make up the biggest block of Internet users, particularly as it relates to the use of social media (CIA World Factbook, 2019). The spread of social media has been argued to be playing an important role in allowing Kuwaitis to interact in ways they have not been able to previously (Wheeler, 2003) and moulding their economic, social, and political views outside of the traditional media (Times Kuwait, 2019). In line with this, it has been argued that the online practices of young people in Kuwait will possibly encourage the most substantial transformations in this society (Wheeler, 2003), consistent with the impact of social media in some other Middle Eastern countries (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). This is because new media has allowed for greater fragmentation of political and religious authority in these countries, as well as more contest to this authority (Kavakci and Kraeplin, 2017), providing an avenue for information and opinions to be distributed that would not have been published in official media (whether state or private) (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013; AlSayyad and Guvenc, 2015).

One way in which the Internet and social media has affected Kuwaiti society is that it allows for gender lines to be transgressed in a way that they would not otherwise be within the Kuwaiti society where gender roles (and women's 'place' in particular) are strictly enforced (Wheeler, 2003; Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017). The majority of Kuwaiti young people live segregated lives, with men and women attending different schools based on gender or at least being separated within classrooms at university (AlMatrouk, 2016). The Internet now allows them to communicate across gender lines much more significantly and in this way, undermines the traditional conservative social rituals in Kuwaiti society and facilitate greater autonomy among the population in this area and other areas (Wheeler, 2003). However, this does not mean that social media is a free-for-all in Kuwait or other Arab countries as the cultural and religious values in the society are also reflected online (Wheeler, 2003). This is seen, for example, in the back and forth between needing to uphold traditional Arab and Muslim culture while participating in the more open, global online culture (Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017).

2.6 CULTURE, RELIGION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS IN KUWAIT

Religion and culture are very important in determining how public relations is and should be practiced within Kuwait and other Arab cultures (Almutairi and Kruckeberg, 2019; Alsaqer and Al Hashimi, 2019), consistent with the idea that public relations is grounded in culture (Curtin and Gaither, 2007). First, research indicates that communication is based on relationship in Arab countries (Zaharna, 1995; Wang, 2006), which can be linked to the high-context communication in these cultures and the collectivist culture that fosters strong relationships (Hofstede, 2011). Additionally, Almutairi, Al Sharoufi and Dashti (2020) argues that a paternalistic culture "emphasis[es] power, collective good, obedience and harmony" and all of this affects communication and social relations in the country. This is consistent with earlier research from Ayish (1998) indicating that paternalism affects communication within the Arab context, which is seen in greater weight being given to information from authority figures and is based on an assumption of some level of naivety on the part of the receiver in terms of their ability to make decisions based on the information availability.

As it relates to public relation, Vujnovic and Kruckeberg (2005) argue that any Arab model of public relations must acknowledge the fact that communication in these societies is a social ritual and is not primarily a means of transmitting information, which is again a difference between high- and low-context countries (Hall, 1976; Okabe, 1983). From this perspective, public relations in Arab countries is most effective when it focuses on interpersonal communication and relationship-building rather than focusing on persuasion (Vujnovic and Kruckeber, 2005), which may be a partial explanation for the ineffectiveness of public relations in these countries since they tend to use press agentry and public information models that focus on persuasion and manipulation (Grunig, 2017).

From the communication perspective, Men and Tsai (2012) found that high-context countries will put more emphasis on product-related educational or entertaining information in line with their more indirect communication styles, while low-context countries are more likely to use ‘hard sell’ approaches based on direct sales information in line with their direct communication styles. In the online space, Würtz (2005) discovered that websites in high-context cultures are more likely to use imagery for communication rather than text, and this imagery is more likely to be linked to values characteristic of high-context/collectivist cultures, such as family values. He also found that high-context cultures are more likely to depict the product being sold being used by individuals in their images, in contrast to low-context cultures in which the images are more likely to portray individual’s lifestyles and may or may not directly emphasise the use of the product being sold (Würtz, 2005).

Second, research from Gaither and Al-Kandari (2014) in which they identified six value orientations from examining the websites of three Kuwait banks, allowed them to draw implications for public relations (specifically aimed at Muslims) in this country. Consistent with Vujnovic and Kruckeberg (2005), they argue that Arab countries’ authority orientation supports the adoption of a model that focuses on personal influence, as well as using their connection with religious figures within public relations. This would also be supported by their communal kinship orientation and collectivist orientation, which emphasises strong kinship ties and indicates that strong and direct personal communication is likely to be the best way for public relations professionals to be effective within this context (Gaither and Al-Kandari, 2014). Further, Kuwaitis' affinity with the past supports resistance to change and innovation (in line with their uncertainty avoidance), which means that public relations should be cautious when proposing any behavioural and attitudinal changes (Gaither and Al-Kandari, 2014).

Third, the type of public relations practiced in a country is likely to be linked to culture as both the public relations practices and the country's culture have been shown to be linked to ethics/perceived level of corruption. As discussed in Sections 2.3 and 2.8, honest and open communication is emphasised in the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig, 2017) and it is only this model of public relations practice that offers the most effective strategy for the development of strong, positive relationships between the organisation and customers/the public (Seltzer and Zhang, 2010). For this reason, Fawkes (2015) argued that it is almost impossible to practice ethics in the asymmetrical models of public relations. Thus, to the extent that Arab cultures use press agentry and public information models that focus on persuasion and manipulation, then it is unlikely that high levels of ethics are being practiced by PR professionals (Grunig, 2017). Additionally, research indicates that cultural factors are connected to level of perceived corruption in a country, with high power distance, collectivism, masculinity, and high uncertainty avoidance being linked to higher levels of perceived corruption (Yeganeh, 2014). This configuration of value orientations has been shown to be linked to high perceived corruption in a country, no matter the level of socio-economic development in the country (Yeganeh, 2014). As highlighted in Section 3.4, Kuwait is high in power distance and uncertainty avoidance, and has a collectivist culture although it has a feminine culture based on Hofstede's (2011) classification. Still, as highlighted above, Kuwaiti culture and politics supports some aspects of a masculine dimension (Chun et al., 2015) and thus can be argued to have the full configuration of value orientations that is linked to high perceived corruption.

This is also supported by later research supporting the configurational approach to understanding corruption in which Stevens (2016) examined how a configuration of value orientations independent with democratic institutions and socio-economic contexts to determine the level of perceived corruption in a country. Consistent with Yeganeh's (2014) results, Stevens (2016) found that a traditional orientation, in which people accept traditional, hierarchical forms of authority, is linked to high perceived corruption when combined with low levels of democracy, low human development, and high levels of inequality in income. As highlighted in Section 3.4, Kuwaiti culture continues to embrace traditionalism (Chun et al., 2015; Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017) and the high-power distance means that Kuwait can be classified as having a traditional value orientation. This value orientation is linked to high perceived corruption since it is likely that this population to defer to the demands of those that are higher in the social hierarchy, even if these demands are not justified (Stevens, 2016).

However, an important outcome of this research is that it is clear that none of these factors work in isolation and having a traditional value orientation alone will not determine the level of perceived corruption of the country (Stevens, 2016). With Kuwait, the data indicates that it has the configurations of value orientations that are linked to high perceived corruption, along with relatively low levels of democracy and low relatively income inequality, which are also linked to high perceived corruption (Yeganeh, 2014; Stevens, 2016). This indicates that Kuwait is likely to have high levels of perceived corruption, which is consistent with information specifically on corruption, such as Transparency International's (2019) report showing Kuwait's corruption perceptions score is 41 out of 100 and the country is ranked 78 out of 180 countries observed. This may have implications for how public relations is practiced within Kuwait and would provide further support for the idea that press agentry and public information models would be used in Kuwait, since these are less ethical models of public relations.

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented background information on the Kuwaiti context, providing information on the country's geography, language, religion, economic and political situation, and culture. This was followed by a discussion of digital culture, social media, EQ and CQ specifically in Kuwait and the impact of culture and religion on public relations within this country. This is combined with the discussion of public relations and social media in the previous chapter to develop the theoretical framework of the research discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into two main sections laying out the theoretical framework for this research. The first section of this chapter discusses public relations, including critical discussions on models of public relations, the impact of culture on public relations, and the practice of public relations in Arab countries. The second section examines literatures on social media, and its use in public relations, considering both western and non-western perspectives. Within these sections, the theoretical framework is presented that guides the research, with five propositions presented related to each research question based on the literature from Chapters 2 and 3.

3.2 DEFINING PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations is an important aspect of the communicative infrastructure of modern organisations, so public relations practitioners as masters of this applied communication discipline, occupy a prime position in fostering a shared understanding between the organisation and the public, and gaining and maintaining the latter’s support. To that end, public relations practitioners aim at preserving the organisation’s positive image and reputation by highlighting the bright side of its activities and the beneficial services that it provides to the community. Thus, the main purpose of public relations is effectively achieved when organisations influence public opinion and behaviour, through communication and active interaction (Mikáčová and Gavlaková, 2014).

Public relations at a global context were a result of globalisation and the internationalisation of businesses, which called for a way that would allow organisations to reach out to other organisations and individuals in different countries and establish mutually beneficial relations international public relations. Alongside with globalisation, technological changes followed, which gave the audience freedom of expression and the impact of public opinion. The success achieved enabled the dissemination of information and ideas, gave the opportunity for people to communicate with each other, and affect the public opinion substantially across the globe (Mikáčová and Gavlaková, 2014). However, differences in law, language and culture between these transnational relations have resulted in the creation of obstacles that require the use of an effective international public relations strategy in order to ensure that they are successfully overcome. As a result of this requirement for effective management of public relations, the field has blossomed over the last forty years with the establishment of public relations agencies and organisations in many different countries globally (Curtin and Gaither, 2007). Due to diverse cultural influences affecting institutional structures, often influenced by the legal and socio-political environment of each country, it can be argued that varying forms of public relations have emerged. Indeed, according to Curtin and Gaither (2007, p13) "the field is fraught with inconsistency and varied international views of its purpose and practice." As a result, despite the recent phenomenal growth of public relations practice, there is still no single definition of public relations.

In fact, since 1900, till today, there is not a uniform definition of public relations in addition to being difficult to define due to the challenges, scholarly opinion on the matter keeps changing over the years. Ivy Lee defined it as a "two-way street", which means that companies can communicate with their preferred clients and listen to them through communication professionals (Breakenridge, 2012). Edward Bernays sees public relations as a function of management that charts public attitude, defines the various stakeholders, and produces an interest in an organisation, which allows a programme of action to be developed and undertaken to gain understanding from and acceptance of the public (Theaker, 2016b). In 1976, Rax Harlow developed the following public relations definition:

> *"public relations is a distinctive management function, which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and corporation between an organisation and its public; involves the management problems or issues; helps management to refine an organisation's management communication behaviour" (cited in Tench and Yoemans, 2009).*

Later, Grunig and Hunt (1984, p25) defined public relations as the "practice of managing the spread of information between an individual or an organisation (such as a business, government agency, or a non-profit organisation) and the public.” Several later studies, in 2003, suggest that public relations influences conduct to accomplish target goals through successful management of the relationships and interactions (Gregory, 2011). In the UK, Cornelissen’s (2013) definition of public relations presents it as a management function responsible for administering and organising the work done by communication experts in various fields, for example, media relations. Similarly, the Public Relations Society of UK CIPR, also uses a management function to define PR. Breakenridge (2012) defined public relations 2.0 as a profession to build relations and increase involvement with people; to that effect, technology can be utilised to increase the interaction between the public relations practitioner and the public. This latter definition for public relations will be used in this research.

On the other hand, ŞEŞEN (2015) defined public relations as an administrative task that relies on all forms of communication available, from personal contact to public communication, as the nature of communication is two-way. A more encompassing definition is offered by the Chartered institute of Public Relations in Britain (CIPR, 2020, np), which defined public relations as follows:

> *“…the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.”*

Similarly, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) defined public relations as “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics” (PRSA, 2020, np).

Historically, the majority of public relations research has been based in America, a country characterised by its adherence to democratic values, economic and press freedom, and civil liberties (Curtin and Gaither, 2007). Thus, it can be argued that public relations needs a specific environment to exist and develop, which would maintain the aforementioned conditions. Some countries are not able to provide these elements (Yeganeh, 2014; Stevens, 2016) and it is argued that their absence renders the practice of public relations impractical in these contexts (Curtin and Gaither, 2007). This idea is investigated in this research.

3.3 MODELLING PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMUNICATION

Grunig's (1993, 2017) model of public relations communications is one of the most popular ones in this scientific area, and has found widespread use (see, for example, Ferguson, 2018 and Moss et al., 2017). Grunig (1993) outlined four models of public relations communications that can be seen as increasingly more complex. First, the press agentry or publicity model can be seen as the first level in which persuasion and manipulation are the primary tools that are used to influence the desired audiences and achieve the desired responses in terms of opinions and thoughts (Grunig et al., 1995). This is one-way communication, meaning the organisation is not seeking feedback or opinions from its audience and generally does not conduct audience analysis or other formal research to determine the communication tactics that should be used (Grunig, 2017). One-way communication techniques, such as newsletters and press releases, are used to communicate with audiences. In this approach to public relations, controlled messages are sent by organisations through these one-way communication tools that include annual reports, newsletters, brochures, and press releases, which are carefully crafted by organisational professionals (Hill and White, 2000). These tools allow the organisation to craft their own message for information-seeking publics to influence them (Smith, 2013).

For example, newsletters, are published by organisations and are meant to be informative in a manner similar to magazines or newspapers as well as incorporating the relationship-building features of mail (or mail) (Smith, 2013). Similarly, press releases are short pieces written by organisations to provide information to journalists on issues the organisations think are newsworthy so that this information can be passed on to the general public via newspaper reporting (Catenaccio, 2008). Nowadays, these press releases are also usually available on organisation's websites but there is specific value to organisations having their press releases published by a third party (the media) as this is seen as a way of promoting the organisation to a wide audience and improving its image and reputation (Ohl et al., 1995). Press releases are implicitly self-promotional although explicitly they are meant to be informative, supporting the idea that these kinds of on-way communication tools are best for persuasion and manipulation (Catenaccio, 2008).

Second, the public information model also relies on one-way communication techniques to communicate with its audience but is more concerned than the press agentry model with the accuracy and objectivity of the organisational information provided (Grunig et al., 1995). However, it still does not use formal research to determine the communication tactics that are used (Grunig, 2017).

Third, the two-way asymmetrical model of public relations uses two-way communication in the sense that data is collected from/about its audiences that is then used to develop more persuasive approaches to communicating with the audience (Grunig et al., 1995). It is also two-way communication because “more professional, sophisticated and effective” approaches to communication are used in which information is exchanged with the audience (Grunig, 1993, p144). It is similar to the press agentry model in that persuasion and manipulation are still used to influence their audiences and is deemed asymmetrical since the communication is used to benefit the organisation more than its audiences (Grunig, 2017), which is an approach that is used a lot in marketing and advertising. The focus in this model is usually on short-term changes in perceptions and attitude without using increased knowledge about the audience to change the organisation, meaning that the goal is to get the audience to accept the organisation’s perception so that its strategies can be achieved (Grunig, 1993).

Finally, the two-way symmetrical model also uses two-way communication but is different from the asymmetrical model since the aim is to promote respect and shared understanding between the organisation and its audiences so that the interaction is mutually beneficial (Grunig, 2017). In this model, the role of the public relations practitioner is to be the link between the organisation and its audience, serving to negotiate and resolve conflict rather than seeking to persuade and manipulate (Grunig et al., 1995). In contrast to the asymmetrical public relation model, honest and open communication is emphasised in the symmetrical model as the basis of mutual understanding and continuous adaptation of the organisation's policies and operations in accommodating its audience and their desires (Grunig, 2017).

This two-way symmetrical model of public relations communication is held up as the approach that practitioners should strive to achieve from an ethical perspective, as well as based on empirical research showing that the two-way symmetrical model of public relations practice is the most efficient and advantageous strategy for developing a mutually beneficial relationship between the organisation and its audiences (Seltzer and Zhang, 2010; Mikáčová and Gavlaková, 2014). For example, based on the concept of dialogue in public relations (two-way communication), many practitioners are using dialogue or dialogic to describe ethical and practical approaches (Kent and Taylor, 2002). It is worth mentioning that the root concept of a dialogue comes from communication theory. Public relations researchers use the idea of dialogue to describe effective and ethical public relations communication (Kent and Taylor, 2002). To have an effective and influential dialogue, organisations have to be able to appropriately handle trust, risk, and vulnerability. In other words, organisations have to be committed to a specific set of values when having a relationship with a desired audience. Later, Taylor and Kent (2014, p384) discussed the importance of engagement as an important part of dialogue, which they defined as

> *"part of dialogue and through engagement, organisations and publics can make decisions that create social capital. Engagement is both an orientation that influences interactions and the approach that guides the process of interactions among groups."*

According to Kent and Taylor (2002), dialogue can be characterised as having five attributes:

1. Mutuality of the organisation, which means to understand the relationship between the public and the organisation. Recently, with the global spread of public relations, factors affecting public relations in a

single country may affect public relations in other countries. The central character of mutuality is cooperative effort and strategy to resolve any problem that might face all the parties.

2. Propinquity refers to the audience’s opinion, which is important when they need to express their needs to the organisation.
3. Empathy means that a trust environment must be created between the organisation and the audience. Thus, the dialogue can be succeeding.
4. Risk in dialogue could be defined as the situation where participants who might face an unwanted risk when engaging in dialogue. It might affect the organisation’s interest.
5. Commitment refers to the honesty in a conversation and the dialogue held due to interest and for the understanding of each other.

Based on the above, Kent and Taylor (2002) suggest three ways that a public relations practice should consider when developing a dialogue on a daily basis, while building relations with an audience:

1. Building interpersonal relationships. public relations practitioners should have a dialogue with the audience; consequently, they need to develop the relevant required ability and skill.
2. Building mediated dialogic relationships. This can be achieved by using media and a web of channels to establish dialogue.
3. Taking a procedural approach to dialogue.

Finally, based on a research programme conducted by the International Association of Business Communication (IABC) in 1984, Grunig and colleagues developed the excellence theory with the aim of establishing a public relations theory. It presents an improvement of PR, as practiced in three countries, and is part of a study of the way that public relations practice can achieve excellence in the public relations industry, based on four levels of excellence in public relations management (Dozier, Grunig and Grunig, 2013; Grunig, 2013). The researchers examined 300 organisations in the US, Canada, and the UK through qualitative research and studied public relations practitioners’ behaviour toward the audience and presents ways of settling a public relations practitioner’s problems.

Grunig (2013) defines success in an organisation as a combination of interest and the rise of profit. The research indicates that achieving the level of Excellence starts with three main questions (Dozier, Grunig and Grunig, 2013; Grunig, 2013):

1. How can the organisation use public relations to engage with the public?
2. Why is public relations used by organisations to communicate effectively with the public?
3. Why do organisations who have used Excellence theory have more effective public relations and better communication with the audience than those who do not use it?

This theory tries to find the ability of public relations to create an effective organisation, and defines four levels to manage public relations strategically as follows (Dozier, Grunig and Grunig, 2013; Grunig, 2013):

1. Department level (How can public relations in the organisation collaborate with all the departments in the organisation?)
2. Programme level (Why, when, and how does each public relations practitioner perform the communication program?)
3. Organisational level (Respect the communication process with the public and provide them with the proper feedback.)
4. Economic level (The real value of the Excellence theory is to benefit the organisation's clients and provide employment.)

3.4 PUBLIC RELATIONS AS A PROFESSION

3.4.1 The Profession of Public Relations

Pieczka (2008) highlights that there are different perspectives on what professionalization means, including a very common view that a profession is established when it fits a few specific criteria. Said criteria include formal training, code of ethics, professional associations, and relevant protections from the perspectives of legality for the profession. L'Etang and Pieczka (2006) suggest that professionalization is important for the sake of ensuring “social respectability” that would help the profession of public relations to be separated from propaganda (p. 265). In order to make sure that an average consumer has a positive view of public relations, it is critical to guarantee its professionalization.

Public relations can be presented as a profession that aims to serve the public interest, a goal which is thought to motivate public relations professionals instead of just material gains (Coombs and Holladay, 2013). To that end, public relations requires registration and certification of public relations professionals, based on regulations of the relevant legislation that controls the use of the title and issuance of credentials that permit the practice of a particular profession (Theaker and Yaxley, 2017). Public relations involves formal education and examinations before entry into the profession, and a code of ethics that governs the practice. In this case, public relations is founded on an identifiable base of theoretical knowledge that requires a certain period of education. Importantly, however, ethics goes beyond legal requirements and should “seek to understand [and address] the moral issues that arise from business practices, institutions, and decision making and their relationship to general human rights” (Gower, 2017, p. 1). From this perspective, public relations professionals have moral obligations to themselves (to have integrity), clients, their employers, the professional, and the society in general (Gower, 2017).

Considering Ernest Greenwood’s (1957) attributes of the definition of profession, public relations fits that definition since it is a systematic body of knowledge, which involves theories that are valid and prepare the individual to obtain a practice license (Theaker and Yaxley, 2017). The second element is the authority that stems from a public relations professional’s extensive education and governs the practice through certification and licensing. The authority is illustrated by the acceptance of the clients towards the judgments of the professionals and their seeking a professional in that area to undertake their projects. As such, it can be argued that public relations involves sanctions since it entails powers and privileges that are guided by the existing legislation on licensure, education, and experience that are required to practice the profession (Coombs and Holladay, 2013). Public relations is also guided by ethical codes that govern the relations with the client and other professionals (Curtin and Gaither, 2007; Coombs and Holladay, 2013). These ethical standards are enforced with the core purpose of protecting the public interest rather than seeking financial gain. For instance, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations issued the code of ethics and standards and registered professionals who qualify to practice public relations (Theaker and Yaxley, 2017). In fact, according to Grunig (1993), demonstrating that ethics and good character are maintained during professional interactions allows any occupation and by extension public relations professionals to gain the respect of the public. Public relations practitioners confirm that an integral part of their profession is to perform their duties with a commitment to maintain public responsibility, based on their code of ethics, and preserve the public's best interest, for example, by effectively building relationships of trust between it and their clients (Brunner, 2016). The final element is the culture of the profession. PR's culture should be characterised by well-developed values and practices that are appropriate to society and intend to prevent malpractice by highlighting the distinctive norms of behaviour and values that guide the interactions with clients (Coombs and Holladay, 2013).

An additional view by Pieczka (2006) can be presented to demonstrate that there are more perspectives on professionalization. Pieczka (2008) suggests that the key views of profession can be translated into perceiving professionalization as either the process of improving a profession, a process of closing the profession off to exploit its benefits, or as a means of control. Thus, the above-presented perspective which highlights the criteria that an activity needs to satisfy to be called a profession corresponds to the view that professionalization is meant to improve said activity, for example, by introducing a code of ethics. From the second perspective, the code of ethics would be introduced to monopolize power, and from the third one, it would exist to ensure the self-control and self-restraint of the people involved in the profession. Pieczka (2008) highlights that the first view is the most influential one, but according to this author, by approaching public relations with a more critical perspective, it is possible to identify issues and difficulties in establishing public relations as a profession.

For example, the second and third view have the benefits of the analysis of power imbalances, and according to Pieczka (2008), the increasing power of public relations, especially in certain countries (the US) might indicate an issue in ensuring social justice and guaranteeing ethical conduct in the profession. The ethics of public relations, according to Pieczka (2008), have received some attention in the professionalization literature, but the author also suggests that more investigation on the matter is required for more in-depth findings.

In an essay in collaboration with Jacquie L'Etang (L'Etang and Pieczka, 2006), Pieczka suggests that "public relations has aspirations to professionalize itself" (p. 265), which could and should be achieved with the help of the above-discussed criteria and, in particular, education. However, the authors insist that there is a discrepancy between the practice and academic studies in public relations, suggesting that the education in public relations should be interdisciplinary, and the research should be focused on defining the concepts used in the discipline's practice. Other concerns include appropriate examinations, reasonable approach to professional association membership and so on. In other words, in 2006, Pieczka (2006) found the education and research related to public relations to be lacking, criticizing the idea that things like a code of ethics or an accreditation process were enough for the professionalization of public relations.

In a more recent article, Pieczka (2019) mentions the term "public relations professionals" in without criticizing it, but it should be highlighted that the term appears in a quotation. While that does not necessarily imply that the issue has been resolved, it should be highlighted that the primary criticisms of public relations professionalisation by Pieczka (2006, 2008) have been published more than a decade ago, which makes them rather outdated. However, the frameworks that Pieczka (2008) has presented appear to have remained useful despite their introduction in the past century, which makes the presented information relevant.

More recent research on the topic generally employs the view that professionalization is something that can be assessed based on a number of criteria (Molleda, Moreno and Navarro, 2017), which is why it is difficult to find other critical pieces highlighting the issues in professionalization. Still, the presented information allows to make the following conclusions. Professionalization is a complex phenomenon that is defined differently by different scholars. It provides important criteria to review and assess the ability of an activity to be called a profession. However, it is very common to simply apply these criteria without a critical look on how well they are integrated. Professionalization, therefore, is a difficult thing to achieve, and it is helpful to criticize professions for the sake of social justice and power balancing.

3.4.2 Public Relations as a Strategic Management and Communication Tool

Within organisational theory, public relations can be viewed from two different standpoints, summarised in the following concepts: (1) symbolic, interpretive paradigm and (2) strategic, behavioural paradigm (Van den Bosch and Riel, 1998; Grunig, 2011). According to the first paradigm, which is the symbolic, interpretive paradigm, public relations are leveraged after the strategic decisions were made and used to interpret those decisions to the audience, while assuring that the company's reputation and brand image are not damaged (Mikáčová and Gavlaková, 2014). With that in mind, the symbolic, interpretive paradigm assumes that organisations use media platforms, corporate communicative platforms and other tools in order to announce certain changes and create necessary impression (Van den Bosch and Riel, 1998). Thus, public relations is performed *post-factum* and not integrated into strategic management (Van den Bosch and Riel, 1998).

The second paradigm, which is the strategic, behavioural paradigm, uses public relations before and during the decision-making process (Van den Bosch and Riel, 1998). The strategic, behavioural paradigm presents public relations as a communicative tool in which both parties – organisations and consumers – take part in the communication process. Thus, according to the symbolic, interpretive paradigm, organisations make certain strategic decisions (for example, launch a new product or change their pricing policy) and after that develop a PR strategy to communicate the decision and make sure that consumers are getting the right impression. In contrast, the strategic, behavioural paradigm engages consumers via two-way communication before making any changes, allowing them to influence the organisational decisions and considers their feedback (Kim and Ni, 2010). Accordingly, public relations shift from merely interpreting the organisations' actions into directly affecting them. It does not mean however, that public relations acquire a different meaning. instead, the strategic, behavioural paradigm increases the number of potential tools and methods that can be used to build a better organisational strategy (Van den Bosch and Riel, 1998; Kim and Ni, 2010; Grunig, 2011).

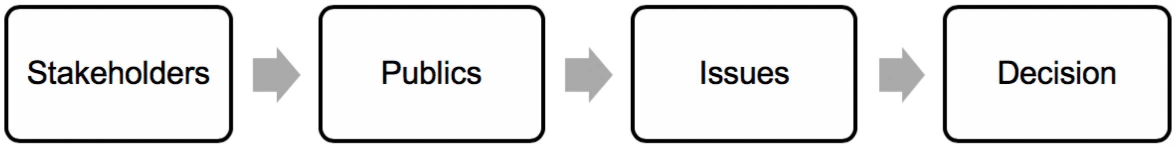
Given the existence of the above paradigms, it is of no wonder that the discussion on whether public relations can be a strategic tool, has been around for a long time. In fact, one can see this particular tendency of not conceding to one interpretation of the role of PR in organisations when examining the relevant discourse of modernist and postmodernist scholars. In particular, scholars who pursue a modernistic approach in terms of their perspective on organisational management claim that PR only helps companies to control their environment (Leitch and Neilson, 2001), whereas scholars favouring postmodernism state that PR gives power to the audience and allows it to influence decision-making (Knights, 1992). When critically analysing both factors, it is possible to assume that postmodernism theory is becoming more credible in the recent times. In fact, all organisations operate in a certain economic, political and social environment with numerous stakeholders, including customers, government, competitors, and non-profit organisations. All of these stakeholders have the power to influence organisations' strategies. Public relations is used to connect with these stakeholders, analyse their needs and objectives, and incorporate this knowledge into organisations' strategy to make it the more effective (Berger, 2007).

Some scholars, however, criticise the view of public relations use as strategic management tool. Among these scholars are Cheney and Christensen (2011), who state that there is a trend to divide organisational communication activities into three categories: PR (focusing on reputation), organisational communication (focusing on internal channels), and marketing communication (focusing on stakeholders). These three types of communication pursue different goals (selling services or strengthening reputation) and go in different directions (internal or external), and therefore, this means that PR cannot be considered as a strategic communicative tool, since this role belongs to marketing communications (Dahlén, Lange and Smith, 2010). However, the division of various types of organisational communication into different categories becomes more and more obsolete these days. Thus, it has been argued that both public relations and marketing communications are directed externally and deal with important stakeholders (Cheney and Christensen, 2001). This can mean that organisations try to create artificial boundaries between these two functions of communication, by which they decrease the strategic power of public relations. Currently, there is a strong trend to put all three types of communication together so that consistent and strategically important communication can be developed and disseminated both internally and externally (Falkheimer and Heide, 2014; Fill, 2017).

While organisations realise the strategic value of public relations, scholars have only just started analysing the potential impact of strategic public relations on companies' performance. Some scholars even calculate the public relation's return-on-investment, which previously was not used in the context of communication and relationship-building (Grunig, 2016). Indeed, it is complicated to estimate the amount of financial resources that organisations save or the profit they manage to gain due to thought-through public relations, but it is possible to analyse how PR helps companies achieve their strategic goals. The main research of PR as strategic tool at this point is conducted by Grunig and Repper (2000). According to these researchers, the strategic public relations go through four stages. The first one is concerned with stakeholders and it allows the organisation to define those people, groups, and others that can impact or be impacted by the organisations' activities. The second stage – publics – divides stakeholders into passive and active groups, where active groups are called publics and are expected to have the biggest impact on organisations strategies. The third one – issues – deals with defying issues, which are discussed by publics, showing what topics are trending among the most active parts of stakeholders. The final stage offers certain public relations mechanisms to track and address the issues in accordance to the organisations' strategy (Grunig and Repper, 2000).

Figure 3: Four Stages of Strategic Public Relations

(Based on Grunig and Repper, 2000)



The work of Grunig and Repper (2000) is based on empirical research in which they analysed 323 organisations in Canada and the US by asking their CEOs around 1700 questions regarding the organisations' public relations, performance, and strategic objectives. The research found out that the most successful organisations used to view their PR as a part of strategic management, which facilitated their efforts in reaching their goals more effectively, than those organisations, which regarded PR as a mere interpretive tool (Grunig and Repper, 2000). However, this theory of excellence is being criticised for the lack of practical implications and evidence of the real effectiveness of PR tools in strategic management (Szlemko and Christen, 2007). Yet, however, even critics agree that public relations are slowly becoming an integral part of all managerial processes and currently the theoretical basis needs to be updated with more research of strategic public relations (Flynn, 2006).

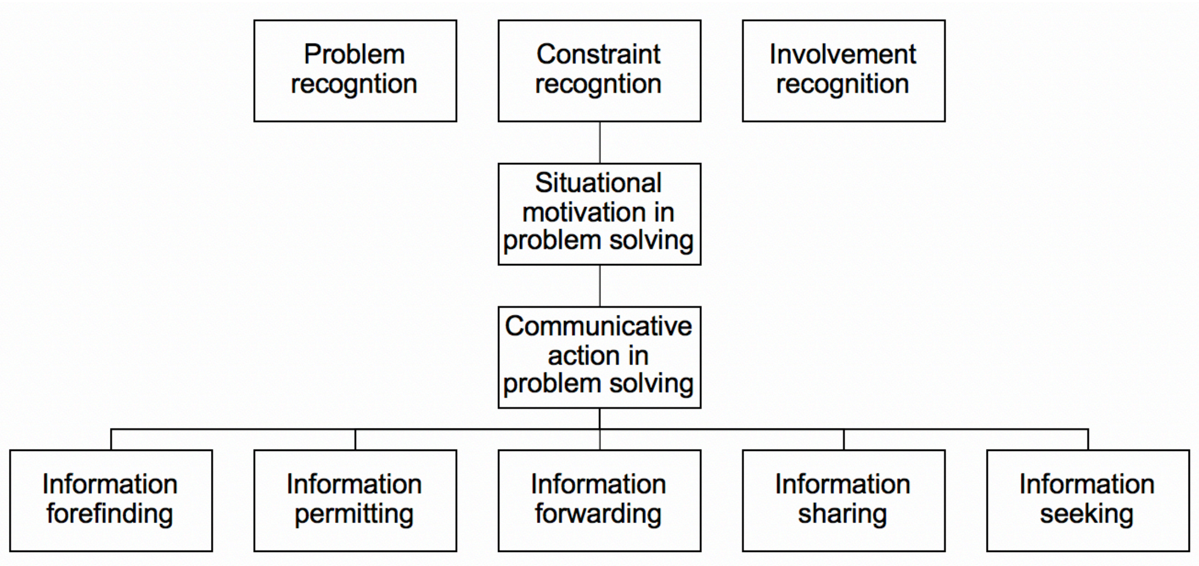
3.4.3 Public Relations' Reputation and Relationship Management Function

The view of public relations as a reputation and relationship management function belongs to the more traditional first paradigm of symbolism and interpretivism (McQuail, 1997). Initially, the reputational concept of public relations was partly based on the audience control paradigm in which consumers are seen as passive receivers of information, assigning organisations the role of communicative leaders and organisations could use public relations to control the audience (McQuail, 1997). This paradigm assumed that organisations need to craft the right messages, which will be perceived by the audience and shape up the organisations' image and reputation in their consciousness (McQuail, 1997). However, nowadays scholars prefer grounding public relations on a more progressive situational theory of problem solving (Kim, 2006). This theory (Figure 4) claims that the audience rarely remains passive in crisis or problematic situations (Kim, 2006). People in any audience gather around its most active representatives to interact with the problem, analyse it, develop personal attitude towards it and search for solutions (Kim, 2006).

Thus, consumers are presented as passive receivers of information and instead, they like analysing and understanding information, tend to engage into a dialogue with an organisation, and try to form their own attitude towards the organisation (Kim, 2006). The majority of reputational and relationship-building PR activities during problematic situations are currently based on this theory (Kim et al., 2013). Kim et al. (2013) studied organisations, which actively engaged consumers into communication during crisis situations, and compared them to those organisations that followed the audience control concept and simply informed their audience about crisis situations. The study showed that the first group of organisations was much better perceived by consumers than their counterparts (Kim et al., 2013). The study supports the use of engaging PR during volatile times as a means of positively affecting organisations' reputation and relationship with consumers.

Figure 4: Situational Theory of Problem Solving

(Kim, 2006, p2)



Importantly, public relations is not only important during crises but all the way through organisations' activities. In fact, Lange, Lee and Dai (2011) believe that organisations need to build their public relations with exceptional attention and skills in order to build their image and reputation and develop good relationships with their audiences. Although there is still no consensus on what organisational reputation is and whether it can be artificially managed or not, scholars agree on three following points. Firstly, consumers pay attention at what companies do and how they communicate their actions; secondly, the observed behaviour of the companies can influence consumers' buying decision; and thirdly, the way consumers perceive an organisation can become a competitive advantage for the organisation itself (Wartick, 1992). Thus, by building effective relations with the audience, organisations should be able to strengthen their reputation. In the empirical literature, researchers have investigated the correlation between organisations' reputation and its public relations (Yang, 2007; Lee and Park, 2013). For example, Lee and Park (2013) found out that organisations that actively interacted with their consumers through websites, social media, and offline meetups have a better reputation than those companies that were more distanced from their consumers. Furthermore, Kotha, Rajgopal and Rindova (2001) explore the reputation of Amazon and the role of public relations in building it, analysing over 700 pieces of media communication issued by Amazon. They found that, among the most important factors that contribute to creating a positive reputation of Amazon, one can name strong storytelling, regular and one-time two-way communication with the audience on all platforms and sing a one-to-one model of interacting with consumers (Kotha, Rajgopal and Rindova, 2001).

3.5 THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON PUBLIC RELATIONS

3.5.1 Culture and Communication

One popular theoretical framework that is used to understand culture and its impact on communication, which is a critical aspect of public relations, is Hall's (1976) high-context and low-context communication framework. Individuals grow and develop in a certain environment and this context affects their verbal and nonverbal communication. Context varies between different cultures and in turn so does verbal and non-verbal communication and in consequence social relations, as context affects personal characteristics and cognitive links, among other things. Based on this realisation, Hall (1976) discussed and defined the aforementioned two types of culture and communication styles.

In distinguishing between these types of culture, Hall (1976) argued that the relative importance of the context in determining meaning in routine communication is the key distinguishing factor. In a high-context culture, context is more important than spoken language, meaning that much is left unsaid and communication is often implicit, meaning that the context is where much information is encoded and has to be decoded (Hall, 1976; Hall and Hall, 1990). The underlying reason for this, according to Okabe's (1983, p39) arguments, is that in high-context cultures there is "cultural homogeneity [that] encourages suspicion of verbal skills, confidence in the unspoken, and eagerness to avoid confrontation." Thus, in high-context culture, meaning is largely derived from body language, and communication is based instead on the use of expressive means or symbols such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and gestures, instead of focusing on transmitting messages clearly through written or oral speech (Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008). As can be expected, not only personal relationships but also public communication and message dissemination are affected by the characteristics of this context type. Thus, in these high-context cultures, a lot of things cannot be said, as the context is what complements the direct message (Hornikx and le Pair, 2017).

In contrast, in low-context cultures, the underlying context becomes less important as a tool for communication, and instead information exchange is explicit, precise, open, and specific with the emphasis shifted on the speaker in order to allow him/her to convey meaning clearly and accurately through lingual means (Hall and Hall, 1990). In these cultures, “very little is taken for granted [and] greater cultural diversity and heterogeneity are likely to make verbal skills more necessary and, therefore, more highly prized” (Okabe, 1983, p38). Consequently, in low context culture, communication is as clear and direct as possible, as individuals attempt to convey information accurately.

Communities with high-context are more responsive to informal and implicit, collective, and indirect communication, while low-context cultures are usually more responsive to direct, formal, rational, explicit and individual communication (Proszowska, 2015). For example, people such as Australians, Americans and Swiss adopt a low context culture, and thus communication behaviours among their members are very clear, while Arabic, African and Japanese cultures use high-context culture and therefore their communication behaviours are less direct in addressing the topic of dialogue (Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008). A summary of comparison between high- and low-context cultures is presented in the Table 1 below.

In high-context cultures, it is expected that small and interrelated groups to be formed, since groups can actually rely on each other for support, while it may be difficult to gain support and assistance out of these groups (Croucher et al., 2012). In contrast, a member of a low-context culture is more likely to rely on him/herself, trying to solve a problem alone without relying on the group; a negative outcome of this attitude is that it tends to foster perceptions of lack of support when engaging in an activity or trying to procure information (Croucher et al., 2012). This is consistent with the individualistic orientation with research showing that members of low-context cultures are less socially oriented as well as less likely to avoid confrontation, are comfortable when changes occur in a short amount of time, and find it easier to deal with unfamiliar situations (Kim, Pan and Park, 1998).

Table 1: Characteristics of Low Context and High-context Cultures

(Based on Croucher et al., 2012; Hall, 1976; Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008)

Low context culture	High-context culture
• Task oriented. • More knowledge is codified, public, external, and accessible. • Explicit and conscious knowledge. • Fragile bonds between people with little sense of loyalty. • Individual achievement. • Specific, detailed, and precise communication. • Values individualism. Values individual initiative and decision making. • Tends to emphasise highly structured messages. • Product is more important than process.	• Relationship oriented. • More internalised understandings of what is communicated. • Implicit and not fully conscious knowledge. • Strong people bonds with affiliation to family and community. • Team achievement. • Less direct communication. • Values group sense. • Tends to give simple ambiguous, non-contextualising messages. • Process is more important than product.

Thus, a member of a high-context culture may need some time to adjust and adapt his/her behaviour when moving to a low-context culture, and vice versa. For example, in order to complete their tasks, members of low-context cultures may not take the time to establish strong relationships that would facilitate this process, since a low-context culture emphasises greater independence, where having relationships is still expected, but they tend to be greater in number and in consequence more superficial (Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008; Croucher et al., 2012).

3.5.2 The Role of Cultural and Emotional Intelligence in Public Relations

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) has been defined as the ability to relate and communicate effectively and breach the intercultural barrier between individuals and groups of people (Crowne, 2013). In other words, CQ outlines the degree of competence when working with heterogeneous groups. Low-CQ individuals fall back on their own cultural norms and paradigms, which can create a disconnect between the public relations practitioner and the target audience, whereas high-CQ employees are capable of better internalising the viewpoints of different cultures (Li and Zahran, 2014). Gilaninia et al.'s (2013) results partly support these findings as they argue that managers from different cultures usually experience trouble managing different cultural groups no matter their CQ level, suggesting that public relations departments would benefit from diverse teams, which each member representing a cultural subset of the target country.

In culturally diverse context, CQ has an important role to play when it comes to public relations and marketing (Al-Sharhan, 2018; Charoensukmongkol, 2020). When advertising a product or promoting content to a diverse audience, CQ helps navigate between two different approaches – one being to focus certain content on certain groups, based on their cultural uniqueness and identity (beliefs, tradition, religion, etc.) or providing a culturally-homogenised product that may appeal to everyone (Al-Sharhan, 2018). Depending on the product or content, either of these approaches would be appropriate. Being capable of predicting and empathising with the emotions of the intended audience is crucial – an inappropriate use of the homogenisation strategy might result in a backlash for disrespecting national uniqueness, whereas catering to specific groups may result in exclusion of others (Al-Sharhan, 2018). From a marketing perspective, CQ is said to have a dominant position when it comes to adaptive selling behaviour. The study by Charoensukmongkol (2020) discovered that when public relations practitioners try promoting services in a cultural environment foreign to their own, trait awareness and greater degree of knowledge about the culture in question play a pivotal role in the success or failure of the effort, with a positive correlation between higher sales and higher CQ score among employees.

In addition to CQ, Emotional intelligence (EQ) has been identified as an important metric used in public relations since both have been identified as helping public relations practitioners to connect to the audience, develop emotional relationships with them, and propagate authentic content (Clark and Polesello, 2017; Dangmei, 2016). Crowne (2013) identifies EQ as the ability to spot and manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others, whereas in direct or indirect contact. Being capable of identifying the customer's emotions in relation to one's own would assist in finding the most appropriate points of pressure to conclude the sale (Santos et al., 2019). Li and Zahran (2014) indicate that individuals with relatively low EQ scores focus on their own emotions more so than on receiving input from customers or employees alike. At the same time, those with high EQ scores prove to be more efficient in managing their own emotions, thus being capable of focusing their attention on other groups (Li and Zahran, 2014).

CQ is placed by some researchers into the subordinate position to EQ, with the perception of CQ being EQ framed by specific cultural notions, practices, and concerns (Bhatt, 2020). In line with this, Ouakouak et al. (2020) put forth an idea that companies with high levels of EQ and CQ generate better sales and have a better influence on their customer communities, being capable of presenting themselves as public leaders and adhering to the principles they wish to project on their customer base.

As with CQ, EQ has been identified as having an impact on adaptive selling behaviour but the effect of EQ on sales performance remains inconclusive, with results varying from one region to another. Still, Dos Santos et al. (2019) advocate for the use of EQ in the performance of various activities associated with sales, such as direct or indirect sales, maintenance of healthy online and offline communities, and monetisation of those relationships through greater mutual relationship and performance. However, these findings are challenged by AlDosiry et al. (2016), who examined the effects of high or low EQ scores on total sales performance in sales professionals in Kuwait. The results indicated very weak or no correlation between the salespersons' ability to assess emotions and their total sales performance, at least when it comes to significant purchases, such as cars and vehicles of transportation (AlDosiry et al., 2016).

From a public relations perspective, the influence of EQ is also ambivalent. According to Segon and Booth (2015), it is possible for individuals with high EQ to express unethical behaviour, using their understanding of emotions to essentially manipulate the audience to their own benefit. The researchers point out that the ability for empathy and emotional self-control does not exactly come with the concepts of virtue (Segon and Booth, 2015). In fact, audiences would consider the concept of trying to understand and utilise their emotions to sell them something as an attempt at manipulation. At the same time, EQ is necessary to identify the points of emotional interest in an audience in order to provide the content they would sympathise with (Chowdhury, 2017). With a low level of EQ, it becomes more difficult to conduct public relations and content management, as the responses to audience desires as well as predictions about their reaction to certain forms of content or messages expressed by the organisation would be less accurate (Chowdhury, 2017).

Still, Clark and Polesello (2017) highlighted the importance of the connection between EQ and CQ when it comes to communicating effectively to audiences in that do not share the same cultural and emotional paradigms as the focal organisation. Additionally, Leonidou et al. (2019) argue that, for effective use of EQ and CQ in public relations, product promotion, and customer group management, the customers must never feel manipulated, excluded, or have their unique experiences neglected, otherwise this may lead to the communication with the audiences becoming compromised as well the reputation of the organisation and relationship with the consumers.

In line with this, Bagnied et al. (2016) argue that while EQ is less important when affecting direct sales, instead playing a much more significant role when managing social groups, engaging in public relations, and making predictive analysis of content that the majority of potential customers would appreciate. They found that brands that successfully engage their audience in behavioural, emotional, and motivational aspects foster greater brand loyalty, which positively affects sales. EQ is stated to have a positive correlation with these efforts (Bagnied et al., 2016). Similarly, Muhammad (2014) argues that high EQ allows public relations practitioners to gain greater amounts of positive feedback and generate brand participation and loyalty from audiences.

3.6 PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN THE ARAB WORLD

Public relations in modern society have become very complicated; this is due to the expansion of urbanisation, industrial activity, and scientific and technological progress. Large organisations with thousands of employees have emerged and are dealing with millions of people not only in the Arab region but also the whole world. In the Middle East, public relations are perceived to be a tool of the government, used primarily as a political weapon (Almutairi and Kruckeberg, 2019). The idea of Western public relations first entered the Gulf countries in the late 1930s (Culbertson and Chen, 2013), indicating that the region has a relatively short history with public relations in the modern times (Almutairi and Kruckeberg, 2019). When oil was discovered in the Gulf countries, it affected the region's economy, and economic development affected all other areas, including the political and social sectors. These economic changes created the need for communication channels (Culbertson and Chen, 2013). There was also increasing interaction with the West, which led to a greater dissemination of ideas and practices performed in the Western world, including the area of public relations. For example, in 1935, the Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO) was established in Saudi Arabia. This has been identified as signalling the beginning of using public relations in that country. ARAMCO brought the use of Western models of public relations to the area and then the company created a research unit to study the communication, language, traditions and social status of the people in Saudi Arabia to determine how to most effectively communicate with both its local and expatriate audiences (Van der Muelin, 2003). ARAMCO's public relations department became one of the largest and most successful in the country and this resulted in the expansion of public relations in Saudi Arabia.

Since then, the Saudi government has been using public relations as a tool to regulate polices, manage relations between the government and the public sector, and obtain public support (Van der Muelin, 2003). Theaker (2016a) highlighted that the role of public relations is assumed by communication experts, and it is associated with managers and solving problems, which is a common role for PR practitioners. Therefore, sometimes public relations professionals can be programme planners. Public relations appears to have been not as well received in Saudi Arabia in the next years, as Hussein, Mohammed, and Harron (1991) reported that Saudi public relations managers and practitioners perceive public relations as propaganda. This is consistent across the Arab world in which national broadcasting systems used their platforms for propaganda since the 1990s (Kraidy, 2012). To minimise this problem, Saudi public relations organisations preferred to engage in face-to-face communications (Hussein, Mohammed, and Harron, 1991).

In contrast to Saudi Arabia, the history of public relations in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been short, as its development began in the 1970s and 1980s, when the UAE started becoming a centre of trade and economics because of its oil production and foreign investment (Kirat, 2006). Having opened its doors to many foreign companies that opened branches and offices in the region, the need for modern public relations practices in both the public and private sectors is evident in the UAE (Kirat, 2006). By the mid-1980s, most organisations in the public sector in UAE had a PR department (Al Khaja, 1985). During the 1990s, public relations grew in the UAE due to the increased attention that companies gave to its important role in their commercial services success. For example, Emirates Airlines is one company that stressed the importance of public relations in organisational communication (Ayish and Kruckberg, 1999; Al-Jenaibi, 2014b).

There is limited information available on public relations in the Middle East as a result of sparse research in this area (Almutairi and Kruckeberg, 2019). Still, there have been several studies that found that the practice faced many problems in the Arab world. The major problem is the hidden and unknown role of public relations in organisations, the limited attention paid to public relations, and the lack of public relations professionals (Hussein, Mohammed and Harron, 1991). Al-Enad (1990) believed that, in the Arab world, public relations is understood as a tool to disseminate general information, but it can also be used as a reception and advertising agent.

In the Arab world, it is argued that public relations is misunderstood and is usually almost always associated with public information and publicity and it is considered to be an administrative job, akin to customer service (Kirat, 2006; Al-Kandari and Gaither, 2011). There is an argument whether public relations in the Arab world is as effective as high-quality marketing in advertising and business (Kirat, 2006). With the onset of technology and the digital information society, the private and public sectors have paid more attention to public relations' role in the organisation than ever before. Still, there has still been a complaint among practitioners that there has been a lag in adopting digital technologies as part of public relations in the Arab countries like Kuwait, in comparison to Western countries (Ebrahim, 2017).

This can also be attributed to the democratisation efforts that these countries have been engaging in the last years, where the increased use of two-way communication (symmetric communication) is required (Kirat, 2006). In fact, public relations is most effective in a democratic environment, where there is an increased availability of information. However, according to Kirat (2005, p326): "Most Arab countries are still lacking democratic governments, freedom of expression, individual freedoms, effective civil societies, active public opinion, and strong economies, thus inducing a negative impact on professional and systematic practice of public relations." As such, public relations plays a secondary role in the Arab world and the role of the public relations professional remains vague, and it has a negative perception (Rizk, 2005; Bashir, 2019). It is argued that the problem with public relations in the Arab world is that public relations departments are usually not strategically mind, limited research has been done on public relations in this context, and public relations departments are poorly managed, lack planning and have delivered a poor performance (Bashir, 2019).

To sum up for the Arab countries, Kirat (2005) argued that there several major problems plague public relations agencies. Despite the administrative and social changes in each country, the concepts, methods and practices of public relations are relatively similar in most Arab countries. In general, the most important problems and challenges facing public relations in the Arab world are (Kirat, 2005; Rizk, 2005):

1. Lack of appreciation of the role played by public relations by the senior management;
2. The prevalence of concepts about the duties, activities and role of public relations professionals, which can be contrary to the fundamental ideas behind public relations and the role it can play in organisations.
3. The lack of appreciation for public relations practice, which is often considered a secondary activity that is not as valuable to society and productive; and
4. The small size of PR departments in Arab countries, which leads to role minimisation, the non-dependence and administratively linked to the appropriate administrative or senior management.

This is consistent with more recent research in this area such as Bashir (2019), who examined the role of public relations in corporate, public and non-profit organisations in Kuwait. He found that there were a lot of barriers to public relations practitioners being strategically involved in the organisation, which included an inadequacy by senior management in understanding public relations as well as a limited number of qualified public relations practitioners (Bashir, 2019).

3.7 ETHICS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations is among the fields that have attracted significant debate in terms of ethics. According to Parsons (2016), ethics is considered to be a part of public relations strategy. Fawkes (2015) revealed that it is hardly possible to practice public relations ethically in the asymmetrical models. Thus, while Bowen (2008) believes that ethics is the most important factor in an organisation achieving excellence, there is a strong claim that very hard to understand how public relations could be ethical, or even to search for customers' benefit, because there is a gap between basic ethics and persuasion (Fitzpatrick and Bronstein, 2006).

