The Use of Social Media by PR Practitioners and Organizations in Saudi Arabia

By

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Abstract

This study examines and analyses how social media are being used for PR practice in Saudi Arabia, and how organizations integrate social media into their PR communication. Three research methods were consequently adopted: a survey to gather data from 117 PR practitioners, an online questionnaire conducted with 20 PR practitioners, and one-on-one interviews with senior PR managers from four organizations, and five Saudi academics. This research compares the use of social media with traditional methods of PR communication, finding that PR practitioners and organizations mainly use social media for their low cost, and prompt and wide dissemination of information. The findings also indicate Twitter as the most important and most frequently used platform across the entire study sample, followed by YouTube, and Facebook. Additionally, the findings show that the main purpose for using social media in PR in Saudi Arabia is to collect information about customers and products, but PR practitioners and organizations rarely use social media to build new relationships or to communicate with clients and stakeholders. Likewise, it was found that the use of social media did not differ across organizations of different sizes and sectors. Furthermore, the findings revealed that traditional media are valuable for PR practitioners and organizations in Saudi Arabia, with TV, radio and newspapers representing essential tools of PR communication, while social media form part of the same media pie, sharing the budget and adopting the same strategies as traditional media. Moreover, the main challenge encountered by the PR practitioners and organizations was the management of online interaction and exchange with the public. Here, the practitioners generally avoided engaging with online communities, partly due to their limited ability to develop suitable content, and partly because of their inability to use the proper Arabic dialogue or dialect as a means of engaging with the public to build and maintain relationships.

Declaration

The work presented in this thesis is my own and has not been submitted to any examination body or for any academic award. All the works adapted from other sources have been acknowledged through proper citations and the generation of a corresponding bibliography.

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Dedication

To my king and queen: my father and mother

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This research investigates how public relations (PR) practitioners and organizations are currently using social media for PR communication in Saudi Arabia. It addresses the changes that have occurred in the PR field, in light of the constant development in technology, examining how organizations and PR practitioners use traditional media tools such as newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations, as compared to social media tools – particularly Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The research likewise focuses on gaining an understanding how these social media tools are integrated into the setting of PR communication within organizations, in order to explore the benefits and advantages that PR practitioners exploit when using social media. Furthermore, this thesis examines the new profile of PR practice in Saudi Arabia, especially the current dichotomy of PR practices, while identifying new and emergent challenges for PR practitioners and organizations.

In addition, this study examines the state of PR education, as well as the training that is offered by universities in Saudi Arabia and the organizations that deploy PR practitioners. The purpose of this investigation is to understand the nature and perspectives of PR practitioners, regarding the education and training provided. Moreover, this study investigates the budget and other resources that are allocated by organizations to PR employees. Finally, the research examines the overall impact of social media and technologies on the PR industry, and the current function of PR practitioners and organizations in the Saudi context.

1.2 Research Background

As per the researcher's knowledge, studies on the adoption of social media tools in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region in general are very limited, amounting to a mere handful of papers, one prominent study being by Almfleah (2017), who compared the use of Facebook and Twitter by PR departments in the Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC) and Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Saudi MCI), in order to determine how private and public organizations use these social media. The above author consequently found that social media had changed the way in which the PR practitioners in these two organizations engaged with their publics and stakeholders. Almfleah (2017) also found that there was a lack of policies and guidelines for PR practitioners, regarding the use of social media, and an absence of training and support in most aspects of social media usage (Almfleah, 2017). On the other hand, a recent study undertaken in Kuwait by Al-Kandari et al. (2019) examined the use of Instagram by eight Kuwaiti banks, listed on the Kuwait Stock Exchange Market (KSEM). Here, it was noted that all Instagram posts generated by the banks were in Arabic, containing the religious wording, 'Allah', 'Koran', and 'Islam' to enhance the banks' credibility, and build trust with their stakeholders and the public. The implication of this language was that the banks were operating in accordance with Islam.

Furthermore, the most relevant and up-to-date research reviewed for this thesis was conducted by Bashir and Aldaihani (2017), in the form of interviews with 19 PR practitioners from corporate, governmental, and non-profit organizations in Kuwait, so as to understand how these organizations use social media networks to achieve PR objectives. Bashir and Aldaihani (2017) also explored the way in which PR practitioners view the advantages of using social media for PR communications in Kuwait, and the barriers that PR practitioners encounter when adopting these new

tools. They also looked at whether and to what extent these tools had changed PR practice in the context, suggesting the need for a strategic approach in terms of purpose, roles, responsibilities, policies and guidelines for the management of social media among higher management and PR practitioners. Moreover, it was found in the above study that there was a need for improvements to the PR curriculum and practicum, so that communication technologies could be integrated into PR practice.

Meanwhile, this current study goes beyond investigating how social media have changed the way that PR practitioners and organizations conduct PR, comparing the use of traditional media tools and exploring the impact of social media on the usage. Furthermore, this research investigates how organizations implement social media tools in their PR communications, thereby identifying and understanding the challenges and obstacles that they encounter when adopting social media in PR practice. Additionally, this study investigates the policies and guidelines that organizations integrate into their agenda when using social media.

Aside from the above, in a recent study on the knowledge and skills of PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia, Almehraj (2017) found a disconnect between what is taught in universities and actual PR practice. Likewise, in an early 20th century study in Saudi Arabia, conducted by Al-Shohaib, Al-Kandari, and Abdulrahim (2009: 29), it was concluded that:

> PR professionals in Saudi Arabia mainly employ simpler and basic Internet features for the tasks of public relations such as through email and websites with the learning of WWW as the majority of the PR professionals in Saudi are not equipped with the required Internet and social media training.

From an international perspective, related research on a similar topic, which compares the use of traditional media (owned media) with the use of the new media tools, such as social media platforms, Wiesenberg, Verčič and Zerfass (2016) examined the

changes that have occurred in the media landscape, from the perspective of European PR practitioners. The above authors therefore conducted annual surveys over a period of several years, finding that there was a shift in prevalence from public to private media, with mass media such as newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations losing their importance in western and northern Europe to a greater extent than they did in eastern and southern Europe. Moreover, in an earlier study on the use of traditional media, in light of the development of the new technology, Verhoeven et al. (2012) found that PR practitioners in Europe viewed print media as the most important communication tool in the organizational PR mix. However, Facebook and Twitter were found to be the most important online tools of PR communication.

Elsewhere, Wright and Hinson (2017) conducted a 12-year longitudinal study on the use of social media by American and International PR practitioners, revealing that social media had already built an active network for PR communication, even as early as 2005. The use of social media had subsequently continued to increase, with constant adoption of Facebook and Twitter in PR practice. Wright and Hinson's (2017) study is a continuous contribution to the literature on the adoption of social media for PR practice, following on from their three-year international empirical study, published in 2008, and building on their early work on this topic (Wright and Hinson, 2006; 2007). In fact, their early findings indicated that social media had radically changed the nature and role of PR practice, but also showed that traditional media were more highly valued than social media for their accuracy, reliability, truth, and ethics, whereas social media served to complement traditional media.

Furthermore, on the use of social media platforms by PR practitioners among Fortune 500 companies, Smith, Blazovich, and Smith (2015) found that over 80% of Fortune 500 firms used social media with no difference in mean adoption between industry

types. However, the above authors noted some differences in the kinds of platform adopted, with manufacturing firms favouring Facebook and Twitter, and retail firms tending to prefer Facebook (Smith, Blazovich, and Smith, 2015).

In terms of the challenges and obstacles encountered by PR practitioners, the successful adoption of social media for PR communication requires a full understanding of the content of each network (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009: 59). In addition, training is an important aspect of social media adoption for PR practice, with a necessary focus on understanding the new tools (for example, which tools to use, how to use them, and how to measure their use effectively) (Distaso, McCorkindale, and Wright, 2011: 327). Kuruc and Opiyo (2017) propose that training could be through ongoing and on-the-job training in the use of new media, and through institutions of higher learning like universities.

1.3 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to investigate how PR practitioners and organizations use social media networks for their PR communication in Saudi Arabia. This includes examining the impact of these new media tools on the use of traditional media such as newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations. Therefore, this research aims to determine the impact of social media use on the PR industry in general in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Furthermore, it endeavours to discover various aspects of the training provided by organizations, and goes further by analyzing PR education in the Saudi education system. In so doing, this study attempts to provide an understanding of PR practitioners' knowledge of the use of social media for their professional practice, in order to ascertain how Saudi academics in the field view the use of the new media tools, as opposed to traditional media.

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- Examine and determine 1) how, and 2) why PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia use social media for PR communication.

- Examine and determine the current use of traditional media (newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations) for PR communication in Saudi Arabia.

- Analyze the use of social media by organizations, in terms of how social media are integrated into the PR communications of those organizations, including their strategic approach, policies and guidelines, and training provision, in contrast to using the existing traditional media tools.

- Analyze and understand PR as it is taught in Saudi public universities, as well as gathering the perspectives of academics, regarding the knowledge and skills possessed by PR practitioners in the Saudi market.

1.5 Research Importance

Prominent studies in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf in general have contributed to the topic of this current thesis, but have mainly focused on the use of the medium, namely, social media platforms and their functions, benefits, and advantages – specifically, Facebook and Twitter in Saudi Arabia (Almfleah, 2017); Instagram in Kuwait (Al-Kandari et al., 2019), and the obstacles and challenges in the adoption of social media by Kuwaiti banks (Bashir and Aldaihani, 2017). However, this current research is important because it goes beyond analyzing the functions of a social media platform, but rather seeks to determine the rationale behind PR practitioners using these new technologies in their practice.

Furthermore, this research poses questions about the use of traditional media, conducting a comparative investigation that is expected to reflect the overall impact of social media on the PR industry in Saudi Arabia. Likewise, this study endeavours to explain the shift from public media, presumed to be government-controlled in KSA (as discussed in Chapter Two), towards the new media.

Previous studies have emphasized the need for training as a result of the emergence of new technologies; for example, Almahraj (2017) stresses that university education alone is not sufficient to equip PR practitioners with the basic skills and knowledge that they need to perform in the PR industry. This current study therefore goes further to obtain information from academics in Saudi Arabia, with a view to identifying what might be required by newcomers to the PR professions in the Saudi PR industry.

1.6 Methodology

As explained previously, this study sets out to go beyond examining the use of social media by PR practitioners and organizations, in terms of the most frequently used social media, although this is also one of the current study objectives. Instead, data will be collected from various sources to identify the social media tools that are being used most extensively for PR communication and the reasons why, as well as discovering the policies and guidelines that have been put in place by organizations to ensure progress in the field of PR, and the education and training that are available in the market. Furthermore, an important aspect of this research is the comparison between the use of traditional and new media, thereby determining the impact of digital media on the PR industry under the constant development of technology. Specifically, a survey, online questionnaire, and one-to-one interviews were combined in this research to analyse three main elements that are directly related to the study

aim: 1) PR practitioners, 2) Organizations that are listed on the stock market, and 3) academics from a prominent university in Saudi Arabia.

1.6.1 First Methodology

In this study, a survey was used to gather the perceptions of PR practitioners, regarding the use of social media for PR in Saudi Arabia. The survey was aimed at determining the level of usage of social media platforms for PR communication, in terms of the preferred platforms and reasons for using social media in PR practice.

In Chapter Two, this research presents various benefits and advantages based on the Saudi and international literature, where the participants were asked about the advantages, so that an understanding of the overall use of these new platforms could be deduced. The survey was also designed to provide data on the use of traditional media and their importance in the mix of tools for PR communication. Furthermore, it gathered data based on gender, enabling further analysis of the use of social media by male versus female PR practitioners. However, since gender is not a core topic of the current study, the research merely highlights this interesting aspect, recommending further research based on the findings. Finally, the survey enquired about the PR practitioners' perceptions of training and the ease of using social media in general.

The survey design, sampling procedure, and data collection process are explained in Chapter Three (outlining the research methodology), and the results and findings of those procedures are presented and discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

1.6.2 Second Methodology

Secondly, an online questionnaire was used in this study to collect data from 20 PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia. The rationale for deploying this method was to obtain PR practitioners' insights on the use of social media for PR practice in Saudi Arabia, including the challenges that they faced, the training required, and their overall perspective of using the new media, as opposed to traditional media tools. Furthermore, this online questionnaire was designed to allow the PR practitioners to state their opinion of the impact of social media on the Saudi PR industry in general.

1.6.3 Third Methodology

Thirdly, the research investigated how PR communications using social media platforms are enacted within organizational settings. To achieve this, one-to-one interviews were conducted with senior managers from PR and communications departments in four organizations that operate in Saudi Arabia and utilize social media for their PR practice. The outcomes of the interviews were expected to provide an overview of how social media platforms are implemented in various communication strategies within the four predetermined organizations, as well indicating the level of awareness of policies and guidelines associated with social media use. In addition, the interviewees were asked about training provision for social media use in PR, and the overall impact of using social media on the use of traditional media tools, including the functions of PR communication in general.

1.6.4 Fourth Methodology

In this study, interviews were also conducted with academics from King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, specifically the University's School of Media. King Abdulaziz University is a major institute of higher education in KSA. It

was established in 1967 as a national university to introduce higher education into the western region of Saudi Arabia (KAU, 2021). From this University, five full-time faculty staff were sampled, who teach PR and other modules relating to the new media, including Digital Communications.

1.7 Research Contribution

Globally, social media use had already formed a dynamic interactive environment by the late 2000s (Wright and Hinson, 2017). Subsequently, by the beginning of 21st century, the number of social media users was estimated at 1 billion, tripling within just one decade to reach an estimated 3.02 billion users in 2021 (Statista, 2021). Specifically, over 50% of the total population in Saudi Arabia were active social media users in 2018 (Statista, 2021), with Saudis using social media platforms for political and social purposes, highly motivated to seek information (Alothman, 2013). Furthermore, research on innovation in the late 20th century (1990s) refers to technologies relating to the World Wide Web. In contrast, most contemporary research focuses on the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WeChat, and Weibo, amongst others (White and Boatwright, 2020).

In line with contemporary research in Saudi Arabia (for example, Almfleah, 2017) and Kuwait (for example, Bashir and Aldaihani, 2017; Al-Kandari et al., 2019), this research endeavours to contribute to the current knowledge about the use of social media for PR practice, determined to dig beneath the surface of how social media tools are currently being used, and to identify which social media platforms are used the most in PR practice.

In this study, data were gathered from PR practitioners, organizations, and academics in an attempt to understand the full impact of social media on the Saudi PR industry, including the impact of these new tools on traditional methods of communication. Furthermore, this study addresses the ways in which social media are implemented within organizational settings, and how these affect various aspects of PR strategy, including the training, budget, and general resources that organizations allocate to PR communication. Additionally, this study presents data gathered from academics to build a picture of PR education and training, and ascertain the overall use of social media as opposed to public media.

Once collected and analyzed, these data are expected to:

- Fill a gap in the existing literature by exploring how social media are implemented in organizations and how they influence the cultural practice of PR within them.

- Enrich the existing literature, providing the academic research community in Saudi Arabia with an updated picture of PR practitioners' social media usage.

- Enable the Saudi research community to gain a better understanding of attitudes towards using digital media in PR, and the current management and communication strategies employed within marketing and communications networks or organizations.

- Contribute to the overall understanding of PR education in Saudi higher education institutions, thereby contributing to the development of training in the use of the new media and PR skills.

- Contribute positively to the sharing of knowledge and capacity-building across the PR industry in Saudi Arabia, as well as benefiting the communications agenda for corporations operating in the Saudi market.

1.8 Research Gap and Parameters of the Study

This present research is aimed at understanding how and why PR practitioners use social media in Saudi Arabia. It also explores the challenges and obstacles faced by PR professionals and organizations in the process of adopting this new technology. Also highlighted is the impact of social media use on the role of traditional media in PR practice in the Saudi context. The framework for this study is explained in depth in Chapter Two to illustrate the expected contribution to the literature and explain the gap that this research seeks to fill.

To understand the relationship between the theoretical framework of the current study and the research aims; social media must be examined in light of building two-way symmetric relationships, as this principle is essential to PR practice and represents a facility that social media networks offer PR practitioners (Grunig, 2009: 2). Thus, the present research seeks to determine how and why PR practitioners use social media, while investigating the essential principle of building and maintaining a symmetric relationship with their public.

To date, there has been a lack of studies on the subject of social media use for PR purposes in Saudi Arabia, including the training provided and the relationship between social media and PR practice. Moreover, there has been no previous, in-depth analysis of this phenomenon conducted in the Saudi context. Macnamara and Zerfass (2012: 289) state that 'significant gaps remain in knowledge of how organizations are utilizing social media for public relations communication'. Furthermore, Robson (2013: 4) identified gaps in the research on social media use among PR practitioners, declaring that

> Future research needs to go beyond the narrow scope of adoption and practitioners' attitudes towards social media and consider **how social media is enacted in organisations and how it informs the cultural practice of public relations inside the organisation.** [Emphasis added]

This study is therefore expected to fill a gap in the literature, in terms of understanding how organizations in Saudi Arabia integrate social media into their PR communications. This study also draws upon the international literature on the use of social media in PR, in order to ascertain the associated advantages, benefits, challenges, obstacles, and training, given the dearth of Saudi and regional studies on this topic. In particular, the current section highlights the research gap and parameters of the study, whereas Chapter Two presents the theoretical framework, relating it to the thesis as a whole.

1.9 Background: Saudi Arabia

As mentioned previously, an intensive literature review was conducted in this study, reviewing the global and Saudi literature (see Chapter Two). In this section, however, an attempt will be made to encapsulate the history of PR in Saudi Arabia and provide some brief background of Saudi Arabia as a country, looking at its PR industry, culture, religion, and political system.

1.9.1 Saudi Arabia and Social Media Usage

Saudi Arabia is situated on the Arabian Peninsula in the Middle East. The country plays a key role among the Gulf States and in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The official language and mother tongue of its inhabitants is Arabic, and the dominant religion is Islam, which the Kingdom shares in common with Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain (Lugmani, Quraeshi, and Yava, 1987: 59).

In 2020, according to UN data, the population of Saudi Arabia was estimated at 35 million (Worldometer, 2020), with 25 million social media users, the largest social media presence in the world (72.38% of the Saudi population) (Global Media Insight, 2021). For example, according to recent reports from media groups, Saudis constitute the biggest group of active users on Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat in the Middle East (Global Media Insight, 2021). Furthermore, it is forecast that by 2025, Internet penetration in Saudi Arabia will reach 97%, amounting to 36.2 million users (Statista, 2020).