Some argue as to whether ethics is foundational to public relations practice and organisations in general. However, Fawkes (2015) argues that ethics is a central element to the construction of professional legitimacy. Still, Toledo and Avidar (2016) argue that research into ethics in regard to its relation to social media and public relations is difficult since ethics is culturally relevant and this is also supported by Distaso and Bortree (2014) and Bowen (2017) who argue that different cultures will have various ways of addressing public relations ethics

Still, it has been shown that public relations practice can face significant and challenging ethical issues. Parson (2016) argues that, until today, the public relations profession has been characterised by a bad reputation. It is known for being less than honest and often dealing in half-truths. In this case, trust as a value is one of the basics elements that builds a strong relationship with the audience. As noted previously, Brown (2009) argues that public relations practitioners themselves are the ones to blame for losing trust and that conflict ethics and crisis is the only sector of public relations that has strong ethics. Toledo and Avidar (2016) reviewed several unethical public relations practices that might be a result of the appearance of social media. For example, bloggers may be paid or receive gifts from organisations to write about their products and this becomes problematic if this is not disclosed to the audience (Toledo and Avidar, 2016). These kinds of behaviours, in addition to others such as using fake identities in comments, are unethical and would undermine public relations being practiced ethically. Toledo and Avidar (2016) argued that the appearance of social media, accompanied with the scholars' focus on the positive dimensions of using social media in public relations, has caused the appearance of more unethical public relations practices as the potential negative effects were underplayed. Phillips and Young (2009) argued that public relations practitioners might lose control over both the message and the distribution process in the modern social networks, which might lead to the emergence of their unethical practices.

The existence of unethical practices when public relations practitioners use social media is evident in both industrialised and industrialising countries. According to Toledo and Avidar (2016, p168), "unethical public relations practices occur in highly developed and democratic societies as well as in more corrupt and totalitarian societies." Further, the online environment could lead to some ethical problems, such as textual posts with inaccurate information, or the use of fake and misleading images to spread false information. This can result in online privacy issues and the loss of the customers' trust. Thus, online practice is a sensitive area and public relations practitioners have to be careful in to ensure they spread correct information and be vigilant in order to prevent the spreading of false information on their customers in the rapidly updating online community (Fitzpatrick and Bronstein, 2006). Technology and online media have increased transparency, rendering organisations easier to observe and allowing the audience to interact with them and leave their feedback. Indeed, there have been many cases of angry clients commenting online on an unsatisfactory experience and sharing their feelings of disappointment. Specifically, they cannot hide from the clients as social media can be used to complain/give negative feedback (Brown, 2009). It appears that the relationship between the practitioners and the public needs more attention to ethics and protecting public interest (Brunner, 2016). If a company does not act in a prompt and satisfactory manner to resolve these issues, it could put the organisation's reputation at risk. Hence, Ott and Theunissen (2015) conclude that only the effective interaction analysis could help to protect an organisation's reputation in crisis.

Valentini (2015) doubts whether social media serves public relations since a lot of honesty and accuracy is required for an ethical public relations practice to be undertaken in which the interest of the public to be advanced (Fitzpatrick and Bronstein, 2006). Similarly, Parsons (2016) mentions that ethics requires the free flow of information to cultivate and preserve the integrity of the relationship with the public. Still, it is possible to use both social media and public relations ethically, as shown by Lee et al.'s (2014) work showing that many of the largest companies in the US use social media as a tool for symmetrical communication with Twitter supporting the sharing of more truthful and socially responsible content while Facebook supports the sharing of more authentic and equitable content.

At the organisational level, the management of ethics can be defined as "the formal, systematic, and goal-directed development of activities for improving organisational ethics in order to realise and balance the expectations of stakeholders" (Lee and Cheng, 2012, p82). This includes one or more of the following elements: formal written ethical codes, ethics committees, ethical communication tools, ethics officers, formal procedures to address unethical behaviour, training programmes, and incentives for behaving ethically (Lee and Cheng, 2012). However, research indicates that most public relations professionals get their knowledge of ethics in this field from professional work experience and their personal values and family upbringing, rather than from any training they received from the organisation (Bowen, 2006). Specifically, Lee and Cheng (2012, p92) found that "[t]he failure of the workplace to be an active ethics learning locus that engages practitioners in ethics is not surprising, given that many public relations organisations are not providing formal ethics training to their employees." They also found that there were deficiencies in organisational ethics guidelines, that includes codes of ethics, and argue that the combination of deficiencies in training and ethical guidelines "reveals a lacklustre picture of formal, systematic, and goal-directed development of activities for improving ethical decision-making and ethics compliance structures in … organisations" (Lee and Cheng, 2012, p92).

In line with this, Schauster and Neill (2017) argue that professionalism needs to be supported by specialised training, which is an important avenue for allowing practitioners to have open dialogue about ethical issues and in this way support their development as ethical professionals (Place, 2019). This should include experiential training such as case studies, crisis simulations, debates, and role play (Place, 2019). However, this training is often not provided by organisations (Schauster and Neill, 2017). Still, they also found that some organisations had 'moral imagination' in seeking to use social media ethically, taking proactive steps such as requiring bloggers/influencers to sign contracts outlining what they can and cannot do in marketing for the organisations, training influencers/bloggers, signing off on particular language for them to us in their posts on social media, and then following up to ensure that influencers/bloggers are following the rules (Schauster and Neill, 2017). The leadership is important at this level since public relations practitioners have identified the organisational culture and executive leadership as being vital to their moral development, which is necessary for ethical public relations practice (Place, 2019; Remišová, Lašáková and Kirchmayer, 2019).

Training is particularly important because it can support moral development of practitioners while ethical codes do not (Delaney and Sockell, 1992; Peck and Matchett, 2010; Place, 2019), particularly as codes of conducts' exhortations for honesty and integrity often do lead to ethical behaviour in practice (Schauster, Walker and Duffy, 2018). Still, both codes of conduct and ethics training are vital elements of a full ethics programme, along with aspects that deal with accountability, monitoring, and correction (Kaptein, 2016; Kirsten, Wordsworth and du Plessis, 2017). Additionally, some researchers have found codes of conduct to be effective aspects of ethics programmes that help to positively shape managerial behaviour, making it an important inclusion in a well-rounded ethics programme (Remišová, Lašáková and Kirchmayer, 2019).

3.8 PUBLIC RELATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICE

3.8.1 Defining Social Media

Social media communication allows users to develop their own individual networks to communicate and engage with other users online. Social media is a new communication medium based on rapidly developing technology. According to KhosraviNik (2017, p582), social media can be defined as:

> *"…electronically mediated communication across any electronic platforms, spaces, sites, and technologies in which users can: (a) work together in producing and compiling content; (b) perform interpersonal communication and mass communication simultaneously or separately – sometimes mass performance of interpersonal communication; and (c) have access to see and respond to institutionally (e.g., newspaper articles) and user-generated content/texts."*

This includes social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, content-based sites like YouTube and Wikipedia, instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp, and other many other groups of online media (KhosraviNik, 2017). This research focuses on social networks, which are defined as:

> *"Web-based service that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site"* (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, p211).

Garrigos-Simon, Lapiedra Alcamí and Barberá Ribera (2012) asserted that in this decade, social media networks are essential to organisations and managers for them to enhance their design creation, increase their creativity and improve their learning. New technologies can provide opportunities to share information and engage with a community in a fast and low-cost manner and these technologies are discussed below.

The introduction of Web 2.0 has necessitated that public relations practitioners change their methods of communication (Brown and Waddington, 2013; Almeida, 2017). This stage of the web was an improvement on Web 1.0 at which time the web was 'read only' and users were treated as passive consumers of information since they were unable to create their own content for the web (Almeida, 2017). In contrast, Web 2.0 allowed users to become involved in content production, largely through the creation of social media networks, and overall providing tools that supported greater interaction, collaboration, and participation of users (Almeida, 2017; Choudhury, 2014).

For public relations practitioners, the best approach is to understand and learn how to engage in an online environment and public relations practitioners should choose the communication tool that most effectively corresponds with their goals (Disitasso and Botree, 2014; Komodromos, 2016). Green (2010) stated that communication over social media is personal and supports one-to-one dialogue. While the most significant function of public relations is broadcasting to a wide public audience, since social media is treated in public relations as strategic management tools, engagement over these platforms changed the characteristics of public relations dialogue (Philips and Young, 2009). From this perspective, Macnamara (2010) argues that Web 2.0 and later technologies are theoretically aligned with the excellence approach in public relations, in which the two-way symmetrical model of communication is recommended because of its effectiveness and its adherence to high standards of ethics.

More recently, companies equipped with Web 3.0 can gather past and present customer information by examining communication data performing data analytics (Garrigos, 2009). This is based on the capability of Web 3.0, also called the semantic web, to organise how users search and view content in order to be able to optimise and customise users' searches and advertisements based on their preferences and behaviours (Almeida, 2017). Specifically, Choudhury (2014, p8097) notes that Web 3.0 "is able to improve data management, support accessibility of mobile internet, simulate creativity and innovation, encourage factor of globalisation phenomena, enhance customers' satisfaction and help to organise collaboration in social web." Further, in Web 3.0, users see different views of the same data because of context and personalisation (Almeida, 2017; Choudhury, 2014).

These changes presented by Web 3.0 are based on network structure, depending on users who share, live, learn and act via social networking technologies. Thus, one of the advantages of Web 3.0 for business is crowdsourcing, in which people that are networked work together collaboratively to undertake a task (Vukovic, 2009). Hence, through crowdsourcing, this network of individuals allows companies to reduce production costs as companies can use crowdsourcing to access an online workforce that is scalable (Vukovic, 2009; Garrigos-Simon, Lapiedra Alcamí and Barberá Ribera, 2012). This environment is useful for marketing and strategic management and thus improves decision making by managers. These decisions can affect a company's reputation (Garrigos-Simon, Lapiedra Alcamí and Barberá Ribera, 2012).

The advent of Web 3.0 means that passive customers have become active participants in all product or service stages (Shiffman, 2008). This development requires organisations to open networks for interaction with customers for them to be able to satisfy consumer demands (Almeida, 2017). Customers need to know about a product from the conceptualisation to the sale stages. In short, the evolution of Web 3.0 is driving organisations to collaborate with customers and stakeholders via different networks. With the existence of communication expert managers, this environment can lead to increased productivity and competition, thereby enhancing customer trust and organisational reputation (Garrigos-Simon, Lapiedra Alcamí and Barberá Ribera, 2012).

Most recently, Web 4.0 has been presented as the newest stage of the continuous evolution of the web (Almeida, 2017). It has been called the symbiotic web because of the motivation being human and machine interaction in a symbiotic process, based on the organisation of metadata achieved in Web 3.0 (Choudhury, 2014). Web 4.0 is in the development stage and there is no proper definition or clear outline of this stage, but it is expected that this will provide more comprehensive user interaction and personalisation (Almeida, 2017; Nath and Iswary, 2015). Web 4.0 would "not [be] limited simply to display information but proposes to behave like an intelligent mirror that offers concrete solutions to what the user needs (Nath and Iswary, 2015, p340). Benefits of Web 4.0 would include greater accessibility, better user experience, and more efficient use of the semantic web to better integrate and access information (Nath and Iswary, 2015). Web 4.0 would therefore provide even greater communication capabilities for businesses and their audiences and this can be used to deploy the excellence approach in public relations if this is what companies want to achieve (Almeida, 2017).

3.8.2 Types of Social Media

Most people will immediately identify Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram as social media applications, but the landscape is much wider than that. Social media is an overarching term used to describe various platforms, be it established (such as the social networking sites Facebook and Instagram, or blogs and wikis) or emerging (such as apps) (Lietsala and Sirkkunen, 2008). The overall impact on marketing and public relations has been tremendous, and social media democratised corporate communication. Individuals and communities have been empowered to create videos, pictures, social media posts and spread them among a wide array of platforms. Apparently, social media is very powerful. Often, however, organisations remain distanced or mismanage their social media presence. Perhaps the main reason for these pitfalls is the limited understanding on what social media is and the forms it can take (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

A decade ago, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) highlighted that social media has not been systematically categorised. In their influential paper, the scholars propose a social media classification on the basis of two dimensions: social presence, media richness and self-presentation, self-disclosure (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The point is that on the one hand, communication is influenced by the intimacy created through presence (asynchronous vs. synchronous), as well as by richness of the medium with the amount of information it might deliver. On the other hand, people mostly choose to participate in social media because they are willing to present themselves through self-disclosure.

Figure 5: Social Media Classification

(Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p62)

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

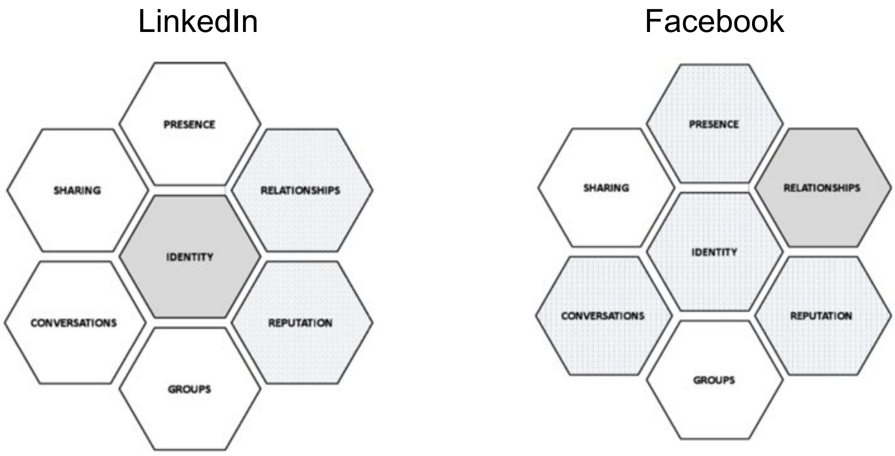
The authors suggest that all these six groups provide opportunities for building relationships with consumers. However, it seems that the matrix Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) is not up to date and hardly could be used as a hands-on tool by managers. For example, YouTube has grown from a community to the second largest social networking site globally (see Figure 7).

In 2011, Kietzmann and colleagues built on the work of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) and propose the 7 building blocks model. According to them, the PR practitioner can manage social media only if they understand the functions in terms of identity, conversations, sharing, reputation, relationships and presence.

For example, LinkedIn is about building identity, reputation and relationships, while Facebook meets a wider array of goals (Figure 6). Indeed, it is useful to understand the strengths and weaknesses of social media platforms, Still, the Honeycomb model only gives some basic guidelines and is open to interpretations.

Figure 6: Social Media Functionalities

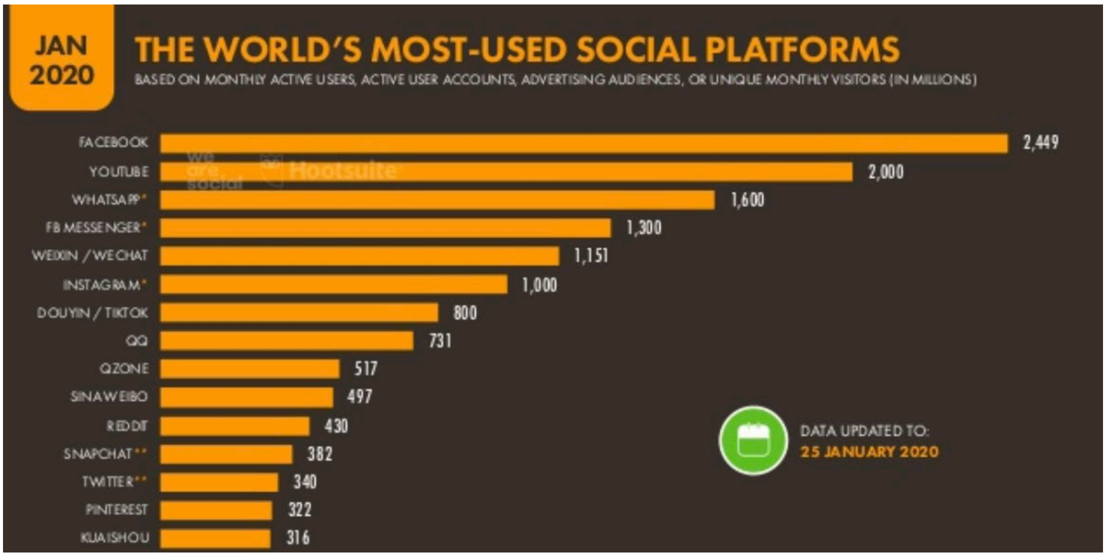
(Kietzmann et al., 2011, p248)



So far, the frameworks showed that a public relations professional may select from a range of social media tools, depending on the organisations' objectives. Social networks are the most popular group of social media platforms, along with search engines (Chaffey and Smith, 2017). Looking closer at social networking sites, Facebook remains the dominant platform in terms of active users, followed by YouTube and Instagram (We are Social, 2020; Figure 7).

Figure 7: Most Popular Social Media Platforms Globally

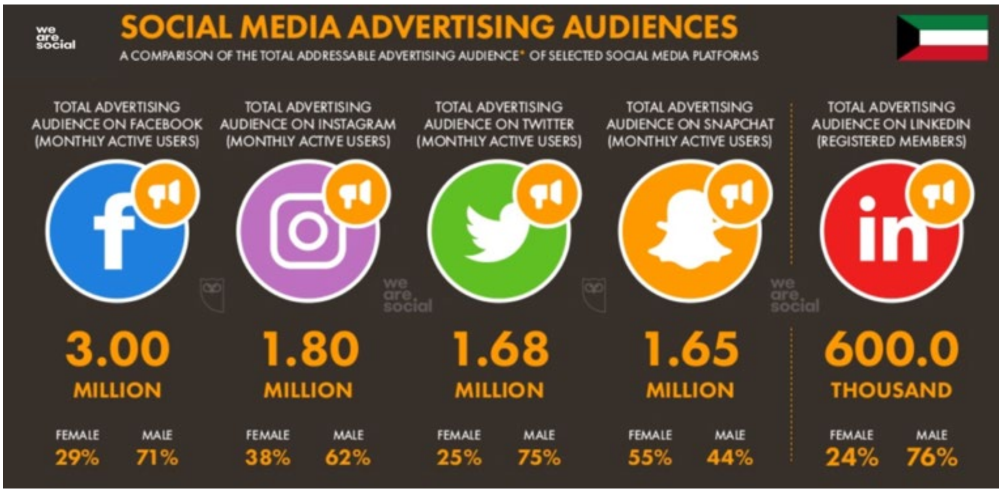
(We are Social, 2020, np)



In Kuwait, Facebook is also the most-used social media platform, with 3 million active users in 2019 (Figure 8). Instagram is on the second place, closely followed by Twitter (We are Social, 2019). The ranking needs to be treated with caution, however, since YouTube is missing.

Figure 8: Social Media Users in Kuwait

(We are Social, 2019, np)



Facebook was launched in 2004 and since then, it has become the leading social networking site for both individuals and businesses (Chu, 2011). Facebook offers opportunities for targeted communication. It is inexpensive, and its analytics help with effectiveness tracking. The social network is very popular, but it is particularly effective to reach more mature cohorts. Nearly two thirds of users are aged 35 years or older (Meyer Foundation, 2018).

PR professionals report that Facebook communication is the most frequently assessed part of their social media work (Wright and Hinson, 2013). Facebook is among the most visited websites in Kuwait. Interestingly, YouTube has more visitors. The video-sharing network is on 2nd place and the search engine Google is #1. Nevertheless, Facebook is the platform consumers spend most time at – more than 13 minutes per day (Alexa, 2019).

Facebook is appealing for organisations because it makes information dissemination interactive, quick, and transparent and therefore, trust and credibility are enhanced (Chu, 2011; Ji et al., 2017). People are brought together, and their voice can be heard. The many-to-many communication is a source of information, expertise, and insights to solve problems. Meanwhile, organisations can build the desired image and stay connected with stakeholders (Bertot, Jaeger and Hansen, 2012).

When it comes to Facebook use, there are differences depending on nature of the organisation. For instance, the banks are concerned with maintaining reputation, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, as well as communicating with consumers and resolving issues on a daily basis (Senadheera, Warren and Leitch, 2011). The public sector uses Facebook as well (Linders, 2012). Officials are interested to leverage social media resources to communicate with stakeholders and improve their products and services (Reddick, Chatfield and Ojo, 2017). By interacting with citizens on Web 2.0 platforms it is possible to achieve broader public participation than through traditional channels (Depaula, Dincelli and Harrison, 2018). Moreover, Facebook offers opportunities for communicating with a wider array of stakeholders, including community associations, businesses, potential voters, and citizens from other countries (Zavattaro, 2013). On the other hand, social media monitoring may detect trends, sentiments and new ideas (Bertot, Jaeger and Hansen, 2012; Kavanaugh et al., 2012).

Despite the numerous benefits, Facebook poses threats for organisations both in the private commercial and the public sector. Facebook is a platform for communication between people with often heterogenic interests and such interactions are not always positive (Reddick, Chatfield and Ojo, 2017). Moreover, a single negative comment on Facebook can easily result in a reputational crisis (Ji et al., 2017). Thus, the biggest advantage of Facebook – its interactivity – is also the biggest drawback (Mucan and Özeltürkay, 2014).

YouTube is a video-sharing platform that is very effective for storytelling and engaging stakeholders. Its effectiveness lies not only in the video material itself. YouTube offers many features for branding and integrated marketing communications, such as on-screen banners and end-of-video buttons to link with websites or other social media channels (Meyer Foundation, 2018). YouTube, along with Instagram and Snapchat, is the primary social networking site for Centennials, or young consumers aged 18-24 years (Williams et al., 2017).

Research by the World Advertising Research Centre revealed that for marketing managers in the banking sector, online videos are among the most effective channel for meeting their marketing objectives. For example, the Egyptian EGBank used videos to present the story of Oufa, a young customer aiming at independence. Video content engages and entertains young audiences, without being as interruptive as traditional advertising (WARC, 2019b).

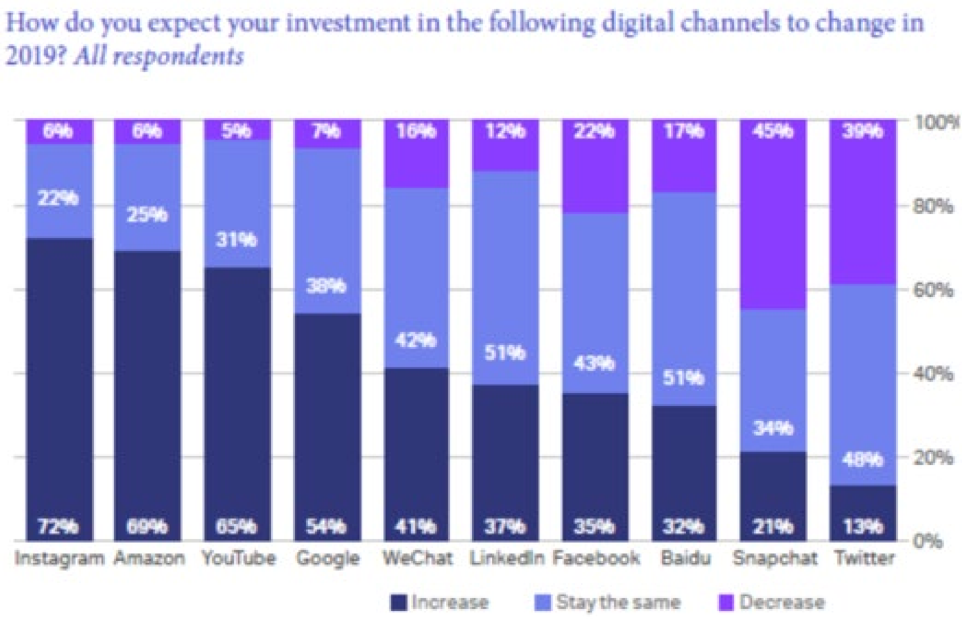
Similarly, YouTube is used to by public agencies to promote social causes and since 2007, public service announcements though videos have been proliferating (Paek et al., 2011). For instance, the Scottish Government successfully used a 50-second video to popularize pap smear testing among young women (WARC, 2019a). Similarly, a video issued by the Australian Government to help prevent violence was the most popular YouTube post in the country for two months in 2016 (Munro, 2017).

To sum up, the advantages of YouTube involve possibilities to reach and engage young audiences, allowance to upload lengthy videos, while there is no limit on how many videos to upload, and opportunities for message integration across channels. However, the social network is also increasingly known for its distracting advertisements and inappropriate content that can create negative associations with the campaign on brand (Meyer Foundation, 2018). YouTube is often *not* a brand safe environment, because the network failed to stop videos of racial and religion hatred, a study by WARC (2019c) shows. Nearly 40% of consumers negatively change their attitudes towards brands that run alongside offensive content (WARC, 2019c). Moreover, YouTube is another Web 2.0 platform that provides opportunities for uncontrolled dissemination of information through the comments feature. Indeed, brands like Apple and Amazon turn off comments, but such restriction is questionable (WARC, 2019c).

In 2012, *Instagram* was introduced as an image-based social network. Facebook acquired it soon after that as Instagram became the faster-growing networking platform (Rakos, 2014). Instagram is still rapidly expanding, while Facebook usage is declining among youngsters in particular (Chaffey, 2019; WARC, 2019d; Figure 9). The users of Instagram mostly fall into the 20-35 age bracket, but it is growing among all generational cohorts. Even if globally, the platform is more popular among females (Meyer Foundation, 2018), in Kuwait users are most male (We are Social, 2019).

In Kuwait, Instagram is the second most popular social network (see Figure 8). With its 1.8 million users (We are social, 2019), nearly 42% of the Kuwaiti citizens use it. Given the fall of Facebook, soon it might become the leading one. Therefore, Instagram has enormous potential to reach stakeholders. PR practitioners should leverage the platform to meet their objectives.

Figure 9: Use of Social Media in Marketing Communications (WARC, 2019d, np)



What makes Instagram so successful is the opportunity for storytelling through powerful showing, rather than telling (Meyer Foundation, 2018). The users of the platform are also very open to corporate communication. The vast majority (80%) of the accounts follow at least one company (WARC, 2019d). More recently, users are very engaged not only in images, but in stories, too. Stories give businesses with opportunities for high engagement at low production costs (WARC, 2019d).

For those organisations willing to invest more resources, Instagram is appropriate for influencer marketing and celebrity endorsement. For example, the Swedish organisation Ung Cancer used Instagram to raise the awareness for testicular cancer among the society (WARC, 2020). It leveraged the influence of the pop celebrity Felix Sandman, who had nearly 160k followers on Instagram (WARC, 2020). It is not only the reach that skyrocketed; 80k adults in Sweden actually completed self-examinations, so the campaign was extremely successful (WARC, 2020). Instagram is also an appropriate platform for corporate social responsibility (Kwon and Lee, 2021). Firms may inform the public how they act as corporate citizens, serving the needs of communities. Moreover, organisational reputation receives immediate feedback through the comments function (Kwon and Lee, 2021). Therefore, the performance could be evaluated, but also relationships with stakeholders might be established (Al-Kandari et al., 2019).

Banks have also realised the huge potential of Instagram to engage targeted audiences (Ajina, 2019). In Kuwait, a study by Al-Kandari et al. (2019) examined how eight local banks use Instagram for PR. The content analysis of Instagram posts revealed that institutions in the banking sector mostly utilise the platform for promotion, informing stakeholders, community building and engagement. The journal article is also significant because it highlights on the cultural idiosyncrasies of the Kuwaiti society. The authors highlight the influence of religion on PR in the banking sector: there should always be “balance between obedience to Allah and meeting bank business objectives” (Al-Kandari et al., 2019, p1). Very often, the authors claim, the PR profession is executed in a tactical, rather than in strategical manner. Although the study identifies a gap in existing knowledge, its scope and methodology are limited. Therefore, more efforts are needed to understand how Instagram is and should be used in the PR function of Kuwaiti organisations (Al-Kandari et al., 2019).

With the rapid growth of Instagram, there is also room for pitfalls and fraud. Like the other social media networks discussed so far, the lack of control remains an issue and negative comments may rapidly turn against the organisation’s interests (Fill and Turnbull, 2016). For example, an influencer or celebrity may lose the respect of the public and the negative image could be easily transferred to the organisation. Additionally, fake influencers and the use bots grow, which results in huge losses for organisations (Bailis, 2019).

Twitter is a microblogging network that was founded in 2006. Twitter used to be very influential, but its user base is declining. A key strength of Twitter is that it is an important information source for many, and for young men in particular (Meyer Foundation, 2018). Senadheera, Warren and Leitch (2011) suggest that Twitter is used more as an information source, rather than as a platform for continuous conversations. On the contrary, practitioners-oriented research suggests that Twitter provides opportunities for real-time interactions with engaged users (WARC, 2019b). Conversations revolve around and organisations can unleash Twitter’s potential to spread newsworthy, informative, or witty messages (WARC, 2019b).

A study by Senadheera, Warren and Leitch (2011) revealed that banks give more prominence to Twitter than Facebook. Moreover, Twitter is often used by banks as a platform for crisis management. (Senadheera, Warren and Leitch, 2011). As the study is focused on the Australian banking sector. Still, a longitudinal study published in 2017, which investigated social media use in PR, showed that Twitter has been gradually replacing Facebook (Wright and Hinson, 2017). For example, Twitter is very well used by Australian banks to build relationships. The social network is perfect to engage with those who want immediate answers to their day-to-day questions or when there are crises (Senadheera, Warren and Leitch, 2011).

Social networking sites might be the most popular set of social media tools, but the public relations practitioner’s efforts are not limited to Facebook and Instagram. Blogs emerged as a social media application in 1996. A company may decide to run its own blog, and this is a potent tool for developing relationships in an intimate way, similar to interpersonal communication. Therefore, blogs are effective in achieving public relations’ core goal, namely developing and maintaining two-way relationships with their audiences (Cho and Huh, 2010).

Organisations do not have to run their own blogs, where the content is produced and published by the institution, to make use of blogging technology. A firm might work in partnership with bloggers. Through opinion leaders, the informative and persuasive functions of blogs are powerful to influence public opinion (Xifra and Huertas, 2008). For example, the bank Sartander partnered with The Times for the “Successful Modern Entrepreneurship” campaign. Pairing with a reputable newspaper was aiming to improve the poor public opinion for British banks after the recession. Sartander used supplements and features in the newspaper and on blogs. The multi-channel strategy boosted the campaign’s credibility and reach (NewsCred, 2014). Alongside with this persuasive function, blogs allow for market analysis and monitoring of audiences’ attitudes and opinions (Hallett, 2005).

The effectiveness of blogs to improve reputation and build relationships is used in the public sector, too. An interesting example is the campaign launched by the State Government of Rio de Janeiro, following a crisis in the area Complexo de Alemao and its drug dealer's invasion, rains tragedy and controversial pacification policies (WARC, 2012). To improve negative feelings, the Government decided to open dialogue channels on blogs and other social networks. Facts were humanised and spokespersons with credibility were used to improve reputation and popularise the Public efforts to improve its policies (WARC, 2012). However, influencing public through bloggers might be unpredictable. Uncontrolled blogs can easily damage corporate reputation (Cho and Huh, 2010). Moreover, blogs require maintenance through production of much content, which requires significant resources (NewsCred, 2014).

As highlighted above, messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and WeChat have very high usage rates. Researchers suggest that messaging apps will overtake traditional social platforms such as Facebook in terms of users (Chow and Hamill, 2016). Therefore, PR specialists need to be prepared for the future of social. Unlike Facebook, WhatsApp is a vehicle for authentic communication (Miller and Sinanan, 2017). Messaging apps very much resemble a natural social environment, used for conversations. Organisations may earn a place in these conversations by offering valuable and engaging content that consumers find beneficial. Moreover, WhatsApp allows for the rapid spread of messages. Therefore, the app is suitable environment for viral campaigns. However, the message should be insightfully crafted because users would share a message if it is useful (52%) and/or from a trusted person (30%) (Fouad, 2017). The rapid dissemination of information can also be treated as drawback. For example, in 2019 consumers received a message advising them to withdraw their money from the UK Metro Bank. Despite the bank advising customers that this was fake, there were queues of panicked consumers and the share price of the institution dropped (Griffin, 2019).

3.8.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Media Use for Organisations

The Internet has become one of the easiest and most affordable ways to communicate with publics, both in the public and in the private commercial sector, including banking institutions (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Still, there are some specifics of social media use, depending on the sector the organisation operates in, that can be advantageous or disadvantageous to that organisation.

Social media is a golden opportunity for businesses to stand out from competition (Chaffey and Smith, 2017). Reasons for the differential value of Web 2.0 applications are the unprecedented power for visibility, information and experience sharing, engagement, relationship and communities building, and for reputation and crisis management (Yang and Kent, 2014; Fill, 2017). Ultimately, these variables can result in sales and profits generation (Yang and Kent, 2014).

First, social media platforms are effective for awareness building. Yang and Kent (2014) argue that social media is a tool that holds great significance for its capacity to drive corporate visibility, which they define as "public presence of an individual or organisation in the media" (p563). According to the scholars, visibility positively influences organisational trust, loyalty to the brand and hence, sales. Moreover, when social media tools are utilised which the goal of boosting brand awareness, journalists are another stakeholder group that can notice the company (Yang and Kent, 2014). This, in turn, may result in improved media coverage.

Second, social media platforms are also effective for to stimulating engagement with stakeholders. However, the mere presence on Facebook or Twitter is not enough to meet the firm's objectives (Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga, 2010). The company might create interesting and entertaining content to broadcast to social media followers. Users with lower levels of engagement can just consume content and engage in simple interactions such as liking or sharing (Malthouse et al., 2013). Still, promotional activities that focus on creating awareness through information sharing do not actively work to engage with audiences at a high level (Malthouse et al., 2013). Instead, conversations might be a more powerful source of engagement, since turning passive bystanders in active participants has been shown to result in greater intimacy and engagement (Hanna, Rohn and Crittenden, 2011). This is the case in public organisations as well, with research showing that discussion online can improve civic engagement (Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela, 2011).

Much of the dialogue between companies and customers revolves around providing information and assistance. Consumers have changed their information sources, moving to online and word-of-mouth sources. On the other hand, traditional sources such as advertisements and posters are becoming less effective (Sethuraman, Tellis and Briesch, 2011). Therefore, social media sites have been increasingly used for customer service. Consumers have been shifting to social media for help, rather than giving a call or drafting a detailed email. However, a company needs to be very well prepared to address queries, as studies shows that more than 70% of users expect a Twitter response within an hour (Xu et al., 2017).

Third, perhaps the key advantage of social media for businesses is that it provides almost limitless opportunities for relationship building (Yang and Kent, 2014). Through relationships, trustworthiness, brand attitude and corporate reputation are also enhanced (Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom, 2015). However, their study revealed that most organisations use social media as a one-way communication tool for informing publics instead of as relationship building tool.

Taken together, the activities around building awareness, engagement, participation in and monitoring of dialogue, customer service and addressing complaints, refers to online reputation management (Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom, 2015). Reputation consists of an emotional and a rational component and by serving customers and building a brand online, companies assume that they will improve their corporate reputation (Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom, 2015).

Finally, social media is efficient; it is not only cheaper than traditional above-the-line media, but it also presents opportunities for smart targeting to reach niche audiences (DiStaso, McCorkindale and Wright, 2011; Fill, 2017). Social media is particularly useful to target younger audiences (Hanna, Rohn and Crittenden, 2011; Ramo and Prochaska, 2012) and this allows promotional budgets to be optimised (Fill, 2017). Other sources of savings are cost reductions, cost avoidance, and improved service time (Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga, 2010). For example, a bank may shift customer service from face-to-face or phone to social media (Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga, 2010), and providing service on the web is cheaper and quicker.

In general, a common assumption is that social media is very useful, and each organisation should use it. Every business should be present on Web 2.0, otherwise it is missing a golden opportunity to improve its competitiveness and is likely to be left behind as other organisations adopt this technology (Ryan and Jones, 2009). However, the digital tools landscape is so rapidly developing and changing that Chaffey and Smith point out that “good digital marketing is still relatively rare” (2017, p21). Both scholars and professionals tend to provide generic guidelines on social media use, ignoring the unique mission, vision and objectives of the business (Yang and Kent, 2014). Chaffey and Smith (2017) agree with this view and use the term “sloppy digital marketing” to refer to the lack of integration between online presence and business objectives. The value of social media use comes from the way these tools are used to achieve specific goals (Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Not only could social media be useless, but it may also pose reputational risks for a company. For example, a lot of employees create and share content on behalf of the company, whether directly or indirectly (as representatives of the organisation). For a public relations manager, this is a challenge because they now have to manage the various array of risks from all organisational members, including possible code of conduct violations, security and confidentiality breaches (Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga, 2010). Risk management on social media is particularly sensitive in regulated industries such as pharmaceuticals or banking (Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga, 2010).

Overall, it is questionable if social media efforts are beneficial for a company and its reputation. Indeed, the more engaged stakeholders are, the more positive their perceptions of corporate reputation (Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom, 2015). However, consumers might be also easily engaged in negative word-of-mouth (WOM) and boycotts on social media as these platforms could easily be turned against the firm’s interest because they are not under the marketers’ control (Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012; Fill, 2017). Further, people’s interactions on social media platforms are often more intense than when using traditional methods of communication and therefore electronic WOM has a more significant effect on consumer behaviour than traditional marketing communication, making it vital that organisations pay heed to social media and other forms of electronic WOM (Alalwan et al., 2017; Vinerean, 2017).

3.8.4 Strategic Use of Social Media

So far, public relations and marketing communication have been discussed although no clear distinction has made between these. In the traditional view on public relations, its function within the organisation is seen as separate and distinct from the role of marketing (Key and Czaplewski, 2017). This is discussed by Grunig (1992) and others focused on public relations who argue that public relations and marketing play different roles within the organisation in order achieve different aspects of the organisation's goals (Gesualdi, 2019; McKie and Willis, 2012). However, in practice, the line between public relations and marketing has been increasingly blurred and this has become even more marked with the greater use of Web 2.0 technologies (Estanyol, 2012; Gesualdi, 2019). As a result, public relations and marketing are generally understood to be complementary and converging disciplines (Papasolomou et al., 2014; Cheney and Christensen, 2001) and generally this is based on the idea that public relations is market-oriented and being more strategically to achieve organisational objectives (Estanyol, 2012; McKie and Willis, 2012).

One new approach to using public relations in a market-oriented way is called marketing public relations, which Papasolomou et al. (2014, p12) defines as

> *"…a promotional tool that directly or indirectly contributes to the achievement of marketing and sales objectives by promoting brands and causes in a trustworthy manner, creating media and public interest in them, preparing the public for news, creating favourable perceptions and stimulating positive word-of-mouth communications."*

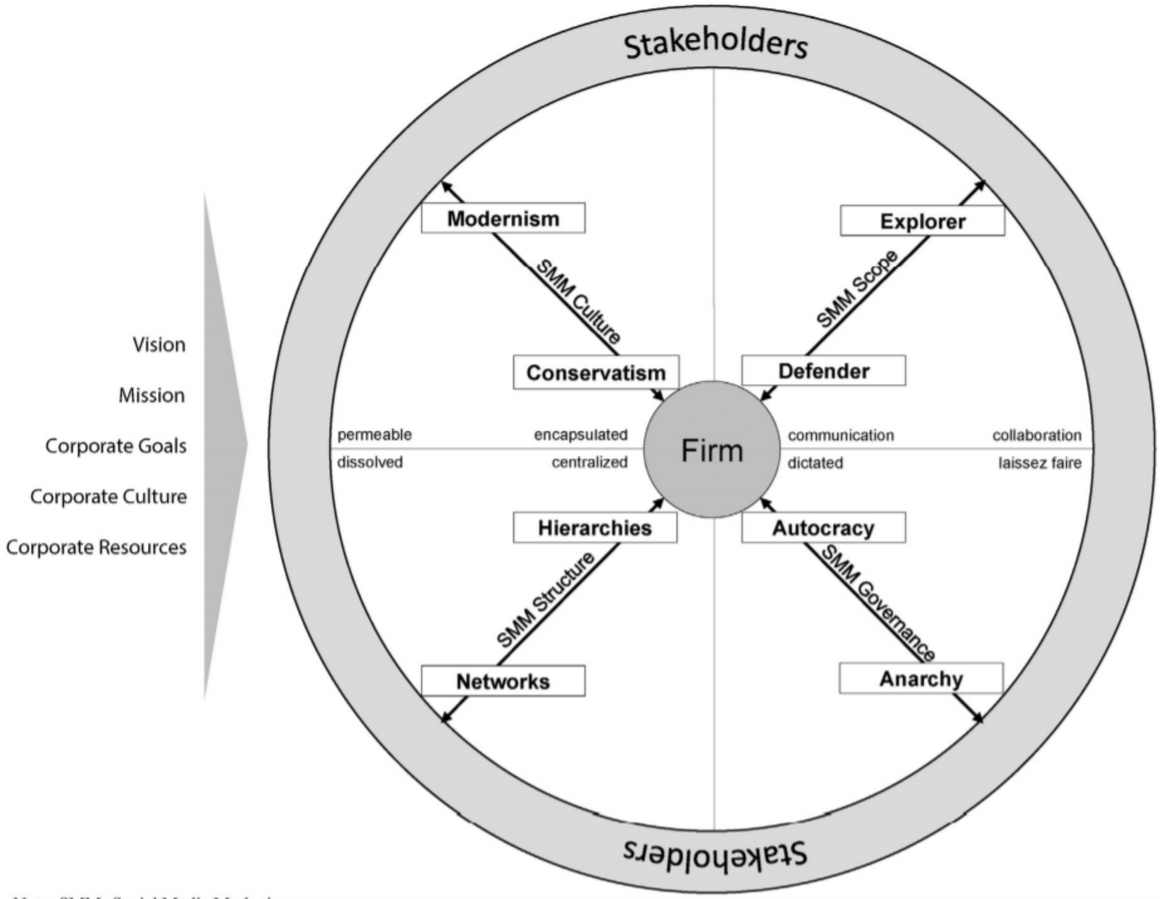
In differentiating between marketing and marketing public relations, Papasolomou and Melanthiou (2012, p1462) argue that marketing public relations is unique in the fact that it is intermediaries or connectors that are engaged in spreading the marketers' message to the desired audience.

Marketing public relations focuses on advertising and includes elements such as event sponsorships, advocacy and cause-related marketing, and image advertising, which can be used to strengthen the organisation's image and reach difficult-to-reach audiences (Key and Czaplewski, 2017). More recently, social media has been identified as a key tool of marketing public relations (Papasolomou et al., 2014; Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012). Specifically, the main purpose of setting out a social media strategy is to help the organisation to achieve its strategic marketing goals by supporting the creation of a valuable and unique competitive position (Tafesse and Wien, 2018).

In examining ways in which social media can be used strategically (along with public relations) to support marketing communication goals, Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch (2017) present a holistic framework for the strategic use of social media in marketing along four primary dimensions (Figure 10):

1. Social media marketing scope,
2. Social media marketing culture,
3. Social media marketing structure, and
4. Social media marketing governance.

Figure 10: Strategic Social Media Marketing Framework
(Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch, 2017, p121)



Note: SMM=Social Media Marketing

First, the scope of the social media strategy can be one of two approaches: explorer and defender. In the explorer approach, organisations seek to use the capability of social media in terms of interactivity to create authentic dialogue with its internal and external stakeholders, while “with the defender approach, consumers may try to communicate with the company through social media but receive standardised answers or even no reply at all” (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017, p121). Second, the social media culture can be either based on a modern approach or a conservative approach. A conservative social media marketing culture “is represented by an encapsulated, traditional, mass-advertising approach to social media marketing” while a modern approach is open, authentic, and includes risk taking (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017, p120). The conservative approach has been found to be the least engaging for the audience (Lappas et al., 2018).

Third, the social media strategy can be structured in networks or hierarchies. Companies using a network approach have a “fragmented, decentralised, dissolved, and cross-functional” approach to the way in which social media is controlled while those using a hierarchical approach have a centralised approach to control (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017, p120). Finally, governance of the social media strategy can range from anarchy to autocracy. In an autocratic system, social media is administered in a centralised way, usually by only one department (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017). However, this approach reduces the ability of PR professionals to communicate with their audience authentically and transparently. At the other end of the spectrum is an anarchical approach in which there are no rules for using social media and all employees and departments are free to communicate via social media (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017). This approach is not recommended and instead, companies need to have policies and guidelines for social media use and make sure employees are trained in this area (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017). These policies and guidelines are necessary for reducing the risk of improper communication from employees via social media (Tafesse and Wien, 2018). This is also important for integration of social media with other communication/public relations from the organisation in order to support brand consistency (Valos et al., 2017).

3.8.5 The Role of Social Media in Public Relations

Researchers have identified the benefit of using digital technologies as tools for public relations (Ebrahim, 2017). Among these, social media communication has been shown to have a significant impact on public relations practitioners. According to Obar and Wildamn (2015), the appearance of Web 2.0 has increased social interaction. Breakenridge (2012) believes that PR is a communication programme for developing messages. Additionally, Web 2.0 and new technologies have changed the professional role, communication and the method of interaction with the audience. Lipschultz (2015) observes that social media assists PR in increasing sales, limiting expenses and creating online conversations. These conversations could lead to online purchases. Therefore, marketers need social media to be involved in their practice to be strategic in growing their business (Zamani, Giaglis and Kasimati, 2015).

In addition, to remain competitive and develop their business, company PR must ensure that online networking is associated with their current and future objectives and strategies. As a result, PR managers place traditional tools with social media to establish and create originality in PR work to influence and reach the audience (Philips and Young, 2009). Therefore, PR practitioners adopt social media as an opportunity to operate communication instantly via social media networks; practitioners attempt to reach and engage with a large audience (Lipschultz, 2015). Public relations practitioners should manage both context and component (Brown and Waddington, 2013). Therefore, it is essential to understand that the audience is no longer passive and that PR professionals have shifted to Web 2.0. This shift established a need for PR practitioners to have their own brands and services to achieve success more effectively in their work (Breakenridge, 2012).

Breakenridge (2012, pp158-159) produced the social media strategy wheel to help public relations practitioners to utilise social media more effectively. Social media requires practitioners to think in a creative way to reach the targeted audience. Further, it is a technology communication it needs a behaviour planning. This wheel sections are:

1. "Tracking and monitoring": helps to find what are the most important information that the audience need?
2. "Distribution/ channel strategy": helps to recognise what platform the audience like to participate. Why do the audience choose one specific platform to share?
3. "Communication / content optimisation strategy": what issues and content that affect the audience? This part of the wheel finds the influence of the messages and improve the content.
4. "Engagement and measurements": seeking for the best method to interact with audience. What kind of engagement shell the audience take? What information want to provide for the audience.

5. “Measurement strategy”: to track one program success and determine the measurement strategy.

Lee et al. (2015) identified social media works as a separate factor in addition to the role of played by the social media manager and technicians. Breakenridge (2012) added that, in a limited time, social media could destroy a company’s reputation and image. In contrast, organisations today could deal with crises proactively through PR practices in social media. Zamani, Giaglis and Kasimati (2015) concluded that having a rapid response strategy to a crisis, via social media, could protect an organisation’s reputation. As shown, public relations practitioners have begun to use social media because Web 2.0 creates a direct communication with the audience, which was impossible before (Valentini, 2015). The use of social media provides opportunity to develop stronger and more positive relationship between the organisation and its audience.

3.8.6 Social Presence and Media Richness

The Internet is a place known for its capacity to promote and maintain social interaction, and the growth of the global telecommunication infrastructure has meant that the telecommunication system acts as a mediator for an increasing number of said interactions and relationships with others (Biocca, Harms and Burgoon, 2003). Research in organisational communication reveals that media is likely to be chosen to accommodate in a more effective manner activities that have been influenced by social presence. Users may o utilise media “to modulate social presence for a wide range of activities including getting to know someone, exchanging information or goods, problem solving and making decisions, exchanging opinions, generating ideas, resolving conflicts, or maintaining friendly relations” (Biocca, Harms and Burgoon, 2003, p458). Social presence and media richness theories can increase understanding of how people behave in mediated environments, which allows for differences among different media to be examined and measured (Biocca, Harms and Burgoon, 2003). This is because the social presence theory and media richness theory are similar in that they both

> *"…emphasise how communication media differ in the extent to which they (a) can overcome various communication constraints of time, location, permanence, distribution, and distance; (b) transmit the social, symbolic, and nonverbal cues of human communication; and (c) convey equivocal information" (Rice, 1993, p452).*

Social presence can be defined as "the degree to which a medium is perceived as conveying the presence of the communicating participants" (Rice, 1993, p452). Presence, which can be understood as the perception at a psychological level that other people are present at a physical level, is communicated by words and other verbal and nonverbal cues as well as the context in which the communication occurs (Short, Williams and Christie, 1976). According to this theory, different mediums have varying ability to convey presence (Rice, 1993). In order to understand why some mediums, have greater social presence than other mediums, the way in which social presence has a connection with two concepts of social psychology is examined: intimacy (interpersonal vs. mediated) and immediacy (asynchronous vs. synchronous) (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). There is an expectation that social presence will be lower when mediated communications take place, such as telephone conversation, compared to interpersonal communications such as face-to-face discussion and is also expected to be lower for asynchronous communications such as e-mail than synchronous communications such as live chat) (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Additionally, mediums with higher the social presence will allow communication partners to have a greater, the social influence on each other's behaviour (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Thus, the use of media that are categorised as having a higher degree of social presence should be crucial for the undertaking of social tasks, such as relationship-building.

According to Biocca, Harms and Burgoon (2003, p459), social presence technologies can be defined simply as "technologies that are primarily intended to increase real time social interaction." Social media technologies can clearly be put into this category. Higher levels of social presence are generally presented as being positive in terms of the impact on communication, however, it can also reduce the effectiveness of communication (depending on the goal) and can increase the audience’s susceptibility to being deceived and manipulated (Biocca, Harms and Burgoon, 2003).

Media richness theory uses as its basis the social presence theory, and it is built on the premise that greater richness has a connection to higher social presence (Zmud, Lind and Young, 1990). Media richness can be defined as “the extent to which media are able to bridge different frames of reference, make issues less ambiguous, or provide opportunities for learning in a given time interval, based on the medium's capacity for immediate feedback, the number of cues and senses involved, personalisation, and language variety” (Rice, 1993, p452-453). This theory argues that communication media vary in their capacity to support understanding and assumes that the purpose of communication is to resolve ambiguity and to decrease uncertainty (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Richer media is differentiated from leaner media by the media’s ‘information richness,’ which is defined as “the amount of information a medium could convey to change the receiver’s understanding within a time interval” (Robert and Dennis, 2005, p12). Based on the degree of richness of the media, some will be are more successful in reducing ambiguity and uncertainty (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

According to this theory, the more attributes the medium possesses, the richer it is. As such, considering this definition, face-to-face communication is regarded as being the richest medium since it maintains the capacity to offer instant feedback and includes many verbal and nonverbal cues while also using natural languages (Daft and Lengel, 1984). Telephone calls are argued to be next in richness since it allows for instant feedback, but the lack of visual cues means that “individuals have to rely on language content and audio cues to reach understanding” (Daft and Lengel, 1984, p198). In contrast, letters, emails and other types of written communication are argued to be less media rich since the feedback is not instant and the are limited cues (Johnson and Keil, 1999). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classify social networking sites as medium in terms of both social presence and media richness, since both have text-based communication although they also have the ability for sharing video, images, audio, and so on.

An important assumption of this theory is that the task that is being undertaken will be more successful if its needs are in line with the chosen a medium's ability to communication information (Dennis and Valacich, 1999). Indeed, the essential underlying principle in both social presence and media richness theories is that matching the medium's characteristics with the goal of the communication will make communications more effective (Rice, 1993). This is supported by Kwak's (2012) research showing that consumers use face-to-face communication when they need intimacy and personalisation, while they are more likely to use a leaner medium like social media when they are already knowledgeable about the topic being discussed.

However, there is limited empirical research to support this argument, and this is particularly applicable to new media such as social media. For example, media richness theory would predict that voicemail would be seen pas higher in media richness than e-mail but research by Johnson and Keil (1999) in the context of providing student feedback indicated that both are seen by students as capable of providing feedback of sufficient quality to meet their needs. In seeking to explain this, Robert and Dennis (2005) argue that using rich media causes paradoxical outcomes. Based on the results of their research, Robert and Dennis (2005) argue that using a medium that is both high in social presence and media richness will increase motivation but will also lead to reduced information processing ability, and vice versa. This shows that high social presence and media richness has a dual impact on the audience, acting to improve and worsen cognitive performance (Robert and Dennis, 2005).

Nonetheless, research indicates that face-to-face interaction is still the dominant mode of interpersonal communication (Baym, Zhang and Lin, 2004; Lee, 2010). At the same time, this is also research showing that some users are dpnding on social media as a means of interpersonal communication to a greater extent than face-to-face interaction, although these social media platforms have not been found to be substitutes for face-to-face interaction (Kujath, 2011). Instead, social media communication has been found to be an extension of face-to-face interaction, with social media communication reinforcing face-to-face communication instead of displacing its use of (Kujath, 2011; Dienlin, Masur and Trepte, 2017).