1.9.2 Public Relations (PR) in Saudi Arabia

Public relations in the Arab peninsula traces its roots to the dawn of Islam in the early 600s (Kirat, 2015), where PR practices may be observed in the teachings of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), who employed such practices to spread the message of Islam as a new religion with distinct values and principles (Kirat 2015). However, the history of PR as an actual profession in Saudi Arabia is associated with the discovery of oil and the subsequent economic boom (Altamimi, 2014). The point at which PR was first practiced as a profession in the Kingdom, and when the first PR department was established, was marked by the founding of Saudi ARAMCO in 1933 to prospect for oil in Saudi Arabia. Saudi ARAMCO, a joint venture between Saudi Arabia and the Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL), launched the first official PR arm in the Kingdom, in order to help staff and managers from the US to acclimatize to Saudi culture, thereby avoiding communication problems (Freitang and Stokes, 2009). The practice of PR grew dramatically in Saudi Arabia during the 20th century, but due to the absence of a political system that accommodates free media and freedom of expression, PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia have encountered many obstacles that hinder their progress (Altamimi, 2014: 92).

1.9.3 Influences on Public Relations (PR) Practice in Saudi Arabia

Lugmani, Quraeshi, and Yava (1987: 59) cite a number of variables that influence the PR market in Saudi Arabia: religion, socio-economic conditions, consumer orientation, attitudes to ecology, media infrastructure, and government control and the regulatory structure. Out of these six factors, religion is highlighted as the most influential, shaping the culture. The second most influential factor is government control, which extends to the control of businesses, the education system, public media, and many other aspects of Saudi society (Lugmani, Quraeshi, and Yava, 1987: 59).

Saudi Arabia is the centre of the Islamic world, because of its two holy mosques in Makkah and Medina (Alanazi, 2013: 241). Due to the ethics of PR in Islam, PR companies in the Kingdom cannot deploy tactics like emotional appeals or fear, and neither can they use content that contains sexual references, fake research, or false evidence (Haque and Ahmad, 2016). In terms of the public media that is owned by Saudi Arabia, these consist of nine TV channels and six radio stations. Some channels are also broadcast from outside the Kingdom, such as MBC TV, which is considered as the main TV network in the Arab world (Kim, 2020). Moreover, publishers and editors in Saudi Arabia must be approved by the government before being appointed, and all newspapers must obtain a Royal Decree to operate in the Kingdom (BBC, 2006). Thus, there is a high level of control over public media and online content exercised by the Saudi government (Awad, 2009: 40), and censorship is strict, with any criticism of the government or Islam being automatically barred (BBC, 2006).

In Chapter Two, the history of PR in Saudi Arabia is described in more detail, as well as the culture and practice of Islam in Saudi Arabia, the gender ratio in PR

employment, PR education, public media, and the government's control over media outlets.

1.10 Thesis Structure

The current chapter, Chapter One, introduces the research topic, as well as presenting the research aim, study objectives, importance of the study, data collection methods, research contribution, research gap, and research parameters. The structure of the rest of this thesis, along with a brief description of each chapter, is outlined below.

1.10.1 Outline of Chapter Two: Literature Review

The review of the literature in Chapter Two relates to changes in PR communication, as deduced from the international and Saudi context. This review spans the literature on 20th century PR, before the creation of social media platforms and widespread Internet use, to the 21st century, characterized as the era of digital and social media. Also highlighted in Chapter Two are the advantages and challenges of social media use for PR practitioners and organizations. Furthermore, the literature on the lack of training is discussed, while also examining broader influences on PR practice in the Kingdom, such as culture and religion. Likewise, Chapter Two illustrates the Saudi government's political control and censorship of mass media, compared to digital and social media. Furthermore, Chapter Two discusses the theoretical framework of this research in depth. In sum, the Chapter presents a review of the relevant research, first from Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, and then from the global context, as well as explaining the theoretical framework and how it relates to the thesis as a whole.

1.10.2 Chapter Three: Research Methodologies

Chapter Three presents and explains the design, process, and execution of each methodology implemented in this research, for the purpose of the data collection. It describes the design of the instrument, presents the rationale for the questions, outlines the distribution methods relating to each methodology, and sets out the timeframe for the data collection. In addition, this Chapter justifies the sampling techniques applied and describes the study sample, after which it explains the methods used for interpreting and analyzing the data. Overall, Chapter Three describes the design of the interview guide and online questionnaires, sampling procedure, and data collection, and explains the steps taken to develop and approve these instruments.

1.10.3 Chapter Four: Survey Result and Findings - Use of Social Media by Public Relations (PR) Practitioners

Chapter Four presents and analyzes the results of the online survey conducted with 117 voluntary participants. It presents the participants' demographic data, and data on their use of social media platforms for PR – comparing their use of, for example, Facebook and Twitter, with their use of traditional media (for example, newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations). These data results are presented to explain the survey findings. Finally, this Chapter relates the survey findings to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

1.10.4 Chapter Five: Interview Results and Findings – Use of Social Media in Public Relations (PR) Communication by Organizations and Practitioners

In Chapter Five, the results of the one-to-one interviews with representatives from four selected organizations in Saudi Arabia are presented and analyzed. Also illustrated

and analyzed are the data gathered through the online questionnaires completed by 20 PR practitioners. In addition, the Chapter presents the findings for each method and relates them to the literature and study focus. In so doing, it explores the issues that surround organizations' training, policies, and guidelines for social media use in PR, as well as the challenges and obstacles facing PR practitioners and organizations in the age of digital communication.

1.10.5 Chapter Six: Discussion, Conclusion, Research Contribution, Research Limitation, and Recommendations for Future Research

Chapter Six of this thesis discusses the overall findings from the four sets of data, in light of the relevant literature and the framework of the thesis. The Chapter also concludes the thesis, and lists its contributions to the existing literature. Similarly, the Chapter makes a number of recommendations for research and practice, followed by an explanation of the study's limitations and suggestions for future studies.

1.11 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the current study, beginning with a description of the research background and then proceeding to the research aims, objectives and importance of the research. The research methodology was then explained and the anticipated contribution of the research highlighted. Finally, the structure of the thesis was presented, with a brief description of each chapter.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This current chapter investigates and discusses the impact of changes in PR practice on PR practitioners and organizations, based on the literature from Saudi Arabia and other contexts worldwide. In particular, international perspectives and definitions of PR are discussed in relation to the present research, beginning with perspectives of PR that are associated with the 20th century. These are presented in the first section, so that the various characteristics of PR itself are outlined, as identified by scholars prior to the advent of the Internet and social media tools. This first section subsequently examines perspectives and functions of PR in the 21st century context, addressing the changing characteristics of PR in the digital age. Therefore, PR practice is discussed from two main angles: prior to and following the introduction of digital and social media, highlighting the ensuing challenges and obstacles that are implicated for PR practice. Furthermore, the first section of this chapter presents and illustrates the theoretical framework underpinning this study and driving the data collection methods, while also explaining the relationship between this theoretical framework and the research aims and objectives.

In addition, this chapter examines the broader context and influences on the conceptualization and conduct of PR practice in Saudi Arabia, including the role of culture and religion (Islam), the gender ratio in PR employment, PR education, and the political and media censorship to which public media and digital outlets are subjected in the Kingdom. Specifically, the current situation regarding the use of public media in Saudi Arabia is described, together with the impact of social media use in PR practice on various aspects of Saudi society.

The final section of this chapter presents various research on the use of social media by PR practitioners and organizations in the Gulf region overall, especially Saudi Arabia. This is followed by related research from international contexts, including related findings and recommendations. The final section then concludes the chapter as a whole.

2.2 Perspectives of Public Relations (PR) in the 20th and 21st Centuries

The impact of the Internet on formats and styles of communication has contributed to the changing characteristics of PR, both in its definition and practice. For example, PR research in the 21st century refers to online PR communication, which is nuanced and layered, with more activities than were envisaged within 20th century notions of two-way PR communication. Grunig (2009: 1) states 'the new media have the potential to make the PR profession more global, strategic, two-way and interactive, symmetrical or dialogical, and socially responsible'. In particular, Tench and Yeomans (2009) compare PR involving traditional media tools with online PR (see Table 2.1), concluding that the 'old' PR is best described as the 'good news' of traditional media, disseminated via a one-way channel in a mass-marketing approach, in order to promote products and services via traditional media, especially print publications. Meanwhile, the 'new' PR communicates both good and bad news, with an emphasis on micro-targeted relationships to 'talk up' ideas, issues and trends, using all types of media and including all stakeholders and publics (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Comparison between past and present public relations (Tench and Yeomans, 2009: 329)

Media Relations Techniques	
'Old'	'New'
Press	Media
Emphasis on 'good news'	Willing to discuss both good and bad news
One-way channel	**Emphasis on relationships**
Mass-marketing approach	**Micro-targeting approach**
Promotes products and services	**Talks up issues, ideas and trends**
Focuses on print publications	**Skilled in using all types of media**
Favours press conferences	Favours individual briefings and exclusives
Only addresses the media	**Aware of all stakeholders and publics**

Furthermore, Solis and Breakenridge (2009: 35) emphasize the importance of conversation, interactivity and relationships: 'New PR is about people and relationships, not just about new tools.' The new PR has therefore introduced a key influence into the practice equation, regarding publics, the way people communicate, and the growing importance of people in driving communications. Consequently,

> PR in the era of socialized media requires a fusion of traditional PR, Internet marketing, Web-savvy market intelligence, and the ability to listen and engage in conversations without speaking in messages. (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009: 35)

Definitions of the term and functions of PR from a 20th and 21st century perspective, as espoused by scholars and professionals, have emphasised the building, management, and maintenance of relationships as the core of PR. For example, Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1985: 2) view PR as 'the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends'. Moreover, L'Etang (2009: 13) points to the role of PR as 'the occupation responsible for the management of organisational relationships and reputation'. In the same vein, the Charted Institute of Public

Relations (CIPR) in the UK defines PR as: 'the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain good will and understanding between an organisation and its publics' (Fawkes, 2007: 316). Fawkes (2007: 317-318) thereby emphasises that the terms, 'planned' and sustained' suggest that relationships are not built without effort and action, because they need to be 'established' and 'maintained' according to the definition (Fawkes, 2007: 317-318).

In their research on the excellence theory of PR, first published in 1992 (Macnamara, 2016: 335), Grunig et al's research focused on building two-way symmetric communication between organisations and their publics, where 'individuals, organizations, and the public should use communication to adjust their ideas and behaviors to those of others rather than to try to control how others think and behave' (Grunig and Grunig, 2008: 332). Furthermore, on the definition of PR, Grunig et, al., (1992: 6) emphasised relationship-building as the centre of the PR function, with the basic premise of excellence theory in PR being 'that two-way symmetric relations between organisations and their public can be achieved by PR practitioners who are positioned in senior management… and represent the interests of the organisations and their public' (Macnamara, 2016: 335).

Since the first published work on the study of excellence, which is particularly associated with the two-way symmetric model of PR, criticism of the dominant PR paradigm have been raised and discussed (Macnamara, 2016: 334-335). Macnamara (2016: 341) argues that the predominant practices in PR and strategic communication, remain one-way, and are 'more anti-social than they are social' and 'promote disintegration rather than integration of organizations within the societies and communities in which they operate.' Therefore, 'if two-way symmetric communication exists', then it should be evident when organizations use social media

networks (Macnamara (2016: 339). The new media tools are dialogical and interactive in their nature (Grunig, 2009: 2). However, the disintegration of organizations from their public is even found in their adoption of social media tools, which are fundamentally designed to offer opportunities for interaction, dialogue, co-orientation, and symmetric communication (Macnamara, 2016: 341). The next sub-section discusses the dynamic global shift in media tools, attempting to explain how these new tools have ultimately shaped the current PR field.

2.2.1 Pre-digital versus Post-digital Public Relations (PR) Practice

The impact of digital communication on PR practice has brought about a shift towards social media tools and changes in communication, occurring as a result of social media networks. Highlighted here are the various benefits of these networks for PR practitioners and organizations, alongside their obstacles and challenges.

Traditional mass media, such as newspapers and TV dominated the 20th century, wherein large-scale media were established to form a social institution that produced and disseminated symbolic content and information to entire populations (Hirsch, 1977: 27-28). Before the spread of the Internet, information was divided into two main categories: mass communication, which included newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, organizational newsletters, business publications, and interpersonal micro-communication, including conversations or letters between two people (Phillips and Young, 2009: 5). However, Phillips and Young (2009: 7) also describe how the affordances of speed and interconnectivity in Internet communication have shaped the development of online PR practice, explaining that micro-communication between two people may only have changed in terms of the time consumed, whereas context and essentiality remain intact.

Research on the importance of Internet use for PR purposes inevitably highlights the critical role of technology. According to Dutton, di Gennaro, and Hargrave (2005), successfully shaping and maintaining a public image requires effective communication with online communities. Vorvoreanu (2008) also concludes that the Internet is critical for PR professionals whose responsibility includes organizational communication management. Furthermore, Curtis et al. (2010) indicate that social media tools are beneficial methods of communication for PR practitioners, and that organizations with designated PR departments are more likely to adopt social media.

Hence, the Internet has opened up new windows of communication for PR practitioners, with four major considerations: 'platforms', 'channels', 'context', and 'content' (Philip and Young, 2009: 168). Previously, the Internet did not allow for two-way communication in online PR, as it was initially introduced solely as a data access point (Aljabre, 2013). Later, in March 2007, the Internet began to offer social platforms where users could interact (Weaver and Morrison, 2008). Nevertheless, the global PR field has generally been slow to adopt the Internet as an essential element of its practice (Phillips and Young 2009: 97). Worldwide, companies have tended to add customer relationship management to their websites and blogs, while ignoring social media sites (McCorkindale, 2010), despite being constantly reminded that social media networks are critical to their survival and profitability (Miller, 2006: 167). Furthermore, in research from the early 2000s, Shel Holtz, a professor of online PR in the US stated, the '[n]ew media is not based on the old, but it affects and changes them' (Phillips and Young, 2009: 4).

To elaborate on the above, social media networks have been identified as 'web applications that allow the creation and marketing of user-generated content' (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 62). Additionally, Richter et al. (2009) refer to the management

of social Internet systems by social networks as the miracle of Web systems management. Commenting on Richter et al. (2009), Almfleah (2017: 40) suggests that this view of social networks encompasses all practices deployed by Internet customers to expand or maintain their social organizations. Besides, social media constitute a tool for delivery and collaboration, enabling different types of relationship to be created, which are usually incomprehensible or difficult to integrate into traditional frameworks (Brogan, 2010). These online relationships not only allow users to search for data, but also enable them to pass it on to others in an informal setting (Aljabre, 2013). Moreover, social media permit the customers themselves to sell and effectively represent company brands, serving as powerful and important substitutes. Conversely, customers can just as easily have a negative impact on a brand, if their representation of it is open to interpretation or evaluation without company input or guidance (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009: 157).

It should also be considered that social media platforms are the most popular online destinations (Almfleah, 2017), contributing to the Internet's expansion as a source of data and influence on consumers and society in general. These platforms host social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (the focus of this current study), but also include wikis, podcasts, image- and video-sharing, and chat windows (Almfleah, 2017). As a consequence, social media have dramatically influenced PR practice since the appearance of the first blogs and websites. They have evolved, expanded, and been transformed into structures that can support text, images, and audio-visual content in online conversations, newsletters, mixed-media data-sharing, Internet index-marking, wikis, social media networks, and organizations of different kinds (for example, professional, international, local) (Lacey, 2017).

The new PR was born out of an analysis of how Web and multimedia content were redefining the PR concept, in preparation for the reinvention of communication between companies, influencers, and stakeholders (Breakenridge, 2008). According to the International Association of Business Communicators, most Internet clients are subscribed to social media networks such as Facebook or Twitter, which have become the main platforms for declaring and re-stating issues (Ferguson, 2018). As a result, the use of wikis and podcasts has stabilized or even declined (Liu and Bakici, 2019).

Following this discussion and clarification of the birth of social media platforms, for example, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and their influence on online PR communications, the nature of social media networks and their use in PR communication will now be examined.

2.2.2 Social Media Networks and Public Relations (PR)

The dynamic collective environment created by social media networks were already in existence by the late 2000s, with numerous and diverse active users and interaction (Wright and Hinson, 2017). In a 12-year longitudinal study, examining trends among over 5,500 PR practitioners, the above authors found that the use of social media and other types of digital communication in PR practice has grown every year since 2005, especially with regard to the adoption of Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, the Pew Research Center Report (2008) revealed an unprecedented increase in the number of Internet users posting news online, compared to the growth of traditional media. This included an increase in social media users, shifting the direction of PR research towards newly emerging PR forms – in contrast to the late 1990s, where PR researchers were predominantly interested in World Wide Web innovation. In contrast, contemporary researchers are rather interested in the direction that social

media platforms (for example, Facebook, Twitter, WeChat, Weibo) are likely to take (White and Boatwright, 2020).

To illustrate the aforementioned phenomenon, the number of social media users worldwide has tripled within a single decade, reaching an estimated 3.02 billion in 2021, compared to fewer than 1 billion in 2010 (Statista, 2021). In Saudi Arabia, over 50% of the total population were recorded as using social media in 2018 (Statista, 2020). In general, Saudis are highly motivated to seek information via social media, especially for political and social purposes, with Twitter being their main platform of choice to discuss social issues and common political interests with others (Alothman, 2013). In short, social media have radically changed certain aspects of communication for Saudis; what they currently create in discussing contentious socio-political issues on these platforms cannot be published or broadcast via traditional media, which are controlled by the government. Thus, many of the comments tweeted on Twitter cannot be expressed using traditional communication methods (Alothman, 2013). As a result, social media are facilitating political participation in Saudi Arabia beyond what was previously possible before the digital age (Al-Saggaf and Simmons, 2015).

Social media have also transformed the crisis communication landscape, because these media enable greater interactivity. Moreover, crises can be catalysed through social media, due to the nature of these media, which support creation, and the sharing and exchange of information, ideas, pictures, and videos (Apuke and Tunca, 2018). In addition, the networking capabilities of social media can substantially support crisis management practices. For example, Saroj and Pal (2020) analyzed the relationship between emergencies and social media networks, especially Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. The above authors found that natural disasters, like floods, cyclones, tsunamis, and earthquakes disrupt all forms of traditional media, while social media

remain generally unaffected and often serve as the only source of communication in such circumstances (Saroj and Pal, 2020). Consequently, government and other crisis management agencies have considered the power of social media tools and started using them to disseminate warnings, alerts, and status updates, as well as to collect information on the ground (Saroj and Pal, 2020).

In particular, Al-Saggaf and Simmons (2015) noted that social media activity intensified during two natural disasters in Saudi Arabia, and 'social media communication played a part in the way that disasters manifest and are managed'. Hence, social media have helped make crises difficult to ignore (Al-Saggaf and Simmons, 2015). For example, the Facebook page, 'Popular Campaign to Save the City of Jeddah' gave thousands of Saudi citizens a public voice during the Jeddah floods of 2009 and 2011 – many more than would have had a public voice using the more highly controlled and mediated traditional media (Al-Saggaf and Simmons, 2015). Similarly, in the United States, Hughes and Palen (2009) suggest that Twitter and similar technology are correlated with the occurrence of crises and mass convergence events. Thus,

> crisis management could start using Twitter and similar microblogging technology as a way of getting information to the public, which will further fuel personal technology adoption and set a precedent for future use in emergency warning, response and recovery situations. (Hughes and Palen, 2009)

Aside from this, Saudis are increasingly using social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to access healthcare information (Alhaddad, 2018). In tandem with this trend, organizations in Saudi Arabia are increasing their social media usage to publicize their activities or achievements and share important information (Almfleah, 2017). Here, Facebook and Twitter have changed organizational practices in Saudi Arabia (Almfleah, 2017). Similarly, in Kuwait, PR

practitioners have strongly stated their belief that social media are changing PR practice and becoming a major source of news for the public, with Twitter being the most influential (Bashir and Aldaihani, 2017).

In the literature, studies on global social media adoption that were published prior to 2010 show an overwhelming response by PR practitioners and organizations to the use of such media; for instance, Wright and Hinson (2010) conducted a survey among international PR experts, who identified Facebook as the dominant new communication tool in 2010, followed by Twitter as the second most important, with LinkedIn and YouTube as the third and fourth most important, respectively. Similarly, McCorkindale's (2010) survey of Fortune 2000 companies found that many of these companies were increasingly adopting social media as a means of communication, with 69% of the sample declaring such usage in their business practice (McCorkindale, 2010). In the relevant scholarship, it has likewise been deduced that recognition of the importance of social media is increasing, and will continue to do so as new social networks emerge (Alikilic and Atabek, 2012). For instance, Barnes (2010) identified an organizational trend towards social media-sharing, while Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) support a 'more social' approach to design in the social media sphere, emphasizing the importance of recognizing social media properties that empower consumers and render them influential, thereby facilitating relationship-building between organizations and the public. In short, social networks have become a major global communication channel for customer collaboration (Baird and Parasnis, 2011).

By way of illustration, PR executives in Greek firms tend to be well aware of the potential of digital media as an effective new means of practicing PR (Amalia and Prodromos 2014). Meanwhile, Pie et al. (2011) demonstrate that PR practitioners in Europe consider online communities to be the most significant tools for their practice,

predicting that the importance of online communities will continue to increase. Likewise, a Turkish study on social media usage among PR practitioners (Alikilic and Atabek, 2012) noted that PR practitioners in Turkey had been using social media to facilitate dialogue with their publics since the beginning of the 21st century, whereby it was revealed that social media in Turkey have created new disseminators that are characterized by online conversations and communities, consequently replacing traditional media tools.

As research on the use of social media for PR practice progresses, greater penetration of these networks by practitioners and organizations is revealed, pointing to the inevitable implementation of these new tools for organizational survival. For instance, Smith, Blazovich, and Smith (2015) found that over 80% of Fortune 500 companies were using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and nearly 60% were implementing social media in general, with hundreds of companies adopting YouTube. More recently, Dahl (2018) reported that over 66% of current Fortune 2000 organizations use social media platforms for their PR communication.

The purpose of social media adoption by an organization is to attract customers, build brand awareness, develop a brand, and track customer ratings (Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011). However, some organizations use social media to encourage an open and collaborative leadership style (Harris and Rae, 2009). Nevertheless, social media networks are not merely a tool of data exchange; they can also play a vital role in shaping various aspects of customer behaviour (Mangold and Smith, 2011). Organizations can also use these tools to influence customers' perceptions of them and their brand (Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011). For example, consumers often consider reviews and feedback on social media sites before making purchasing decisions (Liu, Karahanna, and Watson, 2011).

Nevertheless, not all companies embrace social media, due to limited resources, legal restrictions, or the lack of control over the content that can be distributed via these networks (Barnes, 2010). In fact, globally, most medium-sized companies and almost all high-end stores have generally considered Facebook and Twitter to be useless to their PR communication (Phillips and Young, 2009: 167). Thus, these platforms will only be effective as PR tools if the company has an interest in using them and an effective strategy for doing so. Hence, no matter how much the transition to online media widens access to the audience for PR professionals, these practitioners must make a significant effort to ensure that their distributed messages are received and acknowledged (Dutton, Gennaro, and Hargrave, 2005).

In light of this comment, social media differ in their function and objectives. Specifically, Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) associate social media networks with two variables: the half-life of information and the depth of information. Here, the above authors clarify that a platform like Facebook is associated with longevity, in that the content is likely to remain for a long time. It also allows for the sharing of high volumes of content, and generates discussion and reviews. In contrast, Twitter only permits short exchanges, due to the limit on the number of characters. Therefore, while Twitter can be used to increase brand awareness, it does not generate enduring content because tweets quickly disappear into the fast-moving newsfeed. Conversely, it should be acknowledged that all social media networks generate a great deal of data and significantly improve an organization's investments, as well as giving their audience a voice. Moreover, the availability of social networks allows new relationships to be built between individuals and organizations, and these networks can reconnect associations and colleagues (Lenze, 2017).

For further clarification, Smith, Blazovich, and Smith (2015) empirically studied the adoption of social media by Fortune 500 companies to identify the social media networks being used, and to ascertain whether their adoption differed by industry, firm size, and growth opportunity. However, no significant difference was found in the mean adoption of social media between industry types in the above-mentioned Fortune 500 sample, although there were some differences in the platforms adopted. For instance, manufacturing firms tended to favour Facebook and Twitter, followed by YouTube, whereas retail firms used Facebook most frequently (Smith, Blazovich, and Smith, 2015).

In more general terms, Pressgrovea, Janoske, and Haught (2018) argue that visual communication is of importance to all aspects of PR research, depending on the phase of social media evolution being examined. The above authors therefore explored a range of ways of stimulating investigation into the intersection of PR and visual communication, finding that visual communication captured users' attention and helped to predict likes and comments that could lead to conversations within social media network communities. Similarly, Al-Kandari et al. (2019) found that banks in Kuwait were integrating religious symbolism into their PR communications, using visual means on the Instagram platform to achieve a balance between religious observance and business objectives.

However, social media are collectively more physically fragmented than traditional media, and communication via these platforms requires various platform-appropriate approaches at every stage. Furthermore, the concept of a social media network is not limited to a specific platform, such as Facebook or Twitter, because these are in a constant state of change, and new technology is emerging at a more or less constant rate (Miller, 2006). This means that new tools inevitably 'evolve, multiply, and even

condense' (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009: 154). Therefore, the method through which PR practitioners and organizations adopt social media for PR practice is the aim of this current research, rather than endeavouring to ascertain the function or popularity of one platform over another. In fact, it is essential for PR practitioners and organizations to understand that the value of online PR communication does not reside in the potential or features that these social media platforms can offer, but rather in the value of the bridge established by practitioners between organizations and their publics (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009: 154-155).

In this study, the adoption of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube by PR practitioners was examined, as opposed to traditional media tools, like newspapers, TV, and radio (see Chapter Four, Survey of PR Practitioners, n=117). Facebook offers the advantage of diverse forms of presentation, with easy acceptance of comments, while Twitter offers brevity and internationality, possibly attracting more intellectual users in the sharing of broader and more objective knowledge. Meanwhile, YouTube is primarily a platform for streaming or hosting videos, wherein the content is usually easy to understand (Theaker, 2020).

Specifically, Facebook is a social network that is free of charge for all users to create profiles, post content such as text and images, and connect with friends, colleagues, associates, and relatives (Almfleah, 2017). As Dahl (2018) reports, Facebook rapidly detects problems and responds accordingly to a large audience, comparing favourably with other social media networks. Public relations practitioners attract large numbers of Facebook followers by engaging in chat about their brands and creating their own company pages (Baccarella et al., 2018). Unlike paper-based newspapers and physical TV channels, Facebook provides users with instant material to watch or read, as well as the facility to respond to content using a range of 'Like' or 'Dislike' buttons,

indicated as icons. There is no limit on time or space, and users can comment without reservation, except where comments are found to breach Facebook's community guidelines. Given that content is displayed indefinitely on a page, user feedback can be tracked, whereby organizations can identify areas that require further attention (Dhanesh, 2017a). Overall, given the diversity of Facebook posts, the speed at which they can be shared, and the facility to accept comments, Facebook provides an appropriate environment for PR professionals (Kim, 2020).

Similarly, PR practitioners and organizations can present content on Twitter – a type of 'micro-blog' that enables users to send messages of up to 140 characters, called 'tweets' (Ferguson, 2018). Images and links can also be shared in this way, providing quick updates, comments, observations, and statements. Twitter's ability to provide affiliates with instant status updates serves the most common goal of PR practitioners in using social media accounts (Willmott and Wastom, 2012). Conversely, PR professionals primarily use YouTube for video-sharing to stream large amounts of video content (Lacey, 2017). This is because YouTube has a video-centric script, unlike Facebook and Twitter, where only the appearance of content is configured. As an indication of its popularity, YouTube is the fourth most visited site in the US (White and Boatwright, 2020). It is therefore often deployed by PR practitioners, as it can be used to host content from traditional media, as well as original content created by customers and potential partners (White and Boatwright, 2020).

In the literature, comparisons are also drawn between the use of social media networks and traditional media (newspapers, TV, radio) for PR practice. For instance, in their study on the use of social media by PR practitioners and organizations in Europe, Verhoeven et al. (2012) concluded that while social media are gaining importance among the mix of media tools in European organizations, they are still not generally

considered to be as important for PR communication as print media or working with journalists. However, Verhoeven et al. (2012) predicted that social media would eventually take over online PR communication. Conversely, Wiesenberg, Verčič, and Zerfass (2016) identified a shift from the prevalence of mass media to owned media, whereupon mass media, in particular, are losing importance in western and northern Europe, and to a lesser extent, in eastern and southern Europe. However, the rising importance of new content practices is considered more or less equally important across the European zone.

In the following sub-section, the various benefits of using social media networks in PR practice will now be explained, as well as some of the challenges and obstacles encountered by PR practitioners as a result.

2.2.3 Benefits of Using Social Media in Public Relations (PR) Practice

Social media support the presentation component in PR practice, with PR professionals using different networks in different contexts. In the era of mass media, PR practitioners only had recourse to printed materials and radio or TV broadcasting, drawing upon press releases, board reputation, conferences, and participation in exhibitions, amongst other channels (Almfleah, 2017). Consequently, it was difficult for PR practitioners to track, weight and measure results, unlike the affordances of social media, which offer an opportunity to connect directly with customers. Whether through the flexibility of Facebook, brevity of Twitter, or rich information of YouTube videos, each platform provides an alternative way for PR practitioners to present their content (Wright and Hinson, 2017). Furthermore, social media facilitate communication, due to the speed at which different types of content can be delivered, and the opportunity for PR practitioners to participate both as respondents and

initiators within exchanges (Bivins, 2017). Thus, communication has been accelerated and expanded by social media, given the ease of use with which ordinary people can express their opinions and describe their experiences via these platforms (Lacey, 2017). Therefore, organizations can gather customer opinions or other feedback about themselves and respond quickly (Flew, 2018).

Overall, the main benefit of social media platforms is that they remain visible and accessible to the public, enabling organizations to connect with potential customers (Sutherland et al., 2020). Consequently, there has been a general shift towards using social media in PR practice to enhance exchanges between organizations and the public (Lenze, 2017). Therefore, the benefits of communication and presentation are associated with social media use.

An equally important benefit of social media for PR practice is the facility for gathering information, whereby social media provide PR practitioners with an opportunity to gather data and explore public assessments of specific issues (Ferguson, 2018). While the data that are circulated via social media are aimed at informing the public, advertisers on these platforms also receive ratings and comments, even engaging in chats with customers about the data presented. For instance, White and Boatwright (2020), and Kent and Li (2020) report that researchers can gather vast amounts of information via social networks. Likewise, PR practitioners can obtain knowledge by participating in conversations, and gathering reviews and responses from those involved in campaigns, which consequently influences their practice (Sutherland et al., 2020). Before the era of social media, PR practitioners were obliged to run extensive surveys, but social media platforms now save cost and time by enabling PR practitioners to approach and engage directly with the public (Bivins, 2017).

Therefore, social media are not limited solely to providing data; they also enable PR practitioners to approach the public to collect data (Kent and Li, 2020). Moreover, interaction and engagement are other affordances of social media for PR practitioners and organizations. As part of this process, tools such as hashtags, first introduced by the Twitter platform, can further facilitate data collection and engagement with the public (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Since social media enable PR practitioners to create and implement a communication process, permitting direct communication between and within organizations, and between organizations and their external audience, questions can be asked and topics discussed at any time by arrangement or in social media posts. This enables prompt and legitimate communication for the purpose of problem-solving and to protect an organization's image with minimal effort (Brunner, 2019). Therefore, data-gathering, interaction, and engagement are three factors of social media that are afforded to PR practice in the contemporary context.

Meanwhile, social media have also improved the performance of PR practitioners, with PR implementation becoming more professional and creative (Kent and Li, 2020). Additionally, communicating via social media enables organizations to better understand their public and explore key elements or various topics (White and Boatwright, 2020). Social media also assist with the formation, development, and maintenance of relationships, bringing PR personnel, organizations, and the public closer than ever before (Dhanesh, 2017b).

Prior to the launch of social media, PR practitioners built relationships by talking to and interacting with organizations via their employees, which was often a difficult task (Theaker, 2020). In contrast, audio-visual content can now be delivered to the public one item at a time, accelerating the development of working relationships (Reddi, 2019). Thus, Taylor and Kent (2014) suggest that social media can help PR

professionals build new relationships with the public in broader areas, where they can connect with multiple actors and create more extensive and diverse social relationships (Dhanesh, 2017b). What is more, social media enhance actual practice for PR practitioners (Kim, 2020), in that close and equally balanced relationships can be formed with all stakeholders (Gelinas et al., 2017). Consequently, improved performance, and the development and maintenance of relationships are merits of social media that are available to PR practitioners and the PR industry. Moreover, as the number of social media users grows and there is ongoing expansion in online activities, social media users can republish the content and comments that are distributed via these channels, thereby providing wider perspectives and deeper insights into news items, while also ensuring a larger audience (White and Boatwright, 2020). Therefore, social media have the potential to offer wider coverage. The next section will now discuss the obstacles and challenges that PR practitioners often encounter when adopting social media tools.

2.2.4 Challenges and Obstacles Facing the Adoption of Social Media Networks for Public Relations (PR) Practice

Irrespective of the identified benefits of adopting social media for PR practice, some of the challenges facing PR practitioners arise from these very benefits. For instance, the widespread coverage of information that is made possible by social media can present a problem if the information is negative, with the power to ruin a firm's reputation (Sheikh et al., 2017). Studies on the challenges facing PR practitioners have revealed lack of control as most commonly reported in relation to social media adoption, because there is a risk of exposing a company's internal and external crises (Distaso, McCorkindale, and Wright 2011). According to Dwivedi et al. (2021), user-

generated content has changed the dynamics of influence and empowered individuals, not just organizations. Therefore, in the era of digital and social media, the challenge for PR practitioners is to understand the nature and mechanisms of communication, in order to ascertain these exchanges can be influenced for their own strategic benefit (Phillips and Young, 2009).

Furthermore, benefits such as communication (especially fast communication), engagement, interaction, and relationship-building constitute double-edged swords for PR practitioners. This shift in PR practice requires studying participants' attitudes in online networks, because they represent traditional communities. Thus, 'how they communicate is subject to the tools and networks that people adopt based on the influence of their social graph and the culture within' (Solis and Breakenridge 2009: 154). Consequently, the successful adoption of digital communications and social media by PR practitioners involves a full understanding of the content of each network. Additionally, understanding the culture of online communities will enable PR practitioners to reach the very people whom they intend to target, 'along with their shared content, thoughts, perceptions, and predispositions' (Solis and Breakenridge 2009: 59). In fact, without understanding the audiences, social media can be very dangerous, and they are 'no place for real-time experimentation' (Solis and Breakenridge 2009: 59). Most importantly, the shift requires PR practitioners to listen to and observe what the public desire and how individuals form relationships with each other.

Public relations practitioners have the opportunity to excel in the era of the new technology. Nevertheless, at this time, they first need to become the people whom they want to reach (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009: 277). Consequently, training is required for PR practitioners, and this training must include a focus on how to determine what

tools to use, how to use them, and how to measure their use effectively, whereupon 'companies must be prepared to efficiently navigate through the ever-changing landscape of social media tools as each day brings new forms of social media' (Distaso, McCorkindale, and Wright 2011: 327).

At the International Conference on Communication, Media, Technology and Design in 2017, Kuruc and Opiyo (2017) presented a paper on the opportunities and obstacles associated with social media use in contemporary PR practice, wherein they argued that the new opportunities presented by social media had possibly enhanced both the actual and potential impact of PR in corporate, government, and non-governmental sectors worldwide. It was concluded that in order to enhance the impact of social media use among PR practitioners and organizations, it was necessary

> to equip existing and emerging PR practitioners with requisite skills that would enable them to cope with the new advances in technology and widely documented emerging shift to the usage, as well as influence and dominance, of social media as the preferred sources of information for most people in modern society. (Kuruc and Opiyo, 2017: 11)

The above authors further argued that such empowerment of PR practitioners could take at least two different forms: 1) through ongoing and on-the-job training of practitioners in the use of new media, enabling them to master and adapt to a range of new technologies, and 2) through institutions of higher learning, like universities, offering PR programmes within updated curricula, where courses on the theoretical and practical aspects of social media could be incorporated (Kuruc and Opiyo, 2017).

Likewise, in reviewing the stages of social journalism that take place via social media in the Fortune 500, Smith, Blazovich, and Smith (2015) claimed that sharing and collaborating with clients was a problem, giving reasons. The above study analyzed the viability or efficiency (ROI) of social networks by examining Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, finding that this remained a test that necessitated

communication being broken down into stages. In the next sub-section, the theoretical

framework of this study will therefore be presented and explained.