3.8.7 Online Relationship Cultivation Strategies

The development of relationships has been argued to be the basis of public relations (Ki and Hon, 2009) and indeed, public relations has been defined as relationship management and thus the relationship between the organisation and its key publics has been seen as the main unit of analysis in the study of public relations (Ledingham and Bruning, 1998; Seltzer and Zhang, 2010). According to Ledingham and Bruning (1998, p62), organisations and their publics develop relationships when the "actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other." In line with this, Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997, p95) argue that these parties develop relationships when they "have perceptions and expectations of each other, when one or both parties need resources from the other, when one or both parties perceive mutual threats from an uncertain environment, and when there is either a legal or voluntary necessity to associate." From this perspective, organisations of different types use various public relations strategies to develop and manage the relationships with different publics in order to generate the desired attitudes and behaviours from these publics (Broom, Casey, and Ritchey, 1997). Overall, this relationship perspective has been identified as being particular important for application in the PR context as identified by Ledingham and Bruning (2000, pxiii) below:

> *"…the relationship paradigm also provides a framework in which to explore the linkage between public relations objectives and organisational goals, for constructing platforms for strategic planning and tactical implementation, and approaching programmatic evaluation in ways understood and appreciated by the ruling management group."*

Research indicates that five important dimensions of a high-quality relationship are openness, trust, involvement, investment, and commitment (Ledingham and Bruning, 1998). This section focuses on the strategies that can be used to develop relationships with these types of qualities, called relationship cultivation strategies.

According to Ki and Hon (2008), relationship cultivation strategies refer to the strategies that are used by organisations to build and maintain quality relationships and indeed, they argue that these relationship cultivation strategies are basically the activities undertaken by public relations practitioners day-to-day. In this way, public relations can be evaluated as effective depending on the ability to develop quality relationship outcomes, including mutual control of the relationship, satisfaction, trust, and commitment, with strategic constituencies (Hon and Grunig, 1999; Grunig and Huang, 2000; Ki and Hon, 2008). Hon and Grunig (1999) proposed six specific relationship cultivation strategies have been proposed that have been used significantly across the literature and these are access, positivity, openness, assurances, networking, and sharing of tasks. Each of these is discussed briefly below.

First, access relates to the amount of contact that between the organisation and its publics (Hon and Grunig, 1999). This contact can be initiated by the organisation or its constituents and access is considered to be granted when both parties are engaged in communication (face-to-face or mediated by technology) and are responding to each other's questions and concerns (Ki and Hon, 2008). Online access can be provided through the provision of a website or a social media page that allows customers/the public to contact the organisation. According to Ki and Hon (2008), this is consistent with Grunig's (2017) idea of two-way symmetrical communication since this indicates a willingness to communicate by both sets of parties. Importantly, however, this exchange can only be considered symmetrical if the communication is being used by the organisation to understand customers/the public and balance the interests of the organisation and customers/the public, rather than just to influence customers/the public (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Seltzer and Zhang, 2010). Further, within the online space specifically, research by Ki and Hon (2006) on corporate websites indicates that access was one of the relationship strategies used by organisations most frequently. Zhu (2011) also supported the use of this strategy, indicating that it produces the highest quality relationship outcomes.

Second, openness is another strategy that is meant to support two-way symmetrical communication between the organisation and customers/the public and include strategies such as providing an organisational history or sharing information on how the organisation's products are made (Hon and Grunig, 1999). Ki and Hon's (2006) research found that openness was the strategy that was most used by organisations in relationship building and was most successful in producing high quality relationship outcomes. This was supported by Hong's (2006) research that found openness was the most used strategy for tourism boards and travel agencies, while positivity was used the least. Positivity, the third strategy discussed here, relates to organisational activities that make the relationship pleasant (Hon and Grunig, 1999) and an example of this is making websites simple or social media pages fun for users. Both trust and satisfaction can be developed as a result of having a positive experience on a company website or social media page. Importantly, context has been shown to be important in determining the relationship strategies that were most effective, as show in research by Waters et al. (2011) where openness and positivity were found as the strategies used most frequently on church websites.

Fourth, assurances are used by the organisation to guarantee various constituencies that their concerns are genuine, which can be achieved by listening to their needs and incorporating these desires and comments into its operations (Hon and Grunig, 1999). Fifth, networking is about building coalitions with other groups that are important to customers/the public, such as forming coalitions with community groups (Hon and Grunig, 1999). These groups can be made with others that are similar, or not, to the organisation but both offer something to customers/the public. Finally, sharing of tasks means that organisations and their constituencies are involved in joint problem-solving or joint policymaking (Hon and Grunig, 1999; Ki and Hon, 2009).

3.9 SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR

3.9.1 Social Media Use in the Banking Sector

The banking industry was among the pioneers in social media adoption (Mitic and Kapoulas, 2012). While the benefits and drawbacks of social media use discussed in the previous section are still valid for banks, there are some sector-specific issues. After the global crisis, the banking industry is under scrutiny. To re-establish trust and to re-build favourable reputation, banks need to engage in effective corporate dialogue (Bonsón and Flores, 2011). Moreover, banking is an industry in which transparency is highly valued. Banks saw an opportunity in social media to provide online information to a wide array of stakeholders, both external and internal. Along with promoting transparency, banks can use social media to gain feedback from various stakeholders and thus, improve their reputation (Bonsón and Flores, 2011; Miranda et al., 2013).

Financial institutions are very much interested in improving customers' service and its speed, efficiency and convenience. Today, e-banking platforms and applications allowed banks to cater the needs of customers on the web. Indeed, e-banking customers expect to be serviced on networking sites such as Facebook (Durkin, Mulholland and McCartan, 2015). By enhancing the service with social aspects, banks are aiming to address the affective component of relationship building (Mitic and Kapoulas, 2012) On the other hand, the study of Durkin, Mulholland and McCartan (2015) shed light on what customers gain of their bank's presence on social networking sites. Young users (aged 15-30) in particular saw real-time information provision as the most important advantage. More mature consumers (aged 31-60) were more interested in returns such as events and competitions.

The Internet has had affected many areas in the banking sector and it has forced practitioners to deal with technology challenges. The internet offers banking managers the opportunity to use new communication tools and follow technology trends. These rapid technological developments, especially in social media, can be observed clearly in the banking industry. According to Kirakosyan (2015), social media is considered to be a new challenge for bankers. Online dialogue tends to be informal and happens in a less secure environment (Miranda et al., 2013). Information privacy and data control are particularly sensitive issues in the banking industry (Mitic and Kapoulas, 2012).

However, neglecting social media may cause banks to lose customers. Bankers need to understand how to use social media most efficiently, consider it a powerful tool and develop a new strategy to tap into its advantages. By using social media, bankers can enhance their relationship with their clients (Kirakosya, 2014). Research has also found that some bankers have already started to utilise social media platforms (Kirakosyan, 2015). However, banks have been more careful to adopt social media mostly due to safety and data privacy issues (Miranda et al., 2013). Still, many bankers do not leverage the full possibility of social media, only using it as an information tool (Kirakosyan, 2015). The content analysis of social media pages run by 15 of the most influential banking institutions in the world provides more details. Findings revealed that social media is utilised to achieve growth in brand awareness as well as for the increase of engagement and customer affinity (Kirakosyan, 2015). However, banks rarely deploy social media for marketing, new client acquisition, to promote loyalty and to actually improve their services. It seems that many banks adopt social media with no clear view on its strategic use or on the goals they are pursuing (Miranda et al., 2013).

3.9.2 Social Media Use in the Public Sector

In a similar vein, many public institutions have been working to improve their reputation by increasing transparency and openness (Bertot, Jaeger and Grimes, 2010). Overall, public organisations across the world have been making greater use of social media to communicate with their stakeholders in order to achieve a range of goals (Graham and Avery, 2013). Since World War I, transparency has been in the forefront in the international public agenda. Those societies that embrace the principle of transparency have governments that are more likely to share information.

There are several advantages of social media use by governments. First, social media is accessible, and the structures are flat. Thus, barriers to communication are overcome (Graham and Avery, 2013). The first step to action is *awareness*. Social media provides indispensable infrastructure for producing, exchanging and disseminating information on social issues (Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín and del Carmen Caba-Pérez, 2018). DePaula, Dincelli and Harrison (2018) specify that on social media, governments provide two categories of information: operational (policy changes, events announcements) or public service (to build awareness on a social issue or call- to-action announcements). For example, Graham and Avery (2013) examined how public organisations used Facebook and Twitter and found that almost half posted at least once per month, almost always about special events and activities, as well as videos and images, and policy issues and information. Nevertheless, both operational and public service information are one-way types of communication (DePaula, Dincelli and Harrison, 2018). As discussed, the interactivity of social media has much more potential than being merely used as an information channel. This may be because the reason that public organisations use social media such as Facebook and Twitter are primarily internal and external (public) pressure, rather than a desire to increase accountability, transparency, or communication quality more generally (Graham and Avery, 2013; Khan, 2012).

Similar to businesses, governments also look for ways to improve engagement. However, the public sector treats social media users as partners, not as customers. In the context of the public sector, engagement refers to the participation of citizens in public activities (Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín and del Carmen Caba-Pérez, 2018). Public institutions are aiming to turn passive citizens, who merely consume public services, into active participants. Thus, social problems could be jointly solved (Linders, 2012). Therefore, the government uses Web 2.0 applications not only for feedback provision, but also for “citizen sourcing”, or when “the public helps government be more responsive and effective” (Linders, 2012, p447). For example, the government of Iceland crowdsourced its new constitution on social media (Zavattaro, 2013).

Social media’s power for niche targeting is used by public agencies as well. But unlike corporations, the public sector is more interested in marginalised groups in the society, or those who were previously under-served and under-presented (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). Moreover, unlike banks, public institutions often have limited PR budgets, rendering social media an ideal and inexpensive method for message dissemination and public engagement (Linders, 2012). Indeed, a single message can reach millions of citizens via various social media platforms (Khan, 2012). Another aspect of efficiency is saving time and social media can optimise information and engagement processes for both the institutions and the citizen (Kantar TNS, 2015). Moreover, citizens have access to information all hours of the day and regardless of public holidays (Dadashzadeh, 2010). Online information circulates with feedback loops between people and the government, and the possibility for quick clarifications helps ensure messages have been understood correctly (Khan, 2012). Therefore, social media use in public sector is both convenient and efficient.

When governments use social media during crises, reputation management is not the sole objective. The flat structure of the web allows for rapid dissemination of information and fast response time, which is crucial when lives are in danger (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). Magro (2012) also argue that social media is effective in disseminating information and instructions when publics are in danger, for example, when there is criminal dangers or natural disasters. Moreover, social sources are important for early spotting of issues and crises (Kavanaugh et al., 2012).

To sum up, social media utilisation in the public sector brings both effectiveness and efficiency. However, there are different levels of social media adoption. Most governments use Web 2.0 applications for mere information socialisation. However, as Khan (2012) explains, this is only the tip of the iceberg. From information dissemination, the public sector should move to mass social collaboration (or “citizen sourcing”) and social transaction (for example, providing tangible services such as driving licence renewal). Still, it has been argued that social media poses too many limitations to be a solid platform for tangible transactions (Khan, 2012).

However, there are disadvantages of social media use in the public sector. First, there are often communication barriers in the public sector (Zavattaro and Sementelli, 2014). Second, while social media platforms allow public agencies to meet citizens on their preferred online places to communicate and establish trust, transparency and democracy, the mere presence on social media cannot automatically fight disengagement (Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín and del Carmen Caba-Pérez, 2018). Most public agencies use social media in a one-way manner and fail to connect with citizens and establish a dialogue (Zavattaro and Sementelli, 2014). Specifically, the research shows that many public sector organisations are using social media for disseminating information but not for developing real engagement with their stakeholders (Lee and Vandyke, 2015). This, therefore, leads to the conclusion that social media tools are actually underutilised by the government section, using Facebook and twitter primarily for posting information on special events rather than to improve democracy, participation, and transparency (Graham and Avery, 2013). The reasons are twofold. For one, unlike individuals and businesses, public institutions are highly regulated and social media use is highly restricted by policy guidelines (DePaula and Dincelli, 2018). For another, like in the commercial sector, in the public sector there is also misunderstanding on what social media is and how it is most effectively utilised. Many agencies, in the US for example, are simply present on social media because staff is simply fulfilling top-down policies (Graham and Avery, 2013; Mergel, 2013; Lappas et al., 2018). This is seen clearly in the frequency with which social media sites are being used as broadcast media, not replying to comments or questions from the public (Lee and Vandyke, 2015).

Even when there is a response, not all interactions with citizens are meaningful and very often the government-citizens dialogue is in fact a simple set of exchanges (Graham and Avery, Lappas et al., 2018). For example, a citizen may receive a response by an agency, and this is treated as “dialogue.” De Paula and Dincelli (2018) explain that social media is effective in nature, so behaviour is also emotional. Therefore, the critical and reasoned dialogue on Facebook or Twitter is fairly limited. Through a content analysis the scholars found that the more emotional and symbolic the Facebook post is, the more reactions and comments by citizens it gets. However, this is a quasi-dialogue and is not a true measurement of civic engagement (De Paula and Dincelli, 2018; Lee and Vandyke, 2015). Additionally, this type of interaction is not a ‘dialogue’ that would help to increase the public’s knowledge on an issue or change their attitudes about the issue (Lee and Vandyke, 2015).

Moreover, even if social media is cheaper than above-the-line tools (DiStaso, McCorkindale and Wright, 2011; Fill, 2017), this does not mean that it is free. There are costs for the agencies' presence on social media platforms and for the maintenance of this presence. Clearly, in the public sector the return of investment is blurred. While corporations can select specific segments and target them, public institutions should serve all citizens (Dadashzadeh, 2010). Therefore, social media planning and monitoring is crucial in the public sector, in order to optimise the already limited resources. In a similar fashion, social media might be cheap, but the platforms itself are so dynamic and rapidly evolving, that their software is often poorly functioning. This creates risks for the privacy of citizens. The mass collection of information, including names, email addresses, and locations, presents risks of information theft or misuse (Khan, 2012).

The challenges could be much harsher than a limited and narrow social media use. Governments face reputational risks on social media as well. Networking sites can easily turn into arenas for public criticism. Very often, critical comments on social media are not related to the post itself, but rather discuss off-topic issues, such as unpopular decisions or corruption. Even if social comments lack sense and credibility, online reputation damage can easily turn into offline loss of public trust (Khan, 2012). Therefore, public agencies also need very well-trained employees to handle criticism. Moreover, scholars such as Magro (2012) call for the establishment of whole social media departments to accommodate the citizens' needs on social media, but also to monitor and analyse large amounts of data. However, restricted budgets are often the norm in the public sector (Falco and Kleinhans, 2018). Finally, organisations in the public sector need to know the advantages and disadvantages of social media to seize the opportunities it offers.

3.9.3 The Use of Social Media by Kuwait's PR Practitioners

The first two research questions are as follows:

1. ***How and to what extent do public relations practitioners in Kuwait public and private commercial sectors use social media?***

2. Are there significant differences in the use of social media between public and private commercial sectors in Kuwait?

It is noteworthy that there is a lack of academic studies published in Kuwait about PR. This is related to the misunderstanding of the PR profession and to the lack of professional PR skills and eligibility (Almutairi, 2013). In this section, propositions are developed about the use of social media in PR practice in Kuwait based on available literature on PR in the Arab world and the PR theories outlined.

Empirical research indicates that the history of public relations in the Middle East has been brief, including Kuwait and examinations to date indicate that the practice of public relations within Arab countries is still in the press agentry and public information stages of Grunig's (1993) model (Kirat, 2005, 2006). As noted in Section 2.6, Kirat (2005) also argued that much of the practice of public relations within the countries of the Arab world remains still in the press agentry and public information stages of Grunig's (1993) model, thus indicating that it is still has a way to go to reach maturity. Specifically, Kirat (2005, 2006) examined this issue and reported that public relations were still largely seen as a tool for organisations to foster the image they desire to project to others using publicity, public information, and propaganda. Additionally, while Kirat (2005) indicates that there are high quality public relations being practiced in these countries, primarily within the areas of business and marketing, he has also argued that:

> *"Arab countries commonly practice PR based on public information and publicity. The objective is mostly to portray positively those individuals and organisations whose tasks consist of performing secondary PR jobs such as assisting customers, guests, fulfilling hospitality functions at the expense of professional public relations, strategic planning, research and providing top management with sound advice"* (p323-324).

This is consistent with more recent research from Al-Jenaibi (2014a) in which she argues that most public relations in the region depends on intuitive or experiential learning instead of using academic and evidence-based approaches to improving communication with their audiences. Thus, while organisations in the UAE, for example, acknowledge the importance of having effective public relations, their strategies continue to be ineffectual (Al-Jenaibi, 2015). Additionally, public relations practitioners note the importance of ethical guidance in doing their work as they seek to reconcile the roles of public advocate and professional advocate (Al-Jenaibi, 2015), which indicates that these professionals are seeking to operate within the two-way symmetrical model but currently do not do so.

Several researchers have examined the way in which public relations is practiced across the Arab world to determine the factors that may affect this. Kirat (2005) hypothesised that a range of factors affected this type of approach to public relations in the Arab countries, first being that public relations has only been practiced in these countries for about 40 years, which he argues means that more time is still needed for “a well-established culture of effective, responsible and powerful public relations” to be developed (Kirat, 2005, p325). Second, public relations in Arab countries is largely tied to the government and public sector institutions, which themselves are particular interested in using public relations for protocol as a means of publicity and manipulation of the public conversation (Kirat, 2005). Third, organisational factors also come into play in determining how public relations is practiced, since senior managers’ perception of public relations and its role in the organisation constrain what can be done, particularly when the role of public relations is seen as just for executing protocol and undertaking publicity and secondary tasks (Kirat, 2005). Specifically, the senior management teams of many Arab organisations are usually interested in one-way communication as they disseminate positive propaganda about the organisation and its leaders, with little or no interest in a two-way communication that would include concern with the feedback and opinion of its audience (Kirat, 2005; Al-Jenaibi, 2015). This may be because of limited understanding of what should be the role of the public relations department and the potential that it has to achieve more significant goals for the organisation; as a result, this leaves this department relatively marginalised in the Arab world (Ayish, 2005; Kirat, 2005).

At a wider level, there are several other political, socio-economic, and legal factors across these countries that are likely to affect the way in which public relations is practiced, including the individual's place within Arab societies and the relevance of his/her opinion in that society (Kirat, 2005). Kirat (2005) identified three main factors that influence the manner in which public relations is practiced within a country, specifically the nature of the political system, individual rights and freedom, and the economic system. This was discussed by Kraidy (2012) who noted that the actual political reality in a country is the most important factor in affecting how the media operates, and it can be argued that this extends to how public relations operates. Kirat (2005) argued that democratic political systems are needed to support a robust public relations system, which is also likely to be linked to individuals being able to express themselves and in general having more rights and freedoms. Further, he argued that public relations operate most effectively within liberal free market economies where free enterprise is vaunted (Kirat, 2005). From this position, he then concludes that most Arab countries do not have these prerequisites, and this thus has a negative effect on the practice of public relations and its ability to develop robustly within these countries. As noted in Section 3.5, Kuwait has one of the most open political systems in the region but there are still restrictions on the media, many individual rights and freedom continue to be curtailed, and free enterprise is not specifically vaunted within this country (Euromonitor International, 2020; Ochsenwald et al., 2019). Based on this information, the following is theorised:

Proposition 1: The communication employed by PR practitioners in Kuwait's public and private commercial sectors is asymmetrical; however, the former organisations use press agentry and public information models of PR that focus on persuasion and manipulation and rely significantly more on them than private sector organisations.

As it relates to social media specifically, this appears to have been accepted by both public and private sector companies as part of their public relations toolbox (Al-Jenaibi, 2013, 2014a). As noted in Section 3.5, within

Kuwait, the use of Internet is very high and approximately 95% of the population being on social media, and since private use of social media is usually the precursor of professional use of these technologies, it is expected that the utilisation of social media professionally in Kuwait would also be high, as outlined below:

Proposition 2: Public relations practitioners in Kuwait's public and private commercial sectors use social media use extensively in their public relations practice.

Additionally, in line with the research above, research within the UAE specifically showed that there was still no engagement in two-way communication achieved by organisations with their publics even with the rise of the Internet and social media that makes it much easier to interact with audiences (Kirat, 2007; Al-Jenaibi, 2013). Similarly, even though it is perceived that social media use may be widespread in Arab countries as a professional tool, but this is still being used as a basic level (Al-Jenaibi, 2013). This tends to occur at an even greater intensity in the public sector, where public relations practices are much more traditional (Al-Jenaibi, 2014a). Further, since the public sector in Kuwait is expected to rely more significantly on press agentry and public information models, its use of social media is expected to focus on one-way communication. However, private sector organisations are in the business of getting the audience to accept the organisation's perception so that their business strategies can be achieved (Grunig, 1993) and therefore can be expected to rely more significantly on two-way asymmetrical model of public relations, particularly in its use of social media. This is expected because engagement over social media has been shown to change the characteristics of PR dialogue (Philips and Young, 2009; Green, 2010) and this is more likely to be reflected in the private sector more quickly than in the public sector, particularly in Kuwait where the public sector is traditionally conservative (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). This would mean that there is a significant difference in the use of social media across public and private sector organisations in Kuwait, as outlined below:

Proposition 3: There significant differences in the use of social media between public and private commercial sectors in Kuwait, with public institutions using social media in a more traditional way (press agentry and public information models) than private sector organisations (two-way asymmetrical model).

3.9.4 The Impact of Culture on the Use Of Social Media by Kuwaiti PR Practitioners

As noted in Section 2.4, Kuwait is characterised as a culturally conservative country particularly because of the influence of Islamic teachings (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012). This is also reflected in its characterisation as collectivist, and high-power distance, feminine (caring) values, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2011). Kuwaitis are characterised as preferring strict laws and certainty by way of strict religious beliefs (Lamoreaux and Morling, 2012), which is supported by research indicating that important Islamic value orientations in Kuwait include respect for religious authority, attachment to the idea of ‘eternal life,’ and spirituality and idealism (Gaither and Al-Kandari, 2014). This is reasonably different from the cultural context of the countries from which public relations originated (Dozier, Grunig and Grunig, 2013; Grunig, 2013). Further, social media use in Kuwait has also been shown to differ from use in the West, as the cultural and religious values in the Kuwaiti society are also reflected online (Wheeler, 2003; Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017). Thus, in examining the practice of PR and social media within Kuwait, the third research question is as follows:

3. ***Does the cultural context of Kuwait affect public relations practitioner’s use of social media and if so, how?***

It can be expected that Kuwait’s cultural context would affect the way in which public relations practitioner use social media within that country, specifically it would be expected that both government and private organisations would seek to observe the traditional and religious rules of the society. For example, as previously highlighted, gender roles (and women's 'place' in particular) are strictly enforced in the Kuwaiti society (Wheeler, 2003; Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017). Thus, while social media facilitate greater autonomy among the population at large (Wheeler, 2003), organisations still have to observethe many rules and restrictions that need to be followed as proper Islamic organisations.

In Kuwait and other Arab countries, there is an apparent double standard about how men and women can behave online, a reflection of the many rules in the Kuwaiti society that are reflected online (Wheeler, 2003). For example, Kavakci and Kraeplin (2017, p851) discuss responses of the Muslims around the world to young people's (especially young women's) social media posts, arguing that there are often outraged responses that "exemplify the metaphorical collisions that often occur today between an online culture rooted in secular, market-based values and the faith-based belief systems of traditional religious groups."

In examining public relations, it is crucial to discuss different ways in which communication can be affected by culture. This can be done by integration Hall's (1976) theory of high-context versus low-context communication culture discussed in Section 2.5 with Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Kuwait and other Arab countries have been classified as high-context cultures (Al-Kandari and Gaither, 2011), and in general they have been identified as preferring vague, ambiguous, and indirect communication styles (Chun et al., 2015). This is consistent with its classification on Hofstede's cultural dimensions as collectivist and high on power distance and uncertainty avoidance (Kim, Pan and Park, 1998; Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008; Hofstede, 2011). Specifically, people in high-context cultures are usually socially oriented, avoid confrontation, and find new situations difficult to manage (Kim, Pan and Park, 1998) and high-context cultures are also most like to be high power distance (Ahmed, Mouratidis and Preston, 2009; Richardson and Smith, 2007). In line with Okabe (1983), Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella (2008, p785) also note that the communication style in high-context cultures “is influenced by the closeness of human relationships, well-structured social hierarchy, and strong behavioural norms,” again making direct links between collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance.

Finally, Men and Tsai (2012) have also found that culture plays a vital role in shaping the way in which organisations communicate with their customers/the public, with low-context countries like the USA are more likely to use ‘hard sell’ approaches based on direct sales information while high-context countries like China are more likely to emphasise product-related educational or entertaining information in line with their more indirect communication styles. Similarly, research indicates that high-context and low-context cultures differ in terms of how they communicate with customers via their websites (Ghanem, Kalliny and Elgoul, 2013; Usunier and Roulin, 2010; Würtz; 2005). Specifically, Würtz (2005) revealed that websites in high-context cultures like Kuwait are more likely to use imagery for communication rather than text, and this imagery is more likely to be linked to values characteristic of high-context/collectivist cultures, such as family values. He also found that high-context cultures have a higher tendency of depicting the product being sold being actively used by individuals in their images, in contrast to low-context cultures in which the images are more likely to portray individual’s lifestyles and may or may not directly emphasise the use of the product being sold (Würtz, 2005). Based on the differences outlined above, the following is expected:

Proposition 4: The cultural context of Kuwait affects public relations practitioner’s use of social media such that Kuwaiti public and private commercial organisations are likely to use convey more indirect information about products, promotions, or companies.

3.9.5 Social Media, PR, and Customer Relationship Management

There are a range of relationship management strategies that can be used by organisations, as outlined in Section 2.9.5. However, the extent to which these strategies remain the same on social media is still being debated. In order to address this question, the final research question is as follows:

4. ***Does the use of social media by PR practitioners affect customer relationship management and if so, how?***

Social media is excellent for supporting two-way dialogue, and access and openness as central relationship management strategies also support of two-way symmetrical communication (Ki and Hon, 2008). This would indicate that companies that use social media will have a higher tendency in engaging in two-way communication with their customers, as it supports popular strategies such as access and openness. However, this does not have any specific support in the literature and indeed, available evidence indicates that many organisations use online media only for distributing information even though the technology allows for two-way dialogue with audiences (Pang et al., 2018). For example, Shin, Pang and Kim (2015) examined the use of both websites and social media platforms together to generate dialogues and develop relationships with customers/the public. An interesting outcome of their research was the fact that they found that these online platforms are actually used in parallel ways by organisations, particularly for information diffusion purposes rather than for engagement (active engagement in conversations) and for one-way communication to a much more significant degree than two-way communication. These results indicate that just having access using social media sites is unable to facilitate two-way symmetrical communication between organisations and customers/the public, even though they may make it easier to communicate with organisations directly. Based on the available empirical evidence, the following is expected:

Proposition 5: The use of social media by PR practitioners affects their customer relationship management strategies, with social media being used to support information dissemination and one-way communication.

3.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the theoretical background for the research. Despite the rapid growth of Instagram and social media, very few studies researched its use for public relations. Only a limited number of studies have attempted to fill in this gap in Kuwait (Bashir and Aldaihani, 2017; Al-Kandari et al., 2019; Bashir, 2019). It is important to address the local context, because in this Middle East country, culture, values, religion and reputation are inherently linked.

Even if Facebook is the most preferred social network by the mass audience globally, its usage rate by practitioners is decreasing. Twitter might have been replacing Facebook in PR use, but the popularity of the micro-blogging platform has also recently dropped. Moreover, in Kuwait, Instagram is more popular than Twitter (We are Social, 2019), and the attitudes towards the former are also more favourable (Al-Kandari et al., 2019; Bashir, 2019). Instagram's size and popularity, along with the awareness and engagement opportunities it offers, prompt PR professionals in both the public and private commercial sectors look for ways to leverage it to meet organisational objectives.

While the study of Al-Kandari et al. (2019) is important and original, it is quantitative in nature, as it uses content analysis and survey questionnaires. Therefore, the reasons for the selected Instagram strategies are rather implied or based on assumptions. A mixed-methods research might help gain more depth understanding on Instagram use in PR functions of Kuwaiti organisations. Moreover, it would also be beneficial to broaden the context and to compare the public and the private commercial sector.

Using the literature, this chapter has also presented five propositions guiding the empirical portion of the research. The way in which data is collected and analysed to address these propositions is presented in the next chapter. Additionally, these propositions are drawn from Grunig's (1993, 2017) model of public relations communications and will be used as the basis of the conceptual model that will be developed to show how the Kuwaiti cultural context impacts on how public relations is practiced.

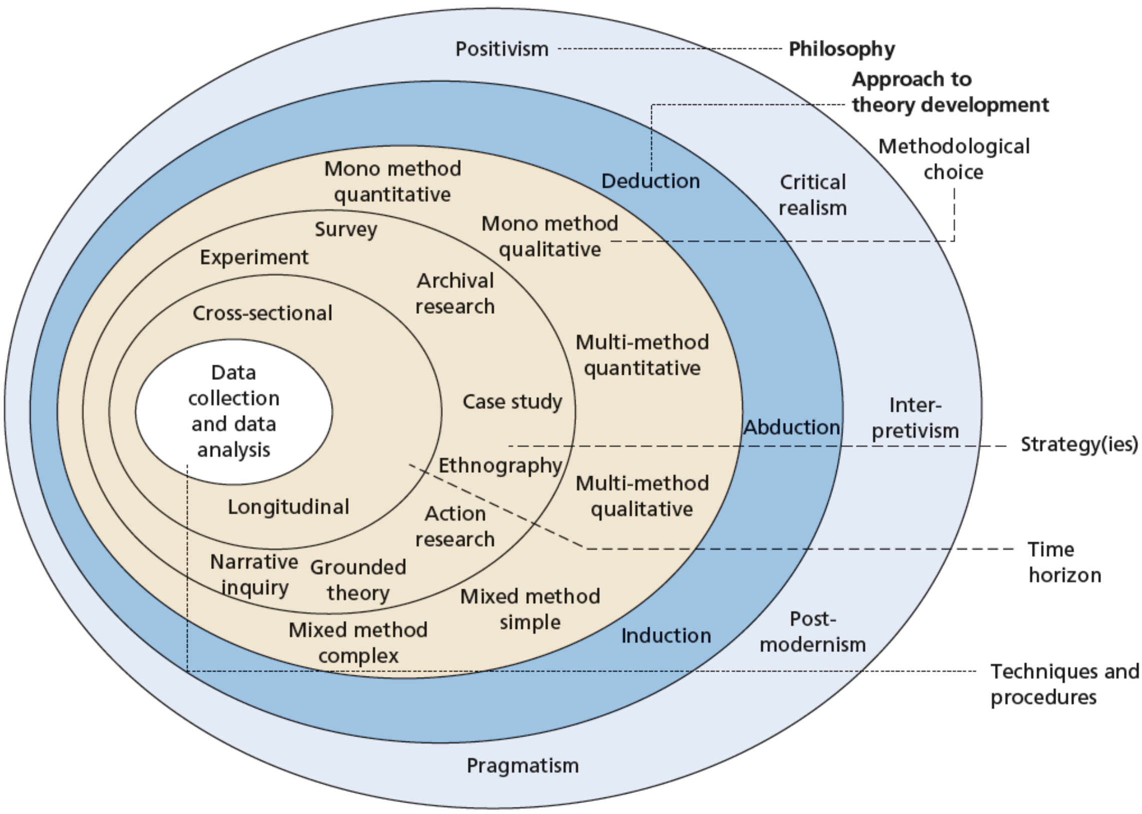
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to perform an investigation on the use and practice of social media by PR practitioners in both private and public sectors in Kuwait. This chapter facilitates this by outlining in detail and justifying the research methodology that supports the empirical investigation of this research issue, since adopting an appropriate methodology helps to fulfil the overarching research aim. This chapter comprised of a discussion of the research paradigm, approach, design and methods used in this study, as well as the data collection techniques, processing and analysis procedures used. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill's (2016) research 'onion' (Figure 11) is used to guide the presentation of the methodology chapter, which is divided into the following five main sections: research philosophy and approach, research strategies, data collection, research population and participants, and data analysis.

Figure 1: Research Methodology Framework

(Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016, p124)



4.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH

The research philosophy refers to the key assumptions made by the researcher about knowledge and how it is created, and it is therefore vital that the philosophy guiding any piece of research be explicated since it affects all the decisions made in conducting the research (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016). Specifically, Easterby-Smith et al. (2004) outlines three keyways in which the research philosophy affects the research process:

1. The philosophical approach should clarify the research design and the research methods used in data collection to address the research questions.

2. The philosophical approach should guide the research and help the researcher select an appropriate design and identify possible design limitations; and

3. The philosophical approach should help the researcher search for and adopt new designs.

For these important reasons, the rest of this section discusses the two key research philosophies used in social science research and justifies the selection of one of these to guide the research process.

Within the social sciences, the two dominant paradigms are positivism and interpretivism, which can be seen as two ends of a spectrum as they have opposing ontologies and epistemologies (Crothy, 1998; Yilmaz, 2013). Ontology is the philosophy of being, while epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge and these are inexorably linked to each other (Easterby-Smith et al., 2004). Positivism is linked to an objectivist ontology, which sees the world as 'concrete' and thus this epistemology "asserts that real events can be observed empirically and explained with logical analysis" and the key gauge used in evaluating the validity of research from this perspective "is whether our knowledge claims… are consistent with the information we are able to obtain using our senses" (Kaboub, 2008, p343). A further exploration of the ontology and epistemology underlying positivism is presented in Figure 12.

Researchers operating within a positivist paradigm overwhelmingly use quantitative methods because these are highly structured, are appropriate for examining causality between the variables, and facilitate statistical analysis (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). This is based on a deductive research approach in which the research process makes a start with a theory of the research relationships being investigated, which is then tested using observations of the phenomenon being studied (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Positivism is an appropriate philosophy and methodological approach for researchers whose aim is to explain phenomena and generalise their results to a broader population (Hovorka and Lee, 2010).

Figure 2: Philosophical Assumptions Along a Continuum

(Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016, p129)

Assumption type	Questions	Continua with two sets of extremes		
		Objectivism	⇔	Subjectivism
Ontology	• What is the nature of reality? • What is the world like? • For example: – What are organisations like? – What is it like being in organisations? – What is it like being a manager or being managed?	Real External One true reality (universalism) Granular (things) Order	⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔	Nominal/decided by convention Socially constructed Multiple realities (relativism) Flowing (processes) Chaos
Epistemology	• How can we know what we know? • What is considered acceptable knowledge? • What constitutes good-quality data? • What kinds of contribution to knowledge can be made?	Adopt assumptions of the natural scientist Facts Numbers Observable phenomena Law-like generalisations	⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔ ⇔	Adopt the assumptions of the arts and humanities Opinions Narratives Attributed meanings Individuals and contexts, specifics

However, one of the key criticisms of positivism is its rigid and structured approach to conducting research, which may be useful for developing high levels of internal and external validity but falls down in terms of being able to build new theories or addressing rival explanations (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005; Bryman, 2016). These criticisms of positivism led to the creation of alternative research philosophies, primarily interpretivism, which is subjective in nature and seeks to generate meaning and greater understanding (Lincoln and Denzin, 2003). The interpretivist research philosophy is based in a subjectivist paradigm in which the world is seen as being socially constructed, with possible different realities, meanings, and interpretations of any single event, as shown in Figure 12 (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005; Hovorka and Lee, 2010). From this ontology, interpretivism sees knowledge as being created through participant and researcher interaction (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The main concern for interpretivist researchers is understanding how the communication relationship is constructed and re-constructed in a ‘natural’ context, since these researchers see knowledge as being constructed by understanding and interacting with social actors in their ‘natural’ environment (Daymon and Holloway, 2011; Bryman, 2016). Thus, interpretive research is focused on exploring human behaviours, thoughts, and actions to gain a detailed understanding of complicated social phenomena (Klein and Myers, 1999).

In contrast to positivism, but consistent with its ontology and epistemology, interpretivist research relies on qualitative research, which is generally conducted within an inductive research design (Bryman, 2016). Inductive research approaches the research process from the observations of the phenomena of interest, using these observations to develop theory and is therefore suitable for theory generation, while deduction is generally more suitable for theory testing (Hovorka and Lee, 2010). The inductive approach is also useful in interpretivism because it allows for the identification of themes connected to the data (Patton, 1990).

Interpretivism is an appropriate philosophy and methodological approach for researchers whose aim is to understand individual's behaviours, thoughts, and actions, focusing on understanding rather than explanation (Hovorka and Lee, 2010). However, interpretivism also has its criticism, particularly levelled at the subjective and value-laden nature of the research that is argued to reduce internal and external validity (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016). Nonetheless, it is this subjective nature that allows interpretivism to generate more insights and understanding than positivism, since seeking to interpret individual's behaviours, thoughts, and actions is very subjective (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). This does not mean that the research is biased, and as in every type of research, this project is undertaken in a way as to minimise research bias from all sources while maximising the benefits of using an interpretivist research approach.

For this research, an interpretivist research philosophy is used, within which an inductive research approach and theory construction. This supports the use of loosely structured qualitative methods, which are advantageous because they are flexible and thus have the potential for multiple explanations to emerge and in this way extend theory or generate new theory (Anderson, 2010; Choy, 2014). The nature of the present research requires the researcher to observe aspects and seek to discover pattern in the phenomena under investigation that could lead to illuminate wider principles (Babbie, 2005). The researcher adopted an interpretivist position in this study, because it is considered as a flexible method that can help to study and understand the subject of the research as a real-world phenomenon that has multiple realities which make its measurement and interpretation difficult. As a result, interpretivist approach in this research helps significantly in studying this phenomenon in detail within the context in which they occur.

4.3 METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE

As discussed previously, qualitative research is often used within the interpretivist paradigm. However, researchers have to examine their research aim as each decision is being made in the research process to ensure that these decisions are serving the research aim (Saunders and Lewis, 2017). In this research, qualitative research has been selected because it allows for the investigation of the use and practice of social media by PR practitioners in Kuwait, which lends itself to qualitative research since it is used to gain an understanding of people's experiences of events, which are unique and full of knowledge (Bryman, 2016). The present study also used qualitative methods because they allowed access to the world of public relations in Kuwaiti organisations, giving the researcher the opportunity to perform an investigation of the elements of their use of social media. The study focuses on public relations practitioners' experiences with social media and their daily use of social media at work. The findings could help public relations teams avoid issues in the future.

Additionally, this research topic that has not been significantly researched, which means that there is little existing research to guide a deductive approach using quantitative methods, which is the alternative. Instead, qualitative research is particularly useful for investigating a new subject or where there exists little literature (Saunders and Lewis, 2017). Other reasons for using a qualitative approach in this research is that it supports a deep understanding of a social phenomenon, allows for the identification of behaviours and values, and raises wider issues than quantitative research (Harwell, 2011; Choy, 2014). A general conclusion that can be reached is that qualitative approach can be of a significant importance to organisational studies because it offers the researcher the chance to use reflex manner that will definitely lead to dependable and valid research. Primary and unstructured data used in qualitative research gives it a descriptive capability which in turn provide a realistic feel of the social phenomena that cannot be illustrated or interpreted in the numerical data.

A range of strategies are available to qualitative researchers, including collection of words through observations, interviews, conversations, and recordings and images through photographs and video (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This allows for a wide range of data collection and analysis procedures, including archival research, ethnography, narrative inquiry, action research, and grounded theory (Dudwick et al., 2006; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). In this research, a multi-method approach to qualitative research is employed, in line with Denzin and Lincoln's (2005, p5) definition of qualitative research as "multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter… [with] qualitative researchers' study[ing] things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." In this research, two qualitative research strategies are used: semi-structured interviews and archival research. These are discussed in the next section.

4.4 DATA COLLECTION

4.4.1 Data Collection Tool 1: Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews involve listening to people and caring about their stories (Seidman, 2015). In qualitative research, the interview is the most commonly used strategy for data collection (Bryman, 2016). Kvale (2007, pxvii) defines an interview as "a specific form of conversation where knowledge is produced through the interaction between interview and an interviewer. The research interview will be compared to other forms of conversation, such as philosophical dialogues and psychotherapeutic interviews.". Wallen and Fraenkel (2002) also highlight that interviews are effective in supporting interactions between researchers and respondents because they permit the researcher to spend more time with the participants when needed. According to Anderson and Arsenault (2005), interviews are better able to foster participant interaction than questionnaires; provide more information and clarification for both researcher and participant; and allow the detection of unspoken language indicators, such as gestures, facial expressions and tones of voice. The research interview provides deeper understanding of a certain phenomenon as it main purpose is to investigate the opinions, views, beliefs and experiences of individuals regarding issues or topics. Interviews are, thus, "most appropriate where little is already known about the study phenomenon or where detailed insights are required from individual participants" (Gill et al., 2008, p292).

There are several types of interviews that researcher can use in qualitative studies, which usually fall into the categories of unstructured and semi-structured, as outlined below (Gill et al., 2008):

1. Structured interviews in which simple verbal questionnaires that ask the participant a list of set questions. Structured interviews are clear, fast and easy to administer.
2. Semi-structured interviews in which key questions are used to guide the research to help define the area and provide more detail.
3. Unstructured interviews in which the participant is allowed to respond freely, as in a conversation to obtain detailed information. Unstructured interviews include no prepared questions and do not reflect any theory. Questions do not need to be organised in advance. Unstructured interviews consume a lot of time and are difficult to manage due to a lack of guidance.

This study used semi-structured interviews to achieve an in-depth understanding of PR participants' use of social media and practices through a series of 35 questions. The researcher divided the interview guide into four sections. The first part has two welcome questions, and the second part asks some introductory questions about the interviewees' job and experience in PR, both helping to set up the interview and put the respondents at ease (Leech, 2002). The third and fourth questions contains the bulk of the questions and address (1) practice questions are connected to the use of social media within public relations and (2) the issue of ethics as it relates to social media and public relations separately and as it relates to the use of social media within public relations. The interview schedule is presented in Appendix 1.

The tool development was a process that focused on ensuring the response to the research questions, which is why the latter were used to develop the relevant instruments. Aside from the welcoming questions, as well as the introduction ones, where the participants present the information about themselves to justify their ability to provide responses to the questions, the interview guide contains the items that would help to respond to the research questions. The two sets of questions can even be compared. For example, questions 6-10 can be considered as the questions meant to respond to the first research question, and question 22 is clearly meant to respond to the third research question. However, most questions are meant to respond to various research questions. For example, question 16 was useful for the first and fourth research questions. Since the research questions are very condensed, the initial number of items for the interview guide was very significant. It included the items that focused on individual research questions, as well as the ones that were intended to respond to multiple questions, and the goal was to produce sets of questions that could be used by specialists of different positions and experience. However, the reflexive approach suggested that some duplicates were involved in the questionnaire. Reflexivity refers to critically reflecting on various aspects of research, including, for example, its methodology (Palaganas et al., 2017). In this case, reflexivity was used to critique the tool that was initially produced and improve it by making it more succinct while still retaining its ability to gather all the information it was intended to gather. In summary, the reflective approach ensured that no duplicates were involved, and that reduced the number of questions in the final tool.

Undertaking the interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to interact with public relations practitioners in Kuwaiti organisations, highlighting the naturalistic nature of this kind of research. Additionally, this engagement was necessary to investigate the PR environment in the private sector (banks) and the public sector (public institutions). This approach also allows the interviewee to answer questions in more detail (Gill et al., 2008). This option offers flexibility that allows researchers to investigate participant information they had not previously considered (Kvale, 2007). According to Gill et al. (2008), the purpose of the semi-structured interviews is to discover individuals' and groups' views, experiences, beliefs and motivations on specific issues. Semi-structured interviews provide a deep understanding of social phenomena and are effective in exploring sensitive topics. The current research used face-to-face interviews, which allowed the researcher to directly interact with the participants (Saunders and Lewis, 2017). This approach provides flexibility in term of the interview questions and allows the researcher to ask questions when needed to develop rich and deep insight into PR practitioners' use of social media. For these reasons, the semi-structured interview possessed the greatest suitability for this research. Nonetheless, there are some drawbacks that have to be tackled. First, conducting and analysing interviews requires significant effort (Luna-Reyes and Andersen, 2003). Second, it requires significant interpersonal skills and creativity. Moreover, the data collection stage might affect the researcher emotionally and cause stress and limitations.

This study used a 'long interview' technique, which uses an open-ended questionnaire format to guide the interview process so as to "maximise the value of the time spent with the respondents" (McCracken, 1988, p7). In contrast to the unstructured interview, the long interview "is a sharply focused, rapid, highly intensive interview process that seeks to diminish the indeterminacy and redundancy that that attends more unstructured research processes" (McCracken, 1988, p7). This is a 'middle ground' between the ethnographic and journalistic approach to interview that can provide the researcher with "detail, depth, and an insider's perspective" while also providing more directed answers to specific questions (Leech, 2002, p665). The long interviews were selected as the most suitable tool for this research because it offers a better structure meaning that they allow the researcher to learn about the participant's personal experience in a free-flowing manner (McCracken, 1988). The interviews used in this study encouraged the participants to share their work experiences and stories in a spoken language. These stories, in turn, helped the researcher understand the interviewees' real experiences using social media in their daily routines (Seidman, 2015).

The long interview is guided by the interview schedule, as highlighted above, which is created by identifying the categories that have to be included so as to address the research questions (McCracken, 1988). This begins by conducting a detailed review of the literature so as to establish "an inventory of the categories and relationships that the interview must investigate," and this is also important to 'make the familiar strange' and alert the researcher to the taken-for-granted assumptions in the extant literature (McCracken, 1988, p32). Next, the researcher may utilise his or her familiarity with the topic or context being researched to add questions to the interview schedule (McCracken, 1988). The interview schedule is discussed in more detail in the next section.

4.4.2 Data Collection Procedure 1: Face-to-Face Interviews

The present study uses SSIs. The number of questions answered by each participant depends on the participant's work position, specialty, and years of experience. The researcher followed several steps before conducting the interviews. The first step was preparing and selecting interview questions to make up the interview schedule, as highlighted in the previous section. The interviews were designed to collect detailed information from PR practitioners and reflected the main research question. The interview questions were examined and approved by the supervisor and ethical approval for deploying these questions was obtained from De Montfort University.

The next step in the process was a pre-test of the interview as a method of examining the use of social media by PR practitioners. The aim of the pilot study is to identify weaknesses in the main research project and help determine the proper research method (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). According Majid et.al (2017, p1072), “[p]iloting for interview is an integral aspect and useful in the process of conducting qualitative research as it highlights the improvisation to the major study.” For this reason, pilot studies are beneficial procedures that can be employed to strengthen the interview protocols (Tashakkori, Teddlie and Teddlie, 2003; Castillo-Montoya, 2016). However, pilot work has certain limitation related to the small sample of participants in which the data saturation was not reached, and this has to be kept in mind (Tashakkori, Teddlie and Teddlie, 2003).

In October 2017, the researcher conducted a pilot test of the interview schedule and process specifically meant to test the efficiency of the questions and the participants’ ability to understand them. Following the pilot study, the main set of changes were made to the interview schedule. First, ice breaking questions added to build intimate instead of direct start such as: How are you today? This helps to build rapport with the interviewer and improve the quality of the responses received (Leech, 2002). Second, introduction questions were added before getting into the questioning directly related to the research questions, such as How many years have worked in the current organisation? This also helps to build rapport by putting the respondent at ease (Leech, 2002). Third, the structure and wording of some questions were revised to improve clarity, for example, ‘What programmes are you using?’ was rephrased as ‘What social media sites are you using?’ This is one of the important outcomes of the pilot study, which allows the researcher to apply the modifications and suggestions and to practice the interviewing techniques that enable him/her to achieve the research goals (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

In the final step in the data collection process, the reviewed interview schedule (Appendix 1) was used to collect the interview data from both male and female practitioners and managers from different organisations and industries in Kuwait (discussed below). The interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes and were conducted in either Arabic or English, depending on which was desired by each interviewee. The PR practitioners’ responses to the interview questions were collected through audio recordings and written notes. The researcher performed an active role in the interviews. Specifically, in addition to playing the role of the questioning interviewer, the researcher talked to the participants in a conversational context and encouraged them to speak in their everyday language, as recommended by Leech (2002).

4.4.3 Transcribing and Translating the Research Interviews

Before the interview data could be analysed, the interview audiotapes were transcribed and then all the written material (from the audiotapes and notes) were translated. To prepare the data for the translation, the researcher listened to the recorded interviews and transcribed them. Transcription is the "process of reproducing spoken words, such as those from an audiotaped interview, into written text" (Halcomb and Davidson, 2006, p38) and represents an important step in this research for the purpose of facilitating the data analysis. These transcribed interviews were checked for accuracy and amended as necessary in the process described below.

The data was collected in Kuwait, where the respondents speak Arabic, while the research report (this thesis) is presented in English. The transcripts there had to be translated into English. Additionally, the majority of the research process was undertaken in English and thus two sets of translation took place in this research process. First, the research questions, consent sheet, and information sheet were created in English (target language) for confirmation with the research supervisors and then translated into Arabic (source language) (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Second, since some of the data was collected as audio recordings in Arabic (source language), this then had to be translated into English (target language) after the audio was transcribed. Both stages of the translation process had to be attended to, since difficulties can arise in language translation at any point in the process, especially when very different languages like English and Arabic are involved (Al-Amer et al., 2015). Thus, translation had to be carefully undertaken because "[t]he reliability of the translation process is critical to the integrity of the results as this can be threatened if there are inaccuracies" (Al-Amer et al., 2016, p151). Further, the translation process is being reported transparently and systematically here to enhance the finding's integrity, overall rigour, and auditability (Usunier, 1998; Al-Amer et al., 2015).

In this research, the research instrument (interview schedule, consent sheet, and information sheet) was translated using back-translation (or backward-forward translation) in which the source document is translated to the target language and then these documents are compared to create the final version (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). This approach was used because it is likely to discover the most problems, even though it requires the use of more than one translator and is a lengthier process than a direct translation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Al-Amer et al.'s (2015) research supports the use of back-translation even though it is a demanding and lengthy process because it has been identified as producing the best rhetorical translation and thus supports content, semantic, and textual equivalence. Later, the audio recordings from the interviews were translated using direct translation, which was easier to implement but can lead to discrepancies (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016) and for this reason, the transcripts produced in English were checked and re-checked for accuracy multiple times, and changes made as needed, as described below.

An important issue identified by Larkin, Dierckx De Casterlé and Schotsmans (2007) is that the translation process can substantially impact the research when a translator is used that is trying to convey meaning based on a language that is unknown to him or her. Thus, effective translation requires that language proficiency and knowledge of the source and target cultures be in balance (Larkin, Dierckx De Casterlé and Schotsmans, 2007). If this has not been done, they argue that "qualitative researchers [then] need to justify their use of positivist ascribed methods of translation, particularly if the language is a major component of their research study" (Larkin, Dierckx De Casterlé and Schotsmans, 2007, p474). To overcome this issue in this research and to ensure that the translations of the research instrument to Arabic and the interview responses to English had equivalence of meaning, both English-speaking and Arabic-speaking translators were used. Further, the researcher's native language is Arabic, and she has studied in English for several years, allowing her to also be able to check the instrument and the research transcripts for meaning. This ensure that the translators are familiar with the languages and cultures with which they are dealing, allowing for less chance that the meanings are missed because of cultural differences (Usunier, 1998; Larkin, Dierckx De Casterl, and Schotsmans, 2007).

However, Larkin and colleagues (2007) also argued that living outside the native community (in this case, the Arabic community) and becoming acculturated to the host community (in this case, the English community) may influence the translation process. To address this, the researcher sent the audio tapes and the transcribed documents to a Kuwaiti translator expert centre approved by the British Council so that the English language version of the interviews could be checked against the original Arabic interviews to further ensure the accuracy of the translation. Using individuals from the source language is valuable for verifying the translations and support consistency, which is one of the pillars of translation quality, while relying on experts helps to verify translation accuracy and support congruence, another pillar of translation quality (Larkin, Dierckx De Casterlé and Schotsmans, 2007; Karwalajtys et al., 2010; Al-Amer et al., 2015).