2.2.5 Theoretical Framework and Research Gap

In *Managing Public Relations,* Grunig and Hunt (1984: 21) constructed four PR

models to help understand the stages of development in PR history, prior to and during

the 20th century. As explained in Chapter One, this study has aimed to understand how

and why PR practitioners and organizations adopt social media for PR practice in

Saudi Arabia, applying Grunig and Hunt's (1984: 21) four proposed PR models to

construct the parameters of the theoretical framework that underpins this research, and

to drive the data collection in terms of designing the questions, and defining the

expected results (see Chapter Three: Research Methodology for more depth). In

Figure 2.1, a description of each PR model is presented, according to its authors.

Pre-20th century PR

The press agent/publicity model

Publicity driven PR

Grunig and Hunt (1984); Grunig et, al. (1992)

20th century PR

The public information model

Disclosing accurate information, no research, no two-way communication

Grunig and Hunt (1984); Grunig et, al. (1992)

20th-21st century PR

Two-way symmetric/asymmetric model

Building relations based on communication between organisations and their public

Grunig and Hunt (1984); Grunig et, al. (1992); Grunig (2009); Macanamra (2016)

21st century PR

Social media adoption for PR communication/two-way symmetric model

Challenges and obstacles, policies, guidelines, education, training

Macnamar and Zerfass (2012); Robson and James (2013); Robson (2013); Bashir and Aldaihani (2017)

In addition, Chapter Three discusses and explains how each PR model is assessed in relation to the PR function that is extracted from the data gathered from all the participants. Furthermore, Grunig (2009: 2) summarized that the principle of two-way and symmetrical communication must be integrated into PR for it to be effective, with research, listening, and dialogue being used to manage and build relations with both internal and external strategic publics. Here, the author associates the potential of achieving two-way symmetrical communication with the emergence of new media tools, due to their dialogical, interactive, relational, and global properties, which make them a major player in a strategic management paradigm of PR (Grunig, 2009: 2). Conversely, according to Macnamara (2016: 337), research conducted prior to and

after the age of interactive social media networks shows that organizations and PR practitioners predominately use social media as tools for disseminating organizational messages and persuasion in an orientational rather than co-orientational way, which would otherwise enable both sides – organizations and their public – to communicate and participate. Interestingly, Macnamara (2016: 343) notes that listening – identified as an essential component of communication – has not been listed in many PR research monographs or textbooks that include text on excellence theory (Grunig et al., 1992).

Macnamara's (2016: 341) view of the functions of PR and strategic communication in achieving the crucial PR principle of two-way symmetric communication with the public (Grunig, 2009) must be investigated according to socially integrated PR models that would shift the ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations of the PR field. In this regard, Manamara (2016: 341) explains that this shift in the ontological foundation would take PR from a management function that serves the organization's interests, to a function informed by pluralism and serving as a social function for the organization and society. However, a shift in the epistemological foundation would move PR from a rationalist-scientific approach to a humanistic, subjectivist, and socially constructed perspective of how knowledge, meaning, and understanding are created. Lastly, changes in the methodological foundation of PR would move from quantitative generalization, with goals and predicted control, to qualitative methods that produce cultural findings with goals and social media change (Macnamara, 2016: 341).

As noted in Figure 2.1, above, in relation to the 21st century literature, this current study extends on research that addresses gaps in the literature, as identified by Macnamara and Zerfass (2012), concerning the use of social media by organizations and PR practitioners in two-way communication. This study therefore investigates and

identifies the challenges and obstacles that PR practitioners face when adopting social media around the world (see, for example, Robson, 2013; Robson and James, 2013; Bashir and Aldaihani, 2017).

Mcnamara and Zerfass (2012: 303) note that globally, early use of online networks for organizational communication was mainly experimental and random, rather than strategically planned. In particular, there was a lack of clear objectives, no integration with other organizational communication, and no assessment based on objectives or KPIs. Despite the popularity of social media studies in PR in Europe and Australia, Macnamara and Zerfass (2012: 289) state that 'significant gaps remain in knowledge of how organizations are utilizing social media for public relations communication.'

Robson (2013) extended on the work of Macnamara and Zerfass (2012), finding that despite the boom in academic research in the area of social media adoption for PR practice, significant gaps remain in the knowledge of how organizations are using social media. In particular, Robson (2013) calls for future research to investigate

> why a lack of strategy and governance is prevalent in organisations, why organisations are failing to embrace the dialogic, collaborative and engagement features of social media to build relationships with their publics, and gain a deeper understanding of how social media is organised and practiced by organisations. (Robson, 2013: 12)

Robson and James (2013) also extended on Macnamara and Zerfass's (2012) statement, in order to further understand the perception of social media usage, drawing upon practitioners' experience. The above authors demonstrated that the majority of their participants lacked a strategic approach to their current use and plans for future use (Robson and James, 2013: 12). They called for further investigation to help understand how PR practitioners could overcome barriers and explore the possibilities offered by technology, in terms of moving towards the adoption of social media for

building a two-way communication relationship with their public (Robson and James, 2013: 12).

In the Gulf region, and in line with the research highlighted above, Bashir and Aldaihani (2017) interviewed PR practitioners in Kuwait to understand how organizsations use social media networks and identify the challenges and barriers that they encounter when adopting these new media tools. Bashir and Aldaihani (2017) also explored the perceived advantages of using social media for PR communications, from the perspective of PR practitioners in Kuwait, together with the barriers that they encountered when adopting these new tools. They also looked at whether and to what extent these tools had changed PR practice in the context, suggesting the need for a strategic approach, in terms of purpose, roles, responsibilities, policies, and guidelines for the management of social media among higher management and PR practitioners. Moreover, it was found in the above study that there was a need for improvements to the PR curriculum and practicum, so that communication technologies could be integrated into PR practice.

Meanwhile, this current study extends the investigation of how social media have changed the way in which PR practitioners and organizations conduct PR, comparing current approaches with the use of traditional media tools, and exploring the impact of social media on this usage. This clearly necessitates an examination of how organizations implement social media tools in their PR communications, while identifying and understanding the accompanying challenges to that implementation. However, this study also looks at the policies and guidelines that organizations integrate into their agenda when using social media.

In discussing various perspectives and definitions of the nature and function of PR in the context of the 20th and 21st centuries, a new understanding of PR may be gained in

light of the emergence of the Internet and social media tools. More specifically, the next section discusses the extant literature on PR in Saudi Arabia.

2.3 Public Relations (PR) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)

In this section, the literature from the Saudi context is reviewed, in order to try and understand the history and development of PR practice in the Kingdom. Public relations will therefore be discussed in the general context of the Middle East and the specific case of KSA, pre- and post-Millennium, in order to clarify changes in the characteristics of the PR industry, which are associated with a shift in the use of media tools. According to Grunig (2008: 338), global research on PR communication relating to the two-way symmetric model must consider contextual conditions, including culture and language, the political and economic system, and the media overall. In this section, Saudi culture and religion (Islam), the education system in KSA, Saudi politics and public media, and the Saudi government's censorship of media outlets are explored, among other elements that potentially impact the PR industry in the Kingdom.

All research on 20th century PR in Saudi Arabia is likely to take 1923 as the starting point, this being the year when the modern state of Saudi Arabia was founded (Alanazi, 1996: 247). The significance of PR at this time lay in the fact that communication became a matter of priority for the Saudi government, due to the need for the reigning King (Abdulaziz Al-Saud) to communicate with tribal leaders across the Kingdom (Alanazi, 1996: 243). Specifically, Alanazi (1996) refers to PR activities such as lobbying, the opening of Consulates in different countries, and the exercise of diplomacy to resolve Arab-Israeli conflict. The 20th century understanding of PR involved building relationships and engaging in two-way communication with the

public and other stakeholders. Prior to this, rulers in the Gulf region had communicated with the people in open meetings.

Later, in 1933, ARAMCO was formed as a joint venture between Saudi Arabia and the Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL), with the aim of prospecting for oil in the Kingdom (Freitang and Stokes, 2009). ARAMCO subsequently established its first official PR arm to help its personnel from the US to acclimatize to Saudi culture, so that communication problems could be avoided (Freitang and Stokes 2009). Public relations practices were further developed in the Gulf during the 1950s (Alanazi, 1996: 252; Abu Osbaa, 1998), when other foreign companies began their operations in the Gulf States, within and on the back of the oil industry. Initially, however, PR was predominantly concerned with the companies' advertising and publicity departments (Badran, 2014: 11). In this way, it was during the 1950s that PR was first practiced as a profession in Saudi Arabia,

From the 1970s to the 1980s, there was subsequently a transformation in Gulf PR practices, with the adoption of international standards, because of the rapid development in local economies due to oil exports, the arrival of an experienced foreign workforce, and the expansion of local media (Badran, 2014: 12). In particular, the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) recognised the potential of PR in the Middle Eastern region during the 1980s and included a Gulf States chapter, with practitioners in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Smith, 2014). Then, in 2003, the IPRA established a Gulf Chapter in Dhahran, KSA to organize training programmes and an annual conference, with a code of conduct for its 500 members from across the GCC (Badran 2014: 17).

Nevertheless, research associated with 20th century PR in the Arab world in general and KSA in particular indicate that PR was not initially understood as an actual professional practice, or even given much importance by Arab governments or local organizations. For example, Al-Enad (1990) notes that in the Arab world, the term, 'general relations' is usually applied, rather than any term that could be translated as 'public relations'. In fact, the term 'public relations' or even 'public' has no identifiable equivalent in the Arabic language (Al-Enad, 1990). Neither does the term appear in the 'general relations' literature published in Arabic. Therefore, the function of PR practice was initially unfamiliar and misunderstood in the Arab world. In this regard, the reference to PR as 'general relations' may have been responsible for the continuing ambiguity of the aims, nature, opportunities, and plans associated with PR (Al-Enad, 1990). This misunderstanding of PR persisted in Saudi Arabia until the early 21st century, where budgets and other resources for PR departments were barely considered in organizations (Alanazi, 1996). The findings reported by Al-Enad, (1990) and Alanazi (1996) were reflected in the interview data gathered from academics in this current study.

In the latter part of the 20th century, as revealed in the relevant research, the relationship between PR and the media was weak in Saudi Arabia. Alanazi (2013: 253) reports that two thirds of a sample of survey respondents (n=55) comprising PR practitioners had never contacted or worked with the media, despite the fact that in the West, the media determines the function and success of PR practitioners. Al-Enad (1990) even states that PR was used in Saudi Arabia during the 20th century 'just for the sake of using it', while Badran, Turk, and Walters (2003) claim that the expectations of PR professionals in public and private agencies in the Middle East reflect an old-fashioned view of PR functions. The above authors argue that PR is

merely used as an excuse to fill the position of PR officer or create a post for an administrative assistant.

According to Hussein, Mohammed, and Harron (1991, cited in Alanazi 1996: 248), PR in the Arab world did not become a research topic until towards the end of the 1970s, namely, in Egypt from 1975-1980; Iraq in 1978; Sudan in 1979, and the UAE in 1984. The above-mentioned studies found several common problems facing PR practitioners, including the absence of a top-level PR role in organizations; varying definitions of the PR role; a limited PR vision among employees; secondary importance attached to PR; low PR budgets; a lack of research and scientific planning, and interference in PR departments by other departments (Hussein, Mohammed, and Harron, 1991, cited in Alanazi 1996: 248).

In contrast, there was an overwhelming increase in the number of PR companies operating in the Gulf region during the first decade of the 21st century. According to Abdelhay (2014), this increase was as much as 63% between 2006 and 2010. In Saudi Arabia, the market has created a space for PR, due to various reasons that include the inescapable demand for PR services and media relations among organizations (Alsharq Alawsat, 2006). With regard to the Kingdom's media industry, however, it has entered a new era through the technology revolution and new means of communication that are available to Saudi citizens. These technologies have altered the direction of the media, because 'normal citizens, in the era of new media, have transformed into journalists, and thus, the whole equation of the media as we know it, has changed' (Alarabiya, 2018).

Research on Internet use among Saudi PR practitioners in the early 21st century (Al-Shohaib, Al-Kandari, and Abdulrahim, 2009) found that only 46% of PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia ever used the Internet for PR tasks, indicating that PR in Saudi Arabia

had been slow to assimilate the Internet. Later research on this usage in Saudi Arabia showed that PR professionals tended to use the Internet for media relations, to broadcast news videos, access news items, and publish news on organizations' websites for general public consumption (Al-Shohaib, Al-Kandari, and Abdulrahim, 2009).

In terms of research on PR practice in one university in the Saudi capital of Riyadh, Alanazi (2013) demonstrated that practitioners are generally familiar with PR activities, such as writing press releases and newsletters, communicating with the media, hosting events, etc. Conversely, one study on the use of social media platforms by organizations in Saudi Arabia (Almfleah, 2017) compared the use of Facebook and Twitter by companies in the Kingdom's private and public sectors, in an attempt to understand the magnitude of the ethical implementation of two-way symmetrical communication by companies with their publics via social media. Almfleah (2017: 144-146) found that PR practitioners were unlikely to adopt the two-way symmetrical model, in that the organizations studied mainly used social media to publicize their activities or achievements and share important information. It was therefore concluded that rigid structures in Saudi public organizations were likely to continue to impede the advancement of two-way symmetrical practice. Moreover, the Saudi public neither sought nor expected equal reciprocation from organizations.

Hence, Almfleah (2017: 24) argues that 'the roles of PR practitioners in public and private enterprises in Saudi Arabia remain ambiguous… and appear trapped within the vague concept that organizations and people in Saudi Arabia have cast upon PR practices'. Besides, PR practitioners in private and public organizations do not appear to regularly engage their publics in online debates, but both private and public organizations use Facebook and Twitter in an ethical manner (Almfleah, 2017: 240).

Nevertheless, it should perhaps be borne in mind that Phillips and Young (2009) suggest the same regarding the international adoption of the Internet for PR purposes.

To conclude these points, Almahraj (2017) investigated the knowledge possessed by PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia, together with the ways in which Saudi culture and public communication factors affect PR practitioners in the Saudi context, finding that practitioners' knowledge came from their everyday experiences. This type of knowledge was viewed as important in Saudi PR recruitment. Furthermore, Almahraj (2017) focused more on cultural factors in Saudi Arabia and their multi-level influence on PR practice, which will be discussed in the following sub-section.

2.3.1 Culture, Religion, and Public Relations (PR) in Saudi Arabia

According to Almfleah (2017: 146) PR practice in Saudi Arabia cannot be defined according to Western perspectives, and in research on PR in Saudi Arabia, the role of culture and Islam cannot be overlooked. Instead, an understanding of how these factors shape the daily practice of PR practitioners is required. From an international perspective, empirical evidence has shown that culture influences communication, with the diversity of cultures and political systems worldwide causing PR practice to differ from one country to another (Sriramesh and Verčič, 2003). In general, PR must deal with the surrounding culture to achieve its communication objectives (Gaither and Curtin, 2007). Therefore, this sub-section discusses the impact of culture and religion (Islam) on the use of social media by PR practitioners, examining how culture and religion are embodied in Saudi society, and how they influence various aspects of the PR industry in the Kingdom.

In research on the influence of cultural factors – such as customs and Islamic culture and religion – on PR practice in Saudi Arabia, Almahraj (2017) identified several

features that affect how PR practitioners in the Kingdom communicate with their publics, as well as looking at how these practitioners behave in their professional lives and organise their work. Among these cultural features are *karam* and *wasta.* The term *karam* translates into English as 'generosity', while *wasta* is the equivalent of 'nepotism' in English, although it literally means 'connection' (Almahraj, 2017) and can refer to personal intermediaries (Mann, 2014), mediation, or intercession (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1994). Almahraj (2017) explains that *karam* affects ethical behaviour in the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists. Conversely, *wasta* is often responsible for the lack of professionalism in the Saudi PR industry, because it results in employing unqualified staff. However, Almahraj (2017) also emphasizes the benefits of positive *wasta,* which can lead to relationships between PR practitioners and journalists. Moreover, Alanazi (2013) notes that interpersonal communication is very important in a relationship-based culture like that of Saudi Arabia, stating: 'When looking for public relations practitioners, interpersonal communication is one of many important skills that should be taken into consideration.'

Conversely, the influence of Islam is evident in almost every aspect of Saudi practice, including social and economic issues (Aldossary et al., 2008). The Kingdom is recognized as the centre of the Islamic world, due to its two sacred mosques, which are located in Mecca and Medina (Awad, 2009: 9). Therefore, Saudi culture is a mixture of traditional and Islamic values, making it difficult to distinguish between culture and religion (Gallagher, 1985). Consequently, in most of the discussion in this current study, Saudi culture and Islam are treated as a single factor in their influence on Saudi PR practice.

In particular, Almahraj (2017) summarizes these cultural features 'as stemming from Islam that regulates and dictates an individual's ethical code as well as behaviour and practitioners' identity'. Beg (2008) also notes that Saudi Arabia has an Arab Islamic government, with a Constitution and legal framework that is derived from the Qur'an. Other studies have likewise related Saudi culture to Islam and the Arabic language, which largely form local culture in the Kingdom. For instance, according to Facey et al. (2006: 4), Saudi society maintains close ties with its principles through Islam and the Arabic language, the latter determining the identity of native Saudis – Dennis et al. (2015) revealed that Saudis tend to use Arabic more often than English while accessing the Internet.

Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that there are large numbers of foreigners residing in the Kingdom; in 2015, 30% of the population consisted of expatriates (Arab News, 2015). Therefore, the effect of a large immigrant population on local culture should be noted in this study. According to Nazzal (2015), a combination of foreign cultures, languages, and religions is inevitably found in Saudi Arabia, given the high numbers of expatriate workers from many different countries. This sub-section merely highlights certain aspects of foreign culture that have been introduced into the Kingdom, in order to gain a deeper understanding of contemporary Saudi culture, but these influences will not to be examined further in this study.

In particular, the influence of the West has been emphasised in the relevant literature. To understand this Western influence, the current sub-section clarifies its nature in relation to Saudi Arabia, as indicated by Hall (1992: 277, cited in Hardy 2010: 2), who argues that 'Western' refers to a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern. In any case, the term 'West' is used to indicate all developed societies in the world, encompassing predominantly white, English-

speaking countries such as Australia and New Zealand, and the economically advanced Asian countries, especially Japan (Hardy, 2010: 2).

That said, in this current study, the Western influence refers to the predominantly English-speaking, developed nations. For example, Zamil (2013) describes Western influence as evident in Saudi Arabia in the adoption of Western dress and use of English instead of Arabic for some words and conversations. Moreover, as illustrated earlier, PR as a profession associated with contemporary media was introduced into Saudi Arabia by ARAMCO, a joint venture between Saudi Arabia and an American company (Freitang and Stokes 2009). Therefore, the terms 'West' or 'Western' in this study mainly refer to the US and/or Europe. As Hardy (2010: 3) explains: 'The "West" generally refers to the nation-states of North America and Western Europe. These are advanced, industrialized capitalist economies.'

Hence, a PR culture that is profoundly impacted by Western knowledge is reflected in Saudi PR practice, through the knowledge possessed by Saudi PR practitioners (Almahraj, 2017: 205). However, this knowledge does not necessarily enhance PR practice in the Kingdom, as Almahraj (2017: 205) explains that PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia generally apply more culturally sensitive knowledge, because 'the local cultural values are not recognized in knowledge that is borrowed from Western sources'.

In terms of social media use and its impact on cultural features of Saudi society, Al-Saggaf (2004) revealed the strong impact of social networks on the conservative culture of both male and female Saudis, among whom social networks allow more space for open-minded thinking, discussion, and self-expression. More specifically, as highlighted by Al-Salem (2005), the widespread use of social media has been reflected in the perceptions and self-perceptions of Saudi women, especially in their attitudes

toward their culture, faith, and own identity. This is because social media have enabled them to publicly express their thoughts and opinions online, thereby giving them a voice (Al-Salem, 2005).

In contrast, the influence of social media on Saudi society can be seen in challenges to religious authority, where social media have exposed male and female Saudis to ideas that conflict with traditional religious and cultural values, sometimes extending to profanity, obscenity, and criticism of Saudi Arabia (Al-Saggaf, 2004; 2011). It should be considered here that religious authority in Saudi Arabia exerts a powerful influence over people's behaviour and lifestyles, as well as on the media content that is distributed through various outlets in the Kingdom (Al-Kahtani, 1999). However, such a clash of values and opinions is not new to the Saudi public. According to Alanazi (1996), progress and development have regularly conflicted with the vision of the Saudi religious authorities, one example of this being the introduction of satellite TV into the Kingdom in the 1990s, whereupon it was initially outlawed by the religious authorities. Prior to this, during the early 1950s, the introduction of radio broadcasting caused some religious leaders to brand the medium as satanic, 'yielding only when the King persuaded them that the radio, as well as the telephone and the automobile, were innovations that could be used to serve religious purposes as well' (Alanazi, 1996, cited in Alanazi, 2017).

2.3.2 Gender and the Public Relations (PR) Profession in Saudi Arabia

In terms of gender, research associated with PR towards the end of the 20th century in Saudi Arabia suggests a very low percentage of female PR practitioners. For instance, Alanazi (1996: 251) collected data in 1992 from Saudi PR practitioners working in all 21 government Ministries, 34 government public agencies, and six government

companies, located in Saudi Arabia's three main cities: Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dahran. Alanazi (1996) deduced from the above-mentioned survey results that PR was still a male-dominated field in Saudi Arabia at the time, whereby '[o]nly three of the 228 respondents were females, and only 26 female employees [were] reported in all of the respondents' organizations'. However, although Alanazi (2013) noted that 78.2% of the survey participants were male, 21.8% did not specify their gender. Therefore, the researcher's assumptions about gender were based on his existing knowledge of the Saudi community. These findings should also be compared with a later study by the same researcher (Alanazi, 2013), which examined the ratio of men to women in PR employment, specifically from an international perspective. Alanazi (2013) referenced the work of authors such as Grunig and Grunig (2011), indicating that, globally, PR practice had already started to become a predominantly female profession, decades previously.

According to the International Bank Report (2019), and the International Labour Association (2019), the progress of Saudi women in various job sectors in the Kingdom, including media professions, is illustrated by the statistic that 22% of Saudi women were working outside the home in 2016, compared to 78% of Saudi men. Furthermore, the International Bank Report clarified that Saudi women were employed in similar jobs to Saudi men, with the exception of physically dangerous jobs, such as those commonly encountered in construction (Alwatan, 2019). According to the International Labour Organization, the progress of Saudi women in the job market has been consistently increasing since the 1990s, with Saudi women representing 14% of the workforce in 1990, 16% in 2000, 18% in 2010, and 22% in 2018, with an increase to 30% forecast for 2030 (Alwatan, 2019). In terms of the media

sector, the first female Saudi TV presenter was Weam Al Dakheel, who became a programme host on the official Saudi TV channel in 2016 (The Conversation 2019).

Consequently, recent studies and reports on PR in Saudi Arabia indicate that Saudi women have made significant workplace progress (Sheikh et al., 2017). However, research on female Saudi PR practitioners highlights Saudi culture and society as a potential barrier. According to Lenze (2017), Saudi norms and traditions have hampered the progress of Saudi women in the PR industry, although many Saudi women have been successful in this professional domain over recent years. Nevertheless, few have obtained positions in the private sector, favouring jobs in government or the charity sector instead (Lenze, 2017). Studies on Saudi public or government sectors have tended to highlight some of the merits that attract Saudi women to such occupations. Al-Abdulkader (2009, cited in Almahraj 2017: 28) explains that Saudis prefer not to work in the private sector 'because of smaller salaries, longer working hours, and the lack of job security'. Conversely, the public sector has generally been viewed as secure, because for a long time, the Saudi government was the main driver of the nation's economy. Consequently, the majority of citizens were employed in state utilities (Alnuaim, 2013: 37).

Other research, such as by Al Shohaib et al. (2009), has cited the scope of daily PR work as the main barrier to women entering PR practice in Saudi Arabia. The above authors argue that the nature of PR and its operational needs, such as the obligation to travel and work with men, can pose a problem in the face of Saudi societal restrictions. These conflicts have discouraged Saudi women from entering PR professions.

Alsohaib et al.'s (2009) argument may be better understood if other research on Saudi women in PR is compared, where it describes the characteristics of Saudi culture that affect women's mobility and their work in general. For example, women in Saudi

Arabia must gain permission from their male legal guardians to travel, take a job, or enroll in university (Deif, 2008). In addition, an important concept relating to women in Saudi culture is their reluctance to talk to an audience of strangers, unless it is an exclusively female audience (Al-dubaikhi, 2013). Al-dubaikhi (2013) therefore hypothesises that Saudi women have low occupational levels, in a critique that presents Saudi women as traditional in their views of women who appear on TV, talk on the radio, or participate in mixed gatherings.

In one study conducted in 2006 by the Center of Saudi Women in Media, using a sample of 209 participants (86% female; 12% male), it was found that 48% of the participants were aged 15-25 years, and 30% were aged 25-35 years (Alriyadh, 2006). The above study aimed to understand how Saudi society portrayed women who work in media occupations, including PR. The survey results showed that the majority of the female respondents were concerned about how Saudi society (including other Saudi women) viewed their work in media (Alriyadh, 2006). The survey also found that 78% of the respondents thought it was important to have women working in all areas of the media, amid the rapid development taking place in the field of communications technology. Moreover, this new technology was perceived to have changed many conservative views of women working in the media in KSA, paving the way for Saudi women to develop themselves in the field, and work alongside their male counterparts (Alriyadh, 2006).

The next sub-section will now examine PR education in the Kingdom, looking at the education provided for both male and female students to further reflect on the gender ratio in PR employment. The relevant literature and interview data concerning gender will also be highlighted from an educational perspective.

2.3.3 Education, Training, and Public Relations (PR) in Saudi Arabia

Understanding the education system and the kind of training that various institutions offer in the Kingdom made it possible in this study to ascertain the background and skills possessed by Saudi PR practitioners, and to shed further light on the ratio of male to female PR professionals in the Kingdom. For instance, Egyptian education has influenced the Saudi education system, because the Kingdom initially hired Egyptians and adopted an Egyptian curriculum and education system, when formal Saudi education was first established in the early 20th century (Wiseman et al., 2008, cited in Almahraj 2017: 46). Almaharaj (2017) likewise describes the history of education in the Kingdom, starting with the early 20th century; in 1935, the Saudi government began to sponsor Saudi students to travel abroad, mainly to Egypt, so that they could study education, agriculture, medicine, and Shariah law. However, in 1942, the Saudi government broadened the scope of its sponsorship programme and more students travelled to different destinations in the world for study purposes, including the US, Europe, Japan, China, Australia, Canada, and South Korea. Almaharaj (2017) clarifies that the number of students studying abroad has increased over the years, as demonstrated by the official figures: 'in 2005 there were 9,241 individuals who graduated with a bachelor's degree abroad, and in 2011 there were 46,438 individuals with a bachelor's degree' (Ministry of Higher Education 2016, cited in Almahraj, 2017: 46).

According to Sriramesh (2003), several PR studies by Arab graduates of US universities have made a significant contribution to the improvement of PR in Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, Saudi universities did not offer PR courses until the late 20th century, and even then, these courses were few in number; for instance, a study by a Saudi daily newspaper (Aleqtisadiah, 2011) on PR education

and courses during the early 21st century in Saudi Arabia reported that PR courses were extremely rare and only 20% of Saudi PR professionals had actually attended one. In the same vein, Almahraj (2017: 205) found a body of knowledge that was disconnected from the Kingdom's PR practitioners and practice, where 'the knowledge that practitioners possess is limited and does not allow practitioners to perform real PR duties, such as campaigning and research'. This knowledge is therefore virtually useless to the PR profession in Saudi Arabia.

From another perspective, Al-dubaikhi (2013) reported that none of the PR professionals in his study had graduated from university with a degree in PR, but rather in other disciplines such as science, governance, social administration, and pharmacy. Similarly, Almaharaj (2017: 203-204) revealed that PR practitioners did not regard diversity in terms of educational background as disadvantageous; instead, they tended to take whatever they had learned from their university studies, adapting it to their work context if they found it useful. Almaharaj (2017: 204) further explained: 'If the practitioner has administrative knowledge, this will help with protocol duties in PR work, just as a degree in psychology is seen as useful in maintaining media relationships.'

Likewise, Almahraj (2017: 205) found that educational institutions and associations do not contribute in any way to the institutionalization of the profession. In this sense, PR occupations in Saudi Arabia do not fulfil the requirements of a profession and PR is quite far from being professionalized in the context, which

> …shows that the educational institutions and related associations do not know what practitioners need, and although PR associations should provide support and development for PR practitioners, it follows the same approach to education as the universities by offering useless theoretical information. (ibid.)

2.3.4 Politics, Public Media, Social Media, and Public Relations (PR) in Saudi

Arabia

This sub-section examines and analyses the state's political structure and influence on PR and the communications industry in the Kingdom. It explains the relationship between the political system and public media, including TV channels, press, and radio, in order to better understand the various political and social factors that possibly contribute to shaping PR practice in Saudi Arabia. In addition, this sub-section discusses and explains the influence of political and government control on the content that appears on social media platforms.

As explained previously, Saudi Arabia's political framework, government, and culture are largely dependent on the Islamic religion, and there is a strong bond between the Saudi Royal Family and the religious authorities, who acquire political positions and participate in government decisions (Awad, 2009). Furthermore, Saudi Public Relations Statue No. 62 supports the views of the religious faction in the Kingdom, translating as follows:

> Public relations firms and agencies, locals and foreign, must practice PR based on the fundamental principles of the practice to serve various commercial, industrial, and managerial sectors in accordance with the Saudi Constitution, and ensure there is no conflict with the Shariah of Islam or with the basic human morals. (Saudi Ministry of Media, 2021)

This is significant because the Saudi Ministry of Media has full ownership and control over all media broadcasting companies, including TV channels, newspapers, magazines, and radio stations operating in Saudi Arabia, and the market is not open for investors (Awad, 2009: 27). Moreover, the Saudi media generally report news, but sometimes deploy strategies (Duffy and College, 2014). Kayat (1996) especially notes that the Saudi media constitute a tool to help educate the population and encourage them to participate in political affairs. As explained by Clarke (2007: 30), the Saudi

government is strict and 'seeks to improve the economic welfare of the citizens while also enforcing (sometimes ruthlessly) the country's customs and traditions'.

Conversely, among the Arab states in general, Al-Garni (2000) and Awad (2009) assume that their governments control the public media, with states fighting for this control, whereby radio and TV channels serve as political tools. Moreover, Abdelhay (2014) notes that freedom of expression is an important issue in political, social, economic, and economic contexts. Mellor et al. (2011: 18-19) ascertain that first, Arab governments strive to monopolize the media, because broadcasters can reach all citizens, regardless of their education. Secondly, the media play a major role in sustaining national unity and a sense of community. Finally, the media are used as a primary tool of political propaganda (Mellor et al., 2011: 18-19).

To provide a brief history of the public media in Saudi Arabia, there was a dependence on international media prior to the 1970s. In 1983, the Saudi press, consisting of eight press agencies, distributed newspapers and magazines. Since the 1990s, however, the Saudi media have had more opportunities to push for liberal activism, globalization, new media, and satellite channels (Alsaqer, 2006). Concerning PR practice, the first official press release in Saudi Arabia was issued in 1924 by *Om Alqura* newspaper, the main voice of the state in the Kingdom, therefore communicating press releases and statements (Om Alqura, 2019). Currently, the Saudi state owns nine TV channels and six radio stations. Some channels are also broadcast from outside the Kingdom, such as MBC TV, which is considered as the main TV network in the Arab world (Kim, 2020).

With regard to the use of social media, research indicates that it is challenging for the government to control communication on these platforms. For instance, according to Aljabre (2013), the Saudi authorities have found it difficult to control the content of

social media, due to the number of dynamic users and smooth profiling. Social media in the West are associated with providing spaces for self-expression, as suggested by Gelma (2009), with social media platforms removing restrictions on opportunities for expression and disreputability, but also drawing the public's attention to the remarkable.

After social media were introduced into Saudi Arabia in the early 21st century (although precise dates for this are unavailable), organizations experienced exponential growth, but the Saudi authorities initially restricted the general public's access to social media (Oshan, 2007). Overall, Arab governments and their administrations have not unreservedly embraced the social, societal, and political consequences of the Internet and open dialogue, whereby the Internet initially encountered inertia, often expressed as 'cultural' reservations about the appropriateness of content on the Internet (Anderson, 2000: 425). Governments and officials in various parts of the Middle East have prevented the spread of Internet provision and access by limiting the infrastructures and offering high prices for the service (Anderson, 2000: 425)

In Saudi Arabia, for example, the government controls the Internet according to fundamentalist Islamic principles. This means that the Saudi Ministry of Media blocks any online data containing material that it considers obscene or highly questionable (Al-Shohaib, Al-Kandari, and Abdulrahim, 2009). According to Al-Hajery 2014 (cited in Alshahrani, 2016), Saudi Arabia was quite late in allowing the Saudi population access to the Internet, compared with the developed world or even other developing countries. This delay was the result of the government's concerns and reservations over the effects of the new technology on Saudi Arabia's conservative culture, wherein

only academic institutions were allowed to use the Internet up until the late 20th century (Alshahrani, 2016).

According to Al-Tawil (2001: 2), King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia was the first institution to be connected to the Internet in 1993. The University has also been responsible for enabling public access to administrative information, while endeavouring to protect Islamic identity and beliefs within the Saudi population. In addition, King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) in Riyadh is directly responsible for filtering the data from different destinations on the Internet before transmitting it to consumers nationwide (Al-Tawil, 2001).

Despite Saudi Arabia's relatively late access to the Internet and state control over its connection, Internet penetration in the Kingdom increased from one million Internet users in 2001 to around 16.5 million by the end of 2013, representing 55.1% of the country's population (CITC, 2014). Furthermore, in 2018 over 50% of the total population in Saudi Arabia were active social media users (Statista, 2020).

In particular, Al-Saggaf and Simmons (2015) examined the use of YouTube and Facebook, as well as access to a daily newspaper and Al Arabiya TV channel during the 2009 flood in Jeddah, a city on the Saudi coast. The above authors found that social media created more space for the public to participate in politics and public life, with thousands of citizens finding a public voice via social media during the flood. In contrast, they had less public voice through the more highly controlled and mediated traditional media.

2.4 Research on the Adoption of Social Media for Public Relations (PR)

Purposes in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf

This section presents relevant findings from the Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia. It outlines the findings presented across the reviewed literature, in order to build an overview of studies on the use of social media by PR practitioners. In Saudi Arabia, Almfleah (2017) examined and compared the use of Facebook and Twitter by both private and public companies in the Kingdom, in an attempt to apprehend the scale of ethical two-way, symmetrical communication between companies and their publics. In so doing, the above author compared the use of social media platforms by PR departments in the Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC) and Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Saudi MCI), conducting one-on-one interviews with senior PR and communications managers from both organizations. The research showed that both STC and Saudi MCI were using Facebook and Twitter asymmetrically, mainly to publicize their activities or achievements and share important information, whereby they appeared to be ethical in their PR practice. The study also found that the use of Facebook and Twitter had changed the way in which PR practitioners at STC and MCI engaged with their publics, in that contact between these organizations and stakeholders was facilitated. Consequently, public access to important information was enabled, and a public voice in the engagement was afforded, especially in terms of allowing criticism of the organizations concerned. In the above study, Almfleah (2017: 145) deduced that

> …public and private organisations in Saudi Arabia need to continue using social media tools and other technologies to enhance their communication with the stakeholders and their publics. However, there is need for PR practitioners to ensure that they pay attention to the content generated by the stakeholders through social media.

In addition, Almfleah (2017: 145-56) suggests that 'adherence to Islamic teachings on ethics is seemingly irreversible and difficult to overcome in the PR practice in Saudi Arabia considering its strong anchorage in the daily lives of practitioners and the publics'. Therefore, it would appear that the continued lack of strong professional PR bodies is a hindrance to the achievement of standardized PR practice, even in terms of ethical PR practice. Almfleah (2017: 144) concluded that 'online PR practice in Saudi Arabia has features resembling a hybrid of PR models with Islam being the biggest influencer while PR practitioner age and gender are important moderators'. The above study calls for further research on the extent to which Islam is implicated in Saudi PR practice, in order to determine whether other cultural and religious aspects affect the way in which PR practitioners perceive and perform PR.

Meanwhile, in Kuwait, a study by Al-Kandari et al. (2019) examined the use of Arabic Instagram by eight Kuwaiti banks listed on the Kuwaiti Stock Exchange. The above study showed that the banks were using Instagram for advertising, distribution, community-building, and communication. The research showed that the banks were working to combine visual communication through Instagram, integrating religious symbols to perform a PR function based on image and influence. The authors concluded that the banks were using the target group's social media sources to find a balance between obedience to Allah and achieving the bank's business goals. The research showed that adding religious messages that mentioned Allah, the Qur'an, and the name of Islam could add credibility to the message and engender trust, suggesting that the banks concerned were responding to religious guidelines. Interestingly, according to Al-Kandari et al. (2019), the tension between the sacred and secular emphasizes Arab cultural values and suggests that Instagram promotes individualism, challenges the traditional Arab emphasis on collectivism, and violates the idea that

online platforms are alien to Arab culture. Thus, the above study called for further research into other social media platforms, notably Facebook and Twitter: 'Future research will look at using Facebook as a social media to build a community, Twitter as a text-based social media and Instagram as mainly visual… to see how social media is used for different PR functions' (Al-Kandari et al., 2019: 10).