In this research, the emphasis in translating the research instrument was on conceptual equivalence, in line with Larkin, Dierckx De Casterlé, and Schotsmans's (2007) recommendations and this included: (1) translating the research instrument, consent form, and information sheet from English into Arabic, (2) re-reading these in both languages to check for word, syntax, grammar, and conceptual equivalence, and (3) making changes to the Arabic material as needed to convey the desired meanings in a way that would be best understood by Arabic speakers. In terms of the interviews, these were translated based on the overall meaning of each response given so that content equivalence was maximised, while also ensuring that semantic equivalence was maintained so that an informative text could be created for later analysis (Al-Amer et al., 2015). Further, as recommended by Usunier (1998), the lexical, idiomatic, grammatical-syntactical, and experiential equivalence in the responses from the interviewees were taken into consideration, which are all elements that make up translation equivalence.

4.4.4 Data Collection Tool 2: Archival and Documentary Research

Archival and documentary research refers to the use of available data sources for achieving the research objectives. Document analysis is defined by Bowen (2009, p27) as “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material.” The aim of archival and documentary research, like other qualitative methods, is to collect and examine data that is then interpreted so as to develop meaning, increase understanding about the phenomenon concerned, and contribute to knowledge development (Rowlinson, 2004; Bowen, 2009).

According to Lee (2012, p391), “a document is a durable repository for textual, visual and audio representations” and many different types of documents can be used. The online data research used qualitative data to study the Kuwaiti private commercial institutions and Kuwaiti public institutions’ online activities and interactions and to investigate their engagement with clients. Salmons (2016) showed that online qualitative research is a broad term for using new information technologies, including social media, to study people’s experiences and behaviours through text, images or actions. Data collected form social media can take these forms, as it can be text or multimedia content, as well as information from user profiles, network data, or tracking users’ behavioural engagement on the platform as shown in their likes, shares, retweets, and so on (Mayr and Weller, 2017).

In this research, data was collected from social media, drawing on both textual and image data. From the organisation studies perspective, a thorough analysis of a limited selection of documents is an appropriate approach to archival analysis (Rowlinson, 2004) and that is the approach that is used here. Based on the research objectives, the focus of this research was Kuwait private commercial institutions (private sector) and public institutions (public sector) and therefore to collect qualitative data from social media pages, the researcher collected data from the Instagram pages of the private commercial institutions and public institutions using extant typology. In other words, the researcher gathered created data without intervention, direct contact, or influence on users. The researcher reviewed archived media data, including posts, written text materials, graphics, images and recorded and visual materials. Extant typology method for collecting online material involves the perusal of documents, media archives and records (Quan-Haase and Sloan, 2017). This non-reactive archival records data collection yielded a huge volume of data for the research (Fielding, Lee and Blank, 2017).

4.4.5 Data Collection Procedure 2: Collecting Archival Data from Social Media

Social media is used in this research because "[o]nline socio-technical systems can be studied as proxy of the real world to investigate human behaviour and social interactions at scale" (Ferrara, Interdonato and Tagarelli, 2014, p24). The complexity of human behaviour is replicated on social media, platforms on which people interact with other, businesses, and government agencies, particularly as social media has become a significant mediator in these relationships (Jaakonmäki, Müller and vom Brocke, 2017). The volume of information available on social media provides a rich source of data for researchers, who have been using social media data for understand users' behaviours (Arabghalizi, Rahdari and Brambilla, 2017).

Social media is analysed in this research for the purpose of examining the social media networking presence of three Kuwaiti private commercial institutions on Instagram, as well as the social media networking presence of Kuwait public institutions across these three social media pages. Drawing on images from Instagram, this research undertakes a visual ethnography, which is ethnographic research that incorporates the use of drawing, photography, video, and/or hypermedia to produce data and present conclusions (Ardévol, 2012; Pink, 2013). Visual ethnography has been identified as "an appropriate and credible methodology in the quest to achieve rigorous and authentic interpretations in marketing and consumer research" (Schembri and Boyle, 2013, p.1251). This works well within the interpretivism paradigm guiding this research and visual ethnography seeks to get 'close' possible to the phenomenon being studied based on visually recorded material (Schembri and Boyle, 2013). In this approach, images are not treated as objective evidence but instead, their analysis is ground in the interactive context through which these images acquire their meaning (Schwartz, 1989). This draws from the perspective that images are polysemic (Barthes, 1977) and thus "the photograph is not a 'message' in the usual sense. It is, instead, the raw material for an infinite number of messages which each viewer can construct for himself" (Byers, 1966, p31). Visual ethnography thus has the benefit of bringing the multiple meaning that are contained in images to the foreground (Barthes, 1977; Schwartz, 1989).

Data is collected from the Internet because "the incorporation of the Internet in ethnographic fieldwork provides the conditions for studying collectives that would be practically inaccessible without the use of these technologies," in this research being the source of textual and visual data for analysis (Ardévol, 2012, p76). This approach has been used for examining visual data from Instagram within a multi-method approach as is done here (see Serafinelli, 2017 and Suess, 2018). For this research, two types of information were collected from private commercial institutions' and public institutions social networking pages:

1. private commercial institutions' social media interactions, including advertisements, posts of pictures and responses to clients.
2. Clients' interactions, likes, comments, judgements, and feedback.

To begin the process of collecting the archival data, first, the researcher chose an appropriate timeline for the data collection. Data was gathered from these three private commercial institutions' social networking pages between October 2017 and October 2018. Second, the researcher chose an appropriate data collection strategy. According to Voss, Lvov and Thomson (2017), a researcher can choose between manual and automatic web scraping, both of which involve making a screenshot of online channels, which is either done manually or using a computer programme. The current research used a manual snapshot method using screenshots of a mobile application, followed by recordings of different aspects of the data (such as comments) via scraping. Figure 13 provides an example of the snapshot of a social media page. Manual scraping was used since the number of screenshots needed for the qualitative analysis undertaken in this research was a manageable number and an automatic process, which is more prone to mistakes, was therefore not needed (Voss, Lvov and Thomson, 2017).

Figure 3: Sample Snapshot of a Kuwaiti private commercial institution's Social Media Page

4.5 RESEARCH POPULATION AND PARTICIPANTS

The target population for the semi-structured interviews was public relations practitioners and customer service managers; thus, the key to the sample selection was to identify public relations practitioners in both private and public Kuwaiti organisations. Sampling contains decisions about data, the type of data that will be collected and analysed, and where this data can be accessed (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). Therefore, selective sampling aims to study a particular group of individuals (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). In this research, a purposeful sample was selected to study PR practitioners and marketing in the Kuwaiti public and private sector. Purposive sampling involves selecting a small, countable number of participants and studying them to provide rich and detailed information and understanding their situations (Yilmaz, 2013). As shown in Figure 14, this is a non-probability sampling technique, which is useful for in-depth focus on and selection criteria have to specified.

Figure 4: Choice of Non-Probability Sampling Techniques

(Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016, p298)

Group	Technique	Likelihood of sample being representative	Types of research in which useful	Relative costs	Control over sample contents
Quota	Quota	Reasonable to high, although dependent on selection of quota variables	Where costs constrained or data needed very quickly so an alternative to probability sampling needed	Moderately high to reasonable	Specifies quota selection criteria
Purposive	Extreme case	Low	Unusual or special	Reasonable	Specifies selection criteria
	Heterogeneous	Low, although dependent on researcher's choices	Reveal/illuminate key themes	Reasonable	Specifies selection criteria
	Homogeneous	Low	In-depth focus	Reasonable	Specifies selection criteria
	Critical case	Low	Importance	Reasonable	Specifies selection criteria
	Typical case	Low, although dependent on researcher's choices	Illustrative	Reasonable	Specifies selection criteria
	Theoretical	Low	Inform emerging theory	Reasonable	Specifies selection criteria
Volunteer	Snowball	Low, but cases likely to have characteristics desired	Where cases difficult to identify	Reasonable	Selects initial participant
	Self-selection	Low, as cases self-selected	Where access difficult, research exploratory	Reasonable	Offers only general invitation
Haphazard	Convenience	Very low (often lacks credibility)	Ease of access	Low	Haphazard

The researcher used purposive sampling because this approach ensures that participants' demographic information matches the research requirements (Patton, 2002) and so the results better contribute to the research findings (Bryman, 2016). Further, in choosing the sample, the researcher ensure that the sample was available and accessible during the research period (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). However, the disadvantage of the selective sample involves limitations concerning generalising research findings to other situations (Yimlaz, 2013).

When selecting participants, it is vital to choose a relevant sample. The participants recruited in the present for this research comprised two groups: Kuwaiti public organisation and Kuwaiti private organisations. All research participants were recruited due to their belonging to these two groups. In this study, it is also important to consider which social media platforms to discuss and which documents to analyse. The research sample should be clearly identified to enable the researcher to determine the limits of the study (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). The Kuwait private sector organisations that were targeted were banks, while the sample for the Kuwait public sector was drawn from government agencies.

The researcher ensured that all participants worked in public relations departments in Kuwaiti private commercial institutions or government agencies and used social media platforms daily in their work. Participants worked as either public relations practitioners or customer service managers. This sample selection allowed the researcher to explore the relationship between customers and practitioners. Three private commercial institutions and three public institutions were chosen. The private commercial institutions were chosen because they are the most well-known private commercial institutions in Kuwait and because of their respected reputations in the banking sector, although a range of popularity was achieved by introducing three banks, two of which were markedly less popular than the third one. The private commercial institutions also have a wide reach across Kuwait and all three private commercial institutions had dynamic social media pages. The three public institutions were chosen had the largest social media following across the platforms studied, meaning that the researcher would be able to collect sufficient data for analysis.

The process of identifying the sample began with the researcher contacting the PR departments of various organisations in both private and public sectors by sending emails and making phone calls to ask for permission to conduct interviews with PR practitioners. Once approval for the interviews was received, the researcher scheduled dates and times for the interviews based on the participants' availability. Interviewees were invited to participate as volunteers and received full information about the research aims and objectives through research information sheets and accompanying consent forms (discussed below).

From the perspective of the selection of the organisations, which was also a part of sampling, the process involved reviewing all the banks operating in Kuwait with a focus on whether or not they had active Instagram pages. For public organisations, the same criterion was enacted. From the perspective of the type of sampling, this approach can, once again, be considered purposive (Bryman, 2016; Patton, 2002; Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016). Indeed, the project did not involve a non-probability sample of all the banks or governmental organisations in Kuwait but rather chose only the ones that could provide relevant information about social media use. This approach is a limitation because the inclusion of only some organisation implies that other ones might be employing their own methods of communication that are not included in this study. However, this method was necessary for feasibility reasons, which is why it was employed.

In total, 22 persons were interviewed for this research, 12 from different banking companies and 10 from different government ministries. For the banking sample, the majority of the sample were customer service staff (50%), followed by PR Managers (25%). In contrast, for the public sector sample, the entire sample were PR professionals holding different titles within the government agency. Only one of the 22 persons in the sample did not use social media, while the others used at least one social media site daily in the work. A greater description of the interview sample is presented in the Results chapter. Finally, the sample for the archival analysis was also drawn using a purposive sampling technique. In this instance, the focus was on critical cases that would allow the researcher to collect a lot of social media data that could then be used to find themes for illuminating the research issue under investigation.

It should also be highlighted that for the semiotic analysis, the banks were selected based on how well-known and popular with the users they were. The popularity was determined based on the activity on Instagram, but a range of popularity was achieved by selecting banks with different levels of popularity (one of the banks, (N), being the most popular one). The decision was, yet again, based on practicality; the banks that are the most active are most likely to produce sufficient materials for analysis, and while the project could not involve many banks, the selection of a few that appeared most popular allowed the project to remain feasible. The limitation of the approach remains the same: purposive inclusion and exclusion of organisations implies that the research cannot guarantee that the findings gathered from the excluded ones would not contradict the ones collected from the included banks. However, purposive sampling has the benefit of ensuring that the sample fits the needs of a research (Bryman, 2016; Patton, 2002; Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016), and for the present research, feasibility was considered crucial.

Finally, it is critical that the data collection was eventually stopped because of the data converging, which resulted in saturation. Data saturation refers to the situation in data collection and analysis when the themes and other analysis items are repeated to the point where no new items can be found (Saunders et al., 2018; Fusch and Ness, 2015). Data saturation is one of the most common and most appropriate approaches to data collection in qualitative research because it improves the likelihood of the sample representing the views of the studied population (Fusch and Ness, 2015). By ensuring that data collection and analysis were carried out in tandem and by securing the opportunity to expand the sample if necessary, the quality of the research was improved.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS

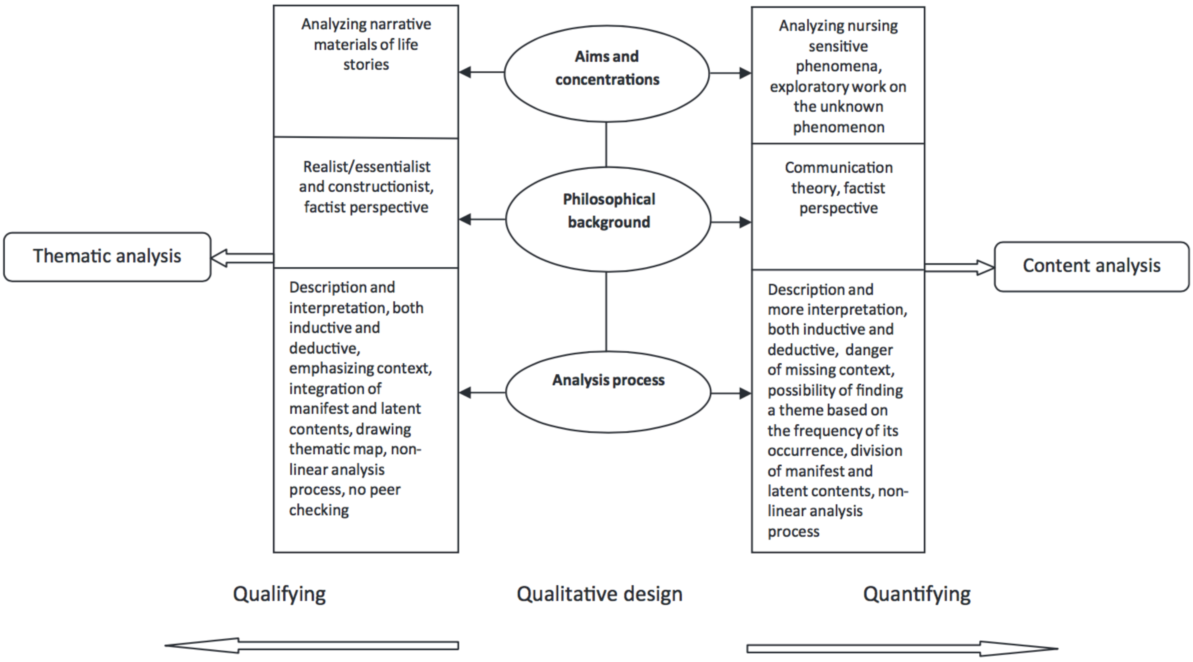
4.6.1 Data Analysis Strategy 1: Thematic Analysis of the Interview Data

Qualitative analysis primarily involves identifying and categorising written words and spoken materials to generate meanings and qualitative researcher have a range of methods from which to choose to undertake this analysis (Moretti et al., 2011). These include content analysis, thematic analysis, ethnography, conversational analysis, general inductive approach, narrative analysis and grounded theory (Schutt, 2011; Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016). Of these options, thematic analysis was deemed to possess the greatest suitability for analysing the semi-structured interview data because of its emphasis on the research context, as identified by Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013), which is especially vital in this research. Thematic analysis was also deemed to be appropriate here because it is a suitable approach for analysing narratives and individuals' perspectives and is more of a qualitative approach to data analysis (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013).

Thematic analysis is a less restrictive method than content analysis, as both allow for interview data to be coded to identify specific themes but with thematic analysis the data is only 'minimally organised' while the data set is described in greater detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p81). Figure 15 presents a more detailed contrast of thematic analysis with qualitative content analysis, showing that thematic analysis is better allows for latent and manifest content to be integrated so that both description and interpretation can be undertaken and presented (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013). Additionally, the thematic analysis approach to qualitative data analysis is more accessible for new researchers in comparison to qualitative content analysis since the former offers a clear structure for analysing the interview data collected that can be followed for developing a valid and organised research report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be used for deductive, inductive or combined approaches (Cho and Lee, 2004; Elo and Kyngäs, 2008).

Figure 5: Characterising Thematic Analysis and Qualitative Content Analysis

(Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013, p399)



In this research, the thematic analysis of the interview data six main stages as per the recommendation of Nowell et al. (2017) and presented in Figure 16. In the first stage, familiarisation with the data is needed, which was primarily facilitated through prolonged engagement with the data since the researcher conducted all the interviews, transcribed them, and participated in their translation. This was supported by preparing for the analysis using the sententious and selective approaches recommended by van Manen (2016), in which the entire interview text is read to understand the fundamental meaning of the interview and then the parts of the interview are read multiple times to identify and highlight illuminating statements and begin identifying important themes. This allowed for the researcher to go through and gain a clear idea, understand and discern through the data, thus managing to "obtain a sense of whole" as one would do in reading a novel (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008, p109) and then reading word by word to develop codes that capture key themes in the interviews (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

The second stage is the generation of the initial codes. According to Saldaña (2009, p3), "a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” Coding is not just labelling, instead it is it is linking, meaning that “it leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea” (Richards and Morse, 2007, p137).

Figure 6: Phases of Thematic Analysis and Trustworthiness Measures

(Nowell et al., 2017, p4)

Phases of Thematic Analysis	Means of Establishing Trustworthiness
Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data	Prolong engagement with data Triangulate different data collection modes Document theoretical and reflective thoughts Document thoughts about potential codes/themes Store raw data in well-organized archives Keep records of all data field notes, transcripts, and reflexive journals
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	Peer debriefing Researcher triangulation Reflexive journaling Use of a coding framework Audit trail of code generation Documentation of all team meeting and peer debriefings
Phase 3: Searching for themes	Researcher triangulation Diagramming to make sense of theme connections Keep detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes
Phase 4: Reviewing themes	Researcher triangulation Themes and subthemes vetted by team members Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	Researcher triangulation Peer debriefing Team consensus on themes Documentation of team meetings regarding themes Documentation of theme naming
Phase 6: Producing the report	Member checking Peer debriefing Describing process of coding and analysis in sufficient details Thick descriptions of context Description of the audit trail Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study

Further, Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p30) argue that "coding usually is a mixture of data reduction and data complication. Coding generally is used to break up and segment the data into simpler, general categories and is used to expand and tease out the data, in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation." The coding was done by using a coding framework.

Third, the codes are then organised into categories in the process of search for themes. Specifically, a tree diagram was used to organise the categories and sub-categories of codes into a hierarchy (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Definitions of each category and sub-category were developed and exemplars of these were identified in preparation for reporting (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Fourth, the themes are reviewed and specifically tested for their referential adequacy by going back to the interview transcripts (Nowell et al., 2017). In the fifth stage, the themes are defined and named, and the final stage of the data analysis is the production of the research report, in this case, which includes the description of the process of coding and analysis, as done in this chapter, and the production of the results chapter. In line with recommendations from van Manen (2016), core and constituent themes were identified in this research and combined with the secondary data about the Kuwaiti context to develop a thick description of the context and a detailed narrative to portray a contextually rich description of PR and social media use in the public and private sector in Kuwait.

4.6.2 Data Analysis Strategy 2: Social Media Semiotic Analysis

Semiotics is a formal approach to analysis in which linguistic sign systems are used as a model to identify and make overt the underlying rules of other systems of signification such as those related to behaviour or physical artefacts (Fiol, 1989). These systems of signification can be analysed to identify their shared meaning because it is assumed that they are supported by a shared set of underlying values (Fiol, 1989). The aim is not simply to describe the sign, which is something that represents for something else in the individual's mind, as argued by Dyer (1982, p.115), who noted that semiotics analysis is not "the simple interpretation of objects and forms of communication [but refers to] investigations of the organisation and structure artefacts and, in particular, to enquiry into how they produce meaning." Thus, semiotic analysis focuses on understanding the deep meanings in messages by examining latent meanings, deep structures, and the signifying process behind signs, codes, and binary oppositions (Neuendorf, 2016). The aim is to make explicit what is contained in an image by looking at the signs within it (Neuendorf, 2016). This is about focusing on connotation as a system of signification, which "involves meanings that are generated by connecting signifiers to wider cultural concerns… meaning involves the association of signs with other cultural codes of meaning" (Barker, 2003, p79). This is in contrast to denotation as a system of signification which focuses on the literal level of meaning (Barthes, 1977). A key advantage of using semiotic analysis is that it makes it possible for researchers to explore beyond the immediate meaning denoted in signs to reveal deeper levels of meaning and the ways in which signs are interpreted similarly and differently (Barker, 2008; Rose, 2016).

When connotation has become naturalised, the various meanings that each sign has become accepted as 'natural' and act as conceptual maps of meaning, which is called myths (Barker, 2008). Specifically, Barker, (2008, p79) argues that myths are cultural constructions and similar to the concept of ideology, which works at the connotative level of signification. Mythology and ideology work at the same level, with ideology being manifested through mythology, and myth and ideology work together to naturalise the contingent interpretation of signs (Barker, 2008).

There are various approaches to undertaking semiotic analysis as researchers have sought to study of various kinds of sign systems. O'Halloran et al. (2011) specify that multi-modal semiotic analysis involves the use of various resources, like movement, language, camera angle, gesture, architecture dress, lighting and other modes of communication. This approach is taken here.

Semiotic analysis deals with the analysis of the small number of images and this means that the data derived from the analysis only represents that sample and not a wider range of material. It is analytical integrity that is vital in this kind of research, rather than generalisability to a wider data set (Bryman, 2016; Rose, 2016). Semiotic analysis is appropriate for this research, given that is analyses a small number of images and examines them in-depth in order to make the signs within them explicit.

For this analysis, Instagram data was collected from the Instagram pages of three private commercial institutions (private organisations) and three public institutions (public organisations). The data was collected from October 2017 to September 2018, which is the same period over which the semi-structured interviews were conducted. After collecting this data, two of the most effective and interactive posts from each month for each source were selected, equalling 24 posts from each private commercial institution and public institution over the course of the year to be analysed. The Instagram pages and posts were in Arabic; thus, the posts were translated from Arabic into English for this research. Certain expressions used in the Kuwaiti language are difficult to translate, but an attempt was made to find similar meanings in English.

The first step in the analysis was to identify the signs in the image (the Instagram post) (Rose, 2016). This is done by looking at the colours, angles, backgrounds, poses, and so on in each photo. In addition to analysing the photos, the captions that came along with the Instagram posts were also analysed, as recommended by Barthes (1977). Images are polysemic and thus open to multiple interpretations (Barthes, 1977; Schwartz, 1989), so examining the caption along with the images can assist in deciding the signs to read as well as the signs that have been privileged. Further, captions serve as anchors that assist the researcher in selecting the appropriate level of perception (Barthes, 1977). Next, it must be determined what the signs are in and of themselves, before assessing how the signs relate to each other. This is followed by an analysis of how the signs fit into a broader system of meaning (Rose, 2016). The final step was to return to the signs (looking at their codes) in order to determine the particular expression of ideology and mythology within them (Barker, 2008; Rose, 2016).

5.7 ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCH

All types of research face threats to validity and often researchers are expected to take steps to ensure that reliability and validity is high in their research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). However, rather than seeking to address validity in the way that quantitative researchers do, qualitative researchers argue that the quality of qualitative research should be specific to this type of research. This is because qualitative and quantitative research have fundamentally different epistemological assumptions, as outlined above, and this therefore means that distinct criteria are needed for assessing reliability and validity in qualitative research (Petty, Thomson, and Stew, 2012). In line with this, qualitative researchers seek to make sure that the trustworthiness of their research, specifically confirmability, which Petty, Thomson, and Stew (2012, p82) define as “the extent to which the findings are the product of the inquiry and not the bias of the researcher.”

In order to ensure confirmability, Petty, Thomson, and Stew (2012) identify four primary strategies that can be used by qualitative researchers: triangulation of methods and analysis strategies, keeping a reflexive research journal, member checking, and an audit trail of the data analysis process. In addition to these, Nowell et al. (2017) identify a range of other strategies for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research (and thematic analysis in particular), including prolonged engagement with the data, (researcher) triangulation, reflective journaling, peer debriefing, and keeping an audit trail (outlined in Figure 16 above).

In this research, triangulation, prolonged engagement with the data, peer debriefing, keeping and audit trail, and reflexive journaling were the main approaches used for ensuring trustworthiness of the research findings. First, triangulation refers to the use of two or more methods or methodologies in the research process, which reinforces the validity of the research findings (Bryman, 2006). This is a key strategy for ensuring trustworthiness of research results since a combination of methods can uncover different elements of the research issue (complementarity) and can also provide data for the research to determine whether results from different sources converge (Bryman, 2006). In line with this, Oppermann (2000, p145) argues that:

> *"A multi-method approach allows researchers to be more confident about their results. It also may help in uncovering a deviant or off-quadrant dimension of a phenomenon… Divergent results can lead to new insights and consequently enriched explanations of a research issue. The multi-dimensional perspective will provide new insights behind the respective walls of individual methodological or data approaches."*

The use of different methods, data sources, researchers, and so on can thus support a more complete explanation of the research phenomenon (Petty, Thomson, and Stew, 2012). Oppermann (2000) presents three different ways in which triangulation can take place: data, investigator, and methodological triangulation. Further, 'multiple triangulation' can be achieved by combining two or more of these approaches to triangulation (Denzin, 1978). In this research, methodological triangulation is achieved by using two methods for studying practitioners' use of social media in Kuwait institutions, specifically, semi-structured interviews and archival analysis of social media. These approaches complement each other because they do not have the same source of bias and thus can provide a fuller view of the use of social media by PR professionals in Kuwait compared to using only one of these methods (Sechrest and Sidani, 1995)

Second, as discussed in the Section 5.6.1, prolonged engagement with the research data was achieved throughout the data collection and analysis process and this was meant to support the trustworthiness of the research by increasing credibility of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017). Third, peer debriefing was used in this research to support trustworthiness, which is an approach that "allows a qualified peer researcher to review and assess transcripts, emerging and final categories from those transcripts, and the final themes or findings of a given study" (Janesick, 2015, np). This was achieved in this research in coordination with a peer enrolled in the same PhD programme, who assisted in reviewing a sample of the interview transcripts, the emerging and final code and categories, and the final themes in the research. There was significant agreement between the researcher and the peer reviewer and any concerns from the reviewer were addressed through discussion and going back to the raw data to make sure that the codes, categories, and themes are consistent with the data. This process of including an external check is specifically meant to enhance the credibility of the research findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

Finally, an audit trail was kept that included reflexive journaling at its centre, as the final method of ensuring trustworthiness in the research. According to Nowell et al. (2017, p3), "[a]n audit trail provides readers with evidence of the decisions and choices made by the researcher regarding theoretical and methodological issues throughout the study." This included keeping a record of the raw data and transcripts (both in Arabic and English) and undertaking reflexive journaling by keeping a research diary in which a complete account of the research project was recorded. The research diary was a reference point for seeing how understandings may have changed or matured over the research process, as well as providing an audit trail, supporting transparency, and assisting with the development of the research recommendations and conclusions (Teusner, 2016).

It should also be noted that reflexivity was a tool employed by this research. In practice, the reflexivity was mostly used to improve the research tool, but it can be emphasized that this feature is known to improve research quality (Palaganas et al., 2017). It is a tool that is generally used to reflect on and be critical of one's decisions as a researcher (Palaganas et al., 2017; Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016). It is predominantly required because of the possibility of bias, but this approach can be very helpful in also assessing methodology choices and other aspects of research (Subramani, 2019). Decisions made during this research were subjected to critical analysis, which was reflected in the journals that was kept during the process. The most prominent example was the changed tool for interviews, which was significantly reduced in size through a reflexive process. This moment of reflexivity revealed the researcher's need for additional work on the tool, which was associated with a limited experience in producing such tools. It also showed a lack of consideration for the participants since the initial version of the tool would have required a longer interview time. In this case, reflexivity helped to reduce redundancy, which led to a more feasible interview time. In general, reflecting on the research process and the researcher's role in it was required to both assess and improve its quality, as well as determine its limitations, which are critical to discuss.

4.7 INTERVIEWS LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

There are a range of challenges that were present in this research because of the context in which the present study was conducted. First, access was a key issue in this research because research that is being undertaken in organisations generally have more gatekeepers to contend with compared to research directly targeting consumers (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016). In this research, Kuwaiti organisations needed to give consent for the research to take place and this ended up being a lengthy process that delayed the data collection. However, a large enough sample was achieved in the end and so the data collection could proceed and provide enough information for the analysis. Second, the distance between the research context and the researcher's location also became a challenge as the researcher needed to conduct the interviews in person and had to travel several times from the UK to Kuwait.

Third, there were the expected difficulties in meeting with men in Kuwait due to the nature and cultural norms of the country and the Islamic rules that govern the interaction between men and women in this country (Marmenout and Lirio, 2014). As an insider to the culture, gender was particularly salient and thus status was both restrictive and empowering, as identified by Bolak (1996). In the interview process, creating rapport with participants is very important to the process, because without trust, interviewees may decide not to provide certain information to the interviewee and the data gathering would thus be incomplete (Meyers and Newman, 2007). There were particularly issues with creating a rapport with some male participants in the interviews, which was again linked to the gender relations in the country and the usual way in which men and women interact (Marmenout and Lirio, 2014). Finally, the researcher made an effort to have all interviews tape recorded, however, several of the female participants refused the recording and instead requested that their interview answers be written down. This was they do not want to record their voice, which is one of the Kuwaiti cultural issues that affected the data collection process, as women are often are not allowed to present in any media or might their family refuse this.

4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics is important in every research project and in this context refers specifically “to the standards of behaviour that guide your conduct in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work, or are affected by it” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, 239). The first key ethical issue that has to be proactively managed throughout the entire research process is informed consent along with informed consent, in which the researcher has to provide enough information and assurances to the research participants to allow for them to understand the consequences of their participation and give their assent to participate freely (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). In this research, information participant sheet (Appendix 5) and a consent sheet (Appendix 6) were approved by the research administration and provided to all interview participants to give them the information needed and allow them to sign that they consent to take part in the research. Important in this process is ensuring that no coercion or pressure was out on the participant and informing them they could withdraw from the process if they choose (Neuman and Robson, 2017).

Second, confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy are important ethical issues that must be taken under consideration and addressed in the research process (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Specific steps were taken throughout the research to address these issues so that all interview participants were able to remain anonymous and none of the research responses are attributable to specific interviewees and all of the private and public organisations used within the study are also anonymised. First, for the interviews data, participants' names were anonymised during the transcription and any possibly identifying information that they mentioned during the interviews was omitted from the transcriptions. Second, passwords were used to protect the interview data during and after the data collection process and third, arrangements were made to dispose of the full transcripts and other data collected in line with University guidelines (three years after the completion of the project). Fourth, in the reporting of the results, no names or specific demographic data was provided that could be used to identify interview participants. Similarly, the data taken from Instagram is protected and therefore the names of the banks and ministries are not used in the reporting of the results. Steps were made to align the way the data was aligned with the rules of De Montfort University and the 2018 GDPR law.

4.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has offered a detailed discussion of the research methodology used to guide the investigation of practitioners' use of social media in Kuwait institutions. Using Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill's (2016) research 'onion' as a guide, the chapter had five main sections discussing and justifying the research philosophy and approach, research strategies, data collection, research population and participants, and data analysis. An interpretivist philosophy was chosen to guide the rest of the research, and consistent with this, an inductive approach was used, and data gathered using two qualitative research strategies (semi-structured interviews and archival research). The qualitative approach is also useful for investigating the meanings people experience in events (Bryman, 2016). This matches the study's goal of investigating Kuwait PR practitioners' practices in using social media. The reasons for using these strategies and the tactics used to collect and analyse the data are outlined in detail, helping to support the confirmability of the qualitative research results (Petty, Thomson and Stew, 2012).

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS FROM THE ANALYSIS OF INSTRAGRAM

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the data taken from Instagram posts made by the private commercial institutions and government agencies included in the sample. The chapter is divided into two main sections, beginning with a descriptive analysis of the sample of Instagram posts taken from three public and private commercial institutions each, making a total of 6 organisations. This is followed by a detailed semiotic analysis of the Instagram posts, which were selected to represent the two groups of organisations based on the common features exhibited by the posts in general (in order to achieve data saturation). To ensure the' privacy, the real names of the organisations were not used and instead they were replaced with letters.

The process of the analysis involved the approach described by O'Halloran et al. (2011), in which multiple modes were identified as signs and, therefore, were analysed. Collected between October 2017 and September 2018, the most interactive posts of each month were gathered to be translated and analysed. The analysis presupposes identifying the signs, including the text and images, as well as captions, discovering their relations, fitting them into a broader system of meaning and, eventually, determining the expressions hidden within them. For this research, it meant reviewing the Instagram posts and breaking them down into signs, after which the ways in which they are related with each other was identified, as well as the ways in which they relate to the wider contexts of Kuwaiti culture, the Internet/Instagram culture and public relations management, which helped to determine their meanings (Neuendorf, 2016). The presented analysis includes six posts that are the most representative of the trends identified during the analysis.

5.2 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE INSTAGRAM POSTS

Both the private commercial institutions and the public institutions in the sample had high volumes of posts per month. In terms of posting volume, (A)

Bank of Kuwait averaged 70-80 posts per month, (G) Bank of Kuwait averaged 90-100 post per month and (N) Bank of Kuwait averaged 130-150 posts per month. All three private commercial institutions showed very good interactions with their customers in the form of replying to their enquiries and providing assistance when needed. This can be linked in some ways to EQ in which the organisation is seeking to elicit some kind of positive emotion through its posts (Li and Zahran, 2014; Ouakouak et al., 2020). Specifically, EQ is important in maintaining healthy online communities (Dos Santos et al., 2019), since it is necessary to identify the points of emotional interest in an audience in order to provide the content that would interest them (Chowdhury, 2017). Further, high EQ allows public relations practitioners to gain greater amounts of positive feedback from their audience (Muhammad, 2014). Thus, the results from the banking institutions indicate they have some level of EQ that helps them with the conduct public relations and content management in a way that is responsive to the audiences' needs (Bagnied et al., 2016; Chowdhury, 2017).

In terms of the public institutions (that is, the public sector portion of the investigation), there was a very different volume of posting on Instagram. (D) public institution averaged 5-10 Instagram posts per month between October 2017 and September 2018, (I) public institution averaged 60-70 posts per month between October 2017 and September 2018 and (H) public institution averaged 6-7 posts from October 2017 to September 2018. There was a significant difference in the interactions between the organisations and their audiences in terms of the private commercial institutions compared to the public institutions, which may be somewhat related to varying levels of CQ and EQ in the public relations approach of these institutions. Thus, these two categories of organisations are discussed separately.

The (I) public institution from public sector has the majority of their posts focusing on the image of the public institution, showing meetings of high-level officials with other high-level personnel of other public institutions and other countries (Figure 2.3.2 in Appendix 2). The next set of posts was focused on the activities and achievements of the public institutions, showing how they are serving the public and achieving their mandate (Figure 2.3.3 in Appendix 2). These are the posts with the highest level of engagement from the audience, with encouraging comments such as “We appreciate your effort” and suggestions for improvement such as “You have to educate the society about driving rules more.” However, as previously noted, there is no interaction between the public institution and the audience, because where the public have asked questions, such as “Can I drive, and wear headset?” these have gone unanswered. As it relates to EQ, public organisations appear to focus on their own emotions more as they mostly publish their achievements without referring to the people, so they’re being more self-centred (Li and Zahran, 2014).

These posts highlight the importance of two-way communication if only to support information transfer and clarification with the audience, with the public institution providing information about their services but failing to respond dozens of requests for clarification and more information from the public. The majority of posts were simply providing information, such as Figure 2.3.4 (in Appendix 2) showing the number of violators of curfew and home quarantine in the country at a specific date during the Covid-19 pandemic. This indicates a lower level of EQ among the public institutions, since organisations with low EQ find it difficult to conduct public relations and content management because they cannot accurately assess audience responses or predict audience reaction to certain forms of content or messages (Chowdhury, 2017). This is an indication of low EQ, since the public organisations usually do not get a lot of feedback and participation from their audience (Muhammad, 2014).

(H) public institution also had these two types of posts, highlighting achievements of the public institution and general information to the public, including meetings of high-level officials. There was one post with a significant number of comments; however, most posts had no response to the public (Figure 2.2.3 in Appendix 2). Similarly, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the public institutions provided a lot of information to the public and (H) public institution was at the forefront of this (Figure 2.2.5 in Appendix 2). There were a lot of comments on this post but again, this was not a two-way communication with the public institution staff. As with the (H) public institution, there are no responses from the (I) public institution staff to any of the comments from the public. The pattern is the same for the (D) public institution in terms of what is posted and the lack of interaction with the public (Figure 2.1.3 in Appendix 2), although the (D) provides more significant news stories about what is going on in the public institution in terms of their achievements (Figure 2.1.2 in Appendix 2).

A different approach has been taken by the private commercial institutions, which are seeking to engage in a dialogue with their customers to develop a closer relationship. For the (A) Bank of Kuwait, the posts that are made focused primarily on the products and services being offered by the private commercial institution, showing the benefits for the consumer (Figure 3.1.3 in Appendix 3). Other posts also highlighted the achievements of the private commercial institution and questions/competitions for customers to participate in (Figure 3.1.5 in Appendix 3).

On some of the private commercial institutions' posts, there are specific comments to the information posted, however, in general, many of the comments from customers are general customer service queries, such as "Is the mobile message free?" Unlike the public institutions, the (A) private commercial institution seeks to respond to all customer queries such as this, either providing direct answers or asking the client to make further contact so that private matter can be dealt with privately. This is replicated when examining the (N) private commercial institution, which goes even further to give detailed responses to customer queries on their Instagram pages and dealing with a lot of customer complaints about its products and services. The (N) private commercial institution had significantly more comments and likes on each of its posts than the (A private commercial institution, indicating more behavioural engagement, although all these comments are not positive (Figure 3.2.4 in Appendix 3). Finally, the (G) private commercial institution is similar to the other two in terms of the posts presented by the private commercial institution and the general customer service questions from customers, although there is generally a lot less interaction in terms of comments from the (G) private commercial institution customers compared to the other two private commercial institutions examined (Figure 3.3.2 in Appendix 3). Nonetheless, the (G) private commercial institution also systematically responded to customer comments and complaints.

private commercial institutions used a combination of English and Arabic in their communication. Many of the posts translated in English, a universal language that foreigners in Kuwait can understand and the first step to CQ. Thus, their use of English is an indication of CQ by private organisation, at least at a basic level (Li and Zahran, 2014). Examining the posts of private commercial institutions, they are very neutral on cultural symbols, which may indicate that they are have higher CQ, as they are providing a culturally homogenised product that may appeal to a multitude of diverse audiences in which various cultural groups co-exist (Al-Sharhan, 2018; Bhatt, 2020). Additionally, private commercial institutions feature expatriate employees in their photos (for example, in Figure 3.1.6 in Appendix 3), which may indicate that their CQ is higher – although this is a somewhat weak connection. According to Bhatt (2020), CQ plays an important part in marketing, brand image, and connecting to various cultural groups in Kuwait because of the fact that the country's population has a significant portion of foreign labourers, with the majority coming from India and the Philippines.

As private commercial institutions seek to gain customers from different cultural backgrounds, they are more likely to try to make sure they are relating to all types of customers, which again is linked to having a culturally homogenised product. In contrast, public organisations appear to be more focused on adding symbols or integrating traditions that would appeal to the Kuwaiti population specifically, with limited focus non-muslims, for example, by having hashtags related to Ramadan and using Arabic more significantly (Figure 18 below). The public institutions also focus more on Islamic principles than the banking institutions, which may not appeal to the entirety of the country's population due to differences in religious confessionalism (Aldaihani and Ali, 2019). Again, not all people who live in Kuwait are Muslim, however, they are the majority of the population (Al-Kandari and Gaither, 2011) and overall, Kuwait's Arab-Islamic heritage permeates daily life (Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017).

This indicates there is not significant focus on CQ by these types of organisations in Kuwait.

A low level of CQ combined with low level of EQ is not an unexpected finding, since there is an important connection between EQ and CQ when it comes to communicating effectively to audiences (Clark and Polesello, 2017). Thus, EQ and CQ have to be used together in order to be effective in public relations and social media content management (Leonidou et al., 2019). The results from the banking institutions in this sample are consistent with research from Aldaihani and Ali (2019) and Bhatt (2020) highlighting the importance of using CQ and EQ to bridge the gap between different cultural groups in order to market business services and support relationship-building. This was also consistent with specific research from Al-Wugayan (2019) about the importance of high levels of both EQ and CQ to create brand loyalty and a strong sense of emotional connection in the Kuwaiti banking industry.

Additionally, the images used on Instagram from the public and banking institutions provide further indication of low EQ in the public institutions and higher CQ in the banking institutions. According to Sprott (2019), countries that use Instagram to focus on hard power imagery, such as looking severe or self-interested in an event or showcasing resources relating to the military or finance, are actually indicating low EQ, while countries that seek to appear candid and interacting with the people on social media are indicating high EQ. From this research, in general, the public institutions focus more on hard power imagery, which is most evident in Figures 2.1.2, and 2.1.4 from Appendix 2. Despite the fact that there some posts that show some attempt at interaction by the public institutions, they are comparably fewer. Further, the public institutions generally do not use affective language or images, instead focusing on the informational aspect and on showcasing achievements which does not engage the audience (Lalancette and Raynauld, 2017; Sprott, 2019). In contrast, the attempt to EQ by the banking institutions is comparably better, as they are appeared to be focusing more on engagement with the public as discussed above. This is consistent with research showing that perceived creativity is an important aspect of Instagram as it makes followers more engaged and interactive with the brand (Casaló, Flavián and Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020).

5.3 SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF INSTAGRAM POSTS

This section is focused on the delivery of an in-depth and specific multi-modal semiotic analysis of the chosen Instagram posts from (D) public institution, (H) public institution, (I) public institution, (A) private commercial institution , (N) private commercial institution and (G) commercial institution to assess and understand the concepts of symbols in the images and captions presented.

5.3.1 Public Organisations in Kuwait

The shot in Figure 17 includes two frames. Specifically, the top frame features some information on the meeting of the ICAO Aviation Security Plan and the Facilities Development Working Group that is to be held at the Radisson Blu Hotel on 8-10 May. The bottom frame offers an illustration of a panorama of the City of Kuwait with a central feature being the Kuwait flag. The Arabian Gulf is also presented in the forefront of the shot with a ship sailing near the shore. The same aspect of the photo also includes an airplane that is presented flying above the Kuwait City in the sky. The whole image is made in black, white, and grey colours with the only coloured element in it being the Kuwaiti flag (Coffin, 2013).

Figure 7: public institution (D) Instagram Post, 6 May 2018

The whole image communicates the formality and importance of the ICAO Aviation Security Plan and the Facilities Development Working Group meeting in particular due to the presence of black, white, and grey colours. The only object in the shot that retains its colours and stands out amidst the rest of the greyscale illustrations appears to be a national symbol: the Kuwait flag. In other words, this signifies that the whole image is developed around the national symbol of Kuwait; this highlights the significance of this symbol and thus urges the target audience to consider attending this meeting by correlating its importance with that of a national Kuwaiti symbol (Coffin, 2013). In fact, as the presence of the flag of Kuwait is highlighted, it can be deduced that the purpose of this is to convince the viewers that by attending the meeting, they should experience the same sentiments of pride that they would experience if they had attended a national event. In fact, this attempt to increase the importance of the aforementioned event is also reinforced with the use of the red colour that is featured in the image in order to exude energy, power and determination. Equally, other meanings of this colour that the photo also attempts to instil in the viewers, include urgency and passion (Coffin, 2013). In other words, this whole presentation creates a hidden connotation that encourages the audience to take urgent action towards attend the meeting in time.

To communicate the essence of the ICAO Aviation Security Plan and the Facilities Development Working Group meeting, there is an airplane present in the photo, which represents civil aviation; however, it appears to be more a part of the background, rather than on the forefront of the shot. The sky represents the airplane parking space and the future Kuwait airport with loads of airplanes thus also demonstrating the links to the aviation sector. Equally, there is a ship present in the photo in order to demonstrate the contacts and associations of civil aviation with the representatives of other transportation companies or sectors and their desire to address the security issues in the aviation sector. The whole picture denotes an atmosphere of stillness and peace. The purpose of this is vital, as it communicates that the City of Kuwait is safe and secure, and the civil aviation airplanes are able to fly freely in the sky. This is reflected in the unusually low position of the airplane in the sky in relation to the Kuwait City and land. In other words, this airplane’s position demonstrates the civil aviation’s ability to roam the skies freely and safely, thus highlighting that the security of aviation has been a primary concern in Kuwait and of high quality.

From a textual perspective, this Instagram post was made for informative purposes. In particular, it communicated the information about the 3rd ICAO Aviation Security Plan and the Facilities Development Working Group meeting in the Radisson Blu Hotel under the auspices of the President of Civil Aviation. The content of the text is also merged within the shot thus creating a strong and clear link between the visual content of the shot and post’s text. This post gained 140 likes that is a bit lower number of likes in contrast to other posts that gained 200-300 likes. Other posts featured official meetings with different official figures that are known in the aviation sector. In fact, this is because such posts that feature the endorsement of official figures increase engagement through WOM. In addition to this, other posts featured certain degree of dynamics and therefore attracted more attention from the audience. Equally, the engagement in the comment section is relatively low, represented by two comments only. In other words, this demonstrates that the post served its purpose and attracted certain attention however not to the degree that it could. Considering the various elements of the post, it can be argued that it is overly stimulating, and the viewer experiences a certain degree of challenge that reduces his/her ability to focus on and consume the information that the post attempts to convey. Considering research by Nielson (2010), which revealed that the audience tends to prefer photos that feature people and tends to ignore photos that are too stimulating, the lower level of engagement that this post has managed to amass is not surprising.

Next, Figure 18 is horizontally placed and presents its message in a central position. The message offers advice as to how to maintain teeth health during Ramadan.

Figure 8: public institution (H) Instagram Post, 9 May 2018

The shot also contains a figure of a tooth illustrated in a simple, cartoonish style. This tooth has a smile on its face and two dental instruments in both hands. This creates positive associations in the viewer’s mind, as the image of the tooth looks sweet and cute, subconsciously giving shape to a desire to read the message in the photo (Cross, 2015). It was revealed that cartoons tend to capture the attention of the audience since these are simple to understand (Cross, 2015). Equally, cartoons tend to trigger deep nostalgia for the carefree years of childhood, thus resulting in the development of positive emotions on the subconscious level (Cross, 2015). As a result, the cartoons feel familiar to people and therefore trigger the development of pleasant feelings.

The whole shot is made in blue colour, which is the colour that communicates stability and trust. In other words, the hidden connotation of this image implies to trust the message in the shot, as it has been created for the viewer's benefit. Furthermore, the post has contrasting colours that catches the audience's attention, and can be considered an infographic, which can increase the rate that viewers understand and consume information (Adams and Osgood, 1973; Smiciklas, 2012).

From the perspective of the textual analysis, the caption for this shot states- "Ramadan_health_advice – chew sugar - free gum after meal". This text is interlinked with the message and the image of a healthy and happy tooth in the picture. In other words, the post advises the audience to chew sugar-free gums after each meal to keep the teeth healthy and happy. The text includes different emoji to highlight different parts of the message. Additionally, as highlighted above, their hashtags are an indication of CQ focusing on Kuwaiti residents specifically, as they are discussing Ramadan (Ramadan_saha), which would also appeal to Muslims searching for that hashtag. Still, this institution does not only focus on health during Ramadan but also on health in general as seen from their hashtags Zarh_asahh (healthiest blossom) and Alaalam_asaha (healthiest world) that focus on health regardless religion. Hashtags are very important in allowing the audience to gauge personality and understand emotions such as excitement and thus can be very useful for organisations to express their EQ and engage with the audience in a more personal and authentic way (Mohammad and Kiritchenko, 2015).

The Instagram posts from Kuwait (H) public institution gain around 200-300 likes therefore this post attracted considerable interest from the target audience (relative to other posts by these organisations). In part, this can be due to the valuable information that this post contains thus becoming a valuable reminder for the target audience. In the context of comments, this post generated certain engagement with 4 comments being made by the viewers. In general, Instagram posts from Kuwait (H) public institution generate around 3-10 comments per post, therefore so 4 comments are considered to be a moderate engagement for this account. Upon evaluation of other Instagram posts from the (H) public institution as well as the (D) public institution, it was visible that the largest engagement occurs when there are public figures being present in the shot that increase the dynamics of the Instagram post and act as leverage of word-of-mouth effects. In contrast, static pictures tend to attract lower engagement and attention from the viewers, however due to the presence of the cartoon figure and important information, the post from public institution (H) has also attracted moderate attention in comparison to other Instagram posts.

Figure 19 features the meeting of the general committee for police affairs. The layout of this shot is horizontal, and the focus is placed on the table and the people that sit around the table. The photograph features only males, thereby minimising issues relating to cultural values. The whole shot features dynamics reflected in the communication between the figures in the shot. In this way, the shot demonstrates the work being done on the different subjects related to the meeting. All the figures that are present in the shot are in business attires and this also highlights that the photo attempts to emphasise professionalism and seriousness. As the post's caption suggests that the under-Secretary of Interior Affairs is present at the meeting, this adds to the significance of the reported event. In general, the whole photo simply reports the meeting that was held on 8 October 2017, thus carrying a more informative and reporting character for the viewers.

Figure 9: public institution (I) Instagram Post, 8 October 2017

This post's caption also carries informational character by stating that the meeting happened and informing the audience about the officials that were present at the meeting. There are no 'emojis' (used to express an emotion) being presented in the text due to the formality and significance of the event. In other words, the formal character of the meeting is reflected in the formal tone of caption. From the perspective of denotation, this shot reflects the professional character of the meeting. On the other hand, the main connotation of this shot is to develop trust in the viewers' minds that the public institution (I) works hard for the society's wellbeing and increase the transparency of its operations, factors that are vital for increasing the public's engagement with the government and its trust towards it. Indeed, such photos also demonstrate the importance and significance of those meetings in relation to the lives of ordinary citizens, on one hand decreasing the inherent mistrust towards political entities and on the other hand increasing their citizen engagement and participation in political issues and processes (Liu and Horsley, 2007; World Bank, 2017b).

In the context of engagement, this shot has gained 1,858 Likes that is slightly lower than some posts gain. The posts that gain more likes demonstrate the figures and faces of those who are in the shot in the clear way. This shot does not show the faces of the individuals clearly and this can be a reason for less likes gained for this shot. Likewise, this is a visual static shot whereas the videos tend to gain larger number of likes and comments. On the other hand, the number of comments is relatively average for the Instagram feed of (I) public institution thus demonstrating certain degree of engagement. There is also no two-way communication between the public institution and the audience, which could have increased engagement further. However, as the assessment of the Instagram feed revealed, videos with certain stories attract larger engagement with the number of comments reaching 134 comments per post.

5.3.2 private commercial institution in Kuwait

The translation for the post in Figure 20 is ‘protect your card information’. It presents a man who is centrally placed in the horizontal layout of the visual. The photograph features only a male, thereby minimising issues relating to cultural values. This man, who appears to be just a regular individual, sits behind a table holding (presumably) his VISA card in a protective manner while his facial expression is demonstrating emotions of fear and anxiety. The central position of the individual and the blurred background draws the audience’s attention to him. This enables the creation of a connection with the viewer that allows him/her to experience the emotions of fear that are presented on the face of this individual, unhindered by other details that may be present in the photo. Likewise, this is achieved by the fact that the shot is made in a horizontal way and this brings the viewer on the same level as the individual on the shot, thus allowing better connection between the viewer and the individual.