Conversely, Bashir and Aldaihan (2017) investigated the ways in which Kuwaiti organizations use social media for their own interests and to satisfy their PR goals. The above authors likewise sought to ascertain the barriers posed by social media to PR professionals. In their study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 19 PR practitioners from corporate, governmental, and non-profit organizations in Kuwait. It was found that the Kuwaiti entities sampled, lacked the relevant skills for using social networks. For example, while the Kuwaiti organizations studied appeared to use Twitter and Instagram the most to promote and disseminate information, this usage was generally occasional and merely reactive. Meanwhile, a lack of strategy and technical skills relating to social media use, combined with confusion over the concept of two-way communication, constituted the primary barriers revealed.

Nevertheless, the current review of the literature failed to uncover any evidence of social media helping Kuwaiti PR professionals to establish bilateral communication as an avenue of building relationships. Moreover, social media usage for PR in Kuwait did not appear to enhance any understanding of a two-pronged approach. Instead, Bashir and Aldaihan (2017: 779) found that social networks were rather a major source of news in Kuwait, with Twitter having the biggest influence on political discussion (60 million tweets in March 2012 alone). In particular, Bashir and Aldaihan (2017: 784-785) identified the higher management and nature of organizations in Kuwait as significant barriers facing PR practitioners in this context. These factors were found

to limit the potential for effective social media use. Compounding this hurdle, the use of social media for organizational communication appeared to be largely experimental and ad hoc, devoid of strategic planning. Thus, the above authors called for further research on the organizational use of social media and the ways in which this usage relates to meeting PR objectives. Moreover, the accompanying opportunities and barriers need to be investigated (Bashir and Aldaihan, 2017: 786).

Bashir and Aldaihan's (2017) findings on the opportunities that PR practitioners and organizations exploit, and the barriers that they encounter when using social media for PR are similar to other findings from around the world, such as Turkey (Alikilic and Atabek, 2012), Europe, Australia, and Asia (Macnamara and Zerfass, 2012; Verhoeven et al., 2012), and among international companies listed in the Fortune 500 and Forbes 200 (DiStaso and Bortree, 2012; Bashir and Aldaihan, 2017: 785). However, this section has highlighted the relevant research in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, where organizations and PR practitioners perceive that social media have changed the PR landscape, but where the use of social media platforms tends to mainly take the form of one-way communication to disseminate various messages and share promotional activities. Nevertheless, PR practitioners and organizations in the Gulf face similar challenges and barriers to those faced by PR professionals elsewhere in the world.

The following sub-section will now present a review of the international literature relating to the current study, in order to reveal common phenomena across global PR in the era of social media, and the uniqueness of the Saudi context.

2.4.1 Research on the Global Adoption of Social Media for Public Relations (PR)

In a review of a 34-year communications technology study published in six PR journals, Duhe (2015) revealed that application and perception studies far outnumber investigations into usability, concerns, and theoretical contributions to a scholarly or practice-based understanding of the new media. However, the focus of this research is to examine the use of social media by PR practitioners and organizations in Saudi Arabia, discovering the obstacles and challenges that they face. Therefore, this study does not look at any particular application or mechanism for implementing a specific online platform, but rather aims to contribute to the current literature in understanding how Saudi PR practitioners and organizations view the use of social media, including the barriers and challenges that beset it. To shed light on this topic, the current sub-section refers to the relevant global literature.

For example, in Europe, Wiesenberg, Verčič, and Zerfass (2016) examined media relations, reflecting the impending transition from media to stolen content, produced and transmitted through strategic communication. The above study explored the changing media landscape from the perspective of a PR expert, while revealing the different media relationships that accompany the use of social media in PR practice. In particular, a quantitative survey of European communications professionals was conducted annually over a period of several years. The results highlighted the shift in prevalence from public to private media. Moreover, large differences were revealed between the importance and use of these methods of communicating with the new media. Thus, the findings point to the main reasons (media monitoring, evaluation of media coverage) why organizations interact with these new media. However, most of the respondents rejected the notion that the new media represented a powerful tool for

shaping public opinion, with only 37% of the sampled European professionals believing that the new media would become important in this role.

Conversely, in Europe, research on the use of social media by European PR practitioners investigated the importance of digital and social media in the following areas: addressing stakeholders, the most important digital and social media tools for PR practitioners, the effects of digital and social media for organizations and PR, the responsibility of digital and social media in an organization, and the implementation of specific social media concepts. Meanwhile, Verhoeven et al. (2012) found that European PR practitioners considered print media to be the most important communication channel in the organizational media mix, although social media networks were treated as the most important tools for online communication tools. Another finding of the above study was that not many organizations in Europe had implemented digital and social media policies by the time the research was conducted. The study identified that only around one third of the respondents stated that they had applied social media guidelines for social media communication. The research concluded that

> [d]igital and social media are gaining importance in European organizations, but they are not the most important element of the organizational media mix in Europe today. Addressing print media, in other words working with journalists as gatekeepers of the news media is still the most important communication channel for European PR professionals. (Verhoeven et al., 2012: 164)

The above authors later stated that online communication in general and social media in particular were expected to take over PR in Europe within the next two years, although it was emphasized in their research that less than one third of organizations in Europe had applied

> social media guidelines, monitoring routines or key performance indicators. The majority of PR departments control the strategic aspects of digital and social communication and the related budgets. European PR professionals consider

most social media features an opportunity, especially the expected rise of content over though at the same time rating open dialogue without control and the ease of spreading information as possible threats for organizations. (Verhoeven et al., 2012: 164)

In Greece, Triantaphyllidou and Yannas (2014) examined the extent to which PR organizations include new media platforms in their men's campaigns and the views of PR consultants on the benefits of using social media in PR. The above authors argued that Greek PR managers have recognized the potential of digital media as a new means of effectively practicing PR for their clients, conducting research, and managing a company's reputation successfully. Popular Web tactics for Greek PR agencies include the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, as well as websites and viral campaigns. Triantaphyllidou and Yannas (2014) concluded that the uptake of digital media by Greek PR agencies is linked to managers' perceptions of the benefits of incorporating new media platforms into PR campaigns. In addition, the above authors emphasized the need to manage digital media with dedicated teams, suggesting that 'one way forward in the future would be to consider both the uptake of new media by PR agencies and the benefits of such uptake', calling for more research to improve the use of digital media in Greek PR.

In Turkey, Alikilic and Atabek (2012) explored social media use by PR practitioners, and their approach to social media tools at home and abroad. Their study aimed to provide PR professionals with information about social media acceptance in PR, and the views of other PR practitioners on social media tools for PR functions. Alikilic and Atabek (2012) concluded that the Internet and social media tools (platforms, blogs, online videos) have revolutionized the dynamics of PR, just as mainstream media is crucial to PR. According to the above study, traditional media continue to play a critical role in the dissemination of messages by PR professionals. Nevertheless, Alikilic and Atabek (2012) deduced that social media had created new broadcasters,

thereby replacing the old media providers. Moreover, the above research showed that Turkish PR professionals had begun to encourage dialogue with their audiences through social media, and the value of social media involvement was evident in all aspects of PR.

In the US, Smith, Blazovich, and Smith (2015) studied the adoption of social media by Fortune 500 companies, in an attempt to identify the major corporations that were using social media platforms, and to determine whether adoption differed by industry, firm size, and growth opportunity. The study found that over 80% of Fortune 500 firms deployed social media, with the average firm using around three social media platforms. Furthermore, the study found that social media had expanded the Internet to become a source of information and influence. In addition, value was being derived from online customer communities engaging with companies to become loyal customers and even champions of brands. The research concluded that 'dialogue and interaction with consumers is what social media is all about' (Blazovich, Smith, and Smith, 2015: 14). However, the above authors added that organizations can use different platforms to accomplish specific purposes: 'With an abundance of social media platforms available, marketers are using multiple social networking sites to reach their constituents' (Blazovich, Smith, and Smith, 2015: 14). The above authors also called for research on the long-term benefits of social media use, which would be observable in a future longitudinal study, suggesting that future studies could investigate how the quality of social media sites affects financial performance.

Likewise, in the US, Waters sand Jamal (2011) analyzed the benefits of Twitter for 200 US non-profit organizations. Their results suggested that these organizations were using one-way models, regardless of the local side of community-sharing and expansion opportunities:

> Given the increasing focus of relationship management in public relations, the results are somewhat discouraging that so little conversations are being attempted in this medium…. a follower of these nonprofit organizations' Twitter accounts might sense an unwillingness to answer questions or respond to others' comments. Despite the use of one-way information, users may be more satisfied that organizations' are soliciting feedback and attempting to get them involved in both online and offline activities. (Waters and Jamal, 2011: 323)

The above authors suggested considering the following topic:

> As Twitter continues to be a social media application that is regularly used in advertising and promotional activities, it is important to see how another set of contexts uses presence, which is important for educational purposes and for professionals… It is useful to know whether […] it could be used very well to participate in the discussion and encourage connections, or whether […] the application was generally useful for sharing data and returning traffic to authorized sites. (Waters and Jamal, 2011: 324)

Again, in the US, Curtis et al. (2010) examined the adoption of 188 social media tools by PR practitioners in non-profit organizations, as well as their perceptions of the credibility of social media news. Through an online survey, the study examined the practitioners' use of social media, familiarity with social media, level of participation in communication technologies, behaviour concerning new media communication outlets, and tendency to adopt these tools. The above study found that the use of social media differed according to gender but indicated that social media tools were becoming beneficial means of communication for PR practitioners in the non-profit sector. Moreover, organizations with defined PR departments were found to be more likely to adopt social media technologies and use them to achieve their organizational goals. Curtis et al. (2010: 92) therefore predicted: '[s]ocial media techniques will become more abundant as PR practitioners become mindful of their effectiveness in regard to reaching target audiences, promoting a specific cause, and further developing communication strategies.' Additionally, as social media expands, PR practitioners need to recognize the resourcefulness of social media tools to effectively reach their public. Curtis et al. (2010: 92) recommended that

it would be beneficial for practitioners to better understand the adoption of social media in major corporations' internal public relations departments and PR agencies, which represent clients in the entertainment, sports, political, and tourism industries.

Similarly, Distaso, McCorkindale, and Wright (2011) interviewed communications and PR leaders in the US to gather their views on the forms of social media that drive organizations, together with the inherent challenges and issues of social networks and resources. The above research revealed that the most common problem for PR professionals was to acknowledge the lack of control associated with social media use, and the unpredictability of users' behaviour and comments. Conversely, the survey showed that some participants were skeptical of the value of social media, while others responded that their staff did not understand how to use social media tools, or at least, could not use them strategically. The results of the above study emphasized that it was difficult for employees to keep up with the rapidly changing social media environment. Distaso, McCorkindale, and Wright (2011: 326) ultimately revealed that organizations use social media 'for big conversations' and to gain a deeper understanding of the market, customers, competitors, and employees.

In contrast, some organizations have tried to take over the introduction of organizational policy for social media. For example, Distaso, McCorkindale, and Wright (2011) concluded that strategic communicators remain puzzled over how best to use Twitter to connect with their external stakeholders on a daily basis. Therefore, organizations only appear to be limited in the way that they use the Twitter platform, which offers a network with a variety of tools, such as hashtags and retweets. These tools allow organizations to bypass the restriction on message size (140 characters) and increase the amount of information that they can share. Distaso, McCorkindale, and Wright (2011) also called for further research to be conducted to analyze other dimensions of Twitter. Comparisons between non-profit, for-profit, and government

sectors could reveal variations in Twitter's communication strategy. Additionally, McCorkindale and Wright (2011) highlighted the importance of training in the use of social media in organizations, adding that this should identify and emphasize the use of specific tools, as well as recommending effective measurement of their use. Businesses need to be prepared to navigate the changing landscape of social networking tools, as new forms of social media emerge every day.

In the US, Lovejoy, Saxton, and Waters (2012) studied 73 non-profit organizations, drawn from the 2009 list of largest non-profit organizations in the US: 'Nonprofit Times 100', specifically looking at the use of Twitter to engage stakeholders, not only through tweets, but also through various other communication methods on the Twitter platform, including hashtags and retweets. The above study revealed that only 73 of the 100 non-profit organizations had a Twitter account at the time of the study. The study also found Twitter to be more complex than expected, whereas non-profit organizations were utilizing it purely as a one-way tool of information dissemination. Thus, organizations were merely continuing to use social media to supplement traditional information.

Meanwhile, in Latin America and globally, Capriotti and Ruesja (2018) analyzed the presence of CEOs in the most active social networks and measured the activity and communication of top executives on Twitter. To compare results, the CEOs of global and Latin American companies were selected. The research revealed very few managers with social media accounts relating to their position, and the majority of users were not using their Twitter accounts properly. The main goal of the above study was to ascertain whether business leaders were present on social media and if so, how they used Twitter as a tool of communication. The authors concluded:

The trend is growing at a very slow pace: the number of CEOs with a presence in social media is increasing, but it is still very low. The same flow can be identified for both samples of CEOs studied, with the particularity that Latin American CEOs are a bit more active than the Global CEOs, but the second ones have better interaction results. Despite the growing presence and activity of CEOs, it seems that Twitter is not broadly being used by them as a dialogical tool, but mainly as a one-way tool to disseminate their own points of view. (Capriotti and Ruesja, 2018: 247)

The above study also concluded that the presence and communication of CEOs on social media were not properly monitored. Therefore, this was an area of communication strategy that companies and their CEOs needed to improve if they were to establish suitable and valuable communication with their audience, thereby enabling dialogue.

In more specific terms, Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) describe three main approaches to the organizational use of social media, describing the first approach as traditional in nature, with organizations viewing social media channels simply as other types of media channel (like TV, radio, print media, etc.). The second approach described by Weinberg and Pehlivan (201) is experimental, because it involves testing and assimilating important factors and critical objectives of social media (for example, conversation, involvement, evangelism). Weinberg and Pehlivan's (2011) study explains the difference in costs and budgets between traditional and social media, wherein professionals know how much to spend on traditional media, but in terms of social media expenditure, professionals were generally found to spend the same amount as those who conveyed or disseminated their brand messages. Thus, it is evident from the above study that third parties (the public) are deployed via social media to help disseminate brand-related messages in their posts and interactions.

Additionally, according to the above research, social media platforms differ in their nature and rules on use and functionality. Likewise, there are differences in the way that individuals use social media platforms. Weinberg and Pehlivan's (2011) study

identified two factors that explain this variation in social media, which can be used to demonstrate important distinctions between these types, so that the optimal types of social media can be deployed for specific objectives: 'the half-life of information and the depth of information.' The former 'is a function of both the medium and the content. It refers to the longevity of the information regarding availability and appearance on the screen and interest in a topic'. This means that where content quickly disappears from a feed, whether because the account has few followers or there is little engagement with a post, it is said to have a low half-life. In contrast, 'depth of information refers to the richness of the content, and the number and diversity of perspective'. This would suggest that online forums or community pages provide greater depth of information on a topic (Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011: 279). Therefore, while new platforms have been created over the past decade, the depth and half-life of information are factors that should still be considered when using social media to conduct PR.

Interestingly, Wright and Hinson (2008) conducted a three-year international empirical study, concerning the impact of blog and social media on traditional media and communications in organizations. Here, they built on their work in earlier studies on the same topic (Wright and Hinson, 2006; 2007), raising more questions about the impact of social media on PR and traditional media use. The above authors found that the new media had radically changed the nature and role of PR. However, their study also showed that traditional media were more highly valued than social media for their accuracy, reliability, truth, and ethics. In the above survey, most of the participating PR professionals believed that social media complemented traditional media, and most were of the view that blogging and social media affected traditional media coverage.

Additionally, the study found that blogs and social media had changed the way in which organizations communicated with external audiences.

Valentini (2015: 174) argues that the positive view of social media held by most PR scholars is 'grounded on the profession's need to reconcile the two sides of PR identity—the rhetorical and the relational'. The above study discusses whether social media reflect these two sides. Valentini (2015) also poses the question of why PR scholars and professionals are so enthusiastic about using social media, even though there is no solid body of research confirming that this usage is beneficial, beyond the personal judgement of these professionals. Valentini (2015: 175) argues that an explanation for this can be deduced from understanding how the dominant 'using social media is good' discourse acts as a mechanism for restoring relations between two distinct traditions of PR function in organizations: rhetorical and relational:

> The public relations profession can serve organizations and publics better by reflecting critically on the consequences and effects of their direct and indirect actions—also in relation to social media—on both publics and society at large. Such reflection requires an understanding, first and foremost, of the impact of digital technologies and social media in interpersonal communications and relations. By understanding better how technologies are changing public behaviors, professionals will be able to assess the nature of their social media actions to be able to provide ethical, responsible advice to their organizations. (Valentini 2015: 175)

2.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented and discussed various perspectives of the 20th century concept of PR, associated with mass communication methods and building relations with stakeholders, prior to the advent of the Internet and social media. In addition, definitions of 21st century PR were addressed to explain elements such as relationship-building and two-way communication. Accordingly, this chapter has presented and illustrated the framework of literature that underpins this study, explaining how the

current study extends on previous research that has addressed gaps in the literature, regarding the use of social media for PR communication. Furthermore, this chapter has explored the dynamic changes that have shaped PR in the era of digital and social media, explaining the benefits and challenges in 21st century PR practice. It reveals that presentation, communication, improved communication, information-gathering, interaction, engagement, relationship-building, strategic improvement, and faster and wider coverage are among the benefits for PR practitioners. Meanwhile, the challenges and obstacles to 21st century PR include a lack of training, the need to understand exchanges with the public and how to engage with that public, drawn from the international literature.

In particular, the history of PR in Saudi Arabia has been outlined, looking at the impact of culture and religion on the actual components of PR, as well as the role of education, the gender ratio, media coverage, and relations with journalists and the public. Also illustrated is the Saudi government's control over public media, comparing it with the government's influence on social media content and clarifying that social media allow more space than traditional media for self-expression. In brief, PR practitioners are exploiting social media for many reasons in the Kingdom, including in response to high demand from the Saudi public.

In sum, this chapter has presented a review of the relevant research on the use of social media by PR practitioners, first globally, and then in the Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia. In addition, this chapter provides an overview of the current study framework, which addresses the challenges and obstacles to be overcome by PR practitioners and organizations. Chapter Three will now present and explain the methodologies adopted to collect data for the current research.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

After introducing and illustrating the theoretical framework that underpins this current study (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Grunig et al, 1992; Grunig, 2008), and explaining how the study extends previous work on the organizational use of social media for PR communications (Macnamara and Zerfass, 2012; Robson, 2013; Robson and James, 2013; Bashir and Aldaihani, 2017), this chapter presents and explains the methodology adopted to collect data from various sources, including PR practitioners, organizations, and academics. The first section outlines in detail the research design, epistemological and ontological position, methodology, and methods in relation to the study objectives. Also explained in this chapter is the rationale behind the selected research methods, together with the ethical considerations and approval process, sampling technique, formulation of the survey and interview questions, and design of the response options presented to the participants. As an overview, this chapter explains the steps taken by the researcher to design, develop, and approve the materials for the data collection.

3.2 Research Methodology

To meet the current study objectives, an appropriate research approach was determined, identifying the most suitable paradigms, research strategy, and methods. The following sub-section states the research approach adopted, and the philosophy behind the data collection.

3.2.1 Research Approach

Depending on the research goal, research approaches can be classified into two main categories: the positivist approach, which seeks generalized patterns based on an objective view of reality, and the interpretive approach, which seeks subjective interpretations of social phenomena from the perspectives of the subjects involved (Bhattacherjee, 2012: 38). The difference between objectivism and subjectivism is that objectivism adopts the stance that there is a single version of what is real, regardless of the researcher's perspective, while subjectivism asserts that reality is made up of an individual's perceptions, experiences, and feelings (Ryan, 2018). Nevertheless, purely positivist research has been subject to criticism since the early 20th century (Al-Saadi, 2014: 3). In fact, according to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020: 40), interpretivism initially developed as a critique of positivism, based on the premise that knowledge is produced by exploring and understanding the social world of the people being studied, focusing on the meaning that they derive from their experiences and their resulting interpretations of the world (Al-Saadi, 2014: 4). Thus, interpretivism argues that truth and knowledge are subjective and therefore, based on people's understanding of their lived experiences (Ryan, 2018).

Hence, interpretivism clearly differs from positivism, because interpretivism values subjectivity, and there is consideration given to differences in culture and environment, in an attempt to gather rich insights (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020: 40-41). Meanwhile, positivism is usually thought of as the 'scientific paradigm' (Rayan, 2018). The aim of interpretive research is rather to ensure a clear understanding of the meaning of events, and the intention behind human actions, with reality being determined by the lived experiences and social values of the researcher and the individual[s] observed (Al-Habil, 2014: 326). Furthermore, interpretivist

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researchers do not consider the existence of a universal law or objective reality, but rather reach for facts through subjective understanding, forming viewpoints out of interpretations (Al-Habil, 2014: 326). As a result, the generalization of universal laws is impossible for interpretivists because of the different values imposed on each specific social phenomenon. In contrast, it is generalization that constructs validity in positivism (Al-Habil, 2014: 327).

An interpretivist approach is adopted in this current study because it seeks to explore and investigate, with an emphasis on the researcher's close relationship with the social world (Al-Saadi, 2014: 10). Here, the researcher and the research process are not completely independent of each other, and the researcher cannot be distanced from the research process. Interpretive methods therefore have the potential to yield insights and understanding in relation to behaviour, helping to explain actions from the participant's perspective, and do not dominate the participants in a study (Scotland, 2012: 12). Thus, an interpretation of the world comes from the actors' point of view, through their explanation of the meanings attached to their actions (Al-Habil, 2014: 326).

3.2.2 Research Philosophy

Crotty (1998: 4) suggests that when designing a research proposal, four main questions should be addressed:

- What epistemology or what theory of knowledge informs the research?
- What theoretical perspective or what philosophical stance (for example, objectivism, subjectivism) underpins the methodology implemented in the research?
- What methodology or what strategy links methods to outcomes?

- What methods or what techniques and procedures does the research propose to use (for example, quantitative and/or qualitative)?

According to Crotty (1998: 4), these four questions or four core elements of research influence each other, in that the theory of knowledge (epistemology) will inform the theoretical perspectives underlying the methodology, and these perspectives will determine the research methodology, thereby leading to the selection of the research methods. The research philosophy consists of what the researcher perceives to be truth, reality, and knowledge (Rayan, 2018). In the present study, the epistemological and ontological assumptions were derived from the researcher's own reflection on and understanding of the PR field in Saudi Arabia, and the phenomenon of adopting social media to create a two-way asymmetric/symmetric relationship with the public.

The epistemological and ontological basis for selecting the data collection methods applied in this current study was influenced by Grunig and Hunt's (1984) view of the relationship between the human mind and reality, in that the four constructed PR models are representations of reality (Grunig and Hunt, 1984: 21). Nevertheless, the human mind can never wholly grasp reality, but rather isolates and captures it in parts, subsequently using those parts to construct ideas (Grunig, 2008: 91). These assumptions informed the present researcher's thinking and understanding of PR in general, and influenced the development of the current research methodology and methods, including the sampling approach, which will be explained later in this chapter. However, the next sub-section explains the theoretical framework in relation to the current study methodology, presenting Figure 3.1 to help clarify the relationship between the theoretical framework and the data collection instrument.

3.2.3 Theoretical Framework

Table 3.1, below, is adapted from Grunig and Hunt (1984) and Grunig et al., (1992), developed according to the researcher's interpretation of the descriptions and functions of each PR model, in order to illustrate how PR activities should be identified and how they should relate to a particular PR model. However, this current research adheres to the fact that two-way symmetric/asymmetric models are most closely associated with the 21st century (Grunig, 2009; Macnamara, 2016). Therefore, two-way asymmetric/symmetric models were the focus of the data collection in this study because the adoption of social media is central to this research, given that the instrument driving the data collection is *building relations.*

Table 3.1: Four PR models as described by Grunig and Hunt (1984) and Grunig et, al. (1992)

	The Press Agent/Publicity Model	The Public-Information Model	Two-way Asymmetric	Two-way Symmetric
In theory	Propaganda	Dissemination of information	Persuasion	Communication
In practice	Spread information	Journalistic reporting of information	Scientific persuasion	Mediator between organizations and their public
Features and attributes	Incomplete Distorted Half-true information	Complete information Not persuasive oriented	Research Target audience Persuade public	Planning Evaluating Negotiation Compromise Mutual understanding
Nature of communication	One way	One way	Two-way In favour of the organization	Two-way relation
Influence	Not determined	Not determined	Change public behaviours	Public can change organizations' behaviour

Two-way Communication instruments	Non	Non	Feedback No Dialogues No interaction No Engagement	Interact Engagement Relations
Formative Research	Non	Non	What the public will accept and tolerate	How the public perceive the organization
Evaluative Research	Non	Non	Examine the feedback	Measure PR effort and effect

Grunig and Hunt (1984: 21) proposed that these four constructed models would cover the parameters of PR, enabling an understanding to be gained of how PR was originally developed and is still being practiced. Nevertheless, the above authors built their models based on ideal-type simplifications. To clarify further, the researcher must consider and examine a collection of attributes and actions in relation to PR practice, in order to understand the function of PR practitioners in relation to the four models, and determine which model fits the category of PR being explored or practiced: 'Not everything any single public relations person does will fit any of the models perfectly. But the models should come close enough that you can fit public relations people you meet into one of the models' (Grunig and Hunt, 1984: 22).

3.3 Research Design

This current research uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to respond to two principal inquiries:

1- How and why do PR practitioners and organizations use social media for PR practice?

2- How do organizations implement social media into their PR communication?

The thesis draws upon the conceptual framework of Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of PR to assess how PR is being practiced in Saudi Arabia. In particular, this research investigates the adoption of the two-way symmetric PR model, as it has been central to research in the field of PR communications and the use of social media by organizations (Grunig and Grunig, 2008; Grunig 2009; Edward, 2016; Macnamara, 2016). In addition, this study investigates the use of traditional media, newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations, comparing them with that of social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, in order to reach an understanding of the overall PR model adopted in the collection of the three data sets in this study.

As explained in Chapter Two, the current study examines the shift in PR practice from traditional media such as newspapers, TV, and radio, which dominated 20th century PR (Hirsch, 1977: 27-28; Phillips and Young, 2009: 5), to the new PR that is associated with the use of new media and the 21st century PR (for example, Tench and Yeomans, 2009) (see Table 2.1). Grunig and Hunt (1984: 13) believed that PR practice underwent stages throughout the 20th century, which have shaped PR practice in different models that can be found in various organizational settings: 'The models help us to understand different stages in the history of public relations, because public relations seems to have passed through stages that resemble the four models' (Grunig and Hunt, 1984: 14). The work of Grunig and Hunt (1984) and Grunig et al. (1992) have spanned and evolved throughout the 20th and 21st century. For instance, Grunig and Hunt (1984) emphasized that three out of the four proposed PR models are asymmetrical in nature; press agentry (emphasizing only favourable publicity), public information (disclosing accurate information but engaging in no research or other form of two-way communication), and the two-way asymmetrical models (emphasizing only the interests of the organization and not the interests of publics) (Grunig and

Grunig, 2008: 337). However, press agentry and public information models are exclusively based on one-way communication methods (see Table 3.1), whereas asymmetric/symmetric PR models are two-way communication methods (Grunig and Hunt, 1984: 23). Therefore, two-way models of PR are advocated for social media use, because social media fundamentally offer two-way communication methods (Macnamara, 2016: 339).

Furthermore, Grunig and Hunt (1984: 14) compare the development of PR to the human development: 'Children pass through different stages as they grow into adults. Not all adults behave like adults, however. Some do not make it through all of the development stages of a human being and remain in one stage of childhood.' This analogy explains that many PR practitioners and organizations adopt one of the earlier PR models and their practice is not developed further (Grunig and Hunt, 1984: 14).

In the present context, the researcher assesses PR practice in relation to the earlier models (press agentry; public information) by investigating the use of traditional media by PR practitioners and organizations, as compared to their use of the new media. This includes obtaining data from PR practitioners and organizaions in relation to each media tool (traditional versus new media), and the budget, policies and guidelines that accompany the adoption of both types of tool. Therefore, it was necessary for the researcher to identify the features of each PR model as applied in previous studies and in particular, as explained by Grunig and Hunt (1984) and Grunig et al. (1992) (see Table 3.1).

To achieve this, mixed research methods were applied, thereby triangulating the objective survey results with the subjective interview data. Creswell (2009: 111) noted that mixed research methods were originally viewed as two separate strands of

research until the mid-1990s, where the discussion seemed to change over how these two strands could be linked. Figure 3.1, below, is constructed to illustrate the data collection strategy and the way in which the data were linked. In order to explore the four constructed PR models in the Saudi context and investigate the existence of the two-way symmetric model, questions were developed according to the selected data collection strategy in this study, as illustrated in Figure 3.1, specifically in relation to the use of social media by PR practitioners and organizations. Here, both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied to question the participants about their level of interaction with the public, as well the relationship, communication, and content-sharing with that public. The data collection in this study also investigated the use of traditional media to build a complete picture of the current use of both traditional and new media tools for PR practice. For example, PR practitioners who rely more on traditional media are more likely to be adopting early models of PR to disseminate information, even propaganda, with no desire to build any two-way communication with the public.
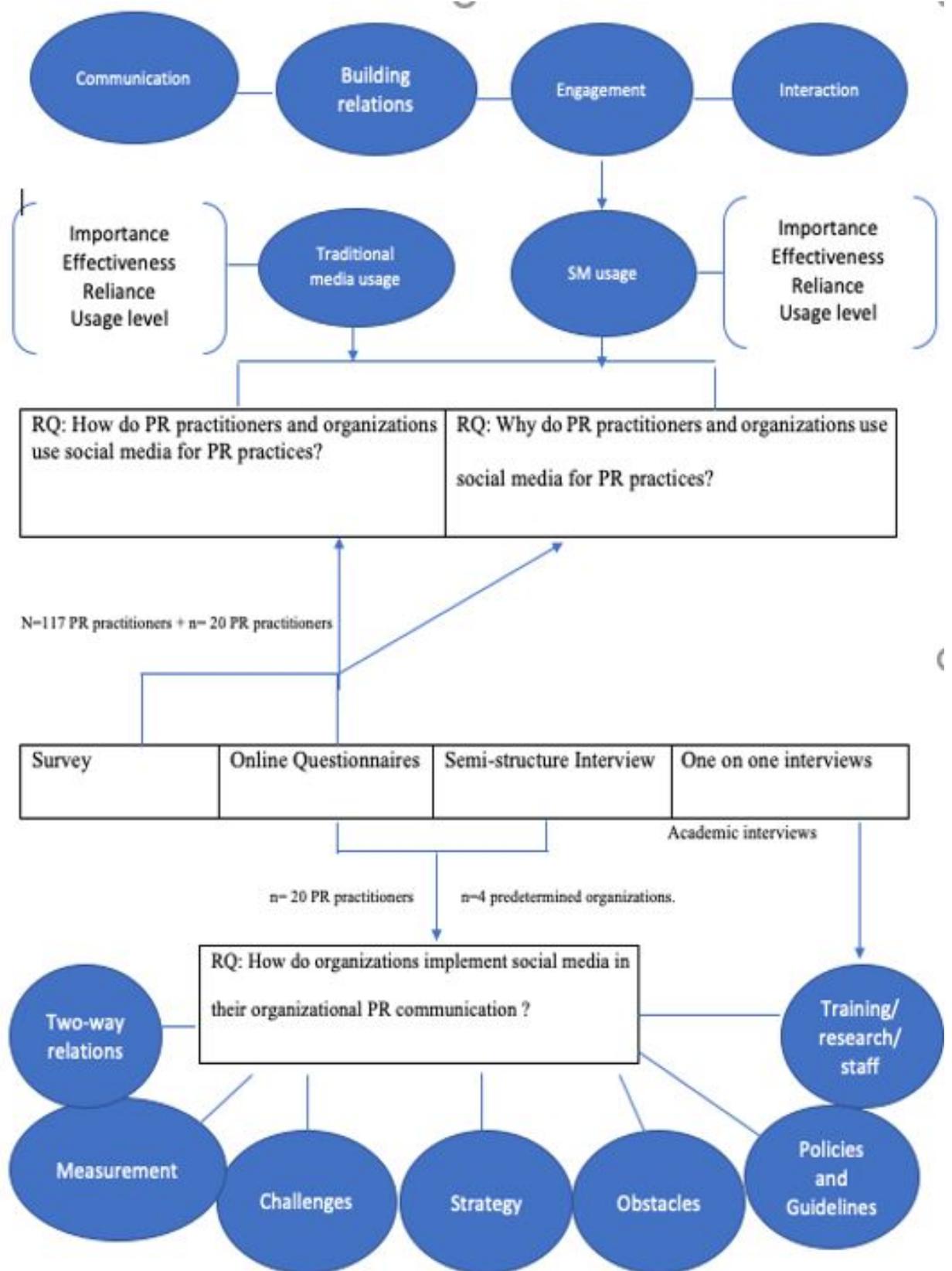
Figure 3.1: Data collection strategy

As mentioned above, the design of the questions in all three data sets was underpinned by Grunig and Hunt's (1984) framework, with a focus on the two-way asymmetrical/symmetrical models (Grunig et al., 1992). In addition, the formulation of the questions was influenced by other literature that identifies and investigates the use of social media for PR practice in the 21st century, because social media advocates models of two-way relations (Macnamara, 2016: 337). Nevertheless, Bashir and Aldaihan (2017) suggest further research is required to identify patterns of social media use within organizations, in order to achieve the objectives PR and discern the opportunities and barriers that accompany social media use in PR communications. However, Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) found that very few Asia-Pacific organizations do not have specific social media guidelines.

3.4 Sampling

Before conducting any of the data collection techniques, it was clearly necessary to select a sample. The optimal sampling strategy would have been to investigate the problem in the entire population of PR practitioners and organizations in Saudi Arabia. However, this was not possible (Acharya et Al., 2013: 330). Therefore, the current study examined a population that was sufficiently large and representative of the whole population (Acharya et. al, 2013: 330). As three methods of data collection would be adopted, three different samples were selected, using two different strategies, as outlined below.

Appropriate samples were selected to collect data for examination in this study, using expert sampling and snowball sampling. Expert sampling involves collecting information directly from individuals or groups who are expert in an area of study (Etikan and Bala, 2017: 2). In contrast, snowball sampling is a process of selecting an

appropriate sample via a network (Etikan and Bala, 2017: 2). Almahraj (2017) used snowball sampling to investigate the influence of culture on PR functions in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, the current researcher used his journalistic and PR background to draw upon connections in the Saudi PR field. In Arabic, this is equivalent to *wasta,* which is a feature of Saudi culture (see Chapter 2 on culture in Saudi Arabia). The next section describes and explains both the quantitative method (survey) and qualitative methods (one-to-one interviews) that were conducted in this study, and includes the selection of the research samples.

3.5 The Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative methods include surveys of segmented publics (Grunig, 2008: 98), and are very effective for answering the 'what' or 'how' of a given situation, because questions are direct, quantifiable, and often contain phrases such as 'What percentage?', 'What proportion?', 'To what extent?', 'How many?' and 'How much?' (Goertzen, 2017: 12). Furthermore, quantitative research helps determine demographic data and can be used to measure usage of a service or product (Goertzen, 2017: 12). Therefore, a survey was implemented in this current study to understand why and how PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia use social media for PR communication. The survey was consequently formulated to collect three main types of data:

- Demographic

- Data on the use of social media for PR practice

- Data on the use of social media versus traditional media for PR practice.

The first section of the survey was designed to obtain the participants' demographic data. Seven questions were included in this section to collect information on gender,

age, years of experience, team size, and employment status. This section would also enable the sampled participants' education and years of experience to be identified, as well as ensuring that the data could be illuminated and analyzed based on gender.

The second section of the survey was dedicated to understanding social media usage for PR practice, with questions designed to identify the participants' level of social media use, especially of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as the participants' awareness of the benefits of using social media to build two-way symmetric/asymmetric relations. Moreover, this second survey section ensured the participants' level of engagement with the public. Furthermore, this section contained questions about training.

The third and final section of the survey was designed to reflect the participants' social media usage, compared to their use of traditional media tools. In this section, questions and statements were included to determine the extent to which the participants considered using both types of media tool and why, specifically in terms of their importance and effectiveness for PR practice. Furthermore, this last section of the survey contained statements for the participants to select according to their preferred mix of tools for their next PR campaign. Among the choices were social and traditional media tools, whereupon it was anticipated that a conclusion could be drawn about the participants' use of social versus traditional media. The next sub-section explains how the current study selected the unit of analysis for the survey.