Figure 10: private commercial institution (A), Instagram Post 1 May 2018

In general, the shot communicates the unsettling emotions and feelings of fear, unknowingness, fright, and risk. In terms of colour palette, the shot is made by using bright colours, thus shifting the viewer’s attention to the man in the centre. The bright, white colours of the shot directly focus the audience’s attention to the darker-coloured figure with the dark-coloured card in his hands. This creates a better association with the man in the centre of the shot and his emotions, thus increasing the speed of message consumption. The grey and black colour of the card create feelings of unsettlement associated with the need to protect the card data from the potential risk. Grey colour symbolises formality and sophistication associated with the card, while black colour represents mystery and the fear of unknown associated with the potential risk of theft thus causing feelings of unsettlement (MLC, 2019). On the other hand, the surrounding white colour decreases the negative effect of the atmosphere of fear, and as such it somewhat neutralises the substantial negative perceptions about the message within the minds of the viewers. Likewise, the blue colour of the text that is merged in the shot, denotes stability, trust, wisdom and confidence. Consequently, these feelings are associated with the (A) private commercial institution brand's logo and message. In other words, these visual elements that comprise this picture, communicate confidence, which becomes associated with the bank. This conveys the message that the private commercial institution has adequate ability to protect the financial data of its clients.

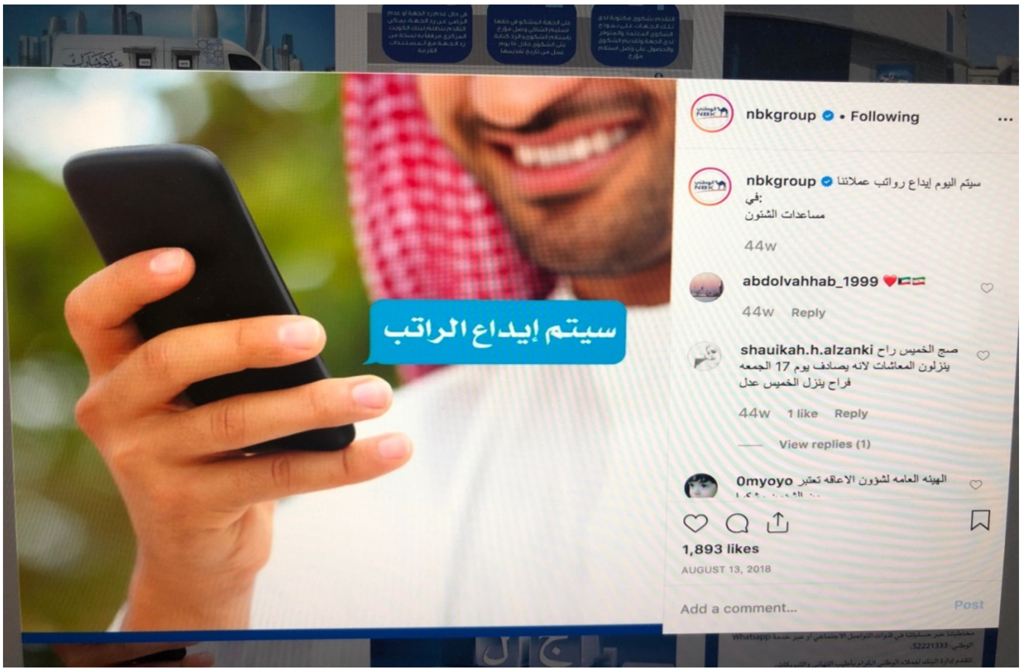
The model of denotation and connotation by Barthes suggests that connotation refers to the creation of the primary meaning of the image while denotation suggests the development of illusion of commonality between the signifier and signified (Bianchi, 2011). In the light of this theory, the primary meaning that comes to the mind of the viewer suggests that the individual in the shot is scared of his or her personal information of his or her card being stolen online. On the other hand, upon further analysis, the card in hand may represent the personal data and all the other relevant valuable data interlinked with the finances hence the text in the shot's description section focusing on protection. Due to the harmony between the textual and visual elements of the post, the connotation of this picture is communicated strongly. Thus, this is forcing the viewers to consider taking extra measures to protect or secure their valuable financial or personal data from a potential theft.

This shot has gained 132 Likes and a few comments thus representing a low interest in the post as well as low engagement. This can be interconnected with the demonstration of fearful emotions for the purpose of emotional persuasion as other posts by (A) private commercial institution that communicate more positive emotions gained more likes over time. This is also applicable to the low degree of engagement that was demonstrated in respect to this post. If there was a different approach to the communication of the need to protect data with the use of more positive emotions and associations (as seen in Figure 3.2.1 – Appendix 3 about a competition with prizes), this post might have gained more likes and comments. Another factor that could have affected engagement is the richness of information, considering the greater number of likes and comments of figure 3.1.3 (Appendix 3) that offered a more extensive textual description of safety instructions.

Finally, the post seems to contradict research by Bakhsi, Shamma and Gilbert (2014), who argued that the presence of a human face can significantly increase the number of likes and comments, compared to posts that do not feature a face. However, although one of the main characteristics of the post is a human face, the post has low to average engagement as was discussed. The reason for this could be the gender of the featured individual, since females tend to attract greater engagement (Gilbert et al., 2013).

The translation of the post in Figure 21 is 'the salary will be debited in client's private commercial institutions accounts.' This shot presents a Kuwaiti man wearing traditional Kuwaiti clothes that smiles looking at his smartphone. The photograph features only a male, thereby minimising issues relating to cultural values. This shot maintains a horizontal layout with the smartphone being in the focused central position, while the smile of the male is blurred on the background. As a result, the viewer's focus is directed towards the smartphone as the main visual feature of the shot.

Figure 11: private commercial institution (N), Instagram Post 13 August 2018



In contrast to the previous post of (A) private commercial institution, this shot is considered to be more positive, inducing an overall more pleasant emotional state to the viewer. Indeed, the smile on the face of the male suggests that the data that he collects from the phone results in pleasant feelings being developed, creating a positive mind-set. In fact, the photo implies that the male has received certain message and is smiling, and that message is about his salary been deposited to his bank account) because of the news that he received from the smartphone; thus, linking the bank's online banking services for smartphones with positive associations for other viewers. Hence, it can be safely deduced that the post is made to convince the target audience to make an illocutionary act to use the smartphones for certain services or operations that the (N) group private commercial institution offers.

This shot presents the message of the post in an implicit way, where the gestures, non-verbal communication, and other shot-related aspects motivate the viewers to use the smartphone for bank services. In other words, the message implies that the viewers would experience positive emotions and feelings when using bank services through the smartphone. In terms of the colour palette of the shot, this post is comprised of bright white, red, and green colours. White signifies goodness and light, while green signifies harmony and freshness, thus contributing to the development of positive associations (MLC, 2019). Finally, red is associated with strength, power and passion thus forcing subconsciously the viewers to maintain this mind set and perform certain relevant actions. In contrast to these bright colours, the smartphone is presented in black to be highlighted in the shot as the main visual element (MLC, 2019). The message from the smartphone is merged in the picture and is in blue colour that communicates stability and trust (MLC, 2019).

When measuring the engagement and interest of the target audience, it can be seen that this post has gained 1,893 Likes and numerous comments. In the time span between October 2017 and September 2018, the posts from (N) private commercial institution moved from 800 to 2000 likes. As such, this post is considered to be quite popular among the viewers. This confirms that the private commercial institution has managed to instil feelings of pride and positive emotions in the audience, and this has contributed to the development of interest among the subscribers.

Figure 12: private commercial institution (G), Instagram Post 19 September 2018

This post is focused on informing the potential and existing clients of (G) private commercial institution that its ATMs serve customers with special needs. The visual shot maintains a horizontal layout, with the photo of the ATM being presented in the upper central position and location points being presented throughout the shot. The whole image is demonstrated in blue, red and grey colours, thus achieving a great contrast between the different elements that comprise the picture, enabling better visibility. This image includes a map with the location points being presented below the photo of ATM with signs that demonstrate the services that these ATM's are able to fulfil. Red colour is used in order to draw the attention of the viewer towards the location points for ATMs that cater to customers with special needs. In other words, this colour is used for attracting the attention of the viewers and demonstrates that the location points carry large significance (MLC, 2019). To maintain the contrast to the red colour, which denotes aggressiveness and passion, blue colour is used to represent the map (MLC, 2019). The colour blue symbolises peace and calmness; therefore, being the contrasting or opposite colour to red, it acts as a counterbalance for it, as the colour red may ignite aggressiveness in the viewers (MLC, 2019). Hence, it is clear that the combination of these colours is implemented to achieve a balance of colours in the picture and in turn neutralise the emotions of the viewers. (G) Bank's ATM in the upper central position is presented in a photographic manner to connotate both a physical and real demonstration of ATM. The ATM object is one of the most important figures in this shot; therefore, it is shown in a different manner and in contrast to other objects in the picture. Equally, a photographic shot of the ATM also presents to the customers how (G) Bank's ATMs that cater to the special needs of the customers actually look like in real life, thus making it easier for the customers to find them. In general, this shot carries more informative character passing on information about the locations of certain ATMs. This shot also has certain textual content that is demonstrated in the lower left position. This text states that upgraded ATMs cater to every customer. The actual text is made in white colour and is highlighted in red colour to draw the attention of the viewers. Below this text is another text made in smaller font size that states that these ATMs cater to customers with special needs. In other words, the textual content that is presented in large font size, provides more significant information and carries the character and style of a slogan with the purpose to attract and interest more customers to use Gulf Bank's ATMs. On the other hand, textual content in smaller font size is made for informative purposes and therefore is regarded less significant in comparison to the previously mentioned textual content. This photo gained 297 likes and 6 comments.

5.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CHAPTER SUMMARY

The application of semiotic analysis to the posts was employed to answer the research questions, and based on the findings, the following information can be used to do that. The first question was about the extent and mode of use of social media use by public relations practitioners in public and private sectors. The analysis suggests that both private and public organisations employ some of the possibilities of Instagram, in particular, through the use of pictures and text, but public organisations are not very likely to employ the opportunity for two-sided communication. The goal of the public organisations can be defined, using Grunig's (1993, 2017) model as either press agentry or public information, while the mode of operation of private organisations is closer to a two-way model, even if it is clearly asymmetrical.

This observation does not just indicate the specifics of the modes and extent of Instagram use among the two sectors; it also responds to the second question, suggesting that public and private organisations do indeed have differences in the way they use social media in public relations. It should be highlighted, however, that there are similarities between them too. Specifically, both sectors rely heavily on one-way communications, which is why both models can be considered asymmetrical and, furthermore, they prioritize information dissemination and the management of customer perspectives over the building of relationships, which, however, is especially true for public organisations. This way, it is apparent that the two approaches are different but not without similarities.

The third question about the cultural context affecting public relations social media use is answered clearly: culture does have an impact on the topic of this research. To be more specific, there are several aspects to cultural impact in this regard. On the one hand, there are clear influences regarding the way the topics are chosen and covered; certain topics, for example, sexual ones, are avoided, and others, for example, Islam, become central, which is reasonable for a tradition-oriented culture (Hofstede, 2011). On the other hand, perhaps more importantly, the specifics of Kuwaiti culture affect the methods, approaches and goals of public relations. For example, the fact that Kuwait is a high-context culture may have led to the more indirect communication between public relations and consumers, and the fact that Kuwait is typically portrayed as a top-down culture might explain the asymmetry in public relations social media communication (Aladwani, 2013; Croucher et al., 2012). Finally, it can also be pointed out that the effectiveness of the communication is affected by cultural features. Thus, relationship-building is very important for a high-context culture like that of Kuwait (Croucher et al., 2012). However, since the organisations do not appear to focus on that, a lot of the findings suggest that the popularity of many of the posts presented is rather low.

The final question is concerned with the implementation of social media in public relations strategies, and while this part of the analysis does not allow insights into the actual inner workings of an organisation, the research does indicate that, at least among the selected organisations, a significant amount of attention is dedicated to social media use. Based on the number of posts, private organisations seem to be more focused on this strategy, however. A more detailed insight into the matter will be found in the interview section of the results.

In summary, this chapter has presented the results of the analysis of the Instagram data from a sample of public and private commercial organisations in Kuwait. The next chapter presents the results from the analysis of the interview data, and then both data sets are integrated and discussed in Chapter 7. Finally, in order to improve the understanding of public relations within the Kuwait, the results from the analysis of the organisation’s Instagram posts are used to develop an alternative model of public relations. Specifically, this chapter presented information that revealed that both public institutions and private commercial organisations in Kuwait use social media to inform their audiences on news about their management and their products. Furthermore, it was revealed that the communication of the private sector is two-way asymmetrical communication. While the public sector using one-way communication, as there is no interaction in the comments section with the audience. Finally, certain cultural elements in congruence with Islamic values were observed throughout the photos in order to attract and engage the audience (e.g., exclusive use of males, traditional clothes).

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS FROM THE INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the interviews conducted with two sets of respondents. One set of interviews were conducted with 12 banking staff and the other set of interviews were conducted with 10 employees working with the government and Kuwait public institutions. The participants demonstrated diverging levels of expertise (based on their positions and experience), which is why they responded to different sets of questions. The interviews took between 45 and 90 minutes, and the language that they used (Arabic or English) depended on the preferences of the interviewees. Audio recording was employed along with written notes. Thematic analysis was carried out in accordance with the literature by Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013) and Braun and Clarke (2006), which required identifying codes and themes within the data. Since the data analysis and collection were carried out in tandem, the results allowed achieving data saturation, which improved the quality of the research (Fusch and Ness, 2015).

6.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Table 2 gives a description of the sample and the social media they use for work for the banking staff interviewed, while Table 3 describes the government staff interviewed.

Table 2: Banking Sample

Number	Current Position	Tenure	Social media used
B1	IT Supervisor	6 years	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat
B2	Customer Relationship Manager	5 years	Instagram, WhatsApp
B3	PR Manager	6 years	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook
B4	PR Manager	5 years	WhatsApp
B5	PR Manager	23 years	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook

B6	Customer Service Manager	10 years	Instagram, Facebook
B7	Digital Channel Officer	2 years	Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp
B8	Service Quality Manager	7 years	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp
B9	Customer Service Manager	7 years	Instagram, WhatsApp
B10	Customer Service Manager	5 years	WhatsApp
B11	PR and Marketing	15 years	Instagram, Twitter
B12	Customer Service and Quality Manger	12 years	Instagram

Table 3: Government Sample

Number	Current Position	Tenure	Social media used
G1	Head, PR and Media Dept.	10 years	Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat
G2	PR and Social Media Officer	5 years	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat
G3	Head, PR Dept. & Electronic Media	18 years	Instagram, Twitter
G4	Head, PR and Media Dept.	11 years	Instagram, Twitter
G5	PR Researcher	6 years	Instagram, Twitter
G6	PR Researcher	2 years	No social media practice
G7	PR Researcher	4 years	Instagram
G8	Head, PR and Media Dept.	20 years	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook
G9	PR and Media Researcher	5 years	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook
G10	PR and Media Researcher	7 years	Instagram, Twitter

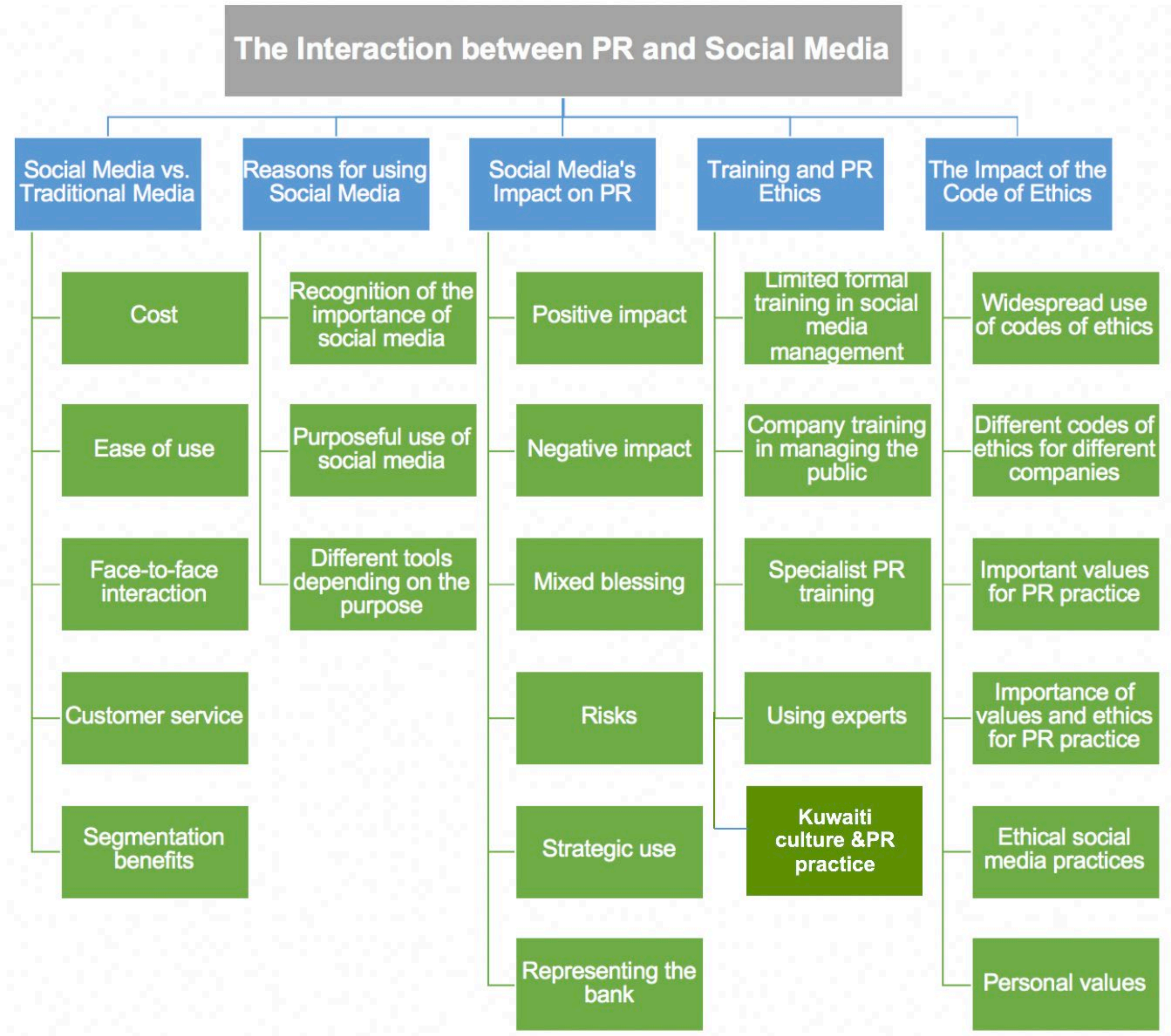
In both samples, Instagram and Twitter are the most used social media sites. For the government workers, 9 of 10 interviewees (90%) said that they used these two platforms for their daily work, and from the employees in the banking sector, 9 of the 12 interviewees (75%) used Instagram regularly and half used Twitter regularly. In the banking sample, Facebook was used just as much as Twitter, with 6 of the 12 respondents (50%) using this social media platform in their work, while in the government sample, only 3 of the 10 respondents (30%) used Facebook and these were also the persons that used multiple social media sites including Instagram and Twitter. Snapchat was the only other social media site used by the government sample (20%), while only one person in the banking sample used Snapchat (8%), while 5 of those respondents (42%) used WhatsApp and 2 of these respondents only used WhatsApp in their work. One person in the entire sample used no social media and 4 of the 22 respondents (18%) used only one social media site, with the rest of the sample using at least two social media sites.

Their reasons for choosing these sites are discussed in more detail below, however, an overview of these results indicates that more established social media platforms were adopted by a greater percentage of the sample, while newer platforms that cater to niche audiences, such as Snapchat, were being integrated less slowly, in line with older research by Eyrich, Padman and Sweetser (2008). This would indicate that this is an enduring behavioural pattern that is less related to the specific social media platforms that are being examined. In line with this, Facebook and Twitter (as the oldest and most established of the major social media platforms) are among the most commonly used tools by both commercial and public institutions (Graham and Avery, 2013).

6.3 CODING SCHEME

The coding scheme is presented in Figure 23. Five main themes have been identified in the research and this chapter presents the results organised based on these five themes, as well as each of the sub-themes identified. Direct quotes are taken from the interviews with the respondents to provide support for the themes and sub-themes.

Figure 13: Coding Scheme



6.4 THEME 1: SOCIAL MEDIA VERSUS TRADITIONAL MEDIA

This theme highlights the potential benefits of using social media in comparison with traditional media for the private commercial institutions in the sample. This theme and its sub-themes and supporting quotes are presented in Table A-1 (Appendix 4). First, only two private commercial institution staff mentioned the benefits in terms of cost, as B5 noted that "traditional methods cost a lot more" and B6 says "it is cost-efficient." One of the government staff also mentioned the greater use of social media in his operations in part being linked to the cost: "now we have a greater spread, especially because social media does not need [any] budget” (G8). This indicates that cost is a consideration for both the private commercial institutions and the government, even though it may not be the primary consideration when deciding to use this approach to interact with customers and the public.

Second, two private commercial institution respondents and two government staff talked about the ease-of-use of social media, making their interactions with customers and the public easier, as highlighted below:

> As for me, both are the same as I have been trained on both methods of communication…. But social media is easier, as I use it to send the link of a video and the client follows the steps (B1).
>
> I prefer to deal via social media sites because they can better inform the audience through reviews, and connection with customers via social media sites is easy and comfortable (G2).
>
> For me, as an employee at the airport, it does not matter [whether I] deal with the public… through social media or telephone or personal communication (G4).
>
> As a government ministry, dealing with the external audience through social networking sites is more comfortable than personal communication because it eliminates personal communication (G9).

Third, several of the respondents seemed to like to use traditional media because it allows them to talk to people face-to-face, for reasons highlighted below:

> Personally, I prefer to deal with the public in person so that I get acquainted with the persons in front of me and ensure they understand what I am talking about. I like to see the person I am talking to and see what he is saying (G8).
>
> I prefer personal contact through face-to-face communication because many times the message is not correctly understood when using social media sites or they do not provide the consumers with clear information (B3).
>
> Face-to-face to study the customer better and to know what customers are feeling. If I want to inform the customer about any product through social media, I cannot figure out his emotions and feelings. And in WhatsApp the customer might read it or not, but during face-to-face [communication] I see by the customers’ feelings or gestures that they do not like that product, and I can quickly change the conversation to another product (B4).

> I prefer to contact the client face to face because it is more personal and persuasive (B6).
>
> Personal communication has the most effective impact on the client… social media only provides information faster (B9).
>
> From my point of view, the best way to contact and deal with the client is face-to-face…because by communicating personally with the client I make sure that the message arrived correctly, there is no false information or confusion, and he understands what I mean exactly and if he needs any clarification, I can explain to him (B11).

This led to the fourth point, which is that face-to-face interaction can be useful in particular situations, especially when they are dealing with complaining/angry customers or with older consumers:

> Face-to-face communication is useful if the client is angry or needs specific papers or is an old person (B1).
>
> If the customer has a big problem, personal contact takes place face-to-face (B2).
>
> The best communication tool for sure is face-to-face because the discontented customer, no matter what happens through social media, cannot be satisfied; but through face to face we can reach the satisfaction required (B5).
>
> …if someone needs help at the airport, of course, personal communication [is used] to solve the problem as soon as possible because through social media I cannot solve problems immediately (G4).
>
> Through face- to-face communication I can deliver the message more clearly to the public, because there are things, we cannot say through social networking sites, [while] through interpersonal communication I can speak more freely (G5).

Finally, several of the banking respondents appear to appreciate specific benefits of using social media, including the segmentation that can take place:

> We can say that [our] Bank is youth-focused, a bank that targets young people… The Bank was keen from the beginning to use social media to attract young people because they are more outspoken and use social media as means for communication (B2).
>
> …social media communication helps to give more information about the bank and its services (B3).
>
> Yes, kind of…Because of the number of people on social media, it makes it easy to communicate with them… [and] target segments that are accessible, such as young people [are easier to reach] (B5).
>
> [You] can give them news, prizes and [have] great interaction (B5).

This is in contrast to the government employees interviewed, as highlighted below:

> All social groups are targeted. We do not have any specifications but for a different period of time we try to target a specific group of people; for example, for a month we target youths, and the diseases can affect them and how to protect their health. The month after we target women's health etc (G1).
>
> We do not have a plan to reach a targeted audience. We post and publish news about higher management and feature coverage from our activities, photography, meetings with important figures and visits from important delegations (G8).
>
> We are targeting the teachers, managers working in the Ministry, parents of the students in public schools and all Kuwaiti People (G10).

At the same time, there is a recognition by these employees that some segments of the population use social media more than others, and in this way, they may use messages targeted specifically at these groups:

> Yes, some messages are directed to the youth group such as …messages [about speeding] (G3).

However, whether this means that social media will lead to more effective communication with audiences than traditional media seems to be dependent on the goal, as highlighted below:

> Twitter, Instagram and Facebook are not very effective (G5).
>
> There should be dissemination of news for passengers and airport services but there is a little focus [on this] because higher management likes to focus more on its achievements rather than passenger services (G4).
>
> People do not care about these agreements [that are announced on social media]. We have to offer airport services and developments not only [information about] higher management and their image that do not serve the passengers and the outside audience (G5).

This issue of effectiveness is discussed further below.

6.5 THEME 2: REASONS FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA

This theme discusses the key reasons that private commercial institutions use social media. This theme and its sub-themes and supporting quotes are presented in Table A-2 (Appendix 4). First, more companies of all sizes are acknowledging the need to be on social media, as highlighted below:

> Social media is very important as it conveys information to the clients easily and enlightens them, as clients are now spending very long time using it, and I as a bank, am available during this long times (B1).
>
> It is very important for reputation purposes and reflects the services of the bank and showed our place in the community as a bank and the public offerings that we have, people know me as a bank, and I am active (B5).

This is the same with the government respondents, who identified specific reasons that social media was useful in their interactions with the public:

> The use of social media sites provides the ministry with great influence because it informs the public about the service, we provide for them and facilitates communication with them, especially if they have any questions. It has also increased our interaction with the public. …. before there was no communication with the public, but with social media sites and communication there has been interaction with the public and we can learn their views which was not possible before social media existed (G8).

Second, both private commercial institutions and the public institutions are clearly using social media in a purposeful way, with clear goals they want to achieve. When asked why they use social media, the banking staff responded that they used social media for “responding to customer questions” (B1) and “for advertising… and to introduce customers to the Bank’s offers” (B2). Still, the general purposes of using social media in the private commercial institutions varied:

> [We use social media for] enlightening the clients and for the easiness of reaching to the most demographics of the society, as using social media is not limited to a specific age (B1).
>
> [We use social media for] communicating with customers and advertising, expanding our work network, attracting new customers and facilitating communication (B2).

Nonetheless, these were similar to the motives used by the government offices in using social media in a public-facing way:

> Instead of the public having to wait in long queues only for inquiries, these matters became very easy… citizens come to the organisation with all documents … social media sites … made day-to-day operations easy (G2).

…the ministry's focus and interest [is] to deliver messages to all members of society through social media. It is an easy and fast way of communicating (G3).

…the benefit of social media is to communicate with the public and know their suggestions and reactions. Also, with social media we are able to answer their inquiries in a quick and easy manner so that they do not need to come to the ministry personally only to make inquiries (G9).

To answer their inquiries in a quick and easy way so that they do not need to come to the ministry personally only to inquire. As we all know in Kuwait the weather in summer is very hot and dry. Thus, providing such services to the public makes the communication easier and faster with the audience (G10).

Third, respondents were savvy in their use of social media, using different tools depending on the purpose of their interactions with the public. Instagram is the most used site as discussed above, with 19 of 22 interviewees (86%) saying they used this site for work. Several of these respondents specifically highlight the reasons they like to use Instagram in particular:

[I prefer to use] Instagram because in Instagram I can post pictures, and pictures explain what I want to tell the customers (B6).

[I prefer to use] Instagram because the picture explains many things. The public does not always have time to read and I personally noticed great interaction with the public through Instagram] (G4).

This is consistent with Ebrahim's (2017) analysis of the use of digital technologies in public relations in Kuwait where they found that Instagram was the social media tool identified as most beneficial for use in this context. This is followed by Twitter (14), Facebook (9), and WhatsApp (6), which is also consistent with research by Graham and Avery (2013) in public sectors outside Kuwait, showing that Facebook and Twitter are usually the most used social media by these organisations. In this sample, four respondents used only 1 tool – two of them used WhatsApp and two used Instagram. The remaining respondents used between 2 and 4 tools, and one respondent used no social media at all. All 8 respondents that used two tools used Instagram as one of those two tools, which was combined with Twitter, WhatsApp, or Facebook. For those using 3 or 4 social media sites, these were mainly Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook (8 respondents). The respondents use social media for different purposes, and this is why they use largely use more than one site:

> [I use] Instagram for events and coverage, Twitter and Facebook… [for] cooperation and coordination with marketing and public relations (B3).
>
> Twitter, Instagram and Facebook…for daily advertisement (B5).

However, other users appear to be less positive about social media use, such as one private commercial institution manager who only uses WhatsApp:

> To contact customers, we have to use WhatsApp because in Arab countries in general there is a tendency to use WhatsApp instead of text messages… personally, I prefer text messages to be honest (B4).

6.6 THEME 3: SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT ON PUBLIC RELATIONS

This theme discusses respondents' view of the impact of social media on how they operate in terms of public relations. This theme and its sub-themes and supporting quotes are presented in Table A-3 (Appendix 4). First, the majority of respondents think that social media has a positive impact on public relations, as highlighted below:

> Yes, social media has had a positive influence on PR practice in many aspects and not just PR, all the bankers' activities (B1).
>
> Sure, of course… I can attract any remote client through social media (B2).
>
> Yes, I agree [because] via social media I can get access a broader customer base and it is cost-efficient (B6).
>
> Of course, social media is available for any customer, so feedback from customers is beneficial for PR practices (B8).
>
> Yes, social media ads have had a positive impact on the bank in the past as the number of customers who opened accounts increased due to social media, and also inquiries increased and the number of customers visiting the bank was reduced (B9).
>
> Yes, on marketing and facilitating transactions, transparency and overall ease for everything (B10).
>
> It is essential for the public relations practitioner (G7).
>
> Yes, after the use of social media, the public has become more familiar with our ministry's activities. … Before the appearance of social media, no one knew about us and our activities and services that we provide to the public, but now we have greater publicity, especially because social media does not need [any] budget (G8).

These positive impacts include using social media to create a closer relationship with customers and the public:

> The bank now uses social media, which has given us the opportunity to encourage customers to deal with the bank and shorten the distance between the bank and the customer (B2).
>
> Social networking sites are the only link between us and the public, through which we offer the latest news about the bank's management and achievements and at the same time we can receive the public's feedback (G4).

However, not all respondents agreed that social media has a positive influence, including B4 that in general did not like to use social media: "No, I do think so. I am against using social media in work… social media does not bring customers." In general, however, respondents took a nuanced view and were able to see the 'mixed blessing,' as highlighted below:

> …there are also people praising social media [but it is a] double-edged sword and we must be careful when using it because it can be harmful even though it is possible to have benefits through its use (B2).
>
> There is a positive impact and there is a negative impact. On one hand, it is a way to communicate with customers as the face of the bank and social media has affected us positively because it is a means of publishing information about the bank and because we can get a reaction quickly from the customers. This has made the impact of social media very large; we see the comments immediately. However, the negative impact is also clear because not all the comments about the bank are positive (B11).

This was further highlighted when respondents were asked about the risks that they saw in using social media in the banking industry:

> Risk comes from the clients who want to defame the image of the bank before the public. So, any mistake made by the employee is considered evidence against him. So, we have to take care in replying and we should not make wrong statements. Even simple mistakes are counted against an employee and may become a big case. The details of the clients must be specific and accurate, and the employee must reply strategically (B1).
>
> Customers criticise the bank for trivial reasons; we cannot completely control all people and their negative comments are not useful to the bank. There are customers who want entertainment and waste of free time (B3).
>
> [There is potential] libel on bank reputations and halal and haram, Islamic or not Islamic. It is easy to harm a bank through social media (B4).
>
> Reputation…A lot of things can affect the bank's reputation, but we must be updated all the time (B5).

Similarly, the government respondents also talked about the potential risk to the public agencies, for similar reasons as those identified in the banking industry:

> Yes, there is a risk…[first], we have to respond quickly to all the rumours published in social media and stop them from expanding. In addition, the risk in the case of rapid response is [that we have] to verify the validity of the …statement [being made]. [We] need some time to be sure, and the speed of response can be a challenge and [we also need] confidence to calm a general negative situation. In some cases, there was some important information missing and we needed some time [to retrieve it] (G3).
>
> The negatives are the inability to control the audience and the audience is rude, and it is true that we do not respond to them, but some of them speak without paying attention to their words and utter words that are offensive and disrespectful and indecent (G9).

There are also unique issues highlighted by those working in the public sector, specifically related to the difference between reality and what top managers may want reflected on social media:

> There are negatives. Yes, many negative comments from the angry public that demands reform. In fact, I cannot answer them, and I do not have the authority to respond to all the comments. If I respond to any user in a way that is not suitable to management, I am the person who will be blamed for any wrong answer and they will send me to law investigation administration. Due to the bad condition of Kuwait airport the majority of the public is demanding changes and reform of the airport, but this issue is not in our hands, it depends on management (G4).
>
> The [Kuwait Airport] is very old but the management wants to polish its image in front of the public [but] services are very bad, so management wants us to show things that show us ideal but in fact exactly the opposite of the image, but people know about this (G5).

Therefore, they have to keep the benefits and risks in mind when dealing with the public on social media. This includes constantly dealing with negative feedback, as they quickly as they arise:

> …our role as specialised PR personnel is to reply to…negative campaigns, and I have to reply to [people on social media] as soon as possible, in less than fifteen minutes and explain to the public (B1).
>
> We are very keen to respond to the client as soon as possible, especially Instagram because it currently represents the bank through pictures… and any negative comment affects many customers. So, we have to respond to any negative comment as soon as possible and invite the client to go to the nearest branch to solve the problem (B2).

Thus, in accordance with the literature, social media does not make the company's message more powerful but instead the customer's message that becomes more powerful than it was before (Wright and Hinson, 2008) as highlighted below:

> There is a wrong belief that if you have had a bad previous experience with the bank, you convey your message quickly by attacking the bank on social media and that client is happy when publishing the false news about the bank. Our role, as PR specialist, is to improve this image within minutes (B1).

This is likely also to be the case with the government agencies, however, unlike the private commercial institutions, they often ignore negative comments instead of trying to deal with them right away, which is often linked to the directions from senior managers not to engage with the public in this way:

> What worries me most is my inability to respond to the public because I am not authorized to do so, and I do not have enough information to respond even if I cannot disclose them because it is an order from our management that I cannot answer some questions (G4).
>
> But if there is criticism and negative comments, we do not give any importance and we do not respond to them (G8).

Thus, in a similar way as with the private commercial institutions, the customer's message is becoming more important, rather than the organisation's message being more powerful:

> There are many negative comments from the internal and external public, this is a negative thing that employees complain about through social networking sites... this distorts the airport's reputation as a front of the state (G5).

In the case of the public institution, the professionals' ability to communicate in a transparent way with the public is stymied by the autocratic way in which social media is managed in these organisations, as highlighted in the comment above from G4. In an autocratic system, social media communication is centralised and overseen by a single department (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017), although in the case of the Kuwaiti public institutions, it is more centralised than this, since communication must get management consent:

> Sometimes we can answer most of the questions. We return to the senior management to get permission to reply. They give us the authority to respond or not. We may take days and weeks before the response. More

> often than not, we cannot reply and leave the question [without] a reply (G5).
>
> As a public relations practitioner in our ministry, we do not have the authority to response the audience because the higher management do not allow us to response anything against their opinion. They like to control everything (G7).

As a result of these perceived risks, the private commercial institutions use social media strategically and have to be careful about what they talk about on social media, as noted below:

> We don't bring up sensitive subjects or any political subject which motivate sectarianism in the society (B1).
>
> Kuwait is a diverse country, and we have to be more aware of each group… as a bank we care about that we are trying not to harm any denomination in Kuwait (B4).
>
> Yes, of course, there is a strategy that has its specific goal, its own monthly and annual plan, the campaigns that will be held, the pictures that will be presented (B5).

This was also highlighted by the government staff, who did not discuss certain topics such as sex (G1) and refer some persons on social media for investigation, rather than responding to them in public (G2). Therefore, they also used a strategic approach in terms of what they posted on social media, as highlighted below:

> When using social media sites, the most important thing is not to expose sectarianism because we will expose a big offense if we expose sectarian topics (G1).

This is also important from the individual's perspective, since most times they are representing the private commercial institution or the government:

> The public does not know who I am and from which department; they know that I am an employee in Civil Aviation General Administration, and I represent it…I am appearing by the identity of General Organisation for Civil Information, not by my personal identity (G2).
>
> I represent the bank, so I have to appear as the representative of the company (B1).
>
> Under the name of the bank definitively. It does not show in my name. We represent the bank… I do not give my personal name if the customer has asked me via social media (B3).

> Any person who filed the complaint by means of social media is prohibited from addressing any customer with my personal or telephone number (B12).

6.7 THEME 4: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRAINING AND ETHICS

This theme discusses examines the relationship between training in terms of social media on how ethics are used on these platforms. This theme and its sub-themes and supporting quotes are presented in Table A-4 (Appendix 4). First, only one of the interviewees from the private commercial institution said they had any formal training for their social media role, and four others from the banking sector said there was internal training in how to utilise social media in marketing and public relations. This was also the case in the government sample, where only one person said they had received formal training in using social media:

> Yes, I had one; it was a specialised course in social media, and how I can deal with the audience through social media sites and attract them, increase the number of followers. The course was in Dubai, General Organisation for Civil Information sent us and paid all the fees and expenses (G2).

In general, though, when asked if they have any social media training, both the banking and government employees largely said none had been provided:

> No, just internal training and supervision… I didn't have special courses in that field (B1).
>
> No but I got general courses for all employees on how we can deal in all the bank matters as a whole (B5).
>
> No, we do not have any training for using social media (G5).

One of the government staff said he had received training at his own expense:

> Yes, as a person I tried to develop myself and took personal sessions at my own expense on how to use social media sites and deal with the public using them, this was my own personal effort and not from the ministry itself (G8).

Overall, however, lack of specific training in social media does not mean that employees are not trained in dealing with social media issues, as highlighted by the respondents below:

> Yes, [I consider myself well trained], I have a great experience. I have been at [this bank] for 5 years and have taken many courses in employee development. And even now with this experience the bank gives me a lot of courses on customer service and how to serve the client the best way and ways to deal with the elderly and how we can cross sell. [These include] *Sales and Service* levels 1 and 2 and A *guide how to deal with customers* (B2).

> With the courses I have learned to use social media correctly. [These include] customer service courses (B3).

> [I do] communication ethics two times a year and have meetings about ethics. They do not speak about punishment [in these meetings], they talk about informing and educating us. As an employee, punishment is the last tool (B4).

Additionally, the banking respondents generally did not think that they needed specialist help in this area:

> As bank employees, I don't think that we need help from communications experts as we are specialists in dealing with the clients. Each employee has had at least 7 courses on dealing with the customers (B1).

> We, as employees, have the ability to communicate with customers properly (B2).

This may be because some of the private commercial institutions have social media teams or specialised public relations teams dealing with customers:

> We have 60 specialist employees [on our social media team]. During each shift, there are at least 12 PR employees who reply to the clients on social media. They have more experience than the branches managers and can answer any kind of question. Social media employees must know all the products of the bank, as the client may ask any question and the employee must know to answer (B1).

Still, a minority saw the benefits of using experts, as highlighted below:

> Yes, because this develops the staff of the bank and makes them work in the right direction and gives intensive lectures to our staff. We contact experts from the United States and Britain, and we already find them very useful. I support them because they are professional and knowledgeable, and they have published many books and they have great background on the subject, and they are developing strategies for our communication (B5).

These benefits were echoed by the government staff, who were more receptive to having a PR expert work with them:

> Yes, because we need a specialist in this field to develop our services to be the best (G1).

> Yes, I [would] strongly like to have a public relations communication expert to teach us how to use social networking sites and how to deal with the public (G8).

> Yes, sure we have a communication expert [on staff] and we resort to him in relation to the questions and dealing with [the public on social media] … I ask this expert and he teaches me what to do… because there are [some] questions that we have insufficient experience to respond to, so we ask help from him to respond to the audience because social media sites are considered a big responsibility on the department of Public Relations and media… now it is considered the image of the organisation. The information that we give [on social media] must be correct and … accurate (G2).

The greater embrace of using communication experts within the public sector may be linked to the fact that, unlike the banking employees who stress the experience they have in handling customers, government staff may not have received significant training in dealing with the public directly and so find it more difficult to do so now that social media has demanded that they do so. Still, the government employees said they had specialised public relations teams and people dealing with social media:

> Yes, we are a team consisting of 3 officers specialised in using social media for the management (G2).

> Yes, there is a specialised team consisting of 4 public relations experts to ensure work done perfectly (G3).

> Of course, I am the one who started this team (G8).

This indicates that public relations and social media are taken seriously within these organisations as well. Finally, both the banking institutions and the government offices took Kuwaiti culture into consideration in their social media practice, although this appears to be more significant for the public sector, as they are specifically representing the public:

> We… must respect the Kuwaiti culture, which is derived from Islamic values. We cannot publish anything that goes against Islamic law or the values of the state (B12).

> In Ramadan, we are trying to provide information about fasting, posts and videos suitable for Ramadan month (G1).

> Yes, I have to take into account the values of society in general and respect public opinion and not to hurt the modesty of our Islamic culture. I cannot post any image that does not match with Islamic culture. I have avoided what is controversial and sectarianism in the community and when posting pictures with women their bodies must be covered. [Women do not have to] wear the hijab, but [they persons have to] be wearing suitable clothes which covers her body to avoid any issues with the public (G4).

> Of course, I have to take into account the societal values of the Kuwaiti society. For example, when filming events, we avoid posting any image of girls and women only after their permission because they always are restricted from appearing in social media sites or appearing to the public. Of course, this is something due to their family values and their rejection of the appearance of women on social networking sites. So, we prefer to take photos of males to protect ourselves from problem (G9).

> Of course, we are a part of the society, we must protect our culture, and traditions. We are the Ministry of Education which brings up the generations, we must be interested in spreading Kuwaiti culture more than others and avoid anything that may spoil it (G10).

6.8 THEME 5: THE IMPACT OF THE CODE OF ETHICS

The final theme discusses respondents' view of the impact of social media on how they operate in terms of public relations. This theme and its sub-themes and supporting quotes are presented in Table A-5 (Appendix 4). First, the banking companies have codes of ethics and all said they receive these when they start work:

> At the beginning of my employment, the bank gave me a training course in which I learned the rights and duties of the bank right and rules (B2).

> Yes, you cannot reach management level if you do not know about the ethical code. The bank reminds me every month or weekly about it and there are many training courses for knowing bank ethics (B4).

Second, most of the respondents thought it best for each private commercial institution to have their own code of ethics, although for different reasons:

> I prefer when each organisation has its own code of conduct for increasing the competition among the banks (B1).

> The standards differ from state to state. We do not compare ourselves to European countries…We have accurate standards derived from Islamic values. These are not universal; we cannot have a common ethical pact with other banks (B2).

> I prefer the regional one because each country has it is own culture. Europe is different from Kuwait. Even between US and Europe [there are differences] (B4).

In contrast, 8 of 10 participants in the public sector said that they do not have (or are unaware of) a code of conduct at work for their practice as a PR practitioner or for using social media. One government staff member said that his ministry has a code of conduct, but it relates to the practice of PR in generally, not specifically for social media:

> Yes, there is a code of ethics that is based on our doing our work accurately and efficiently, in the place where we work, to be loyal to our work, to be alert and have a conscience, and to commit themselves to hard work, in order to honour, defend and develop the profession (G3).

Another participant said she had created her own code of conduct for how the entire department should deal with social media issues:

> We do not have a code of ethics for using social media, but we have a list of points that we should follow. I am the one who made this list. It is a personal effort…it is not an official document… but the team responsible for the social networking sites must follow it, including not responding to negative comments and not responding to the questions that we do not know or are not sure about the answer (G8).

Several of those government employees without a code of conduct specifically related to social media highlighted their desire for this:

> …there is a great benefit of the code of ethics. I wish we had one that directs us how to work because the fact is that we do not have this and did not get any instructions on how to use social media. I know that in our practice there are a lot of gaps, [for example], we do not have the authority to respond to the public... [we respond] only to simple known questions and we have nothing to define our scope of work (G4).
>
> I hope to have a code of ethics so that the public relations practitioner knows his role and defines his duties and rights, but it is possible that each institution creates a code that is appropriate for its work (G9).

However, a lot of this desire appears to link back to the government employees getting little to no training in dealing with the public, especially via social media, and their seeing a code of conduct as being one way in which guidelines can be set down that they can following in doing their jobs well, as highlighted below:

> I hope to have guidelines that give us instructions on how to deal with the audience properly (G10).

The private commercial institution respondents' views of the most important values for public relations practice showed some overlap, with teamwork being highlighted by several respondents, as well as honesty, credibility, respect, and transparency. In the government sample, important values highlighted were respect, honesty, trust, and having patience and understanding with the audience. Overall, there is significant consistency across the respondents about the important public relations values.

Next, two of the banking respondents thought they understood why some people may feel that public relations professionals do not consider values and ethics in their practice:

> … in the past the clients were not knowledgeable and well-informed, but now social media made the clients more well-informed and changed their opinions about the bank and its products (B1).
>
> Yes, this is sometimes true in banks and unfortunately is growing (B5).

However, most many banking respondents do not accept this perception:

> I disagree with this saying and totally reject it because here it shows. In this bank, the ethics and principles of the actual employee shows. Ethics for me is the most important thing, working in the customer's interest (B2).
>
> I do not agree, PR was created to help the client and not to exploit him (B3).
>
> No, no, no, I totally disagree with that. No way the bank can be successful without manners and ethics … because the most important thing in the bank is the customer, nothing else… if any bank employee does not respect you as a customer you will not continue dealing with that bank, you will change to another bank (B4).

In general, the banking respondents think that their organisation practices public relations ethically on social media:

> Yes, through social media we take part in social responsibility campaigns for enlightening the society and for communicating messages every day for all social classes (B1).
>
> We have certain values that we must follow, such as not agitating customers and attracting them through our morality, we have core values. We always follow these ethics in our work (B3).
>
> Yes, of course, because [our bank] does not allow any employee to use social media without supervision because each employee in the institution has specific information they can use (B4).

However, the private commercial institutions did use bloggers and other influencers on social media, and some of the respondents argued that this also raises ethical issues:

> Yes, we pay for famous bloggers to make specific advertisements which attract the youth category. But there is an important point: the ethics of the bank are different from that of the famous blogger and here there is another ethical problem which we face (B1).

This also depends on the type of influencer used, as noted below:

> There are distinguished people who are respected in society. They are not fashionistas or public figures on social media. Celebrities affect the reputation of the bank in a bad way because they do not represent the values and culture of the Kuwaiti society. We are a conservative society. We have certain values. [We use] people who do charity work. The media face [of the bank] is not only girls (B2).
>
> …we do not need them and… all know that these celebrities are lacking credibility and celebrities affect the ethics of the bank negatively… we do not need them even international banks do not use celebrities. Unfortunately, they are a negative phenomenon that is very widespread in society and we must fight it (B5).

All the banking respondents agreed that their personal values influence their public relations ethics:

> Yes, these personal values are inherent in humans. So, the ethics of the bank employee is reflected in his/her work. However, I think the bank should put specific controls for deciding its principles so that the any employee can't violate these principles (B1).
>
> [Yes], everything the person writes on social media reflects on the ethics of the person (B3).

Finally, when asked which part of social media needs more attention and support, ethics was highlighted by several respondents, as highlighted below:

> Ethics need more attention. As the PR employee in the bank, we should not present our personal and private ethics, but should stand for ethics of the bank and appear before the public as a bank. The PR employee should not personify any subject and should always put the ethics before him when working on social media and should deal with the client patiently (B1).

For the government employees, they saw ethics on social media as important but from the public perspective, as highlighted below:

> There are a lot of social media users that are children or have a limited knowledge of our culture or are from another culture… raising some controversial topics as mentioned before especially sexual topics or the matters related to the health of genital organs or marriage advice (G1).
>
> …there are many people from the audience that like to criticise for criticising’s sake, nothing satisfies them, they do not want to abide by the laws of the state and supply the required documents (G2).
>
> …there is an issue with some of the public cursing, I cannot deal with them (G4).
>
> Yes, there are many ethical problems. Until now we did not have any cases that we needed to resort to court for. The easiest and fastest solution for us in civil aviation is to block users that offend and annoy us (G5).

6.9 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter helps to expand, corroborate and triangulate the findings of the semiotic analysis. Based on the research questions, the following conclusions can be made. The first research question, which is concerned with the extent and modes of use of social media by public relations in the private and the public sector, can be used to say that, indeed, social media is used rather extensively in both of them. In fact, only one participant claimed not to use it, and the introduction of different social media, including the newer option of Snapchat, was discovered. It should be pointed out that the more traditional media that allowed face-to-face communication was still favoured by the participants (from both sectors). Both government and bank employees found social media to be a useful, powerful tool, although some concerns were raised regarding its effectiveness. Given how widespread social media use is in Kuwait, this view makes sense (Times Kuwait, 2019).

In response to the second question, some differences between the public sector and private sector were encountered. Here, no propositions about the differences in the specific types of social media used will be offered because the sample of the project is not representative, which is why no statistical conclusions can be offered (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016). However, there was a distinct difference in the way segmentation was treated by the participants; the bank participants considered segmentation an important benefit of social media, but the government employees highlighted targeting all social groups, although the targeting of messages to individual groups was not an unused practice by the government public relations specialists.

The similarities between the two sectors were diverse, but they can include the fact that, in response to the third question, indeed, the culture of Kuwait affects the use of social media by public relations. For example, the interest in preserving the use of face-to-face communication might be connected to the traditionalist nature of Kuwait (Hofstede Insights, 2019). More obviously, the participants highlight the importance of culture for public relations in general, suggesting that it is critical to reflect and protect Kuwaiti (often Islamic) values.

Finally, in terms of the integration of social media use into strategy, both private and public organisations reported that social media had benefits and risks, which is why the strategic approach to the tool was necessary. Additionally, the participants commented on training and ethics, highlighting the importance of both. In other words, it can be suggested that the professionalization of public relations and their social media use is being taken into account (Pieczka, 2008; L'Etang and Pieczka, 2006).

When comparing interviews and semiotic analysis, it can be suggested that the findings are mostly aligned with each other with rare and insignificant differences. For example, similar goals in social media use by public and private organisations were identified by the interviews; they mostly included communication, advertising and information, which is in line with Grunig’s (1993, 2017) model. However, the semiotic analysis showed that asymmetrical communication was mostly employed by private organisations, especially when two-sided communication was considered. In interviews, that was supported by the private institutions viewing the customer’s message as more important. Therefore, in the end, the two methods of analysis produced similar and non-conflicting results, which will be discussed below.

in summary, this chapter has presented the themes drawn from the analysis of the interview data. The next section combines these results with those from the analysis of the Instagram posts and discusses both sets of results considering the research propositions and the existing literature. To improve the understanding of public relations within the Arab world, the results from the analysis of the interviews posts are used to develop an alternative model of public relations. Specifically, the thematic analysis showed that the Kuwaiti cultural context affects practitioner's use of social media in public relations practice, resulting in the use of more indirect communication about products, promotions, or companies by Kuwaiti public and private organisations and that the use of social media by public relations practitioners affects their customer relationship management strategies. Specifically, social media is being used for one-way communication (asymmetrical communication) and information dissemination, which in the case of certain public institutions aims to promote their agenda, even at the cost of the accuracy of information offered. These conclusions are integrated into the alternative model of public relations developed based on Grunig's (1993, 2017) model of public relations communications, showing how the cultural context affects how public relations is undertaken.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This research critically examines PR practitioners' use of social media in the public and private sector, specifically investigating the role of social media as a part of the PR toolkit within the Kuwait context. In order to address this aim, semiotic analysis of Instagram posts and thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews were undertaken, the results of which were presented in the chapter 7 and these results are discussed in detail in this chapter.

7.2 THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY KUWAIT'S PR PRACTITIONERS

The first research question attempted to find out how and to what extent public relation practitioners in Kuwait's public and private commercial sectors use social media. Relatedly, the second research question sought to find out whether there are meaningful differences in the use of social media between public and private commercial sectors in Kuwait. Based on the examination of the available literature, three propositions related to these research questions and each is discussed in turn in this section. First, the results from both the Instagram analysis and interview analysis provide some support for the first proposition as outlined below:

Proposition 1: The communication employed by PR practitioners in Kuwait's public and private commercial sectors is asymmetrical; however, the former organisations use press agentry and public information models of PR that focus on persuasion and manipulation and rely significantly more on them than private sector organisations.

It was revealed that the communication employed by public relations practitioners in Kuwait's public and private commercial sectors is asymmetrical and focuses on persuasion and manipulation. Nevertheless, there are some differences between the communication of the two sectors, as the public institutions rely mostly on the public information and the press agentry models, and private commercial institutions rely on the two-way asymmetrical model. In particular, as was revealed by the interview results, the press agentry model is used sometimes by some of the public organisations to disseminate controlled messages, promoting a more perfected image of themselves that uses persuasion and manipulation to improve their reputation with their audiences, such as with the case of Civil Aviation and the Kuwait airport (Ohl et al., 1995). Nevertheless, the public information model is also used by other public organisations, as it appears that often they are concerned with the accuracy and objectivity of the organisational information provided; however, the employed model is still using one-way communication techniques to communicate with its audience (Grunig et al., 1995). In both cases, even though social media is being used, the posts are used like newsletters and press releases, which are implicitly self-promotional although explicitly they are meant to be informative (Catenaccio, 2008). In the private commercial organisations, the two-way asymmetrical model of public relations is employed in which persuasion and manipulation are also used to influence their audiences; however, more professional and sophisticated approaches to communication are used in which information is exchanged with the audience (Grunig, 1993). Still, the focus in this model is usually on short-term changes in perceptions and attitude without using increased knowledge about the audience to change the organisation, meaning that the goal is to get the audience to accept the organisation’s perception so that its strategies can be achieved (Grunig, 1993).

This can be seen in the way that the public institutions use social media, mostly as a way of conveying information to the public, while the private commercial institutions were more likely to have other reasons for using social media in addition to providing information, such as for reputation management. The research results indicate that public relations is used much more as a reputation management tool rather than for strategic communication by these organisations, as seen by the fact that those using public relations online interpret strategic decisions to the audience after these decisions have been made by others, specifically higher management (Van den Bosch and Riel, 1998; Grunig, 2011). To some extent, public relations is being used strategically by the institutions sampled in this research, since these communications are directed externally and deal with important stakeholders (Cheney and Christensen, 2001). Still, these results are thus in line with the symbolic, interpretive paradigm, with social media platforms being used to communicate changes and make an impression on the audience (Grunig, 2011). This is also a modernistic approach, which sees public relations as a tool for helping companies to control their environment rather than as a tool for allowing the audience to influence the organisation's decision-making, based on a post-modernist approach (Knights, 1992; Leitch and Neilson, 2001).

This is understandable, since public institutions in the research used primarily one-way communication, whereas the strategic, behavioural approach to public relations demands both the organisation and its audience take part in the communication process (Van den Bosch and Riel, 1998). Without two-way communication, organisations will not be able to use public relations strategically. One of the key characteristics of dialogue is risk, as both parties have to open themselves up and sometimes this translates to unwanted risk (Kent and Taylor, 2002). In this research, the organisations do not want to open themselves up to risk, and although they cannot totally avoid it because being on social media is risky, they basically shut down dialogue in order to minimise risk, and thus communication remains largely one-way. Additionally, this can also be linked to the use of the social media in the way dictated by managers, since the focus is on reputation management, consistent with the literature showing that public relations is largely a tool for organisations to foster the image they desire to project to others using publicity, public information, and propaganda (Kirat, 2005, 2006; Al-Kandari et al., 2019).

These results can also be linked to culture in the country, which is discussed in greater detail at a later point of this chapter, but in this case specifically related to culture and corruption since all three models used (press agentry, public information, and two-way asymmetrical) focus on persuasion and manipulation and in this way can be linked to a lack of ethics (Grunig, 1993). Research indicates that cultural factors are linked to level of perceived corruption, with high power distance, collectivism, masculinity, high uncertainty avoidance, and traditionalism being linked to higher levels of perceived corruption (Stevens, 2016; Yeganeh, 2014). As discussed in Chapter 3, Kuwait has high power distance, collectivism, and high uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2011), which are all linked to high levels of corruption. This is consistent with information specifically on corruption, such as Transparency International's (2019) report showing Kuwait's corruption perceptions score is 41 out of 100 and the country is ranked 78 out of 180 countries observed. Further discussion of culture, ethics, and public relations is presented later in this chapter.

Both the private commercial institutions and the public institutions use asymmetrical communication in their approach to public relations, the former using a two-way asymmetrical model and the latter using press agentry and public information models. The private commercial institutions in the sample appear to be further along the way to using public relations in two-way communication with their customers compared to the public institutions, responding to customers on social media and taking more risk. Thus, the private commercial institutions are using a strategic approach, but only to a small degree, by collecting feedback from their customers and potentially incorporating that into their public relations decisions. However, largely, the private commercial institutions also have a symbolic approach to public relations and communication with the public via social media does not appear to influence organisational decisions. Still, the private commercial institutions do a better job than the public institutions in terms of building interpersonal relationships with their audience, which is linked to the fact that there is an attempt at dialogue by the private commercial institutions compared to the public institutions that largely do not respond to questions or comments on social media (Kent and Taylor, 2002). The difference in their approach may be because the private commercial institutions take a marketing approach to their use of social media, which is consistent with the two-way asymmetrical model of public relations in which information is exchanged with the audience. This may also be linked to higher levels of CQ and EQ in private commercial organisations, allowing them to connect with the audience to a greater degree (Clark and Polesello, 2017;

Dangmei, 2016). Still, as discussed above, neither type of institution appears to be seeking to develop strong emotional relationships with their audience or propagate deeply authentic content (Clark and Polesello, 2017; Dangmei, 2016) and this is reflected in the poor interaction identified from the Instagram analysis. This is consistent with research from Bagnied et al. (2016) and Muhammad (2014) highlighting the importance of EQ in managing social groups, engaging in public relations, and content management in Kuwait in order to successfully engage audiences and generate greater amounts of positive feedback.

Second, the results from interview analysis and Instagram analysis provide some support for the second proposition as outlined below:

Proposition 2: PR practitioners in Kuwait's public and private commercial sectors use social media extensively in their public relations practice.

The interviewed staff from the private commercial institutions generally saw the use of social media as part of their public relations practice as beneficial. There was limited link to be made to the cost benefit of using social media, which is highlighted a lot in the literature. For example, DiStaso, McCorkindale and Wright (2011, p327) note that PR professionals see social media as a "cost effective way to receive greater reach for research and timely targeted dialogue." Similarly, Ebrahim (2017) identified the potential to reduce costs as an advantage of using digital technologies in public relations. However, for those in the private commercial sector, cost does not appear to be a significant reason for using social media in their practice. This may be because the private commercial institutions in the sample are large companies with significant budgets set aside for public relations and therefore their reasons for using social media are unlikely to be linked to the significant cost savings that are possible with this type of public relations method, compared to smaller companies (Ainin et al., 2015). There was also a limited number of respondents that highlighted the importance of ease-of-use of social media, which contributes to the greater use of this channel in the public relations toolbox because it facilitates interaction between the public and the organisation compared to other forms of communication. This is consistent with research showing that social media can be useful for public relations by allowing the sharing of documents and information (Brown and Waddington, 2013).

Further, this mirrors results found in other research showing that some social media sites allow customers to share their perspectives on and attitudes toward organisations in a way that they could not express over the phone or in face-to-face communication (Mogaji, Farinloye and Aririguzoh, 2016).This is also consistent in some ways with media richness theory, in which social networking sites are richer than telephone conversations since the former allows for visual cues as well as audio cues in providing the receiver with information (Johnson and Keil, 1999; Robert and Dennis, 2005). Explaining the fact that social media may be more used than face-to-face communication for sharing their feedback with organisations needs greater examination of the use of social networks, which was not a part of the development of media richness theory. This is done by Kwak (2012), who found that people's use and communication motives determine which media is most appropriate. He found that consumers use face-to-face communication when they need intimacy and personalisation, while they are more likely to use a leaner medium like social media when they are knowledgeable about the topic being discussed (Kwak, 2012).

The banking staff appeared to appreciate the specific benefits of using social media, including the user segmentation that can take place, specifically as social media can be utilised to target young people. This strategy is supported by research showing that young people can be successfully and cost-effectively targeted using social media (Ebrahim, 2017; Hanna, Rohn and Crittenden, 2011; Ramo and Prochaska, 2012; Ramo et al., 2014), as well as research showing that social media can be used for segmentation purposes (Chung et al., 2016). This is also consistent with the strategic, behavioural paradigm of public relations in which both organisations and consumers take part in the communication process (Van den Bosch and Riel, 1998; Grunig, 2011) and segmentation of publics is seen as a vital aspect in the strategic management of the PR process (Kim and Ni, 2010). This is in stark opposition to the use of social media by the interviewed government employees, which is understandable in that these government agencies are dealing with all members of the public predominantly and therefore are likely to be seeking to reach as broad a demographic as possible, rather than segmenting and targeting the population. Thus, while corporations can select specific segments and target them, public institutions should serve all citizens (Dadashzadeh, 2010). Nonetheless, some of the public staff were also cognizant of the fact that social media is likely to reach young people more than other demographics in the country.

Overall, though, the results are consistent with Khajeheian and Mirahmadi (2015), which indicates that social media is widely used by public relations professionals but still seen by many as less effective or less important than traditional media as a public relations tool. Thus, while private commercial institutions that embraced early Internet technologies have benefited from the practice (Onay and Ozsoz, 2013), the public relations industry in Kuwait appears to be slow in fully adopting social media in the banking industry and incorporating it fully into public relations practice. In the public sector, however, it appears that there has been a fuller embrace of social media and greater appreciation of how it can help to open up government services to the public. Still, this reveals that consistency is maintained with previous research that shows that organisations are more likely to adopt established social media platforms in their work and less likely to use more technologically complicated tools (Go and You, 2016). Where the users are not familiar and comfortable with using for social media, which has been found to be the case for a lot of government agencies, it makes it hard for this channel to be used to communicate effectively with the public (Graham and Avery, 2013; Kavanaugh et al., 2012). However, the government interviewees were almost all as savvy in their use of social media as the private commercial institution employees interviewed, using different social media platforms depending on the purpose of their interactions with the public, as recommended by social media marketing practitioners (Go and You, 2016; Alhabash and Ma, 2017). The employees also used messaging apps like WhatsApp to compensate for not being social media experts, again depending on various tools to accomplish different communication goals, which is consistent with social presence and media richness theories (Daft and Lengel, 1984; Rice, 1993).

An important issue here is likely to be the fact that the respondents understand that social media can simultaneously have a positive and negative effect on the organisation and thus has to be used very carefully. Interview respondents noted that there are both negative and positive impacts of social media, making it a ‘double-edged sword.’ Social media can pose a negative impact on the organisation since organisations lack control over message diffusion, and this combined with problems that often arise regarding privacy, and data security, as well as the shortage of qualified manpower, to make social media us problematic for organisations (Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012; Malthouse et al., 2013). The importance of these negative aspects has been highlighted in the literature; for example, online reviews influence a company’s reputation and a company with positive customer reviews will achieve better sales revenues while those with negative reviews can lose credibility and sales (Komodromos, 2014). Corstjens and Umblijs (2012) showed that positive, neutral, and negative social media all have significant effects on a brand’s sales, although the extent to which this happens depends on the product category and the industry in which the brand is competing, as found by Zhu and Zhang (2010).

Indeed, electronic WOM has been argued as having a more significant impact on consumer/audience decision-making, compared with traditional WOM that is limited by the individual ties that a person has (Vinerean, 2017). Research by Alalwan et al. (2017) demonstrated that the public’s interactions on social media platforms are often more intense than when using traditional methods of communication and therefore electronic WOM affects consumer behaviour more substantially than traditional marketing communication. Thus, the utilisation of social media can cause both positive and negative outcomes, as the ability of WOM to spread quickly on social media can also do a lot of damage to a brand or to the reputation of government agencies as dissatisfied customers/users can spread negative WOM to many people very rapidly, and the company has little or no control over the content of what is being spread or the dissemination of these comments (Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012).

Consistent with Waddington (2015), several of the interviewees noted that public relations practitioners using social media must be active all the time, not only creating dialogue but also observing and controlling messages, particularly dealing with negative feedback as they quickly as they arise. This is consistent with research from Wright and Hinson (2009) in which they report that the existence of social media has been encouraging organisations to respond more rapidly to criticism, highlighting the growing importance of the audience's/customer's message over the organisation's message (Gallaugher and Ransbotham, 2010).

Additionally, there was scepticism among the research sample about the usefulness of social media channels for effectively reaching the target audience, which was expressed by a few respondents from both private and public organisations in the sample. This can be expected, as research has shown that the extent of social media use by public relations practitioners depends on their subjective viewpoints regarding the effectiveness of the medium and that practitioners who have a high usage of social media, put more emphasis on the importance of social media in public relations practice, affected by their own positive perceptions (Graham and Avery, 2013; Moreno et al., 2015). Further, research has also indicated that practitioners are unlikely to use social media tools if they do not think they are credible (Curtis et al., 2012) or that these tools are likely to be effective (Graham and Avery, 2013). Still, the majority of respondents think that social media has a positive effect on public relations practice. The interview results are supported by research showing that social media has developed into an integral part of PR in both developed and developing countries. For example, Alikilic and Atabek (2012) noted that social media had been adopted significantly by Turkish public relations practitioners. They found that this has facilitated dialogue with various publics, as identified in the previous section. This is also aligned with research from Europe, which demonstrates that public relations practitioners see social media as one of the most important public relations tools nowadays (Verhoeven et al., 2012). Overall, some practitioners are seeing social media as a valuable tool for expediting the circulation of information and allowing that information to reach broader audiences (Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012). This is the case in Kuwait based on these research results, although not all of the respondents thought that social media is useful for achieving their public relations goals.

This is in congruence with the view of social media as an avenue for enabling active dialogue between organisations and the audience, which can allow the relationship between these two parties to be strengthened (Komodromos, 2016; Mogaji, Farinloye and Aririguzoh, 2016; Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012). However, there was little focus on this by the banking respondents, as only one of the banking staff interviewed mentioned relationship building as a specific aim of their social media activities. This again underscores the limited use of EQ in public relations as a way of maintenance of healthy online and offline communities and building relationships with the institutions' audiences (Dangmei, 2016; Dos Santos et al., 2019). However, more of the government staff talked about the role of social media in enabling dialogue with the public, although there is still a focus on 'talking at' the public, with less focus on dialoguing with the public, consistent with previous research examining social media use in public organisations (Lee and Vandyke, 2015; Zavattaro and Sementelli, 2014). Considering this, it should be noted that the mere presence on social media cannot automatically fight disengagement and many interactions with audiences are not meaningful as very often the 'dialogue' is in fact a simple set of exchanges (De Paula and Dincelli, 2018; Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín and del Carmen Caba-Pérez, 2018). Instead, it is conversation that has been identified as having the potential to be a powerful source of engagement (Hanna, Rohn and Crittenden, 2011). This is consistent with research from Lee and VanDyke (2015) and Lappas et al. (2018) in which they report that organisations in general are underutilising the potential of social media for dialogue, instead continuing to engage in one-way communication by using these sites primarily (or only) for information dissemination rather than for engagement.

Overall, in line with the results from Graham and Avery (2013), Lee and Vandyke (2015) and others, social media still appears to be underutilised by the public public institutions in Kuwait. This may be because many respondents still prefer to use traditional media, even while the results indicate that PR practitioners in Kuwait’s private commercial and public sectors use social media in their public relations practice. This happens because the respondents prefer face-to-face contact, they think that the message will be more clearly received, think it allows them to better understand people’s emotions and feeling, or think that is more persuasive. These results are consistent with media richness theory as well, which posits that the task will be performed more effectively when its needs are matched with the ability of the medium used to transfer information (Dennis and Valacich, 1999). Similarly, social presence theory indicates that face-to-face communication would be expected to allow for a greater impact on consumer behaviour than interactions via social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Thus, both social presence and media richness theory can be utilised to offer an explanation on why these practitioners often see face-to-face communication as being the most effective for conveying information and for achieving their goals of persuading their audience. The importance of EQ is also highlighted here, as face-to-face contact may be one way in which the respondents are able to predict and empathise with the audience’s emotions and in this way develop a connection that supports the achievement of marketing and public relations goals (Al-Sharhan, 2018; Dangmei, 2016).

This is also consistent with the personal selling approach that is likely to be used within the banking industry for example, which foregrounds face-to-face interaction and is seen as the most effective way of converting prospects into customers (Key and Czaplewski, 2017). It is therefore unsurprising that the banking respondents in particular liked to use a face-to-face approach and saw it as particularly effective for achieving their goals. Importantly, however, personal selling has different objectives from public relations since public relations focus more on generating liking and preference while personal selling seeks to convert that preference into action (Key and Czaplewski, 2017). Nonetheless, the use of EQ can support both personal selling and public relations since it supports both adaptive selling behaviour and effective communication of the organisation’s image to audiences (Chowdhury, 2017; Dos Santos et al., 2019; Leonidou et al., 2019).

Additionally, some respondents found face-to-face interaction to be useful in specific situations, especially when they are dealing with complaining/angry customers or with older consumers that do not really engage with social media. This is again in line with media richness theory and also with Kwak's (2012) findings showing that communication motives, such as persuasion or soothing angry clients, will determine the media that is most appropriate. Nonetheless, face-to-face interaction and social media communication cannot be seen as perfect substitutes and instead social media can acts to supplement face-to-face interaction even if one is used more for communication than the other (Kujath, 2011; Dienlin, Masur and Trepte, 2017). Indeed, research indicates that face-to-face interaction still remains the dominant mode of interpersonal communication (Baym, Zhang and Lin, 2004; Lee, 2010).

Third, the results from both the Instagram analysis and interview analysis provide support for the third propositions as outlined below:

Proposition 3: There are significant differences in the use of social media between public and private commercial sectors in Kuwait, with public institutions using social media in a more traditional way (press agentry and public information models) than private sector organisations (two-way asymmetrical model).

In line with the presented evidence above, there appear to be critical differences in how the sampled private commercial institutions and government agencies used social media in their public relations practice. Both sets of organisations clearly used social media in a purposeful way, but the public organisations were more focused on giving information to the public, as previously mentioned, than any other task as seen in the interviewees' discussion of their use of social media "to deliver messages" and "to answer their inquiries." These results are consistent with the examination of the Instagram posts of these three public institutions in Kuwait, which indicates that they are making limited use of the potential of social media for spreading information, and their increased ability for self-promotion that could help them improve their image with the public (Lee and Vandyke, 2015; Sobaci, 2016). This is not surprising considering the fact that dependency on one-way communication is a challenge that governments, and especially those in the Arab world, have to overcome (Mishaal and Abu-Shanab, 2015).

The lack of two-way communication reflects the budget limitations that public organisations have as well as their low priority towards communication with stakeholders (that is, citizens) and lack of marketing strategy (Mishaal and Abu-Shanab, 2015). However, an open dialogue between the government and the citizens is vital for effective decision-making and dissemination of important information to the audience (Lee and Vandyke, 2015; Mishaal and Abu-Shana, 2015). It appears that “local government presence in social networks is often considered a symbol of modernity and responsiveness to the needs of a society that seeks engagement via the Internet” (Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín and del Carmen Caba-Pérez, 2018, p42). Unfortunately, this means that social media use by governments is only superficial, as while they are focusing on spreading information and promoting the public institution, it only takes place in a one-way communication way, just like with traditional media sources. This is similar to results found in other countries such as Greece, where local authorities largely used social media in a top-down way to promote municipal events and communicate with citizens one-way, rather than using a dialogic approach (Lappas et al., 2018). These results therefore offer additional evidence to support the conclusions that the public institutions are still ‘talking at’ the public but not engaging in any real dialogue (two-way communication) with it. However, even as tools of information dissemination (Lee and VanDyke, 2015), the Kuwaiti public organisations are using social media poorly and there is limited engagement with public, as is seen especially in one public institution that had very few comments on their posts. Further, for all three public institutions, information dissemination is maximised by providing answers to the public’s questions but none of these public institutions answer questions when asked on their Instagram pages.

Another important issue in examining the models of public relations used in Kuwait relates to ethics, as the press agentry, public information and two-way asymmetrical models are considered less ethical in public relations (Grunig, 1993). This can also reflect the general misunderstanding that exists in Kuwait regarding the role of public relations, as well as the level of corruption in the country. In order to maintain ethical public relations practice, a high level of honesty and accuracy is needed in communication in order for the interest of the public to be advanced and the free flow of information in order to create and maintain the integrity of the relationship with the public (Fitzpatrick and Bronstein, 2006; Parsons, 2016). In line with this, research indicates that more ethical models of public relations need a particular culture to thrive such as democratic governments and freedom of expression that support the free flow of information (code provisions) and honesty, advocacy, fairness (professional values) (Kirat, 2005, 2006).

Maintaining consistency with other research in this area, the results from the public relations practitioners in Kuwait indicated that the level of commitment to ethical practices in public relations was relatively low and is consistent with the country's low ranking internationally on democratic values, freedoms, and transparency (Toledano and Avidar, 2016). This implies that the relationship between public relations practitioners and the public needs more attention to ethics and protecting public interest (Brunner, 2016). If a company does not act in a prompt and satisfactory manner to resolve these issues, it could put the organisation's reputation at risk. This is particularly an issue on social media, as practitioners might lose control over the message as well as the distribution process in the modern social networks (Phillips and Young, 2009). In these cases, ethical practice on social media may go out the window for various reasons, including lack of knowledge or care in the use of social media or in general in terms of the ethics of public relations practice.

This underscores the importance of training for dealing with ethical practice in this area as well as how to use social media effectively, as training is a vital element of ethics management within the organisation (Place, 2019; Lee and Cheng, 2012). Unfortunately, the interviewees in this research generally did not receive training in how to use social media in public relations (and marketing), although private commercial institution employees were savvier in dealing with these issues as a result of other training received. The lack of training on ethics as it relates to public relations found among practitioners in Kuwait is consistent with general research showing that there is often little training in this area in the workplace and instead it is individuals' family values, personal values, and professional experiences that determine their behaviour in this area (Lee and Cheng, 2012). This left it to individuals to determine whether they would behave in the interests of the public or in their own self-interests, indicating the need for more training in terms of ethics (Schauster and Neill, 2017). Additionally, there does not appear to be significant focus on ethics management as seen in the lack of codes of conduct in most of the public institutions and limited reliance on the codes in the banking organisations. The majority of government staff said that they do not have (or are unaware of) a code of conduct at work for their practice as public relations practitioners or for using social media. This is problematic, as highlighted by Lee and Cheng (2012, p92):

> *When a practitioner is unsure whether his organisation has a code of ethics or holds any ethics training for its employees, the implication is that he has no access to his organisation's code of ethics or training programmes, putting him on equal footing as a practitioner who works in an organisation that does not have a code of ethics or does not hold any ethics training.*

The combined deficiencies in ethics training and organisational ethics guidelines in the form of codes of ethics, it appears that these organisations do not have fully formed ethical programmes that would provide the structure for ethical decision-making within public relations (Lee and Cheng, 2012).

Social media allows organisations to easily invite conversation and feedback with their audience, which contributes to the favourable perceptions that all organisations are seeking (Lee and VanDyke, 2015). For public organisations, this favourable perception means that the public is more likely to listen to and trust the information that is being provided by the government (Sobaci, 2016). Dialogue is also vital for improving transparency in public organisations, as well as providing an opportunity for the government to listen to their public and identify their concerns and misunderstanding that they can address (Lee and VanDyke, 2015). At the moment, it appears that the public institutions samples are using

Instagram because it is expected and the rhetoric is that it will support civic engagement and community building (Graham and Avery, 2013), however, they are not specifically engaging with this platform in more than the most superficial way and therefore unlikely to get these positive outcomes. Instead of superficial posts, it is online discussion/two-way dialogue that has been shown to improve civic engagement (de Zúñiga and Valenzuela, 2011). However, promotion of citizen dialogue and government transparency is absent in any substantive way and providing citizens with a forum to ask questions is only useful if those questions are answered. This is highlighted by Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín and del Carmen Caba-Pérez (2018, p31) as follows: “The existence of effective interactive participation by citizens through social media largely depends on the role played by the public administrator, who may be neutral or a dynamic advocate of citizen participation.” In line with this, Bonsón, Royo and Ratkai (2017) notes that it is the public agencies that determine the level of activity in which they will engage on social media and the extent of their engagement in active dialogue with the public.

Their presence on Instagram makes the public institutions’ activities somewhat more exposed to the public view, however, “[a]lthough public institutions provide digital tools for participation, citizen engagement may still be limited because social media by themselves cannot automatically overcome passivity, and so government agencies must take responsibility for encouraging interaction” (Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín and del Carmen Caba-Pérez, 2018, p31). Additionally, what is posted by these public institutions is often very similar to what would be seen in the newspapers, which may indicate that no additional information is being provided to the public than would have been otherwise. This supports research by Mishaal and Abu-Shanab (2015), who claim that one-way communication as the one achieved through traditional media is favoured by public organisations in communicating with the public. Similarly, the examination of the Instagram posts is consistent with DePaula, Dincelli and Harrison’s (2018) work showing that two categories of information are provided by governments on social media, the first focusing on operational issues such as events announcements and the second focusing on public service issues such as call-to-action announcements. Both categories of information are one-way and represent a conservative social media marketing culture, which is similar to the traditional mass marketing approach (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017). However, this approach has been found to be the least engaging for the digital audience (Lappas et al., 2018) and for public institutions to actually engage with the audience and build trust and transparency, they must engage with specific strategies to facilitate two-way communication with the public (Bonsón, Royo and Ratkai, 2017).

In contrast, the private commercial institutions are using social media for a wider range of reasons, including providing information on products and services, facilitating communication, and marketing their products and services to customers. In line with this, the results from the semiotic analysis of the private commercial institutions' Instagram posts are consistent with the analysis of the interviews, where it was revealed that the private commercial institutions are seeking to engage in two-way dialogue with their customers at a greater extent than the public institutions. Unlike the conservative social media marketing culture that continues to be used by the government agencies, the examined Kuwaiti private commercial institutions have started to embrace a modern culture, "which is characterised by a more permeable, open, and flexible social media marketing culture" (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017, p120).

Nonetheless, both the public institutions and private commercial institutions can be seen as defenders in terms of their social media marketing scope, which is shown in their primary focus on communicating (one-way) only with a limited number of stakeholder groups (in both cases, 'customers') for information or entertainment (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017). As highlighted in the discussion of the private commercial institutions and the government, consumer communication is met with no response or standardised responses (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017; Lee and Vandyke, 2015). This is contrasted with the explorer approach in which organisations seek to use the capability of social media in terms of interactivity to create authentic dialogue with its internal and external stakeholders (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017).

Additionally, the private commercial institutions may have a more modern social media marketing culture than the public institutions because they are somewhat more flexible in their approach, but they are not significantly more risk-taking than the public institutions, and thus neither engage in significant dialogue with their public on social media in order to minimise risk. This is in congruence with recent research by Al-Kandari et al. (2019) showing that banks in the Arab world are more likely to use social networks like Instagram for promotion and information dissemination the most, although they also sought to do community building and interactive engagement with customers.

7.3 THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY KUWAIT PR PRACTITIONERS

The third research question sought to find out whether the cultural context of Kuwait affects PR practitioner's use of social media and if so, how. Based on the examination of the available literature, the following propositions was presented:

Proposition 4: The cultural context of Kuwait affects PR practitioner's use of social media such that Kuwaiti public and private commercial organisations are likely to convey more indirect information about products, promotions, or companies.

In line with the expectations, Kuwait's cultural context has been shown to have a significant impact on the way in which these PR practitioners use social media and both those working at private commercial institutions and public institutions made sure to abide by the traditional and religious rules of the society. As previously discussed, social media may act as a 'double-edged sword' and so organisations have to be careful in how they use this channel as part of their public relations. This is related in part to the manner in which social media is used, which offers the possibility for quick clarifications and thus helps ensure messages have been understood correctly but can also easily turn into arenas for public criticism (Khan, 2012). The public relations practitioners interviewed identified risks related to negative feedback and because of these perceived risks, both employees of the private commercial institutions and government agencies use social media very careful about what they talk about on social media. Indeed, both employees at the private commercial institutions and the public institutions took Kuwaiti culture into consideration in their social media practice, although this appears to be more significant for the public sector. There is a particular focus on Islamic tradition, laws, and values, as these are the ones that are held by the majority of Kuwaiti citizens and supported by the state (Ochsenwald et al., 2019). As a result, there are social and religious limits that make some topics, like sex, perceived as not being fit for discussion on these public platforms. However, the respondents also noted that Kuwait is a diverse country, and some topics are seen as ‘off limits’ so as not to which motivate sectarianism. This can be seen as a ‘culturally-homogenised’ approach used by both sets of organisations examined in dealing with advertising a product or promoting content to a diverse audience in Kuwait (Al-Sharhan, 2018). These practitioners have a high level of CQ when it comes to their own culture and thus know what is acceptable within Kuwait for legal, religious, and cultural reasons (Charoensukmongkol, 2020). This is also likely because Kuwait has been found to have higher levels of cultural awareness and increased cultural acceptance of other traditions and cultures linked to having a large expatriate population and the need to bridge the gap between different cultural groups (Aldaihani and Ali, 2019; Bhatt, 2020; Sharif, 2012).

Additionally, this can be seen as a general reflection of the cultural practices within Kuwaiti society as a whole, where women are now being called on to dress more demurely in public than in decades before (Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017). This is in line with the masculine elements in the Kuwaiti culture in which there are moralistic attitudes about sex and sexuality which includes a limited discussion of these issues within public spheres (Hofstede, 2011). This has been shown in other contexts in which presence of a more authoritarian political culture and limited value being placed on sexual freedom are linked to a more limited presence of sexuality within the marketing and public relations sphere across countries (Nelson and Paek, 2005).

As discussed in the previous section, the public institutions in the sample had conservative social media marketing culture while the private commercial institutions were using a more modern social media marketing culture that is more flexible and engaging (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017). In public institutions, this is partially explained by the fact that they are highly regulated and social media use is highly restricted by higher management (DePaula and Dincelli, 2018). Regulation is likely to be an important factor affecting how and to what extent social media is used (Khajeheian and Mirahmadi, 2015). However, the way in which social media communication is governed in these organisations appears to the same, as both have a centralised or autocratic approach to the management of this type of communication, which is argued to reduce the ability of PR professionals to communicate with their audience authentically and transparently (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017). In these organisations, the highest level of centralisation of communication takes place, since all communication must get management consent, which is seen as a risk-averse view of social media marketing (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017). Thus, as previously highlighted, neither type of organisation is particularly modern in its approach to using social media for public relations purposes, which is likely to be linked to culturally conservative nature of the Kuwaiti society (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012) and has been highlighted previously in the examination of the interviews with the staff from both types of organisations. This is also likely linked to religious and cultural influences on public relations in this country, consistent with other research showing that Arab banks seek to balance adherence to religious tenets with meeting their business objectives (Al-Kandari et al., 2019).

This autocratic approach to social media management and PR communication in general is also consistent with the fact that Kuwait is a high-power distance, collectivist, patriarchal country in which hierarchy is manifested in society in different ways (Almutairi, Al Sharoufi and Dashti, 2020; Hofstede, 2011; Chun et al., 2015). Further, there is high value placed on authority figures such as government officials in high power distance countries such as Kuwait (Chun et al., 2015), and this is used by the public sector in their social media posting, where they often show meetings of high-level officials and highlight the image of the public institution. However, these types of posts did not usually have a lot of interaction (comments and likes) from the public and employees noted that they were asked to make these posts because many managers were more focused on image than interaction. This therefore is also likely to stymie PR professionals' ability to communicate with the public authentically and transparently (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017).

Further, the lack of interaction between the organisations and their audience on social media is also likely to be connected to the fact that Kuwait has a high-context communication culture in which the context is where much information is encoded and has to be decoded (Hall, 1976; Hall and Hall, 1990). In Kuwait, as a high-context culture, communication is a social ritual and is not primarily a means of transmitting information (Zaharna, 1995; Wang, 2006). Consistent with this, Vujnovic and Kruckeber's (2005) research shows that the most effective public relations in Arab countries focuses on interpersonal communication and relationship-building rather than focusing on persuasion. The results from Kuwait support the idea that the ineffectiveness of public relations in Arab countries is at least in part explained by the fact the Kuwaiti public relations practitioners use asymmetrical communications models that focus on persuasion and manipulation, rather than focusing on interpersonal communication and relationship-building (Grunig, 2017). Thus, since Kuwait is a high-context culture, organisations should take the time to establish relationships with the audience via social media platforms because this helps to facilitate the completion of tasks within this communication context which is socially oriented (Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008; Croucher et al., 2012).

The analysis of the Instagram posts from both sets of organisations shows that some of the posts are 'high-context friendly,' that is, using body language to communicate meaning and using expressive means or symbols like facial expressions to transmit the message with much less focus on transmitting messages clearly through written or oral speech (Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008). For example, in one private commercial institution post telling customers that their salary will be debited in their bank accounts (Figure 21), several non-verbal cues are used. First, a Kuwaiti man is represented wearing traditional

Kuwaiti clothes and this can be argued to be promoting visual support for Kuwait and the Kuwaiti culture. This is consistent with research showing that images that endorse values characteristic of collectivist societies are most likely to be used in high-context cultures (Würtz, 2005). Additionally, the post shows the product being used by the individual (target audience), which is also how products are usually shown in high-context cultures (Würtz, 2005). Second, the man is smiling and implies that the viewers would experience positive emotions and feelings when using bank services through the smartphone. Thus, the shot presents the message of the post in an implicit way, where the gestures, non-verbal communication, and other shot-related aspects motivate the viewers to use the smartphone for bank services. People in high-context cultures are more responsive to informal and implicit, collective, and indirect communication (Proszowska, 2015), and this is supported by the fact that this post had a high level of engagement and interest of the target audience compared to other posts that were sampled that often used more explicit communication cues.

Additionally, the analysis of the Instagram posts provides support for Men and Tsai's (2012) argument that high-context countries are more likely to emphasise educational or entertainment information related to the product or service being sold in line with their more indirect communication styles rather than 'hard sell' approaches based on direct sales information. In both the public and banking organisations, none of the sampled Instagram posts provided direct sales information (which is more likely in the commercial organisations), instead providing more educational information, with the public organisations focusing on the services they offer and the banking organisations highlighting the products they offer. For example, in two posts from different public institutions, there was textual description of the photos presented that provided a significant amount of information about what was happening in the images (Figures 17 and 19). Both the images and the texts in these posts sought to communicate the formality and importance of the public institutions, again drawing on the indirect communication styles of high-context cultures (Hall and Hall, 1990; Proszowska, 2015).

7.4 SOCIAL MEDIA, PR, AND CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

The final research question sought to find out whether the use of social media by PR practitioners affect their organisation-public relationship management strategies and if so, how. Based on the examination of the available literature, the following propositions was presented:

Proposition 5: The use of social media by PR practitioners affects their customer relationship management strategies, with social media being used to support information dissemination and one-way communication.

The activities undertaken by the private commercial institutions on Instagram are consistent with the types of activities that businesses in general undertake on social media, which includes communicating with customers, offering gifts and prizes, and introducing new products and services (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014).

There was limited interaction with the public on the government sites. First, usually there was no response to questions, which indicates that the focus on information dissemination and one-way communication, consistent with Proposition 5. Another aspect of interaction on social media relates to the level of behavioural engagement, including likes and comments on the posts made by the organisation. There are relatively few comments and likes on the posts from these organisations, and the examination of one post from the (D) public institution indicated that the way in which the post itself was done could explain the limited interaction. This post included both images and textual information and created better engagement than the post with the information about the upcoming meeting in the textual form, as the inclusion of people, and especially prominent figures, can generate more likes and comments (Jaakonmäki, Müller and Jan vom Brocke, 2017). However, research by the Nelson Norman Group (2010) revealed that the audience tends to prefer photos that feature people but tends to ignore photos that are too stimulating, the lower level of engagement that this post has managed to amass is not surprising since it has many different elements.

The analysis of another Instagram post highlighted the public institutions' use of social media in order to achieve information dissemination in particular. For example, one post from (I) public institution showed how they use Instagram in order to provide information to the public on the events that happen in different areas, organisations, and companies for educational and informative purposes. These posts are important for facilitating the dissemination of news about the progress of the work that is done by the public institution, thereby further legitimising their official discourses in the eyes of the people.

In contrast, a different approach has been taken by the private commercial institutions, which are seeking to dialogue with their customers in order to cultivate and preserve a relationship, indicating a higher level of EQ is being used. Unlike the public institutions, the private commercial institutions tried to respond to all customer queries, either providing direct answers or asking the client to make further contact so that private matter can be dealt with privately. One private commercial institution gave detailed responses to customer queries and dealt with a lot of customer complaints about its products and services. There was a lot of behavioural engagement on these pages, with likes and comments, although all the comments are not positive. For the private commercial institutions, many of the comments from customers are general customer service queries. This type of demand from customers for first level customer service or complaint handling was also identified by Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) as something that companies engaged in even though it was not a planned activity but was instead an unavoidable side-effect of the nature of social media. Overall, these organisations systematically responded to customer comments and complaints on their social media platforms, which is something that businesses in general seek to do on social media (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014).

The difference in their approach may be because the private commercial institutions take a marketing approach to their utilisation of social media, which reveals a consistency with the two-way asymmetrical model of PR that is used a lot in marketing and advertising (Grunig, 1993, 2017). This is seen in the way they use their social media posts, such as (A) private commercial institution's post using the theory of "persuasion through emotional arousal" by the means of advertising (Miceli, de Rosis and Poggi, 2006). In this approach, marketers have a specific goal that should be achieved and in some cases like this, the emotional arousal of the viewers is utilised to change the strength of their degree of belief or even change their belief itself (Miceli, de Rosis and Poggi, 2006). As a result, this change induces emotions and goals in viewers, which enable marketers to achieve a set super-goal and develop the viewers' relevant intentions towards action (which in this case is to protect their card information) (Miceli, de Rosis and Poggi, 2006). A post by (N) private commercial institution also included emotional persuasion in the form of positive emotions to convince the audience to use bank's services through the smartphone (Miceli, de Rosis and Poggi, 2006).

This can also be examined by looking at the relationship cultivation strategies used by the private commercial institutions and public institutions in the sample. First, online access is provided by all the organisations in the sample, which is an indication of their willingness to communicate with their audience, but the lack of response to comments and questions by the public institutions again shows that the exchange is not symmetrical (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Seltzer and Zhang, 2010). Therefore, one online relationship cultivation strategy used by both sets of organisations in the sample is access, consistent with research showing that this strategy is used by organisations most frequently (Ki and Hon, 2006), but is used more effectively by the private commercial institutions than by the public institutions. Second, the private commercial institutions used the strategy of openness more frequently as they were more likely to share information on how the organisation's products are made, for example (Hon and Grunig, 1999). They also used positivity, the third strategy, more than the public institutions as they sought to engage users by making social media pages more fun for them (Hon and Grunig, 1999).

Fourth, assurances were also used by the private commercial institutions more, as they were more likely to solicit feedback. In fact, private commercial institutions appear to have been trying to incorporate that into their services over time, which reflects the more strategic approach to public relations as discussed above, compared to public institutions that only told stakeholders their concerns are genuine but did not seek to incorporate these concerns into its operations (Hon and Grunig, 1999). In the data examined, no specific examples of the fifth strategy (networking) were found to be used by either the private commercial institutions or the public institutions. Finally, there were also no specific examples of sharing of tasks in which the organisations and their publics engaged in joint problem-solving or joint policymaking (Hon and Grunig, 1999; Ki and Hon, 2009).

7.5 THE MODEL OF THE FINDINGS

Based on the presented information, the following model of social media use by public relations in public and private sector can be introduced (see Figure 24). The model is based on the ideas of Grunig (1993, 2017). Following Grunig's (1993, 2017) classifications, press agentry and public information are the modes of operation of public relations in public sector organisations, and the two-way asymmetrical model is employed by private commercial organisations. These are the primary differences between the two; however, both of them are similar in that they attempt to use social media extensively while taking into account the cultural context, which affects the use of the tool in a multitude of ways. Examples of such effects include the direct content of the messages produced by the organisations (BBC, 2018; Ochsenwald et al., 2019), the modes of operation of the organisations, and the effectiveness of the communication (Croucher et al., 2012; Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008). In general, the communication of the organisations is mostly indirect, which is in line with the country's high-context communication (Aladwani, 2013; Croucher et al., 2012; Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008). Furthermore, both types of organisations use the social media strategically with the goal of managing customer relationships, disseminating information, and communication, which results in an asymmetrical approach to communication under these circumstances (Catenaccio, 2008; Grunig, 1993, 2017). These approaches are viewed as less ethical than symmetrical communication (Seltzer and Zhang, 2010; Mikáčová and

Gavlaková, 2014), which is in line with the fact that public relations in Kuwait are often associated with propaganda (BBC, 2018; Ochsenwald et al., 2019). As highlighted by L'Etang and Pieczka (2006), ethics should be very important for public relations to be professionalized enough not to be associated with propaganda.

The cultural specifics of the country mean that this one-sided, asymmetrical approach is not the most effective one because the culture favours relationship-building (Croucher et al., 2012; Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008; Vujnovic and Kruckeber, 2005), but the current state of events, based on the presented sample, can be summarized with the help of Figure 24. To clarify, the model is not meant to substitute Grunig's (1993, 2017) model; rather, it is intended to demonstrate the specifics of Kuwaiti social media use by public relations in public and private sector with a focus on the differences and similarities between the two. This is a primary theoretical contribution of the research, and it shows how the presented literature can be used to develop models that are tailored to specific context.

7.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed the results from the data collected in this research, considering the existing literature and using this to address the research propositions presented in Chapter 4. The next chapter presents the conclusions of the research, outlining how the research questions have been answered, drawing practical and theoretical implications, and discussing limitations of the research and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 CONCLUSION

The integration of Web 2.0 at the business and non-business level has brought about new channels of communication that have transformed the public relations profession. Specifically, the growth of social media has brought about the realisation that two-way communication can be easily achieved in the digital realm as social interaction is much easier to facilitate on social media. As such, public relations practitioners have started to use digital media communication more significantly in their work including social media, which has provided them with a new dynamic communication channel that can be used to engage in dialogue with the audience (Almeida, 2017; Brown and Waddington, 2013; Komodromos, 2016). Indeed, two-way communication can be more easily performed through the use of social media by public relations practitioners, as it allows them to engage with a number of different audiences, comprised of customers, stakeholders, business partners and others. Along with advantages, using social media as a public relations tool brings new challenges as these new technologies have significantly changed the professional role, communication and the method of interaction with the audience (Breakenridge, 2009). Social media has the ability to make or destroy a company's reputation and image and thus has to be carefully managed by all organisations.

Social media can also lead to important ethical issues for public relations practitioners and is an important issue addressed in this research (Sebastião, Zulato and Santos, 2017). While ethics has been argued to be the most important factor in an organisation achieving excellence and indeed ethics is a central element in constructing professional legitimacy, 'the grubbier realities' faced by public relations practitioners in dealing with ethics is not often addressed (Fawkes, 2015, p4). Codes may be developed and are often based on an idealised view of the way that public relations should be practiced, but there is limited research that examines how public relations ethics unfolds in real life, particularly as it relates a new aspect such as social media in which there are still few rules (L'Etang and Pieczka, 2006). Given the importance and the rarity of the investigation of this topic, the present research covered a critical and understudied area.

The use of social media for professional use remains in the early stage, and a lack of empirical evidence exists regarding the practice (Macnamara and Zerfass, 2012; Wright and Hinson, 2017). At the same time, social media is ubiquitous, especially in Kuwait) (Times Kuwait, 2019), and both its advantages and disadvantages imply that public relations specialists need to be able to use it (Breakenridge, 2009). This research addressed this gap by critically examining social media use in public relations to find the challenges, issues and implications of social media for public relations practitioners.

Further, public relations, their ethics and the use of social media differ from one culture to another, and this also makes it difficult to make pronouncements about the way that public relations should be carried out (Toledo and Avidar, 2016). In countries such as Kuwait, it can be argued that ethics is a particularly salient issue in this country as a result of its cultural conservativism and the influence of Islamic teachings (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012). The use of social media for a symmetrical two-sided communication is especially important for the country due to it being a high-context culture (Zaharna, 1995; Wang, 2006). It is also noteworthy that Kuwait is studied rather rarely; as a result, there is little information for the public relations practitioners to rely upon in their practice. As one of the first study in Kuwait examining social media use as a public relations tool in both the public and private commercial sectors, this study has sought to provide an understanding of a non-western model of public relations in Kuwait specifically and in the Arab world more generally.

The aim of this research was to critically examine public relations practitioners' use of social media in the public and private sector, specifically investigating the role of social media as a part of the public relations toolkit within the Kuwait context. The research began with critical discussions of models of public relations, the impact of culture on public relations, and the practice of public relations in Arab countries, including Kuwait, and this was followed by a critically discussion of how social media can and has been utilised as a part of public relations practice. As a new piece of research in this area, it was particularly challenging to find a single theory to underpin the study. The research process was further challenged by a lack of existing information about Kuwait and public relations practice. Thus, several theories were used in developing a theoretical model to guide the research, but a significant number of new insights were also gained in the empirical portion of the research in order to develop a culturally relevant model of social media use in public relations to have an impact on government and private commercial public relations practice in Kuwait. This model of the research findings aims to have a deeper impact on the public relations practitioners' practices and to contribute towards developing a social media framework that is culturally appropriate in Kuwait.

The value of the research lies in investigating understudied phenomena within an understudied context, specifically Kuwait. Furthermore, the project involved considering a very relevant topic for public relations practitioners, which also makes the research relevant (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Al-Kandari et al., 2019). This chapter concludes the research by outlining how the results directly addressed the research questions, discusses practical and theoretical implications of the research, then discusses the key limitations of the research and offers suggestions for future research.

8.2 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first research question was: *How and to what extent do public relations practitioners in Kuwait's public and private commercial sectors use social media?* The results show that both private and public organisations use social media as part of their public relations practice rather extensively, which is aligned with how popular social media are in Kuwait (Times Kuwait, 2019). The practitioners were savvy in their use of social media, using different tools depending on the purpose of their interactions with the public/their customers although a few appear to be less positive about social media use and its importance to their practice as public relations professionals. Still, most of them think that social media has a positive impact on public relations, highlighting in some instances the benefits of cost-effectiveness, segmentation and ease of use, although they were quick to identify the risk of using social media and see it as double-edged sword that has to be carefully managed, which is in line with the literature review (Chung et al., 2016; Ebrahim, 2017; Jasser, 2020).

Cognizant of perceived risks, both the private commercial institutions and public institutions are careful about how they use social media, especially staying away from political subjects, sex, and sectarianism, which is reasonable for the traditional culture of Kuwait (Hofstede Insights, 2019). Practitioners also have to be constantly dealing with negative feedback and this aspect of social media in which the public/customers can say what they want about organisations supports the argument that the customer's message has become more powerful than it has been before (Wright and Hinson, 2008). The public institutions appear to be more risk averse in their use of social media (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017) and risk averse management is related to lower use of dialogue on social media by public institutions (Heaselgrave et al., 2016).

Second, it was determined that the public institutions use social media mostly as a way of conveying information to the public (telling the audience what is happening), and sometimes controlled information that only seeks to promote a more perfected image of themselves to persuade and manipulate audiences, which is a very limited use of the full potential of social media such as its ability to improve transparency, increase organisation's ability for self-promotion, and improve its image (Sobaci, 2016). These results are found in the examination of the interview results and Instagram posts of the public institutions in Kuwait, which indicates that they are making use of only one-way communication. This is not surprising considering the fact that dependency on one-way communication is a challenge that governments, and especially those in the Arab world, have to overcome (Mishaal and Abu-Shana, 2015). In contrast, the private commercial institutions were more likely to have other reasons for using social media in addition to providing information, such as for promotion and reputation management. Within the banking organisations, staff generally saw the use of social media as beneficial and, as noted, use social media more significantly as they seek to target and engage with customers more effectively. This is similar to the results from Al-Kandari et al. (2019) and Bashir and Aldaihani (2017), where they found Kuwaiti organisations used Instagram for promotion, disseminating information, community building, and interacting with customers.

Third, while social media is widely used by public relations professionals in Kuwait, it is still seen by many as less effective or less important than traditional media as a public relations tool (Khajeheian and Mirahmadi, 2015). That does not change the fact that both public and private organisations appear to be relatively savvy in the use of social media, employing a variety of platforms, but social media is not preferred by them as they regard offline communication to be more important.

Indeed, staff in both public and private commercial institutions still prefer to use traditional media in their perspective it is more beneficial, which, again, should not be surprising for a traditional culture (Al-Kandari et al., 2019; Al-Shohaib et al., 2010; Hofstede Insights, 2019). In particular, the reasons cited for this include the fact that it allows them to talk to people face-to-face. Face-to-face communication has its advantages (Zmud, Lind and Young, 1990; Biocca, Harms and Burgoon, 2003), in particular the opportunity to read facial expressions and employ body language, but social media has advantages too (Almeida, 2017), in particular ease of use, segmentation opportunities and cost-effectiveness. Apart from that, social media has significant disadvantages or dangers, which further highlights the importance of professional use (Breakenridge, 2009); such disadvantages can include the issue of the negative commentary, which can damage company image. In general, the finding is consistent with both social presence and media richness theory, which as has been revealed that people often see face-to-face communication as being the most effective for conveying information and for achieving their goals of persuading their audience (Zmud, Lind and Young, 1990; Biocca, Harms and Burgoon, 2003). This phenomenon is very relevant for the Kuwaiti organisations and public relations participants that have been involved in the research.

As a result, organisations in both public and private commercial sectors (in this case the private commercial institutions and the public organisations) in Kuwait have been slow in fully adopting social media and incorporating it fully into public relations practice. This is reflected in the fact that neither the private commercial Institutions nor government ministries made relationship building a specific aim of their social media activities and even though the government staff talked about the role of social media in enabling dialogue with the public, there is still a focus on 'talking at' the public, with less focus on dialogue (DiStaso and McCorkindale, 2012). This is particularly the case in public organisations, with several researchers finding that social media is utilised primarily for information transmission in these kinds of organisations (Lee and VanDyke, 2015; Heaselgrave et al, 2016).

It should also be highlighted that for the governmental organisations, it was found more than once that the participants did not feel particularly comfortable with using social media. Additionally, neither governmental nor private organisation participants reported having been trained in the use of social media. At the same time, training is highlighted as an important aspect of the profession, in particular, from the perspectives of professionalism and ethics (L'Etang and Pieczka, 2006). It appears that there might be an issue with skills related to social media use for public relations purposes, which is likely to affect the quality and effectiveness of the messages sent by the participants (Graham and Avery, 2013; Kavanaugh et al., 2012). However, the participants still employed a wide variety of platforms, which is in line with recommendations (Go and You, 2016; Alhabash and Ma, 2017), and might indicate a level of competency.

In general, like many other organisations, those in Kuwait appear to be underutilising the potential of social media for dialogue, which undermines the (perceived) transparency of public organisations in particular and indicates that the organisation is not interested in listening to their audience (Al-Shohaib et al., 2010; Lee and VanDyke, 2015; Sobaci, 2016). Instead, the Kuwaiti organisations appear to be continuing to engage in one-way communication by using social media platforms, such as Instagram, primarily for information dissemination. Still, even as tools of information dissemination, the Kuwaiti public organisations in particular are using social media poorly and there is limited reach of the information being transmitted as seen by the analysis of the Instagram posts. Information dissemination is maximised by providing answers to the public's questions but none of these public institutions answer questions when asked on their Instagram pages and this is reflected in the limited engagement with each post (Lee and VanDyke, 2015).

The second research question was: *Are there significant differences in the use of social media between public and private commercial sectors in Kuwait?* The results show that there are indeed differences in how public and private commercial organisations use social media in Kuwait. The first key difference is the public organisations were more focused on providing information to the public than any other task. However, providing information to the public means that there was no focus on reciprocity, since the organisations depended primarily on one-way communication. This is consistent with the use of social media by governments in other countries in which a top-down approach is used in which information is pushed to citizens primarily about events and general information (Al-Shohaib et al., 2010; Lappas et al., 2018). In contrast, the private commercial Institutions are using social media for a wider range of reasons, including providing information on products and services, facilitating communication, and marketing their products and services to its customers.

This is likely linked to the differences in their use of public relations in these organisations, with a little more strategic emphasis being given to public relations in the banking organisations in the sample then in the public institutions, which is in line with the results from Bashir (2019) and Al-Shohaib et al. (2010). Specifically, in this research, the public institutions appear to use press agentry and public information models of public relations that focus on persuasion and manipulation and are slow to adopt more advanced models. The latter model is only different from the most basic model (press agentry) in terms of its concern with the accuracy and objectivity of the organisational information provided (Grunig et al., 1995). In other words, the public relations practice of all public institutions is based on one-way, dissemination of information to persuade and manipulate the public, and in some cases by using controlled information for self-promotion purposes that influence the public's perceptions of them. In contrast, private commercial Institutions appear to use a two-way asymmetrical model of public relations that is also focused on persuasion and manipulation, but more professional and sophisticated approaches to communication are used in which information is exchanged with the audience (Al-Shohaib et al., 2010; Grunig, 1993). The role of the public relations practitioner in these models is to get positive publicity out and to avoid negative coverage and this can be seen in the activities of both the private commercial Institutions and government agencies on social media, although the private commercial institutions more actively seek to avoid negative word-of-mouth (Bashir, 2019).

The second key difference is that the public institutions have a conservative social media marketing culture, which has been found to be the least engaging for the audience (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017; Lappas et al., 2018). In the public ministries, they often ignore negative comments instead of trying to deal with them right away while the private commercial Institutions made sure to be on top of addressing all feedback on social media. Still, there is also lack of two-way communication by the Kuwaiti private commercial Institutions. Even though the Kuwaiti private commercial Institutions have started to embrace a modern social media marketing culture. In spite of this, it appears from the results of the interviews with banking employees and the analysis of the Instagram profiles of the private commercial institutions that the top priority of private commercial agencies in Kuwait is to defend their reputation, which is shown in their primary focus on communicating (one-way) only with a limited number of stakeholder groups. This likely indicates that the public relations professionals' ability to communicate in a transparent way with the public is hindered by the autocratic way in which social media is managed in these organisations (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017). This is also linked to the bureaucratic type of reporting relationship as it relates to the use of social media by the public relations practitioners, which is supported by Bashir's (2019) results showing that senior management oversees what is done within the public relations department and has to give clearance before communication is made with the public. However, many of the government staff in Bashir's (2019) paper claimed to be autonomous in managing social media, as well as other activities such as media relations, writing press releases and planning events.

There are also a lot of overlap and so there are similarities in how public and private commercial organisations use social media in Kuwait. Specifically, despite of the above, it appears that for both public and private commercial organisations, there were certain factors that resulted in social media implementation to not be used in an effective manner from a strategic perspective. First, both sets of organisations clearly used social media in a purposeful way, which means that the practitioners have specific goals to achieve in using social media. This was identified by Bashir and Aldaihani (2017) in their assessment of social media in Kuwait in which they found that most practitioners use different applications because of their different attributes. However, the goals of the organisations differ: the banking organisations used social media for responding to customers, advertising, and customer segmentation, while the public institution generally sought to provide information to the public more easily but was not specifically using it to dialogue with the public. The lack of two-way communication by government agencies reflects their low priority towards communication with stakeholders and lack of marketing strategy, instead they want to appear modern and responsive but not actually engaging with this platform and engaging in dialogue (Al-Shohaib et al., 2010; Lappas et al., 2018). This is also reflected in the banking organisations, but to a lesser degree since on social media there was some effort taken by the private commercial institutions in the sample to respond to comments and questions, even if only in a simple way.

Second, the press agentry and public information models of public relations are non-strategic and the results from this research are consistent with those from Bashir (2019), who found that public relations departments in both private and public organisations had little real involvement in planning, decision-making, or developing short- and long-term objectives. The issue is further reflected in the lack of social media training in the participants of both the banking and government areas, as well as the general belief that said training, as well as social media specialists, are not required, which contradicts the currently existing research discussed in the literature review. Among other things, education and training are supposed to be important for ethics (L'Etang and Pieczka, 2006; Place, 2019), which is why the similarities between the two types of organisations in terms of ethics might be mentioned as well.

First of all, both models of the two types of organisations being asymmetrical means that they are less ethical than symmetrical ones (Grunig, 1993). The lack of the significant commitment to ethical public relations, which is especially clearly seen in the lack of ethics codes within the two types of organisations, is generally in line with the low rank of the country in terms of democratic values and freedoms (Toledano and Avidar, 2016). Ethics are important for the reputations of these organisations (Brunner, 2016), which is why this finding can be considered a significant issue.

The current investigation thus confirms that public relations continue to be seen as a peripheral issue that senior management sees as relatively unimportant, in line with earlier research from Kirat (2005, 2006). Thus, in the last several decades, there does not appear to be significant changes in how public relations is seen in Kuwait as there continues to be a lack of appreciation of the role played by public relations as well as public relations practice by in the senior management, who generally consider it to be a secondary or peripheral activity in the organisation (Kirat, 2005; Rizk, 2005).

This is consistent with more recent research from Bashir (2019) examining the use of Excellence theory of public relations in Kuwait, in which he found that private organisations were likely to place more value on public relations and apply aspects of the Excellence theory in their practice compared to public institutions. In public institutions, public relations is seen as peripheral to a greater degree than in the private organisations but in general, it appears that most Kuwaiti organisations do not seek to use public relations strategically, as found by Bashir (2019), and this is reflected in the way in which public relations operates and how social media is used.

The third research question was: *Does the cultural context of Kuwait affect public relations practitioner's use of social media and if so, how?* The results indicate that Kuwait's cultural context has a significant impact on both how public relations is conducted and the manner in which they utilise social media as a public relations tool. First, as noted, in Kuwait, the press agentry, public information and two-way asymmetrical models are used significantly in public relations practice as communication remains largely one-way. However, the high-context communication culture in Arab countries means that public relations is likely to be most effective when it focuses on interpersonal communication and relationship building rather than focusing on persuasion (Gaither and Al-Kandari, 2014; Vujnovic and Kruckeber, 2005). This may be a partial explanation for the ineffectiveness of public relations in these countries since they tend to use one-way communication models that focus on persuasion and manipulation (Grunig, 2017). Thus, since Kuwait is a high-context culture, organisations should take the time to establish relationships with the audience via social media platforms because this helps to facilitate the completion of tasks within this communication context which is socially oriented (Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008; Croucher et al., 2012).

Still, Al-Kandari et al. (2019) argue that some social media platforms like Instagram are not suited to relationship building within the Kuwaiti context characterised by collectivism rather than individualism, and this the extent to which public relations via social media can achieve 'higher order' goals like relationship building is questionable in this cultural context. Nonetheless, there are steps that organisations can make to accommodate the high-context communication culture of Kuwait in using social media in which communication is a social ritual and is not primarily a means of transmitting information (Zaharna, 1995; Wang, 2006). For example, due to the capacity for multimedia content afforded by social media, body language and expressive means or symbols like facial expressions can be used to communicate meaning with much less focus on transmitting messages clearly through written or oral speech (Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella, 2008).

Second, it can be argued that the implementation of one-way approaches to public relations has implications for ethics that are not specifically related to the culture of the country in which public relations is being practiced. Specifically, Grunig et al. (1995) have argued that it is difficult to practice public relations ethically when using an asymmetrical model (which includes the press agentry, public information and two-way asymmetrical models identified in this research). This would mean that the level of ethics in public relations in Kuwait is linked to the way in which public relations is practiced. However, the use of these one-way public relations models itself can be linked to culture in the country: the press agentry, public information and two-way asymmetrical models are considered less ethical in public relations, as identified above, and low levels of ethics in these areas has been linked to high power distance, collectivism, and high uncertainty avoidance (Yeganeh, 2014). The results from the fact that the public relations practitioners in Kuwait indicated that the level of commitment to ethical practices in public relations was relatively low and is consistent with the country's low ranking internationally on democratic values, freedoms, and transparency (Yeganeh, 2014; Stevens, 2016). This supports the view that a range of political, socio-economic, and legal factors affect how public relations is practiced and that most Arab countries do not have these prerequisites for public relations to be able to develop robustly within these countries (Kirat, 2005; Stevens, 2016).

The use of social media is also relatively new and there are limited guidelines for organisations to follow and thus unethical practices may be more likely to arise in this context (Bowen, 2017). This is exacerbated by the fact that most of the practitioners did not receive training in how to use social media ethically in public relations and few of the public institutions have codes of conduct, which are both important element of ethics management within the organisation (Place, 2019; Lee and Cheng, 2012). It left it to individuals to determine whether they would behave in the interests of the public or in their own self-interests. Still, there is significant consistency across the respondents about the important public relations values of honesty, credibility, respect, transparency, and trust in the sample. Nonetheless, standards of ethical practice cannot and should not depend only on individual values of honesty and transparency, indicating the need for ethics training for public relations practitioners (Schauster and Neill, 2017; Place, 2019). There is also a need for strong codes of conduct for these organisations since both training and codes of conduct are important inclusion in a well-rounded ethics programme (Kaptein, 2016; Kirsten, Wordsworth and du Plessis, 2017; Remišová, Lašáková and Kirchmayer, 2019).

In using social media for public relations in Kuwait, there is a particular focus on Islamic tradition, laws, and values, as these are the ones that are held by the majority of Kuwaiti citizens and supported by the state (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012; Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017). As a result, there are social and religious limits that make some topics, like sex, perceived as not being fit for discussion on these public platforms, which is aligned with the country's religious and traditional cultural features (Al-Kandari et al., 2019; Al-Shohaib et al., 2010; Hofstede Insights, 2019). Consequently, it appears that, in general, the use of social media is a general reflection of the cultural practices within Kuwaiti society as a whole. Further, the way in which social media communication is governed in both private and public organisations appear to the same, as both have a centralised or autocratic approach to the management of this type of communication, which is argued to reduce the ability of public relations professionals to communicate with their audience authentically and transparently. This is consistent with the culturally conservative nature of the Kuwaiti society. This is also likely linked to religious and cultural influences on public relations in this country, consistent with other research showing that Arab organisations seek to balance adherence to religious tenets with meeting their business objectives (Al-Kandari et al., 2019). Including religious considerations into social media posts has been identified as being unique to the Arab context and can be seen as an approach to community building (Gaither and Al-Kandari, 2014; Al-Kandari et al., 2019). Codes of conduct and ethics training in these organisations would also need to draw from Islamic tradition, laws, and values and reflect the culturally conservative nature of the Kuwaiti society.

The final research question was: *Does the use of social media by public relations practitioners affect their organisation-public relationship management strategies and if so, how?* As noted above, social media is used primarily for information dissemination and one-way communication among Kuwaiti organisations, although the private commercial institutions tried to respond to all customer queries rather than ignore attempts at interaction on social media like the public institutions. The difference in their approach may be because the private commercial institutions take a marketing approach to their use of social media, which is consistent with the two-way asymmetrical model of public relations in which information is exchanged with the audience (Grunig, 1993, 2017; Mikáčová and Gavlaková, 2014; Seltzer and Zhang, 2010). The activities undertaken by the private commercial institutions on Instagram are consistent with the types of activities that businesses in general undertake on social media, which includes communicating with customers, offering gifts and prizes, and introducing new products and services (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014). There was much more behavioural engagement (seen as likes and comments) on the private commercial institutions' Instagram pages, although all the comments are not positive. For the private commercial institutions, many of the comments from customers are general customer service queries. This type of demand from customers for first level customer service or complaint handling was also identified by Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) as something that companies engaged in even though it was not a planned activity but was instead an unavoidable side-effect of the nature of social media.

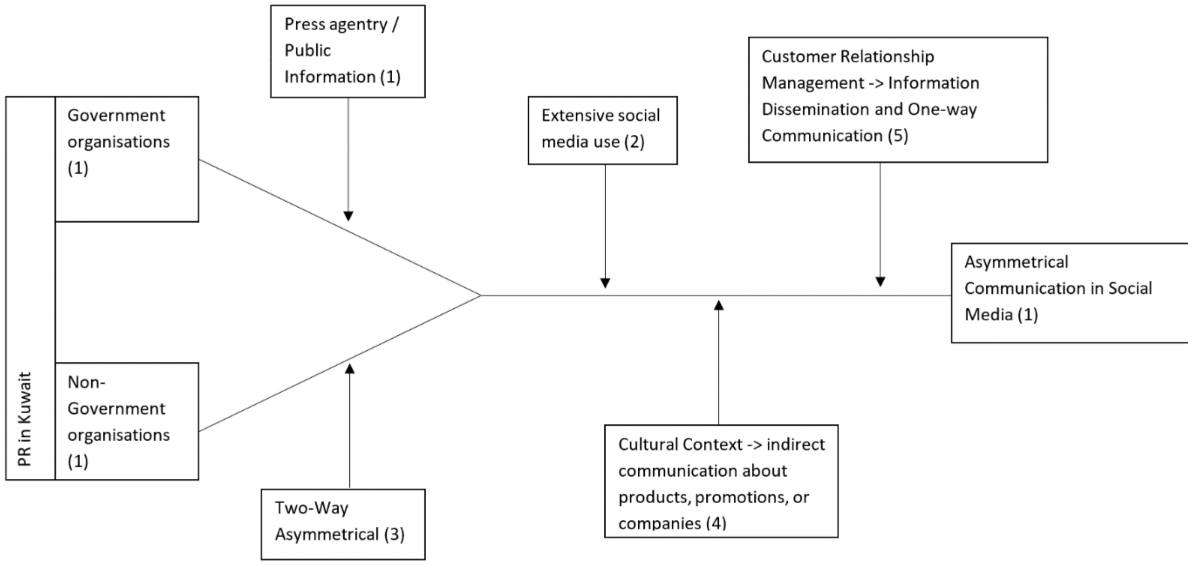
Still, there is still only limited dialogue and so a two-way approach has not been achieved but private commercial institutions are using more relationship cultivation strategies on social media than government agencies. private commercial institutions used online access, openness, positivity, and assurances as strategies to support relationships in the digital realm (Hon and Grunig, 1999; Ki and Hon 2008). On the other hand, public institutions online used access as a strategy and the lack of response to comments and questions by the public institutions shows that the exchange is not symmetrical. Nonetheless, the organisations' photos on Instagram appear to not take into consideration appropriate research based on semiotics and marketing that would allow them to engage the audience more effectively.

8.3 ALTERNATIVE PR MODEL & RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The results from this research have allowed for the development of an alternative model of public relations in the Arab context based on the propositions of the research. This model was developed based on Grunig's (1993, 2017) model of public relations communications, which is one of the most popular models and has found widespread use. Specifically, the press agentry or publicity, public information, and two-way asymmetrical models of public relations are the basis of this model, which has been informed by the public and private sector contexts and the Kuwaiti cultural context. Indeed, while social media is being used extensively by the public and in turn by the private and public organisations of Kuwait, which have recognised the opportunities it offers for reaching and engaging the audiences, there are certain factors that lead to its differing use in terms of ethics, which are all in the asymmetrical spectrum. This comes as no surprise, since it was revealed that media have limited freedom and that propaganda was commonly used by national broadcasting systems, which also resulted in PR practitioners engaging in it and in turn public relations being perceived as propaganda (BBC, 2018; Kraidy, 2012). As such, the press agentry or publicity model of public relations is used by public institutions, reflecting restrictions on the media regarding the transmission of content that criticises government officials or insults Islam (BBC, 2018; Ochsenwald et al., 2019). Nevertheless, due to Kuwait's "'feisty' press and robust legislature" (Kraidy, 2012, p.178), such instances are limited as the public institutions also use the public information model to increase the audience's awareness on certain issues, presenting accurate information that aims to inform. Private organisations use the more ethical two-way asymmetrical model; yet being under the influence of Kuwait's cultural context, limitations are still placed in their communication in order to ensure Islamic values are respected, such as avoiding discussing sex or show pictures with women. Hence, the customer relationship management strategy that both public and private organisations use to attract and engage the audience is still based on communication that is one-way and only focused on disseminating information. This model is presented in Figure 24 and is explained as follows based on the annotations:

1. The communication employed by PR practitioners in Kuwait's public and private commercial sectors is asymmetrical, with public institutions using press agentry and public information models of public relations and private commercial organisations using a two-way asymmetrical model of public relations.
2. Social media is used extensively by practitioners in both public and private commercial sectors in their public relations practice.
3. Public institutions in Kuwait use social media in public relations practice in line with the press agentry and public information models, while private commercial organisations use social media in public relations practice in line with the two-way asymmetrical model.
4. The Kuwaiti cultural context affects practitioner's use of social media in public relations practice, resulting in the use of more indirect communication regarding products, promotions, or companies by Kuwaiti private and public organisations.
5. The use of social media by public relations practitioners affects their customer relationship management strategies, with social media being used for information dissemination and one-way communication (asymmetrical communication).

Figure 14: Alternative Model of Public Relations



8.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

These research findings have implications for practice. First, in Kuwait, the way in which public relations is practiced has to be addressed, since it is not being used to achieve significant organisational goals. It is particularly obvious in the way the strategic approach to social media use is only demonstrated with some caveats, including the lack of training, codes of ethics, as well as the use of a relatively ineffective and outdated (or conservative) model, specifically centralised or autocratic approach (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch, 2017). While it is in line with the conservative nature of Kuwaiti culture (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012), more advanced models of social media strategy exist for the sake of developing a more positive and two-sided relationship with the audience (Breakenridge, 2012; Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch, 2017).

Similarly, the way in which social media is being incorporated into public relations practice in the country is consistent with the asymmetrical communication approach used by most organisations and therefore, the full potential of using social media is being lost. Changing the role of public relations in Kuwaiti organisations is a necessary first step, since senior managers have to appreciate how public relations can add value to the organisation and strategic management for them to make space for practitioners to contribute at a higher level (Bashir, 2019). Public relations can contribute to relationship management, communication, and achieving other strategic organisations goals and in this way provide a higher return on investment than when it is seen as a lower function akin to event planning (Grunig, 2017; Vujnovic and Kruckeber's, 2005). This includes more strategic use of social media, using it as a strategic tool rather than being reactive and only seeing it as a threat.

The specifics of the use of social media should also be dependent on culture. Specifically, the literature review shows that Kuwait has a high-context culture, which might have implications for public relations in terms of the need for building relationships rather than producing information (Grunig, 2017; Vujnovic and Kruckeber, 2005). Furthermore, this research suggests that the information-focused efforts of public organisations are not very effective, as the issues of lack of relationship-building and asymmetry in public relations have been identified. Still, the literature review can imply certain directions for Kuwaiti public relations to develop based on the specifics of Kuwaiti culture.

The issue appears to be especially prominent in public organisations, which also holds important implications for practice. Specifically, it suggests that more attention should be paid to public institutions, and the results of this research would be of particular use for them. Admittedly, if Grunig's (1993, 2017) models are used, both private and public organisations need to make the communication more symmetrical, however, which highlights the significance of the findings for the private organisations as well.

Indeed, it can be highlighted that the public relations management both in public and private organisations indicates issues, but the private ones appear to be closer to the management of their social media use in accordance with the more progressive model (two-way asymmetrical) as defined by Grunig (1993, 2017). That, in turn, implies that the public organisations can benefit from following the example of Kuwaiti private organisations as a type of organisations that exist in the same context. Naturally, it cannot be denied that there are significant differences between public and private organisations. In fact, those differences appear to be directly illustrated by the use of varied social media platforms identified during this research (Al-Shohaib et al., 2010). Still, the existence of an example of a specific course of action, which appears to be in line with the recommended models while emerging from the same context, can be helpful for public organisations.

Furthemore, organisations must respond to changing practices and changing technologies and therefore, ethical standards of practice must be open to change (Schauster and Neill, 2017). At the same time, these ethical standards have ground in common, normative principles like transparency, honesty, and respect and in the Kuwaiti context, Islamic values should also be the basis of these standards. Training is necessary for practitioners to understand ethics and to keep up with technological and societal changes. While there is a lot of tacit knowledge in public relations ethics, Lee and Cheng (2012, p93) argue that “[t]hrough professional and workplace socialisation, ethical knowledge in public relations as a professional construct evolves into a tangible and codifiable body of values that could be translated into ethics guidelines and training materials.” Organisations should ensure they have codes of practice and ethics training, and smaller companies in particular can choose cost-effective training options to such as webinars and videos (Peck and Matchett, 2010).

Finally, a note should be made on training public relations professionals in general, as well as on social media use. Research clearly indicates, as shown, for example, by Pieczka (2008), as well as others (Delaney and Sockell, 1992; Peck and Matchett, 2010; Place, 2019), that the need for education within the profession is very acute. It can be pointed out that Pieczka (2008) does criticize the approach to education in public relations in general, which implies that the issue is not solely a Kuwaiti one. However, it cannot be denied that the information presented by the participants suggests the need for attention paid to public relations education in Kuwait. One of the primary reasons for the importance of training is the moral development of specialists, with the training being a crucial element of a full ethics programme (along with codes of ethics) (Kaptein, 2016; Peck and Matchett, 2010; Place, 2019). From that perspective, training is important to introduce, although, like any other intervention, it needs to be drawing on Islamic tradition and other cultural aspects of Kuwait (Gaither and Al-Kandari, 2014; Al-Kandari et al., 2019), which are so important in this country.

8.5 LIMITATIONS

Although this research answered the set questions, there were several limitations in completing the project. First, it was challenging using semiotic analysis for analysing the Instagram posts as this is a new method as applied to social media and there was no actual guideline about undertaking the analysis. This therefore potentially reduced the validity and reliability of the research results and thus is a limitation of the research (KhosraviNik, 2017). Further, social media posts cannot be wholesomely reduced to semiotics as it is not only about signification and communication and therefore the conclusions drawn from this analysis has to be understood to be limited (Solík, 2014).

Second, translating both the interviews and the Instagram posts into English for analysis was challenging because in Kuwaiti Arabic language is different from standard Arabic and even in translation there are many expressions that may have had multiple meanings that, which may have affected the validity of the translation (Al-Amer et al., 2016). Further, there is no standard of rigour for the translation of interview data and this makes it easier for bias to be introduced into the process (Lopez et al., 2008). Specifically, since the research had to be translated into a language different from the researchers' primary language, and the fact that there were regional variations that were not taken into consideration, introduces the possibility of interpreter bias, which is a limitation of this research (Lopez et al., 2008). Additionally, while the translation process followed recommendations for dealing with cross-cultural research, such as transcribing the interview data into Arabic (the source language) and then translating into English (the target language), this translation process still has an impact on the interpretive process and is a limitation of the research (Al-Amer et al., 2015, 2016).

Third, it was challenging to develop a critical literature review about public relations and social media use in Kuwait because there is limited literature about Kuwait the history and current use of public relations and social media in this country. In general, the project explored the relatively recent and significantly underexplored topics of social media use and public relations, and it placed them within a context that has been barely studied (Almutairi, Al Sharoufi and Dashti, 2020; Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Mucan and Özeltürkay, 2014). As a result, there was a limited amount of existing information, models or guidelines to consider.

Fourth, while the results of this research placed the public institutions in Kuwait in the press agentry and public information axis of Grunig's (1993), the sample used for primary data collection from the Instagram only involved three public institutions. Considering this, it should be noted that the communication of other public institutions in Kuwait may employ different styles of communication, which may involve the use of two-way interaction with the public, which would place them into the two-way axis. However, the inclusion of such additional public institutions is not under the scope of the current study. In this regard, it should also be noticed that the approach to selecting the three organisations was not in any way probability-based, and the findings, therefore, are not generalisable.

Indeed, as highlighted by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016), the methods of sample selection that had been used by the project cannot be considered sufficient for generalisable statements about Kuwaiti organisations. Neither of the samples (the institutions or the interview participants) was probability-based, and these considerations are crucial when reviewing the findings of the project. Additional research can be used to produce more generalisable findings.Finally, the data was gathered in 2017 and social media has been developing very fast and many terms were changing, and maybe even public relations practice itself (Chaffey and Smith, 2017), which is a common concern for research that becomes outdated with time (Saunders, Lewis and

Thornhill, 2016). With new applications coming to the fore like Snapchat, their applicability to public relations practice has not been examined and may impact the perceptions of public relations practitioners as it relates to the usefulness of social media. It is worth to mention that during the covid-19 crisis some data were collected from these public institutions, the same public institutions that have been examined in this research. However, the examination of these same public institutions demonstrates that their public relations practice is much more different in the pandemic period. First, it was revealed that the frequency in which the public institutions are trying to post is greater than usual; likewise, they are posting more content weekly. Secondly, they activated the WhatsApp service and hotlines for 24/7 and emergency contact number. They want to inform the public that they are doing their best to protect Kuwait from this virus. They also showing the future plans to the public and what their next plan to fight the pandemic. Additionally, in their posts they are fighting all the rumours about that virus which are speared among the public. Most of the posts were informative and providing accurate information to the public. Moreover, the posts were encouraging people to stay at home and deliver the Instructions from Kuwaitis government. Still, the public institutions are not engaged in two-way communication and they still do not response to any users. They just post the Covid-19 information updates for Kuwait in order to show that they are making an effort to provide for Kuwaitis citizens and non-Kuwaitis.

On the other hand, the bank sector's role in this crisis was also different. They were more focused on encouraging people to stay at home. They posted many pictures and videos on how people can protect themselves through a number of health instructions; for example, they included posts suggesting for users to wash their hands, wear masks, maintain social distancing measures, and instructions for shopping. Therefore, it appears that the bank sector is still trying to advertise their products to their customers via social media and inform the public that they are trying to help their customers even in that tough time, as they are there to serve them. It is imperative to mention that both private and public sectors were very active in delivering information rapidly. Both have been trying to control rumours and provide advice to the public; by taking the effort to update people, they have been trying to contribute into calming them and helping them to be panic.

Considering these observations of both the public institutions and the private commercial institutions, it was demonstrated that the practice of the public institutions was more organised and they were more open to the public. During the crisis the number of the followers for government increased because the public sought to access a trusted source of information. Additionally, the public institutions were not trying to promote their brand images to the public, but instead appeared to want to serve the public, acting as a trusted information and showing greater transparency to maintain the trust of the public. This implies that these organisations have been taking steps towards a symmetrical model of public relations, thus, future research will need to investigate this into more detail. This research can focus on the effect of a crisis on private and public public relations or examine if these changes are permanent indicating that Kuwaiti public relations is moving towards the two-way symmetrical model.

8.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research presents numerous opportunities for future research to assess, expand on, and extend these results. First, a cross-sectional research design was used and therefore the causal inferences that can be drawn from the research is limited (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). It is therefore recommended that longitudinal research be conducted so as to better understand social media as a part of the public relations toolkit. Alternatively, future researchers can use other research designs to gain further understanding into this issue such as experimental designs.

Second, future researchers can replicate the results in the context of the specific methods used in this research as a way of testing the reliability and validity of the results regarding social media and public relations practice in Kuwait. Replicability of findings is critical for demonstrating their generalisability, as well as their ability to describe the studied phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). This would also provide room for researchers to criticise and advance issues related to public relations practice in Kuwait and the use of social media as a tool for public relations practice in Kuwait. Overall, the design-related limitations of the present study can be taken into account and improved upon in future research; for example, the use of probability sampling for more generalisable conclusions could be very helpful.

Third, future research could look at a wider range of social media platforms and see how they can work differently for various public relations functions. This can also include studying non-Western social media platforms like Weibo and WeChat in China and how they may be used in public relations practice as another step in decentring Western social media and reflect the richness of these practices worldwide (Al-Kandari et al., 2019).

Fourth, similarly to the previous suggestions, future research could investigate other public organisations in Kuwait to determine whether their use of communication through social media platforms is being done under the principles of two-way communication. Considering the heightened use of social media that is taking place worldwide due to the acceleration of digitisation brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, it would be worthwhile to provide a more wholesome insight into the style of communication employed by other public organisations in social media.

Fifth, the issues of culture and ethics should be investigated more significantly to determine their relevance to public relations practice in Kuwait (L'Etang and Pieczka, 2006). The findings of these studies would help to better understand public relations practice in the Arab world, in contrast to the current (limited) literature that uses public relations models developed in the West to examine and explain public relations practice in Kuwait. Additionally, the effects of the culture on the effectiveness of public relations are a crucial topic (Vujnovic and Kruckeber, 2005). By determining which practices are most likely to be effective within the Kuwaiti culture, future research can provide more direction for Kuwaiti organisations on how to handle public relations.

Sixth, the topic of training deserves particular attention since it is critical in ensuring the professionalisation of public relations, as well as guaranteeing ethical conduct in specialists (L'Etang and Pieczka, 2006). The ways in which public relations education, in particular as related to social media, is carried out in Kuwait has been touched upon but not discussed in detail in the present research. Still, it is crucial to investigate this topic more closely in future research, especially through more generalisable investigation. Finally, Kuwait is evolving culturally and to Vision 2035 has played a role and may mean that the context for public relations practice in this country will be changing. Specifically, there are likely to be changes in different sectors of Kuwaiti economy in the next few years that can result in the country's cultural and socioeconomic transformation, and this would also require a transformation in the public relations profession from the current situation (Olver-Ellis, 2020). This would need public relations to adjust to these changes as well as to be more strategic in their communication so that the changes are portrayed in the best possible manner to showcase their benefits for different stakeholders. To that end, it will be important to have a framework on ethical public relations and public relations training based on promoting change as well as the particularities and characteristics of Kuwaiti organisations on which future studies should elaborate.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Welcome

1. Good morning/afternoon.
2. How are you today?

Introduction

3. Can you explain your role in the bank/agency and the nature of your job?
4. How many years of experience you have? (In PR in general and the bank/agency specially?)
5. Are you a member of any PR professional body?

Social media and PR practice questions

6. Do you use social media in your daily work?
    a. If so, what social media sites are you using?
7. In what job roles do you use social media?
8. Do you have any social media training?
9. Within your workplace is there a specialised social media team?
10. Who manages social media messaging or monitoring in your organisation?
11. In your workplace do you have special social media strategy for targeting customer groups?
12. Which social media tools do you prefer to use in PR practice?
13. Do you agree that social media has had a positive influence on PR practices?
    a. Why or why not?
14. What do you think is the risk, challenges and negatives behind using social media in your organisation?
15. Do you prefer face-to-face communication with your client or communication over social media or online messaging?
    a. Why or why not?
16. What is the purpose of using social media in a Bank/government agency?
17. Does your bank/government agency have a 24/7 service for social media use?
18. How important do you think having social media in your bank/government agency?
19. To what extent do you think bank/government agency shows that it cares about social media?
20. Which part of social media needs more attention and support?
21. Are you concerned about cultural values and sensitivities while using social media? (Prompt: For example, different social media tools for different cultural groups).
22. Does Kuwaiti culture impact on your practice of social media in the organisation?

Ethics of PR and Social Media

23. Does your company have a code of ethics?
    a. If so, how do you know about this code of ethics?
24. 11- What is the punishment if you break a rule within this code?
    a. If there is no punishment, did your company communicate its company policy, regulations or value statements, on commencement of your employment?
25. Do you recommend having an international or local code of ethics that applies to PR practitioners on social media?
26. Do you prefer for each organisation to establish a code of conduct to guide employees in their communication on social media?
    a. If this is your preference could you explain why, or offer any alternative?
27. Which values do you think are the most important to PR practice?
28. When you use social media, do you appear using your own identity or do you come under a company identity (i.e. does the audience know who you are?)
29. It is frequently stated that PR professionals do not consider values and ethics in their practice. Do you agree with that assertion?
    a. And can you explain why you agree, or disagree?
30. Do your personal values influence your work with PR ethics?
31. Do you think your organisation practices PR ethically on social media?
32. Do you consider yourself well trained to deal with ethical issues related to organisational communication on social media?
33. What training or courses relating to social media and ethics have you been exposed to?
34. Do you think that social media makes PR practices more powerful and allow greater control over messaging?
35. What recommendation would you make regard the use of social media by PR practitioners?

APPENDIX 2: SAMPLES FROM THE INSTAGRAM OF KUWAITI PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

2.1 – The (D) public institution

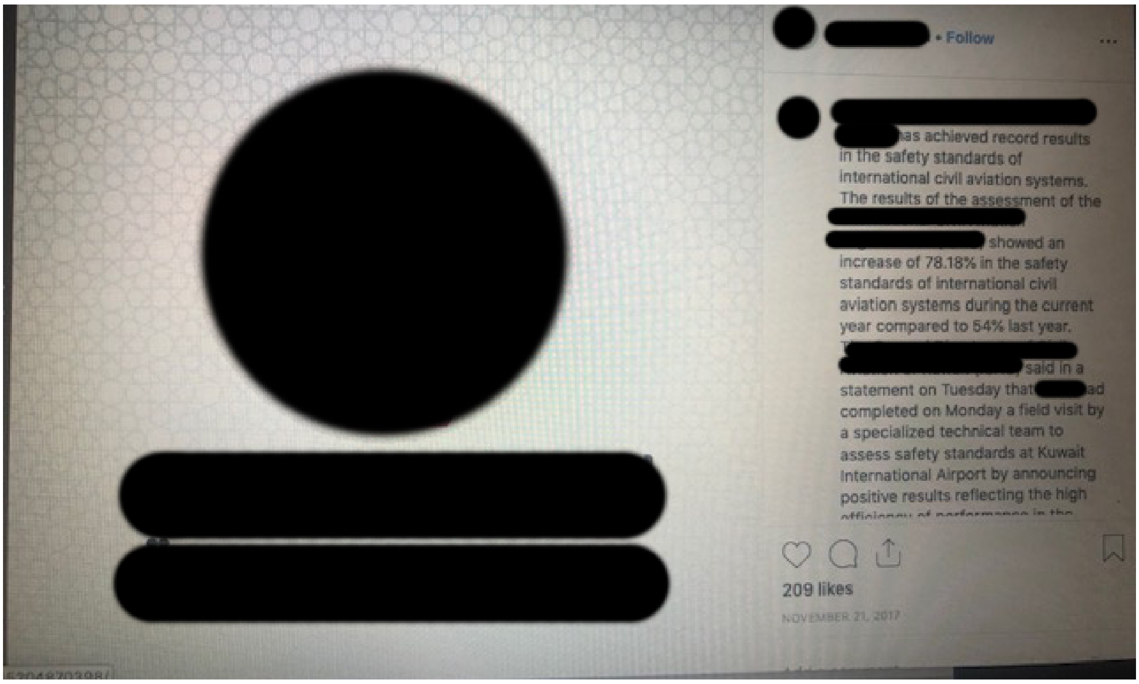
Figure 2.1.1: Instagram Page

Figure 2.1.2: Post 12 October 2017

News translation:
The Director-General of the General Directorate of [(D) public institution, name of organisation redacted] [name redacted] called for addressing a proposed European law to restrict the movement of Arab airlines.
[name redacted] told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the sidelines of the special meeting on the Arab deal with the law of the European Union on fair competition in the field of civil aviation at the headquarters of the League of Arab States that the law (868) European serves only two of the 28 countries within the European Union.
He said the 868 law does not allow Arab governments to support national airlines, although French airlines Air France and Lufthansa have received support from their respective governments for more than 80 years.
He explained that the proposed law came under the pressure of the two European companies, stressing that national companies in the Arab countries are still emerging and need support.
[name redacted] said the law seeks to limit the growth of Arab and Gulf airlines, particularly Emirates, Qatar Airways and Etihad Airways, as they are the most dominant in the aviation market.
He said the European Commission had also objected to the entry of the A380 aircraft into European airspace, wondering "who makes this aircraft the passengers and sells it if they do not benefit from the airlines."
He added that the meeting would raise the situation to the Arab Parliament, which will discuss the European Union before the adoption of the law, stressing that the law represents "blatant interference" in the sovereignty of States and will affect the approval of all countries of the world.

And there is no interaction from the public

__Figure 2.1.3: Post 21 November 2017__

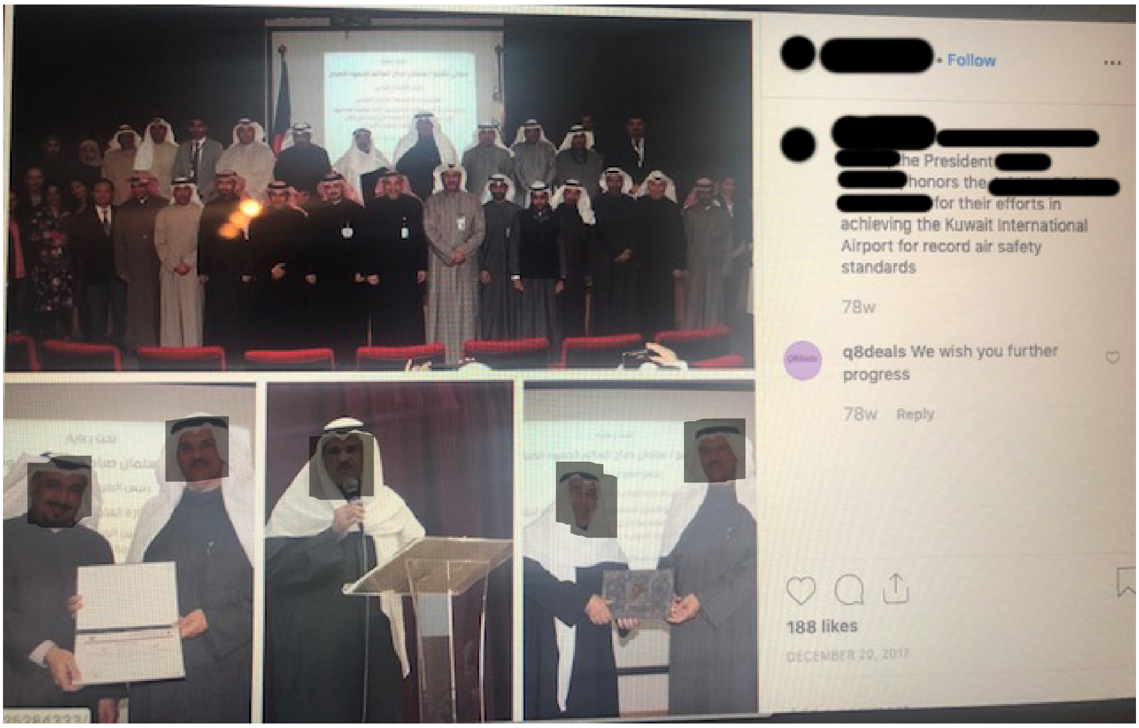


The translation is
Kuwait International Airport has achieved record results in the safety standards of international civil aviation systems. The results of the assessment of the [name redacted] showed an increase of 78.18% in the safety standards of international civil aviation systems during the current year compared to 54% last year.
[name redacted] said in a statement on Tuesday that ICAO had completed on Monday a field visit by a specialized technical team to assess safety standards at Kuwait International Airport by announcing positive results reflecting the high efficiency of performance in the various operational sectors.
She pointed out that this achievement is a record for the State of Kuwait, which paid great attention to modernizing the infrastructure of the air transport sector as it was a top priority of the government under the leadership of His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister of the development of the civil aviation sector in all its forms.
The visit of the [name redacted] team included a comprehensive audit of the relevant administrations of the Directorate General of [name redacted], which included aviation safety, air transport, air-conditioning, airport operations and engineering for eight consecutive days.
She noted that [name redacted] praised the clear jumps achieved by various departments subject to field and technical assessment in record time from 54 percent in 2016 to 78.18 percent this year.
She noted that [name redacted] has valued the developments achieved by the General Administration of [name redacted] with the support of its Chairman, [name redacted] and its employees to meet the main requirements in

implementing the operational safety standards at Kuwait International Airport. The International Civil Aviation Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations working on the application of International Standards and Recommended Practices concerning international civil aviation and policies to support a civil aviation sector characterized by safety, efficiency, security, economic sustainability and environmental responsibility to ensure compliance with global rules.

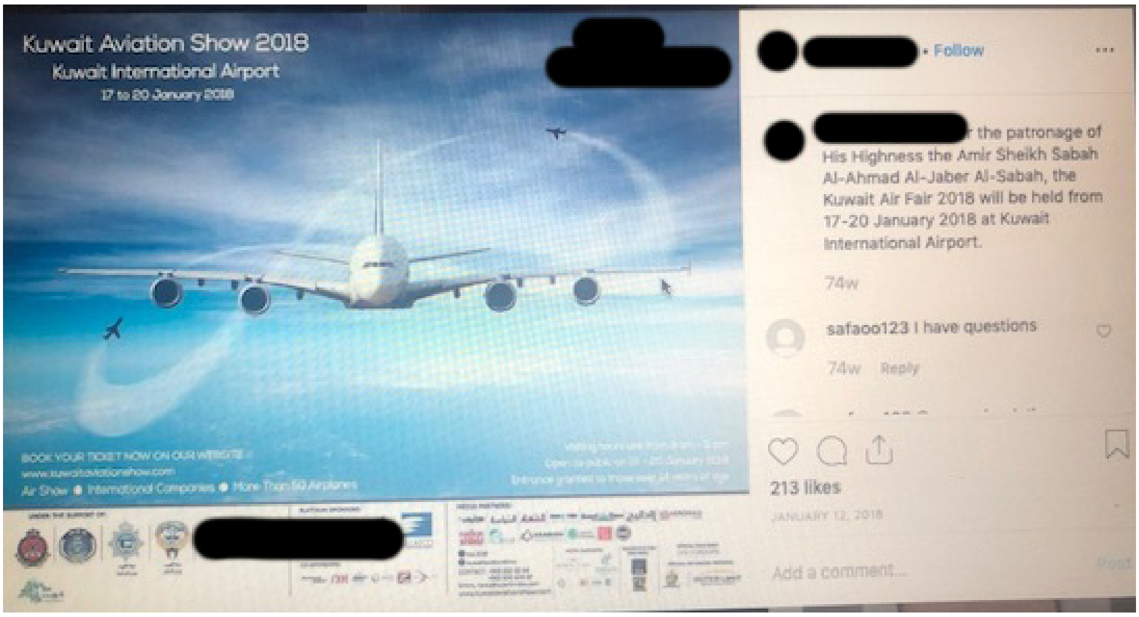
It seems that all the comments from the employers who works in the civil aviation
P1: and where is the safety of the employers
P2: big achievement
P:3 that achievement reached because of the employee's efforts and that an obvious evidence that the civil aviation employees needs to appreciate more.

Figure 2.1.4: Post 20 December 2017



Comments: (just one)
we wish you further progress

Figure 2.1.5: Post JANUARY 12, 2018

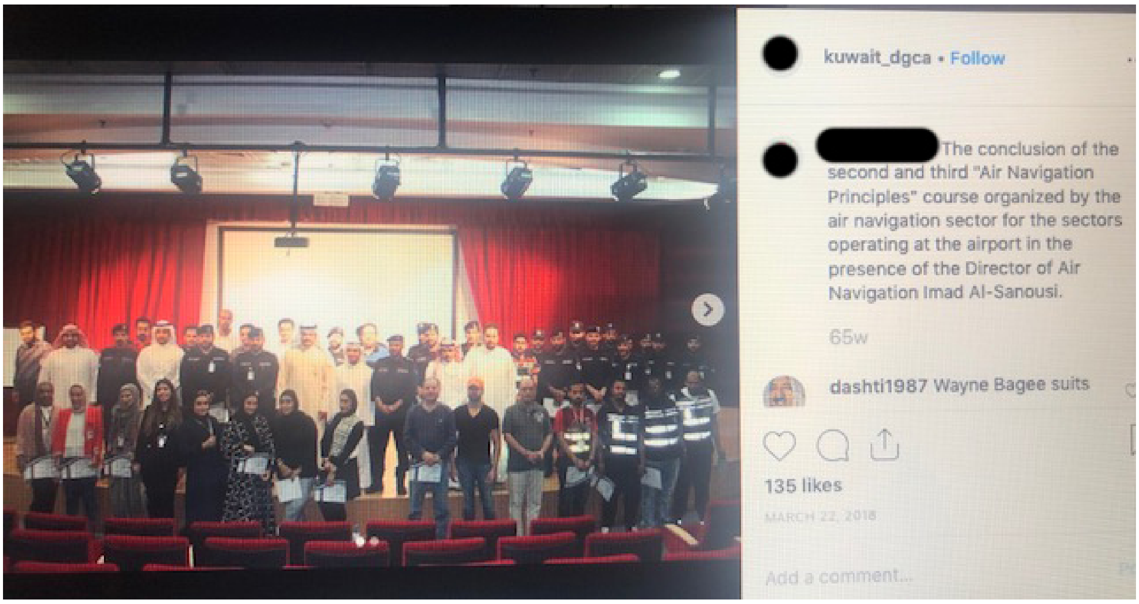


Comments:
P1: I have question
No answer
Can anyone book and travel on the same day?
No answer
P2: it is true what people are talking about the airport being closed during the show? Please announce something official to let the people know
No answer
P3: I went today to the airport 4 hours before my flight then they told me the flight is full I cannot travel.
No answer

Figure 2.1.6: Post 17 March 2018

Comments:
P1: Then show us the assistance building photos
P2: when is the assistance building will open?
No answer from the public institution and all other comments people talking to each other

Figure 2.1.7: Post 22 March 2018



One comment from one employer:
P1: where is our allowance?
No answer

Figure 2.1.8: Post 8 July 2018

Comments:
Only one employer comment asking about their allowance.

2.2 – (H) public institution

Figure 2.2.1: Instagram Page

Figure 2.2.2: Post 20 December 2017

In this post the public institution is posting news about hospital evacuation. No comments.

Figure 2.2.3: Post 10 January 2018

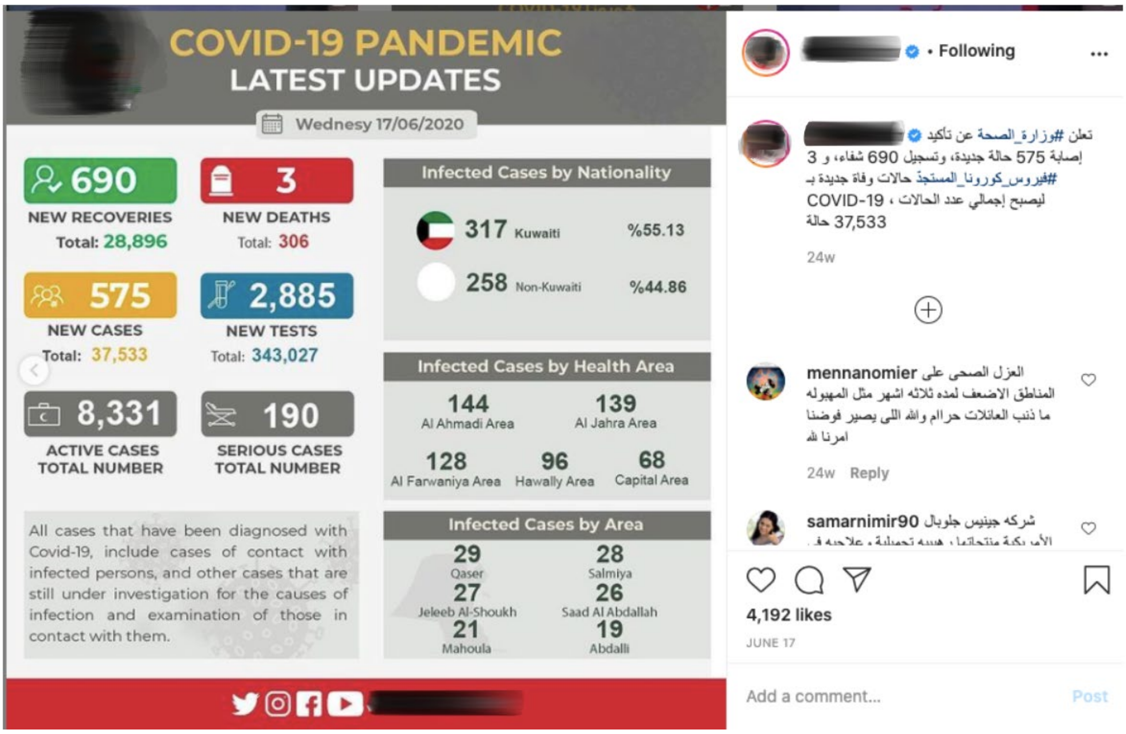
In this in this post, the public institution is posting a news about medical achievement for the first time in Kuwait which is perform transplant the heart of a young Kuwaiti.

There are many positive comments from the audience, but no response from the ministry.

Figure 2.2.4: Post 9 May 2018

In this post, the public institution trying to give advices for fasting in Ramadan. Take care of the health of your mouth and teeth by chewing sugar-free gum after eating, as well as staying away from carbonated and acidic drinks and reducing the intake of citrus fruits and squash and replacing them with fruits

Figure 2.2.5: Post 27 June 2020
(during covid-19 pandemic)



There are hundreds of comments and questions from the public, but no answer from the public institution.

2.3 – (I) public institution

Figure 2.3.1: Instagram Page

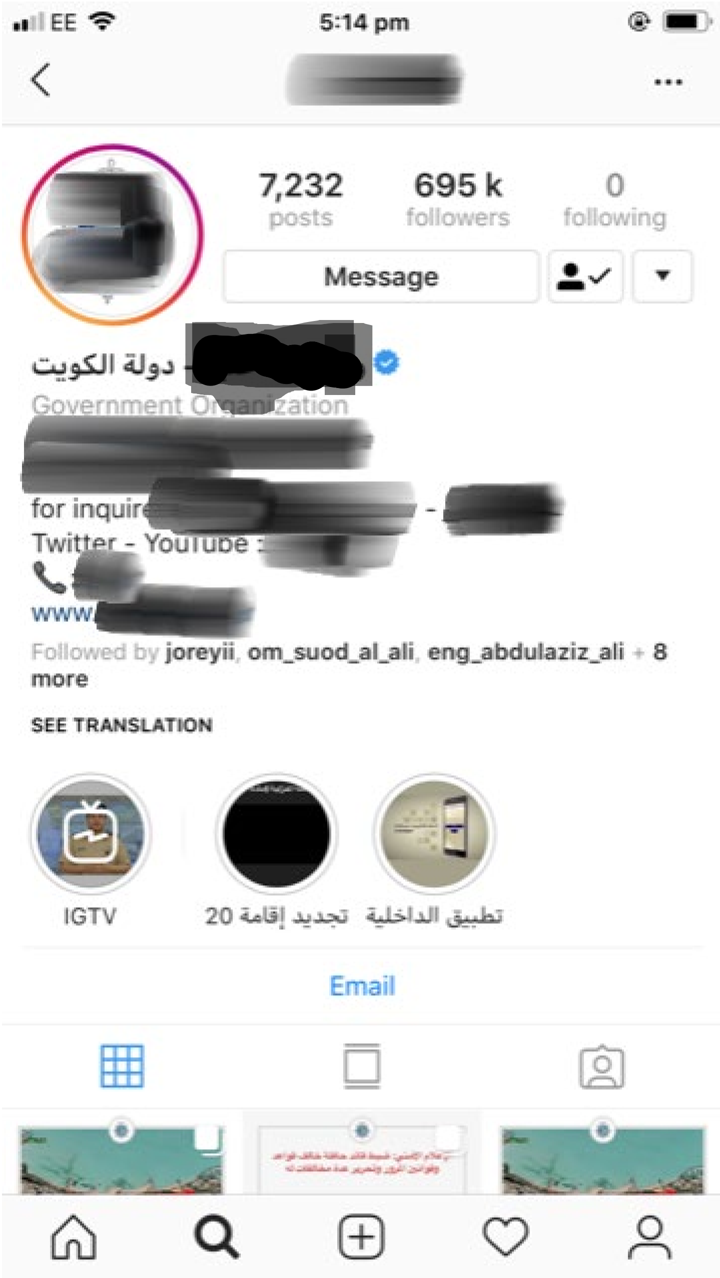


Figure 2.3.2: Post 8 October 2017

In this post, the public institution posts their news
13 comments
God gives the health
And the others not related comments

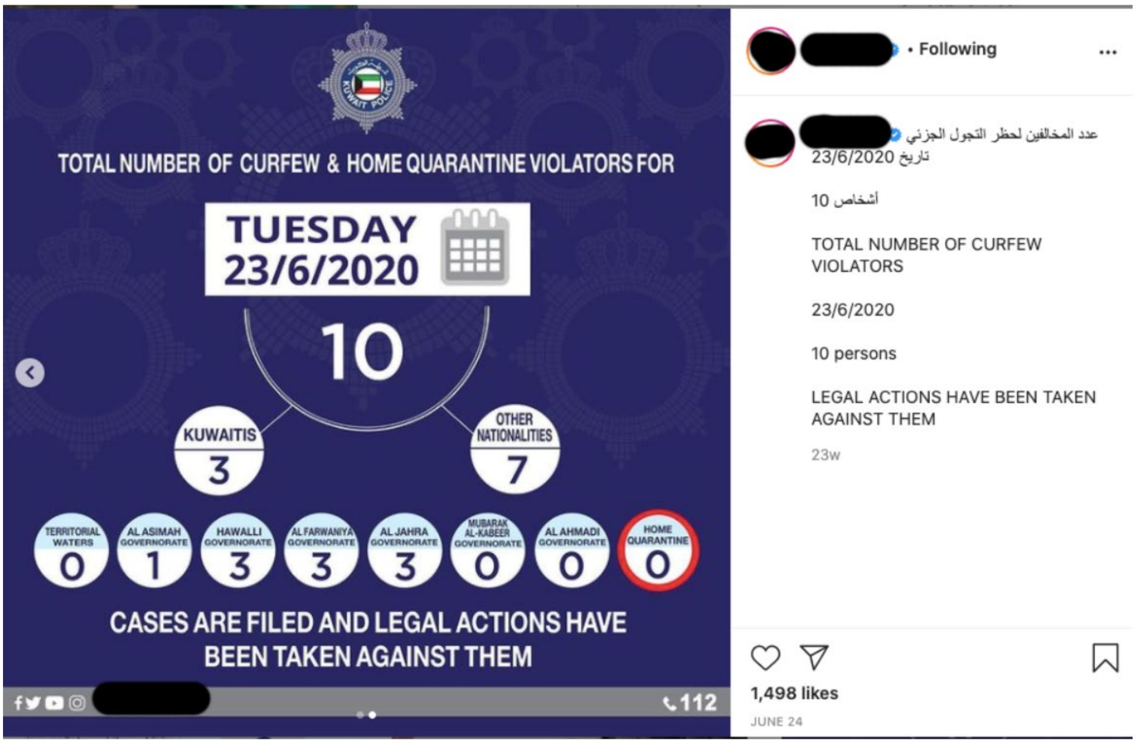
Figure 2.3.3: Post 14 November 2017

In this post the public institution is posting their officers' effort
Comments 103
Goad gives you wellness we wish that thing happens always. It is for drivers' safety.
God gives them health really thank you
You have to educate the society about driving rules more
Continue god bless you
And there are other questions about that but there is no response from the public institution.
For example:

Can I drive and wear head set?
No reply

And others just want to criticize
It makes too much traffic
It is unsuccessful decision.

Figure 2.3.4: Post 23 June 2020 (During covid-19 pandemic)



APPENDIX 3: SAMPLES FROM THE INSTAGRAM OF KUWAITI PRIVATE COMMERCIAL INSTITUTIONS

3.1 – (A) private commercial institution

Figure 3.1.1: Instagram Page

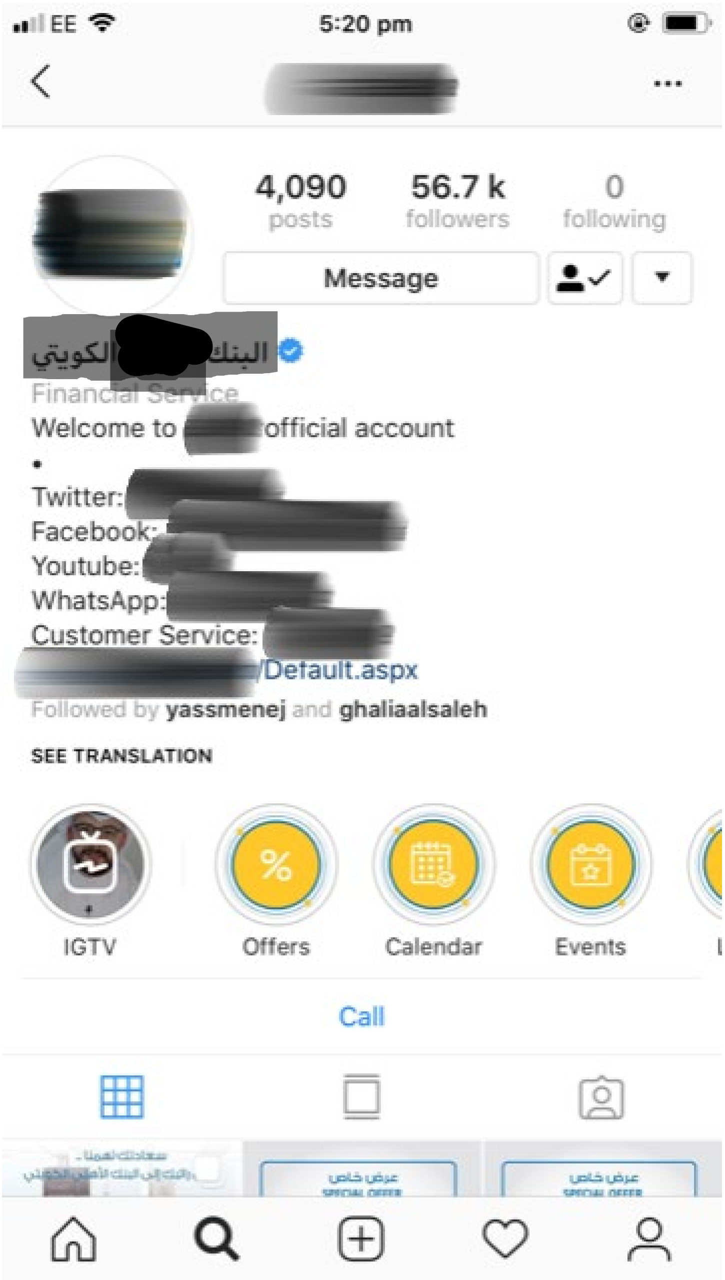
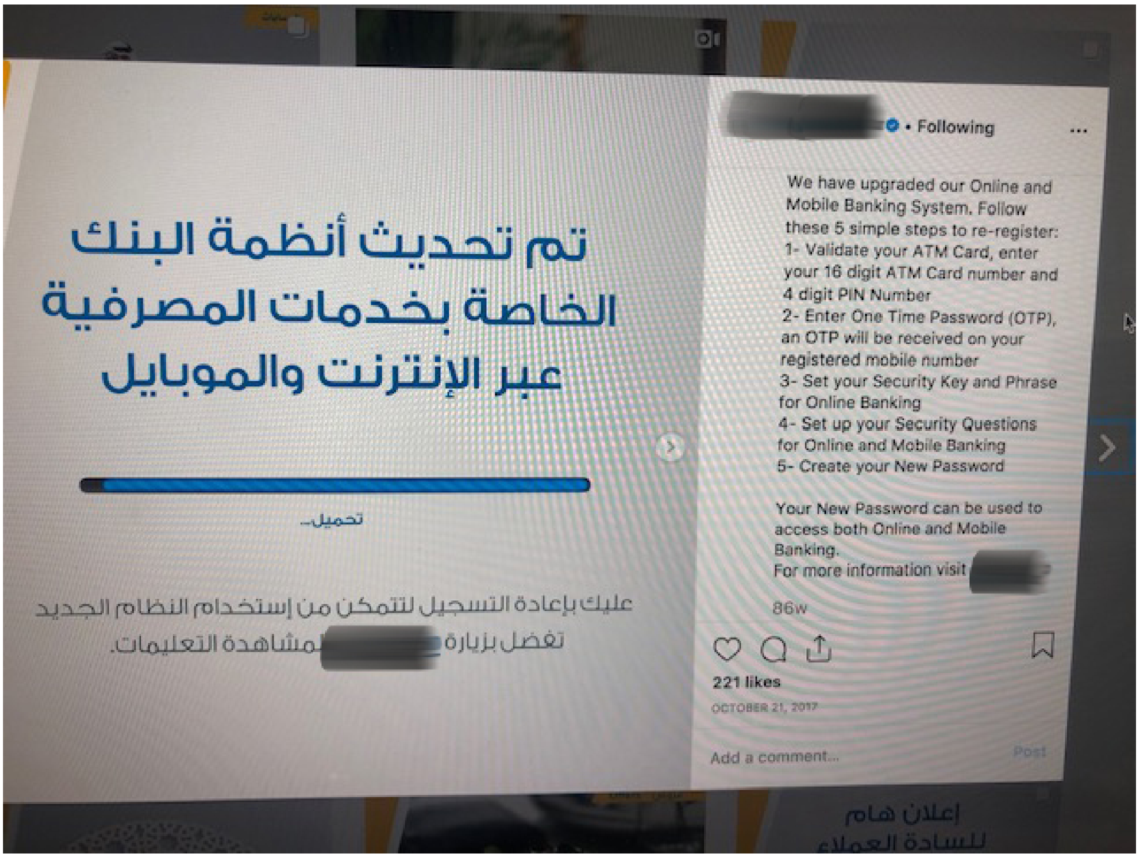


Figure 3.1.2: Post 17 October 2017



C1: since yesterday my message was not delivered and I am calling the call centre for half an hour waiting on the line and at the end the OPT employee says I applied your request!!!
B1: good morning, my brother. If you faced difficulties to connect with us, the call Centre is facing pressure from abnormally high call traffic.

C2: my brother… when will my message be delivered? from Thursday Until now the OPT number did not deliver yet. And I applied a request.
B2: brother …. Our team will contact you on your private number\employer name

C3: fraternally, the developments are for the worst. From yesterday I am calling and until this moment no response
B3: we are sorry sir … for the reply delay the waiting period is now longer than the normal days/ employer name

Figure 3.1.3: Post 11 November. 2017

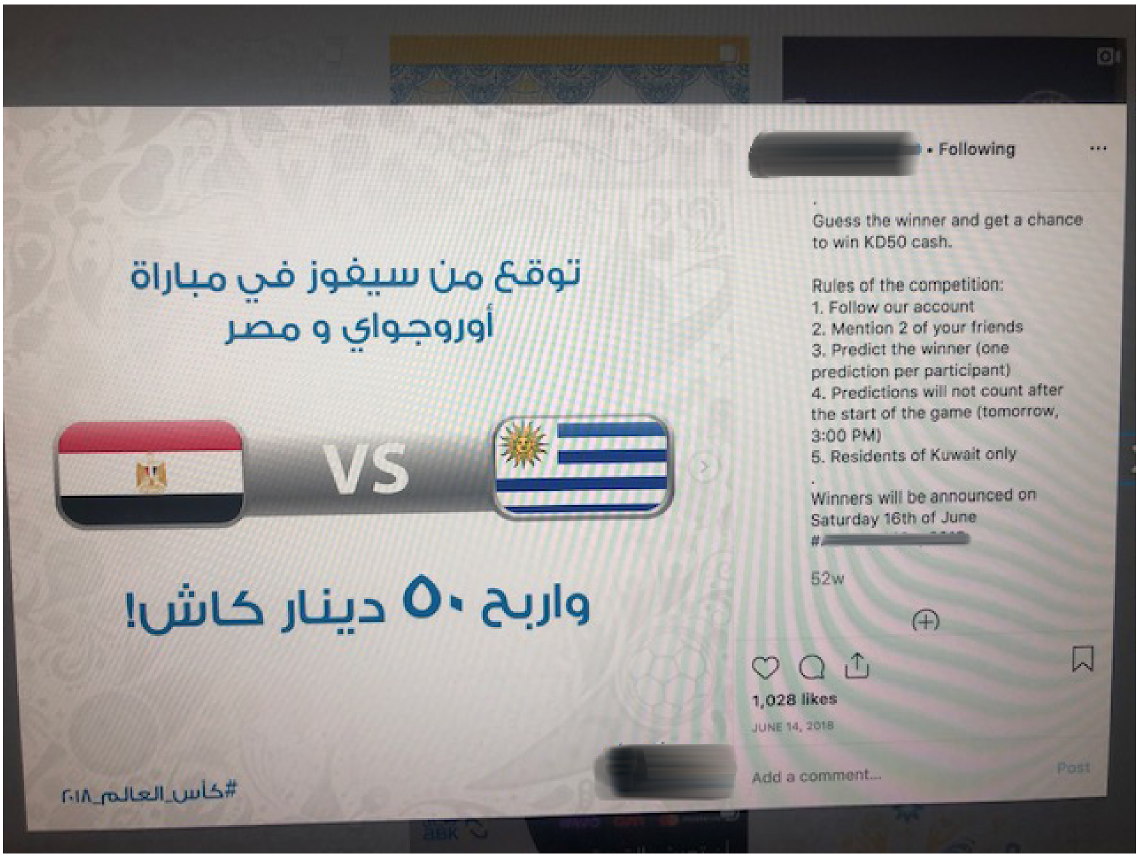
In this post, the private commercial institution is showing the benefits of infinite card
C1: set up the basics first and then apply the face ID service.
B1: hello, brother … If you could please send the problem, you are facing on private messages we can connect with you/ employee name

C2: wonderful, the fingerprint ID with the new application make life easy.
B2: we are always seeking to provide the best for you god give you a long life (a Muslim prayer for respecting others) \ employer name

Figure 3.1.4: Post 1 May 2018

Comments:
C1: Nice advertising
C2: Freedom internet card, needs upgrade, SMS messaging and to enable withdrawal in any ATMs machines.
B: We are constantly trying to improve the services we provide for our clients. Your suggestion will be raised to the department.

Figure 3.1.5: Post 14 May 2018



In this post, the private commercial institution wants to create a competitive environment for their clients and encourage them to interact with the private commercial institution and follow the private commercial institution's account on Instagram with rewarding cash prices.
1.382 comments predicting the winner.

Figure 3.1.6: Post 24 September 2018

In this post, the private commercial institution is sending a message to their customers that they are caring of all society and have the sense of humanity. And customers love that

C1: good luck
C2: well done

Other customers just have other enquires.
C3: is the mobile message is free?
B3: yes, sister it is free / employer name

C4: do you have the k-net link services to transfer the money?
B4: Alsalm alaikom yes, sister we do, you can find it through the application.

3.2 – (N) private commercial institution

Figure 3.2.1: Instagram Page

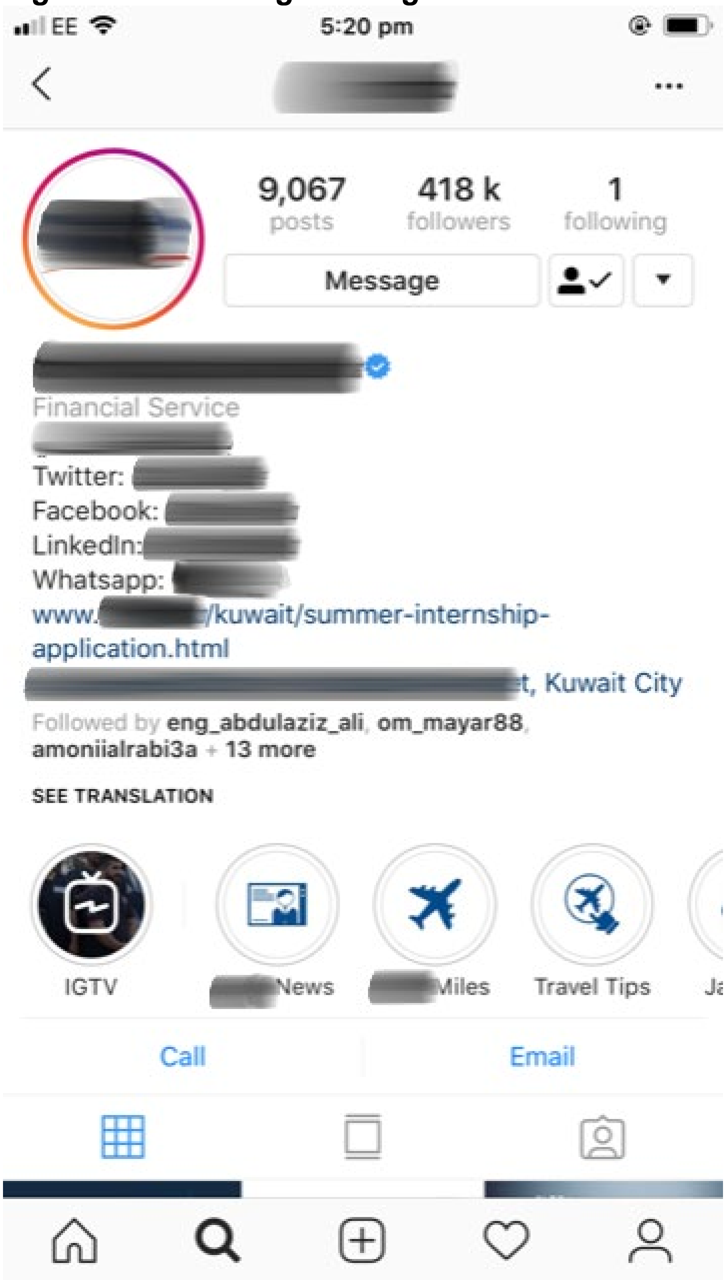
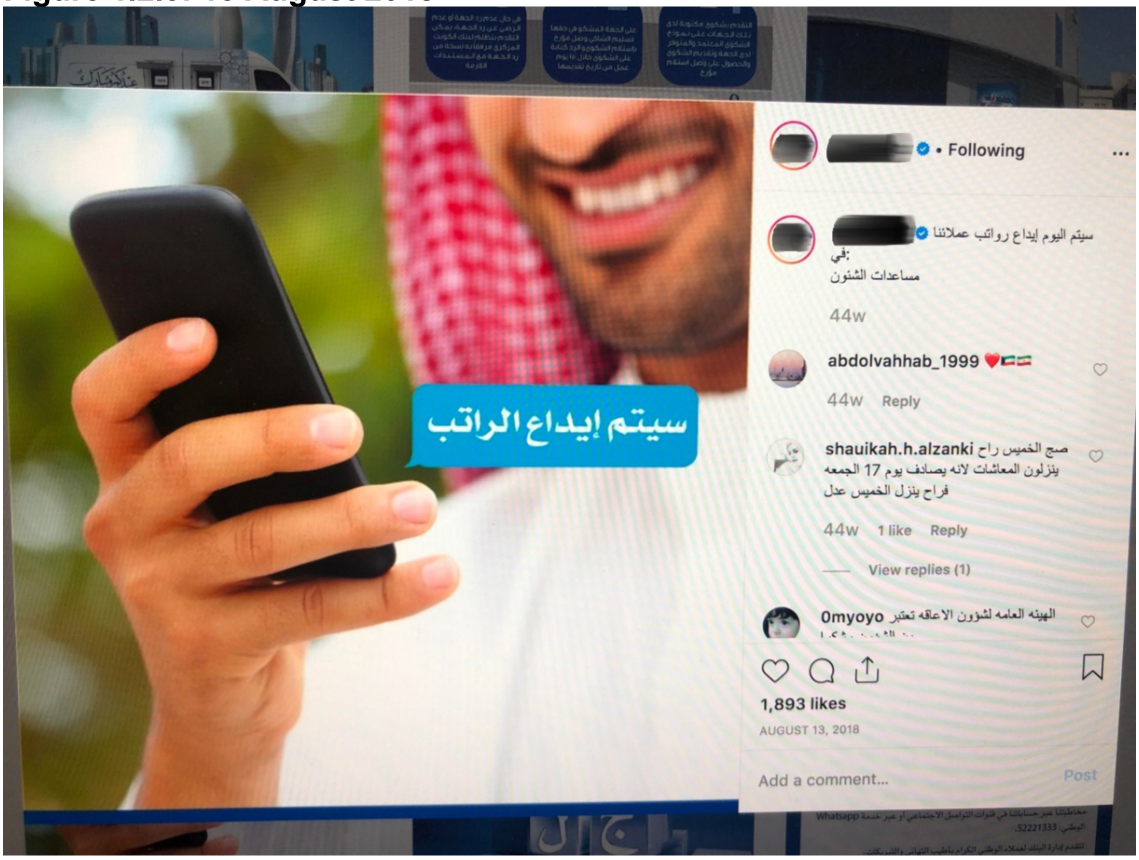


Figure 3.2.2: Post 19 November 2017

13 comments
customers misunderstood
c1: I used my card outside Kuwait, but I did not get any benefits
B1: good morning the rewards just for shopping in Kuwait
As usual asking about their salary
C2: When is the retired salary?
C3: good evening we will deposit the salaries as soon as we receive them from the provider.
Other customer asking about loan

Figure 1.2.3: 13 August 2018



184 comments

the salary will be deposited today the private commercial institution announce the ministries who will deposit their salary today. This post makes lots of arguments because all other customers are asking about their salary when it will be deposit in their accounts.
For example
C1: when is the salary of public authority of the disabled.
B1: we will deposit the salary once we received it from the specialized place.

C2: when is the ministry of justice?
B2: good morning, until we do not know we will announce about it when we received it. Thank you for contacting with us.
And all the other comment informing about their salary dates and the private commercial institution replies to them that they will announce once they received it.

Figure 3.2.4: Post 30 September 2018

c1: good morning does the bank provide the travel card without commission?
B1: good morning you can order prepaid visa card with foreign currencies and there are no charges when you use it outside Kuwait in the case of using the same currency of the country you are travelling to. There is 2% commission when you recharge your card from your bank account and the yearly commission is 10KD. Happy to help you.

C2: I can make a withdrawal from any ATM machine or are there particular places?
B2: good morning, from any ATM belongs to our bank machine.

C3: when are the monthly prizes?
B4: good morning, the monthly prizes are on the last Tuesday of every month except March, June, September and December. We hope you win with us.

C4: before you make all of these developments you have to change the ATM machine for the branch ……. For more than one year we have been making complains but the bank is not taking any action about that and insist of not changing the machine and last time was yesterday afternoon the machine did not work from 4-9 pm. It is hang up 2 to 3 times weekly.

B1: good evening, I am sorry to hear that, we have become aware that we will inform the specialized management to take action. Thank you for connecting with us and welcome.

And there are many comments asking more information about that service and how to use it. Total 60 comments

3.3 (G) private commercial institution

Figure 3.3.1: Instagram Page

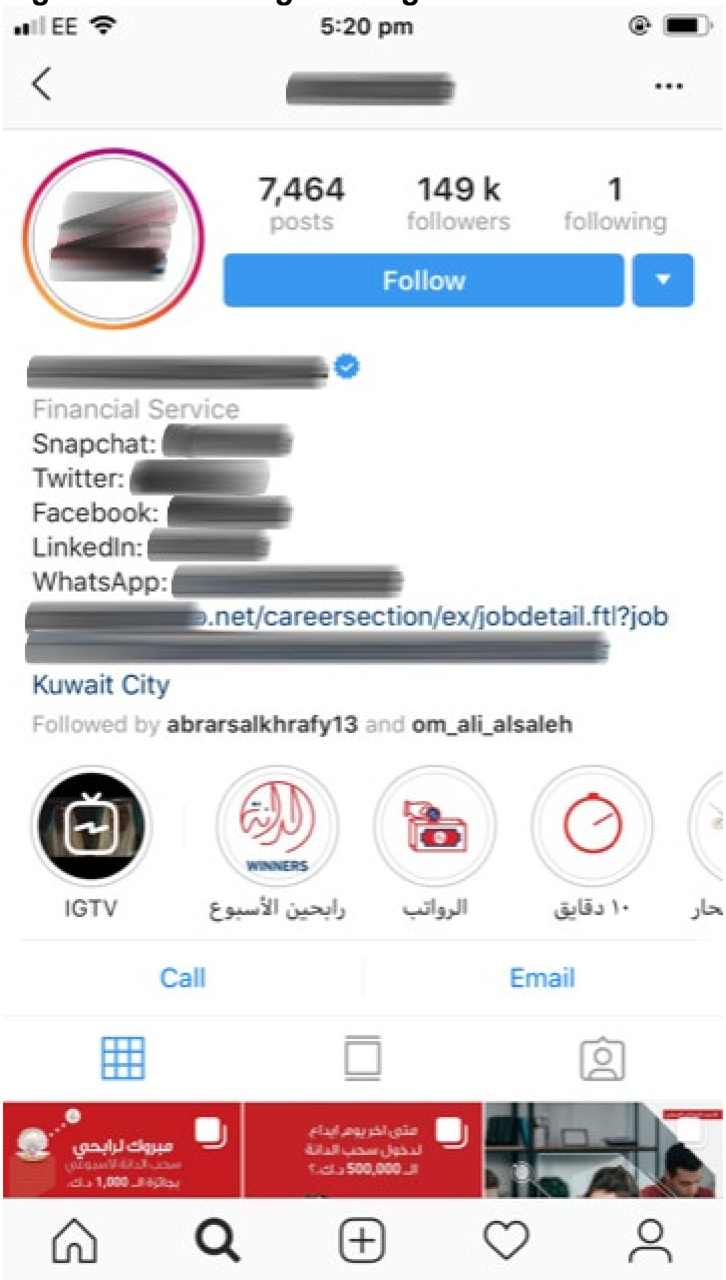


Figure 3.3.2: Post 3 October 2017

3 October 2017
It is a post about security online.
2 comments
C1: can I use it on amazon?
B1: good afternoon, yes you can sir

Figure 3.3.3: Post 17 April 2018

23 comments

1- Alsalam alaikom brother what are the branches that open at night?
   - Alaikom alsalam the branches are (branches name) and opening hours 3 comments angry customers want to change their bank and close their accounts and the bank's reply was the same: talk to us directly to solve your problem

2- I want to transfer my account to another bank
    - Good evening respected sister, we are sorry for that, could you please contact us directly to do what is required – employer name
    Other customers have questions:
3- Do you have any sponsored scholarship?
    - Good evening, no we do not have any scholarship, employer name

    - All other comments asking about their salary

Figure 3.3.4: Post 16 June 2018

2,687 comments

In this post, the private commercial institution is holding a competition with prizes on Instagram to increase its interaction with customers and attract more customers.

This competition under specific rules.

All the comments are making predictions to win the prize

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW THEMES, SUB-THEMES, AND SAMPLE QUOTES

Table A-1: Social Media versus Traditional Media

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
Social Media vs. Traditional Media	**Cost**	…traditional methods cost a lot more (B5). …now we have a greater spread, especially because social media does not need [any] budget (G8)
	Ease of use	As for me, both are the same as I have been trained on the two methods of communication…. But social media is easier. I use it to send a video link to the client and the client can follow the steps provided in the video (B1).
		For example, the online system teaches the client the method of registration online… so it is easier for the employee (B2).
		I prefer to deal via social media sites because it informs the public and, in my opinion, connecting via social media sites is easy and more comfortable (G2).
		For me, as an employee at the airport, it does not matter [whether I] deal with the public… through social media or telephone or personal communication (G4). As a government ministry, dealing with the external audience through social networking sites is more comfortable than personal communication because it eliminates personal communication (G9).
	Face-to-face interaction	Because through personal contact, the interaction is more with the customer (B2). I prefer personal contact face-to-face because many times the message is not correctly understood on social media sites or they do not reach the consumers with clear information (B3). Face-to-face to understand the customer better and to know what customers are feeling. If I want to inform the customer about any product in social media, I cannot figure his emotions and feeling. And in WhatsApp the customer might read it or not, but in face-to-face [communication] I can notice customers' feelings or gestures that they do not like that product, and I can quickly transfer to another product (B4).

	I prefer the face to face interaction with the client because it is more personal and persuasive (B6). I personally like to communicate by face-to-face, but the appearance of social media has changed many concepts, especially customer service in particular and face-to-face contact is almost eliminated (B7). Face-to-face because it is more efficient and effective (B8). Personal communication has more effective impact on the client… social media only provides the information faster (B9). By Face-to-face interaction I can feel and know more about the customer and know what he /she wants. What they think and how I can help them in the way they want (B10).
	From my point view the best contact and the best way to deal with the client is face-to-face…because by communicating personally with the client I can make sure that the message arrived correctly, there is no defect or confusion, and I understand what the client means exactly and if he\she needs any clarification I can explain to him/her (B11).
Customer service	We use both of them but depending on the type of customer, I prefer to use [face-to-face communication] (B12). Personally, I prefer to deal with the public in person so that I know the person in front of me can understand what I am talking about. I like to see the person I am talking to and see what he/she is saying (G8). Face-to-face communication is more useful if the client is angry, needs specific papers or an old person (B1). If the customer has a big problem, the personal communication is the best way to resolve the problem (B2). The best communication tool for sure is face-to-face because angry customers, no matter what happens through social media, they cannot be satisfied, but by face to face we can reach the required satisfaction (B5). …if someone needs help at the airport, of course, personal communication [is used] to solve the problem as soon as possible because through

	social media I cannot solve problems immediately (G4). By face- to-face communication I can deliver the message more clearly to the public because there are things we cannot say through social networking sites [while] by interpersonal communication I can speak more freely (G5).
Segmentation benefits	We can say that [our] Bank is a youth bank that targets young people… The Bank is keen from the beginning to use social media to attract young people because they are more outspoken and use social media more frequently (B2). … using social media communication helps to give more information about the bank and its services (B3). Yes, kind of…Because of the large number of people using social media make it easy to communicate with them… target segments are accessible, such as young people [are easier to reach] (B5). Social media can provide clients with news, prizes and [have] great interaction (B5). All groups of the society are targeted. We do not have any specifications but each period of time we try to target a specific group of people for example for a month we target the youths and the diseases can affect them and how to protect their health. The month after we target women health etc (G1). We do not have a plan to reach targeted audience. We post and publish the higher management news and display the coverage of our activities, photography, meetings with important figures and visits from important delegations (G8). We are targeting the teachers, managers working in the Ministry, parents of the students in public schools and all Kuwaiti People (G10).

Table A-2: Banks' Reasons for Using Social Media

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
Reasons for using Social Media	**Recognition of the importance of social media**	Social media is very important as it conveys the information to the clients easily and enlighten them, as clients now spend very long time in using social media and I as a bank that service should be is available during these long times (B1). I have a special phone from the bank to communicate with customers to use social media (B2). It is very important to the bank reputation and reflects the bank services on Social media. It shows the bank activeness to the community and what the bank offers to the clients (B5). The use of social media sites reflects great importance to the ministry because it informs the public about the service, we provide for them and facilitates communication with them, especially if they have any questions. It has also increased our interaction with the public. …. before there was no communication with the public, but with social media sites and communication there has been interaction with the public and we can know their views which was not possible before existing of social media (G8).
	Purposeful use of social media	Responding to customer questions (B1). [[We use social media to] inform clients about our bank and because of the ease of use we can reach the most categories of the society as using social media is not limited to a specific age (B1). Communicate with customers and advertising, expand the circle of work, attract new customers and facilitate communication (B2). For advertising…and to introduce clients to the Bank's offers (B2). Instead of the public stand up in a long queue only for inquiry, these matters became very easy… citizens come to the organisation with full documents … social media sites … made this operation easy (G2). …the ministry's focus and interest [is] to deliver messages to all members of society by social media. It is an easy and fast way of communicating (G3).

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
		…the benefit of social media is to communicate with the public and know their suggestions and reactions. Also, with social media we are able to answer their inquiries in a quick and easy manner so that they do not need to come to the ministry personally only to inquire (G9). To answer their inquiries in a quick and easy way so that they do not need to come to the ministry personally only to inquire. As we all know in Kuwait the weather in summer is very hot and dry. Thus, providing such services to the public make the communication easier and faster with the audience (G10).
	Different tools depending on the purpose	[I use] Instagram for events and coverage, Twitter and Facebook… [for] cooperation and coordination with marketing and public relations (B3). To contact with customers, we have to use WhatsApp because in Arab countries in general it is oriented to use WhatsApp instead of text messages… for me, I prefer text messages to be honest (B4). Twitter, Instagram and Facebook…for daily advertisement (B5). [I prefer to use] Instagram because in Instagram I can post pictures and pictures explains what I want to tell the customers (B6). [I prefer to use] Instagram because the picture explains many things. The public does not always have time to read and I am personally noticed a great interaction with the public through Instagram] (G4).

Table A-3: Social Media's Impact on Public Relations

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
Social Media's Impact on PR	**Positive impact**	Yes, social media has a positive influence on PR practice in many aspects and not just PR, all the bankers' activities (B1). Sure, of course… I can attract many clients through social media (B2). The bank is now adapted social media and has given the opportunity to encourage customers to deal with the bank and shorten the distance between the bank and the customer (B2). Yes, I agree [because] via social media I can get access a boarder customer base in an effective way (B6). Of course, social media is available many customers, so feedback from customers is beneficial for PR practices (B8).
		Yes, social media ads have a positive impact on the bank. The number of customers who opened social media accounts is increasing. which reduced the number of customers who are visiting the bank (B9).
		Yes, to marketing and facilitating transactions, transparency and ease of use(B10). Social networking sites are the only link between us and the public through which we offer the latest news of management and achievements and at the same time we can know the public feedback (G4). It is essential for the public relations practitioner (G7). Yes, after the use of social media the public has become more familiar with our ministry's activities. … Before the appearance of social media, no one knew about us and our activities and services that we provide to the public, but now we have a greater spread, especially because social media does not need [any] budget (G8).
	Negative impact or negative feedback	There is a wrong belief that if you have a bad previous experience with the bank, you convey your message quickly by attacking the bank on the social media and that client is happy when post the false news about the bank. Our role, as PR specialist, is to improve this image within minutes (B1).

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
		No, I do think [that social media is positive]. I am against using social media in work… social media do not bring customers (B4). …our role as PR specialists is to reply to the negative campaigns, and I have to reply to [people on social media] as soon as possible, in less than fifteen minutes and explain to the public (B1). We are very keen to respond to the client as soon as possible, especially Instagram because it currently has controlled the bank image… and any negative comment affects many customers. So, we have to respond to negative comment as soon as possible and invite the client to go to the nearest branch to solve the problem (B2). There are negatives. Yes, many negative comments from the angry public that demands reform. In fact, I cannot answer them, and I do not have the authority to respond to all the comments. If I respond to any user in a way that is not suitable to management, I am the person who will be blamed for any wrong answer and they will send me to law investigation administration. Due to the bad condition of Kuwait airport the majority of the public is demanding an amendment and reform of the airport, but this issue is not in our hands, it depends on management (G4). The [Kuwait Airport] is very old but the management wants to polish its image in front of the public [but] services are very bad, so management wants us to show things that show us ideal but in fact exactly the opposite of the image, but people know about this (G5). What worries me most is my inability to respond to the public because I am not authorized to do so, and I do not have enough information to respond even if I cannot disclose them because it is an order from our management that I cannot answer some questions (G4). But if there is criticism and negative comment, we do not give any importance and we do not respond to them (G8). There are many negative comments from the internal and external public, this is a negative thing that employees complain about through social networking sites... this distorts the airport's reputation as a front of the state (G5).

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
		management to get permission to reply. They give us the authority to respond or not. We may take days and weeks before the response. More often than not, we cannot reply and leave the question [without] a reply (G5). As a public relations practitioner in our ministry we do not have the authority to response the audience because the higher management do not allow us to response anything against their opinion. They like to control everything (G7).
	Mixed blessing	…there are also people praising social media [but it is a] double-edged sword and we must be careful when we use because it can be harmful even though it has many benefits to the bank (B2). There is a positive impact and there is a negative impact. On one hand, it is a way to communicate with customers as the face of the bank and social media has affected us positively because it is a way of posting information about the bank and because we can get the reaction quickly from customers. This has made the impact of social media very large, we see the comments immediately. However, the negative impact is also clear because not all the comment positive about the bank (B11).
	Risks of using social media	Risk comes from the clients who want to defame the image of the bank in front of the public. So, any mistake made by the employee is considered evidence against him. So, we have to take care in replying and we should not make wrong statements. Even simple mistakes are counted against the employee and may become a big case. We must be very accurate even in details t and the employee must reply strategically (B1). …there are clients who have many followers. One of these clients talks to me, as a bank, in public and in front of all people about a problem angrily and talk about the bank badly. This is a kind of challenge which we could face t. in this case I have to calm the angry client and solve his/her problem so quickly (as soon as possible), so I can protect the bank image (B1). Social media can be more offensive, the client can attack the bank negatively and we do not know who is he\ she (B2). … there is a danger that the employee affects the reputation of the bank (B2).

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
		Reputation is the most important thing in front of a large audience (B2). Customers criticize the bank for trivial reasons; we cannot completely control all people and their negative comments. Which are not useful to the bank image. There are customers who want to entertain through social media and waste their free time (B3 [There is potential] libel on bank reputations and halal and haram Islamic or not Islamic. It is easy to harm a bank through social media (B4). Reputation…A lot of things that can affect the bank's reputation, but we must be updated all the time (B5).
		Yes, there is a risk…[first], we have to respond quickly to all the rumours posted in social media and stop them from expanding. In addition, the risk is in the case of rapid response [we have] to verify the validate the …statement [being made]. [We] need some time to be sure what to response and the challenge in the speed of response we have to be confidence to response the claim and negates the rumour to calm the public and the whole situation. The correct and accurate statement consume sometimes along time to verify it and have the authorization from the higher management in some cases, that long time affect our ministry negatively. If there was some important missing information that needed authorization. (G3). The negatives are the inability to control the audience and the audience is rude, and it is true that we do not respond to them, but some of them speak without paying attention to their words and utter words that are offensive and disrespectful and indecent (G9).
	Strategic use	Yes, [we have a social media strategy] every day. Each employee knows what will be presented to the public (B1). We don't bring up sensitive subjects or any political subject which motivate sectarianism in the society (B1). Kuwait is a diverse country and we have to be more aware of each group… as a bank we care about

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
		that we are trying not to harm any denomination in Kuwait (B4). Yes, of course, there is a strategy that has its specific goal, its own monthly and annual plan, the campaigns that will be held, the pictures that will be presented (B5). The bank is not exposed to anything sectarian… [everything presented on social media must be] commensurate with the customs and traditions and values of Kuwait (B5). When using social media sites, the most important thing is not to expose sectarianism because we will expose to a big offense if we exposed to sectarian topics (G1). Yes, I have to take into account the values of society in general and respect public opinion and not to scratch the modesty of our Islamic culture. I cannot post any image that does not match with Islamic culture. I have avoid what is controversial and sectarianism in the community and when posting women pictures must covering her body. [Women do not have to] wear the hijab, but [they persons have to] be wearing suitable clothes which covers her body to avoid any issues with the public (G4).
	Representing the institution	I represent the bank, so I have to appear as the representative of the company (B1). Under the name of the bank definitively. It does not show in my name. We represent the bank… I do not give my personal information only if the customer has asked me via social media (B3). As a bank employee, my personal name is not known. Any person in the bank who use social media is prohibited to address her/his personal or telephone number (B12). The public does not know who I am and from which department; they know that I am an employee in Civil Aviation General Administration, and I represent it…I am appearing by identity of General Organisation for Civil Information, not by personal identity (G2).

Table A-4: The Relationship between Training and Ethics

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
The Relationship between Training and PR Ethics	**Limited formal training in social media management**	No, just internal training and supervision… I didn't have special courses in that field (B1). No, I have not taken any training to use social media (B2). No, but I got general courses for all employees how we deal in all the bank matters as a whole (B5). Yes, I had one; it was a specialised course in social media, and how I deal with the audience through social media sites and attract them, increase the number of followers. The course was in Dubai, General Organisation for Civil Information sent us and afforded all the fees and expenses (G2). No, we do not have any training for using social media (G5). Yes, as a person I tried to develop myself and took personal sessions at my own expense in how to use social media sites and deal with the public at the end of this personal effort from me but not from the ministry itself (G8).
	Company training in managing the public	Yes [I consider myself well trained to deal with ethical issues related to organisational communication on social media] (B1). Yes, [I consider myself well trained], I have a great experience. I have been at [this bank] for 5 years and have taken many courses in employee development. And even now with this experience the bank gives me a lot of courses in customer service and how to serve the client in the best way. Moreover, these courses teach me how to deal with the elderly clients and how we can cross sell. [These include] *Sales and Service* levels 1 and 2 and A *guide how to deal with customers* (B2). With the courses I have learned to use social media correctly. [These include] customer service courses (B3). [I do] communication ethics two times a year and I have meetings about ethics. They do not speak about punishment [in these meetings], they talk about informing and educating us. As an employee, punishment is the last tool to thing about (B4

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
		Yes, because I took a lot of courses related to banking management and how to deal with customers and how to sell the product through social media (B5).
	Specialist PR training	As bank employees, I don't think that we need help from communications experts as we are specialists in dealing with the clients. Each employee had at least 7 courses in dealing with the customers (B1). We have 60 specialist employees [on our social media team]. During each shift, there are at least 12 PR employees who reply to the clients on social media. They have more experience than the branches managers and can answer any kind of question. Social media employee must know all the products of the bank, as the client may ask any question and the employee must know to answer (B1). We, as employees, have the ability to communicate with customers properly (B2).
	Using experts	Yes, because this develops the staff of the bank and makes them work in the right direction and gives intensive lectures to our staff. We contact experts from the United States and Britain and we already find them very useful. I support them because they are professional and knowledgeable and they have many books and a great background on the subject and they are developing strategies for our communication (B5). Yes, because we need a specialist in this field to develop our services to the best (G1). Yes, I [would] strongly like to have a public relations communication expert to teach us how to use social networking sites and how to deal with the public (G8).
		Yes, sure we have a communication expert [on staff] and we resort to him in relation to the questions and dealing with [the public on social media] … I ask this expert and he teaches me what to do… because there are [some] question we have insufficient experience to respond to, so we ask help from him to respond to the audience because social media sites are considered a big responsibility on the department of Public Relations and media… now it is considered the image of the

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
		organisation. The information that we give [on social media] must be correct and … accurate (G2).
	Kuwaiti Culture and PR Practice	We are a conservative society. We have certain values. [We use] people who do charity work. The media face [of the bank] is not only girls (B2). We… must respect the Kuwaiti culture, which is derived from Islamic values. We cannot publish anything that goes against Islamic law or the values of the state (B12). In Ramadan, we are trying to provide information about fasting, posts and videos suitable for Ramadan month (G1). At end we are Muslim conservative community, we respect all Islamic ethics that we shouldn't hurt the shyness of the community because if we break these ethics, the public will get angry and we will involve in many unnecessary troubles. (G2). Yes, I have to take into account the values of society in general and respect public opinion and not to scratch the modesty of our Islamic culture. I cannot post any image that does not match with Islamic culture. I have to avoid what is controversial and sectarianism in the community and when posting women pictures must covering her body. [Women do not have to] wear the hijab, but [they persons have to] be wearing suitable clothes which covers her body to avoid any issues with the public (G4). Of course, I have to take into account the societal values of the Kuwaiti society. For example, when filming events, we avoid posting any image for girls and women only after their permission because they always have restricted about appearing in social media sites or appearing to the public. Of course, this is something due to their family values and their rejection of the appearance of women on social networking sites. So, we prefer to take photos for males to protect ourselves from problem (G9). Of course, we are a part of the society, we must protect our culture, and traditions. We are Ministry of Education which brings up the generations, we must be interested in spreading Kuwaiti culture more than others, and be far from anything may spoil it (G10).

Table A-5: The Impact of the Code of Ethics

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
The Impact of the Code of Ethics	**Widespread use of codes of ethics**	We have a circular of principles and ethics sent to all employees when they start working in the bank (B1).
		On the first days of working in the bank, the bank gave me a training course in which I learned the rights and duties of the bank what is right and wrong (B2).
		Yes…It is very important thing to the bank. as employers we must protect the customers privacy and secrets. There are written terms of employer's rights and duties, bank terms and how to deal with the clients. We also have some instructions from the central bank of Kuwait or the union of Kuwaiti banks. Specially the instructions from central bank we cannot make any amendment to any of their rules. All banks in Kuwait must follow central bank instructions of using social media . (B3)
		Yes, you cannot go to the management level if you do not know about the ethical code. The bank reminds me every month or sometimes every week about the ethical code and there are many training courses for knowing banks ethics (B4).
		Yes… at the beginning of employment I signed a lot of papers, including the bank principles (B5).
		Yes, there is a code of ethics that is based on the performance of doing our work accurately and efficiently, in the place where they work, to be loyal in their work, to be alert to conscience, and to commit themselves to hard work, in order to honour, defend and develop the profession (G3).
		…there is a great benefit of the code of ethics. I wish we had one that directs us how to work because the fact is that we do not have this and did not get any instructions on how to use social media. I know that in our practice there are a lot of gaps, [for example], we do not have the authority to respond to the public... [we respond] only to simple known questions and we have nothing to define the scope of work (G4).

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
		We do not have a code of ethics of using social media, but we have a list of points that we should follow. I am the one who made this list. It is a personal effort…it is not official document… but the team responsible for the social networking sites must follow it, including not responding to negative comments and not responding to the question that we do not know or not sure about the answer (G8). I hope to have a code of ethics that the public relations practitioner knows his role and defines his duties and rights, but it is possible that each institution creates a code that is appropriate to its work (G9). I hope there is a guideline that give us instructions on how to deal with the audience properly (G10).
	Different codes of ethics for different companies	I prefer that each organisation has its own code of conduct for increasing the competitions among the banks (B1). The standards differ from state to state. We do not compare ourselves to European countries…We have accurate standards derived from Islamic values. These are not universal; we cannot have a universal ethical code with other international banks (B2). I prefer the regional one because each country has it is own culture. Europe is different from Kuwait. Even between US and Europe [there are differences] (B4). It is nice that all banks have a link between them, but each bank needs to have something unique and special that does not share it with others. But in the end, everyone is committed to a similar code, but not an international code because it is incompatible with our values as a society and our culture different from other cultures (B5).
	Important values for PR practice	Team work and transparency (B1). Teamwork is the most important value because I cannot work alone. Also, the working environment must be permeated by integrity and love among all employees (B2). Credibility and honesty, this is how we keep the bank reputation good in front of the public (B3). Respect and calm (B4).

Core Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Quotes
		Respect in all its forms, commitment, and productivity (B5). Credibility and transparency (B12). Patience and understanding because social media is about dealing with a big audience (G1). Respect others and accept others' opinions (G5). Honesty, trust (G9).
	Importance of values and ethics for PR practice	I disagree with this saying and totally reject it because. In this bank, ethics and principles are very respectful. Ethics for me is the most important value for employees, who work in the customer's service and public relations (B2).
		I do not agree, PR was created to help the clients and not to exploit them (B3).
		No, no, no, I totally disagree with that. No way a bank can be successful without manners and ethics … the most important thing in the bank is customers, nothing else… if any bank employee does not respect you as a customer you will not continue dealing with that bank, you will transfer to another bank (B4).
	Ethical social media practices	Ethics need more attention. As a PR employee in the bank, we should not present our personal and private ethics, but should represent ethics of the bank and appear to the public as a bank. The PR employee shouldn't personify any subject and should always put the ethics first when posting on social media and should deal with the client patiently (B1).
	Personal values	Yes, these personal values are inherent in humans. So, I think that the ethics of the bank employee is reflected in his/her work. However, I think the bank should put specific controls for determining its principles so that the any employee can't violate these principles (B1). [Yes], everything the person writes on social media reflects on the ethics of the person (B3).

APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Public Relations Practitioners use of social media in Kuwait organisations

Alternative PR model in Kuwait

Please take some time to read this information and ask questions if anything is unclear. Contact details can be found at the end of this document.

What is the purpose of this study?

The aim of this research is to critically examines PR practitioners' use of social media in the public and private sector, seeking to investigate the role of social media as a part of the PR toolkit within the specific context of Kuwait

Who is organising this research?

The research for this study is being undertaken by [Maryam Alsulaimi] who is [doctoral] student in [Technology faculty] at De Montfort University.

De Montfort University Research Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this research.

Why have I been chosen?

By using the [interview] this project hopes to [collect data through semi-structural interviews].

The researcher aims to interview [22] participants from public relations practitioners across both private and public institutions in Kuwait.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may ask the researcher questions before agreeing to participate. However, we believe that your contribution will assist in benefit from the study result since it enhance their knowledge and experience in their profession.}

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. However, at any time, you are free to withdraw from the study and if you choose to withdraw, we will not ask you to give any reasons.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part in this study we will [interview you and audio record the interview].

The interview will be conducted by [Maryam Alsulaimi] and will last [30 minutes].

We may ask you to participate in a follow-up interview, though participation in this is optional.

What are the possible benefits of participating?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will have a beneficial impact on PR practitioners to enhance their performance.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

While we hope that your experience will be pleasant, [Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort. The potential physical and/or psychological harm or distress will be the same as any experienced in everyday life

May make you uncomfortable. At any time during the interview you can choose to withdraw.

How will my interview be used?

[Results of the research will be published. You will not be identified in any report or publication. If you wish to be given a copy of any reports resulting from the research, please ask us to put you on our circulation list].

On the consent form we will ask you to confirm that you are happy to assign your (or where relevant, your child or vulnerable adult in your legal charge) copyright for the interview to us, which means that you consent to the researcher using and quoting from your interview.

What will happen to the results of the project?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You (or where relevant, your child or vulnerable adult in your legal charge) will not be identified in any reports or publications and your name and other personal information will be anonymised.

What happens to the interviews collected during the study?

Interviews will be [audio recorded and stored digitally], managed by the researcher for the duration of the project. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the interviews and personal information.

What happens at the end of the project?

If you agree to participate in this project, the research will be written up as a [dissertation/thesis]. You may request a summary of the research findings by contacting the researcher. On successful submission of the [dissertation/thesis], it will be deposited both in print and online at De Montfort University, to facilitate its use in further research. The digital online copy of the [dissertation/thesis] will be deposited with De Montfort Open Research Archive ("**DORA**") and will be published with open access meaning that it will be available to all internet users. At the end of this project, the audio and digital data collected from interviews with participants will be deposited at the UK Data Service for use by future researchers.

What about use of the data in future research?

If you agree to participate in this project, the research may be used by other researchers and regulatory authorities for future research.

Who is funding the research?

[This research is funded by [herself].]

What should I do if I have any concerns or complaints?

If you have any concerns about the project, please speak to the researcher, who should acknowledge your concerns within ten (10) working days and give you an indication of how your concern will be addressed. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact [**, Maryam Alsulaimi, De Montfort University,**
Mobile in the UK: 07535994380
Email: P16237489@my365.dmu.ac.uk

].

Fair Processing Statement

This information which you supply and that which may be collected a part of the project will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by the researcher and supervisor involved in the project. The information will be retained by De Montfort University and will only be used for the purpose of research, statistical and audit and possibly commercial purposes. By supplying this information you are consenting to us storing your information for the purposes above. The information will be processed by use in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. No identifiable data will be published.

Contact details
Mobile in Kuwait: Deleted
Mobile in the UK: 07535994380

Email: P16237489@my365.dmu.ac.uk

APPENDIX 6: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Public Relations Practitioners use of social media in Kuwait organisations

Alternative PR model in Kuwait

Mobile in Kuwait : Deleted Mobile in the UK: 07535994380
Email: P16237489@my365.dmu.ac.uk

This agreement is made regarding the recorded interview(s) which took place on [date].

In consideration of my participation in the research and other valuable consideration provided by the De Montfort University ("**University**"), I declare the following:

Declaration:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for this study
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that at any time, I am free to withdraw without giving any reason
- If I withdraw, my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed
- I understand that De Montfort University Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study
- I give permission to the University and those authorised by the University to take images of and/or record me for the above project and/or video/film and/or sound recording ("**Recordings**")
- I grant to the University the right and right to authorise others to make the Recordings available across all platforms and in all media (in whole or in part, transcribed or otherwise) in perpetuity throughout the world for educational, research, commercial and promotional purposes at the University, such uses include but not limited to print and online publication and broadcast

- I agree to taking part in the above study and recording, and hereby assign to the University all copyright in my contribution for use in all work resulting from this project and future projects
- I agree that my data may be managed, stored and archived at the University in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998 http://www.dmu.ac.uk/research/research-support/research-data-management.aspx, and that the University may store electronically the information and Recordings outside the European Economic Area (EEA)
- I understand that **my responses will be kept strictly confidential**, that **all my personal and sensitive data will be anonymised in any reports or publication** and **my name will not be identified in any reports or publication**
- I understand that sensitive personal data may be collected during this interview. This may include information relating to race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, physical/mental health, trade union membership, sexual life or criminal activities
- I understand that the research will be written up as a [dissertation/thesis] by [Maryam Alsulaimi]
- I give permission to other researchers and regulatory authorities to have access to my data in relevant future research
- I understand how to raise any concerns or complaints about this study
- I am aware that there are no compensation arrangements
- I will inform the researcher should my contact details change
- This consent form shall be governed in all respects by English law and the English courts

Name, signature and date:

Name of participant……………………………… Date………………………………

Signature…………………………..

Postal address/phone/email

A copy of the signed and dated consent form and the participant information leaflet should be given to the participant and retained by the researcher to be kept securely on file.