3.5.1 Survey Development

The research was conducted in several stages to develop, approve and distribute the survey, and then to extract the survey data. First, the , the survey questions were drafted and finalized, before being translated into Arabic. The survey was

subsequently ready for distribution. Moreover, both English and Arabic online versions of the participants' consent form and information sheet were prepared and checked, so that the purpose of the study could be explained, and informed consent could be obtained from the participants.

Following the guidelines of the University Research Ethics Committee at the University of East London, the consent form and information sheet were submitted to the Committee for approval. The consent form stated clearly that all the survey participants would be anonymized; it also gave a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study, its objectives, and the rationale behind the data collection. In addition, the participants would be given the researcher's name and contact details (telephone number, email address). Furthermore, to ensure that the participants knowingly consented to participate in the data collection for this study, the purpose of the research was restated as the first item in the survey itself, and qualification for inclusion in the survey was determined by the participants' confirmation of their acknowledgment of the study's purpose.

The next step in the research design was to select a suitable platform for the survey, namely, a platform that would support Arabic – clearly an important consideration, since at least some of the participants were likely to feel more comfortable conducting the interview in Arabic, given that it is the national language of Saudi Arabia, and the mother tongue of most of the interviewees. Thus, to ensure that meaningful phrases of the same quality and consistency were gathered, Arabic was used in the survey. However, translating an English version of the survey, word-for-word, into another language posed the risk of giving rise to linguistic and cultural differences between versions (Chen and Boore, 2009: 236). Therefore, the translation procedure in this study involved the use of back translation and a bilingual technique, which included

an additional check by bilingual Arabic-English speakers (Prieto, 1992). For instance, it cannot be assumed that a particular concept will have the same relevance across cultures (Chen and Boore, 2009: 236-237). After translating the survey, the researcher shared both the English and Arabic versions with experts who spoke both languages, and then bilingual Arabic-English speakers read the data for the third time to double check for any issues that might have emerged or been lost from the translation.

Also considered in the selection of this platform was its data collection and analysis capabilities. SurveyMonkey.com was consequently selected, this being a Web company that provides online tools and services for the creation of surveys, which users can then share via email (SurveyMonkey, 2019) or other social media links.

To select the survey sample, the researcher located prominent PR agencies operating in Saudi Arabia and initiated contact with some of them via telephone calls, texts, and emails, while others were visited in person in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the researcher used his background in PR to contact potential participants. Subsequently, all the available data on the target participants were compiled. Accordingly, the survey was sent to a random sample of more than 300 potential research candidates, including PR agencies, PR professionals in various organizations, and online media agencies. It is important to note that the final survey question asked the participants to state their job description, in order to further ensure the validity of the data. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned here that a disadvantage of SurveyMonkey's anonymization was that surveys with incomplete responses had to be discarded, since it was impossible to trace the respondents for further information. Therefore, their responses did not qualify for inclusion in the sample.

The results and findings of the survey are presented and discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis. Meanwhile, the next sub-section presents and explains the qualitative

methods adopted in this research to collect data from 20 PR practitioners, four predetermined organizations, and five academics from KAU, including the sampling approach and interpretation of data methods.

3.6 The Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data collection methods include focus groups; structured, semi- structured, or unstructured interviews with key participants, and observations of the behaviour of members of the public, professionals, employees, students, or management as they interact, perform tasks or go about their work (Grunig, 2008: 98). Qualitative research holds great potential for the study of PR and marketing communications because it enables researchers to engage closely with the research participants (Daymon and Holloway, 2002).

3.6.1 One-to-one Interviews and Online Questionnaires

This section of the chapter explains the process of designing the interviews with four predetermined organizations, and the online questionnaires with 20 PR practitioners. It also explains the various stages in which the researcher conducted the data collection, including the methodology adopted to transcribe and translate the data, so that themes could be derived in relation to the literature framework. The design of the interview and online questionnaire is explained. below.

3.6.1.1 Designing the Interviews and Online Questionnaire

Based on the literature, two sets of questions were formulated in this study, one for each of the research methods described in this section. These questions all relate to the use of social media networks for PR practice, and the most commonly adopted platforms for this

purpose. The questions were also designed to address training, obstacles, and the challenges facing organizations and PR practitioners. Furthermore, the selected research methods were aimed at comparing traditional media use with that of social media, the impact of social media on traditional approaches, and the impact of social media on PR functions in general. The next sub-section of this chapter highlights each method.

3.6.1.2 One-to-one Interviews with Organizations

This section explains the various stages of this part of the data collection, including the selection of the participants, travel to Saudi Arabia, visits to organizations, and the interview procedure. After drafting the interview questions, consent letter, and information sheet, the researcher contacted all four organizations via email and telephone to arrange a time and date for the interviews. The four companies were selected according to their status, as two companies were based in Saudi Arabia but operated across the Gulf States. Conversely, two were multinational companies operating worldwide, but with a strong presence in Saudi Arabia. These four organizations are also listed in the Saudi or global stock exchanges and differ in their industry sectors. For example, Participant #1 is a Saudi-based manufacturing company. In contrast, Participant #2 is an international manufacturer operating in Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, Participant #3 is a Saudi Company with presence in the Gulf area. Finally, Participant #4 is a global industrial products organization. After arranging a date and time to interview each participant, the researcher registered his details on www.mylifeline.co.uk and prepared a report assessing Saudi Arabia in terms of crime, terrorism, conflict, kidnap, and infrastructure (see Appendix: Interviews with Organizations). The researcher also justified how the trip would be funded, and clarified all the relevant expenses, including air tickets and

accommodation. Accordingly, the research was approved to conduct the interviews in Saudi Arabia.

3.6.1.2.1 Preparing and Conducting the One-to-one Interviews

The interviews were all conducted on different days and in different locations in Saudi Arabia. The time spent on each interview varied from 45-90 minutes. The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The purpose of the study was described in detail on the consent form, which was carefully reviewed with each participant before conducting the interview. All the interviews were also audio-recorded and then transcribed and translated into English to produce a final draft, which was shared with each organization for their final feedback and input. The data were subsequently interpreted, analyzed, and discussed.

In the semi-structured interviews with representatives from the four selected organizations, the researcher asked the following questions but also encouraged the participants to expand and address various points and topics that could be relevant to the purpose of the study:

Researcher Q1: How has social media changed or impacted the landscape of public relations (PR) practice in your organization?

Researcher Q2: How often does your organization use social media for PR practice, and which social media platforms does your organization utilize?

Researcher Q3: Where do you see the future of digital communication in your organization?

Researcher Q4: What are your organization's policies for the adoption of social media for PR practice? What training does your organization provide in this area?

Researcher Q5: How does social media impact traditional media tools?

Researcher Q6: What are the challenges and barriers to adopting social media networks for PR practice?

Researcher Q7: What are the benefits of adopting social media for PR practice?

Researcher Q8: How does your organization measure the impact of using social media for PR and communication?

3.6.1.2.2 Interpretation and Analysis of the Interview Data

All the semi-structured interviews were transcribed from the audio-recordings, and then translated from Arabic into English, where necessary. In particular, one of the interviews was conducted entirely in English, while the other three were in Arabic, but most answers consisted of a mix of English and Arabic. The researcher shared the translated transcripts with the interviewees before proceeding to interpret the data. Analytic induction was carried out for the responses, scanning each line of the data to create codes and themes relating to the current research framework. This method was adopted by Bashir and Aldaihani (2017) in their interpretation of data collected in Kuwait, based on the work of Haley (1996) and Pascale (2010). Nevertheless, the present researcher did not rely solely on interpreting individual quotes from the interviews, but rather analyzed these quotes in relation to the data as a whole (Rabiee, 2004).

Krueger (1994) was the first to provide seven established criteria as a framework for interpreting coded data: words, context, internal consistency, frequency and extensiveness of comments, specificity of comments, intensity of comments, and big ideas. In a later publication, Krueger and Casey (2000) reduced these criteria to the following five headings to develop a framework for data analysis: frequency, specificity, emotions, extensiveness, and the big picture. The main difference here is that words, context, and internal consistency were excluded from the interpretation. Meanwhile, frequency and extensiveness were separated into two categories; intensity of comments and big ideas were reframed as emotions, and the big picture was introduced (Rabiee, 2004). Furthermore, the analysis of data in qualitative research is an on-going reflective process where analytical questions are asked about the data throughout the study (Creswell, 2009). Thus, the researcher scanned each line of the transcript to extract keywords and statements based on their frequency and intensity during each interview. Moreover, the researcher included unique statements or quotes from at least one participant, in relation to the following:

> reaching customers, a total shift, spending, culture and the community, PR agency consumer preferences, customer behaviours, engaging with customers, Arabic speakers, traditional, paid media, images and content, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, dialogue and connection, policies, language, different accents, values, accent in Arabic, politics, political comment, money and time, set of KPIs, impressions, visits, retweets, clicks, conversations, cost, training, followers

The aforementioned key words were then placed in the following categories: frequent use of social media, social media function, PR agencies, impact of using social media on the use of traditional media, factors driving the adoption of social media for PR communication, challenges and barriers faced by organizations when adopting social media for PR communications, and policies and guidelines. In Chapter Five, the

current study explains in depth the result of the interviews and their findings in relation to the themes highlighted above.

3.6.1.3 Online Questionnaires with 20 Public Relations (PR) Practitioners

This part of the chapter presents and explains how the Online Questionnaires were constructed and conducted, including the design of the questionnaires and the sampling for the data collection.

Based on the previous literature, reviewed in Chapter Two and highlighted in this chapter, the following questions were designed for this study, opening with a question about the participants' gender:

Q1: Please indicate your gender.

Q2: What social media networks do you use to practice public relations (PR)?

Q3: What are the reasons behind using the above-mentioned social media networks for your PR practice?

Q4: What is the impact of social media on your field of work in PR and use of traditional means of communication (daily newspapers, TV channels, radio stations)?

Q5: What are the challenges and obstacles you face in using social media?

Q6: Is there appropriate training provided by companies or in other sectors?

Q7: What are the advantages and contributions of social media platforms to your work and to the field of PR in Saudi Arabia?

Q8: Please add any additional input, if appropriate.

3.6.1.3.1 Sampling Procedure for the Public Relations (PR) Practitioners

As highlighted above, the researcher used a snowball-sampling technique, which enabled him to use his connections and network in the field. Therefore, the researcher contacted various PR agencies and PR practitioners to voluntarily participate. The sample for the online questionnaires consisted of a mix of 20 PR practitioners working in Saudi Arabia,

who were invited to participate voluntarily in the current study, using a duly adopted online platform, namely, Google Forms, because it was free of charge and easy to access. It would also provide tools for analyzing the participants' answers. Chapter Five presents the online questionnaire responses in relation to the literature. The following section explains various aspects of the one-to-one interviews with the five academics from KAU.

3.6.1.4 One-to-one Interviews with Five Academics from King Abdulaziz University (KAU)

In this study, the researcher conducted interviews with academics from the School of Media at King Abdulaziz University (KAU). As explained in the first part of this chapter, the researcher purposefully sampled experts, directly targeting PR academics for interview (Etikan and Bala, 2017). Therefore, the study obtained in-depth information from faculty staff who lecture in PR and the new media. Grunig (2008: 91) stated that there was some confusion among practitioners and academics over the discipline of PR, arising from their differing roles and the extent to which their work was complementary, one to the other. In addition, PR practitioners tend to believe that academics are practitioners who have chosen to teach and conduct research rather than practice. Consequently, PR practitioners in the field often have the view that most academic research is useless because they see no way of applying it in their work (Grunig 2008: 91). Furthermore, from a Saudi perspective, Almahraj (2017) notes that there is a disconnection between PR education and PR practice in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, in Kuwait, Bashir and Aldaihani (2017) investigated the obstacles and challenges that hinder the progress of social media adoption among PR practitioners, identifying a need for improvements to the PR curriculum and practicum, so that communication technologies can be integrated into PR practice.

The one-to-one exchanges with PR academics was intended to support the research and conduct an in-depth analysis of the perspectives of PR academics, regarding the adoption of social media and its impact on the university PR curriculum, as well as on the way in which these academics taught PR and conducted their research. Consequently, this method is expected to provide data that will assist the researcher in understanding how PR is being taught in Saudi universities, and facilitate an understanding of the knowledge that PR practitioners acquire.

The collected data were expected to provide important information about PR education and training, as provided for newcomers to the field. Formal qualifications in PR are likewise anticipated to provide a means of assessing the knowledge and skills of PR graduates. As explained in the theoretical framework for this study, the researcher sought to extend existing knowledge of social media use in PR where there appeared to be a clear need to address the challenges and obstacles faced by PR practitioners and organizations when adopting social media for PR practice, especially in terms of the training provided for PR practitioners (see Macnamara and Zerfass, 2012; Robson, 2013; Bashir and Aldaihani, 2017).

This portion of the data was therefore dedicated to gaining insights into PR education in universities, and to shed more light on the impact of social media on education and academics. However, since PR education in Saudi Arabia is not the core focus of this study, the academics' interview responses were looked at as a whole and discussed in relation to the research framework in Chapter Six (Discussion).

The names of the five academics in this study were withheld to preserve their anonymity. Instead, they are indicated by a pseudonym. KAU Participant #1, KAU Participant #2, KAU Participant #3, KAU Participant #4, and KAU Participant #5.

3.6.1.4.1 Designing and Conducting the One-to-One Interviews with Academics

The researcher consequently designed a semi-structured interview, consisting of questions that were expected to generate data on the topic of social media adoption, PR education, and training. In addition, all the academics interviewed were given the chance to give their own input into the topic.

The interview venue selected was the School of Media at KAU in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The duration of the interviews varied between 45 and 90 minutes. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, reassuring the participants that they would be anonymized and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The research purpose was clarified in the consent form, which was carefully reviewed with each participant before their interview. The interviews were also audio-recorded, transcribed, and then translated into English. The final draft of each transcribed interview was shared with the corresponding interviewee to obtain their feedback. The semi structured interview included the following questions

1- How does the development of digital communication in general, and social media in particular impact the curriculum?

2- What are the challenges in adopting digital communications for PR practice in Saudi Arabia?

3- Can you identify barriers and obstacles to adopting digital communication?

4- Can you give your opinion of the PR training provided by organizations and educational institutions?

5- What is the gender balance between male and female PR students?

After working through these questions, the interviewees (academics) were given free rein by the interviewer to give their views on the topic, should they have anything to add. The data gathered in these interviews are included in the Appendix.

3.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented and discussed the research methodology in relation to the literature framework for this current study. In addition, this chapter has discussed and justified the selection of the research approach, which was interpretive. Also discussed and explained were the epistemological, ontological, and methodological philosophy underpinning the data collection. The second part of the chapter then presented and specified the quantitative and qualitative methods used to collect data from a sample of PR practitioners, four organizations, and a sample of academics. Moreover, the sampling technique used to select the participants was clarified, including the compilation of their demographic information. Moreover, details on the steps taken by the researcher to gather the data were also considered. Finally, this chapter described and justified the methods of analyzing and interpreting the collected data. The next chapter (Chapter Four) will now illustrate and discuss the survey findings.

Chapter Four: Results and Findings of Survey on Use of Social Media by Public Relations (PR) Practitioners

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the results of the online survey conducted among PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia. It illustrates the survey results in tabular, graphic, and descriptive form, while also discussing the significance of the findings in relation the literature on the use of social media by PR practitioners that was discussed in Chapter Two.

4.2 Survey and Results

The survey sent out to the participants began by introducing the study and explaining its purpose and aim. It also provided information about the researcher (name, contact number, email address) and the name of the University concerned. The survey results showed that 117 participants had completed the survey after reading and understanding its purpose. Each participant spent an average of 12-15 minutes on completing the questionnaire. The survey consisted of three sections, relating to 1) Demographic data, 2) Use of social media for PR in Saudi Arabia, and 3) Use of social media versus traditional media for PR in Saudi Arabia. The following sub-sections explains the structure of the survey in depth, and demonstrates the results of each section based on the inputs by all participants, and by gender.

4.2.1 Section 1: Demographic Data

4.2.1.1 Gender
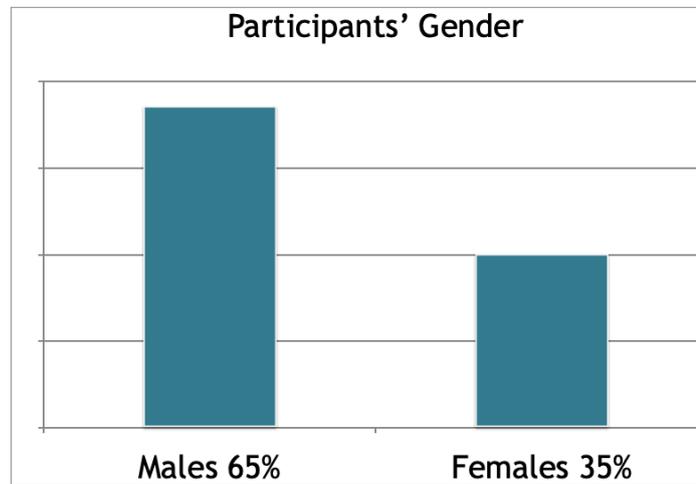
Figure 1: Gender distribution of sample

Table 1: Gender distribution of sample

		Frequency	**%**	**Valid %**
Valid	Male	76	65%	75.9%
	Female	41	35%	34.04%
	Total	117	100.0%	100.0%

Result 1: In total, 117 participants completed the survey, the majority of whom were male (76), translating to 65% of the sample.

4.2.1.2 Age

Table 2: Demographic data – Age of participants

Age Group (Years)	**All Participants n=117**	**Female**	**Male**
<21	1%	1%	0%
21-30	34%	66%	17%
31-40	41%	24%	51%
41-50	26	8%	31%
>50	1%	0%	1%

Result 2: The majority of the participants (75%) were aged 21-40 years. More specifically, 41% of the participants were aged 31-40 years, this being the biggest segment in the sample. Meanwhile, 34% of the participants were aged 21-30 years, and 26% of the participants were aged 41-50 years. However, just one participant was under the age of 21 years, and only one participant was aged over 51 years.

Result 2 by gender: Just over half the male participants (51%) were in the age-group, 31-40 years, followed by 31% in the segment, 41-50 years old. However, only 17% of the male participants were aged between 20 and 31 years, while the majority of the female participants (66%) were aged 21-30 years, followed by 24% of female participants in the age group, 31-40 years.

4.2.1.3 Educational Level

Table 3: Demographic data – Participants' education

Education	All Participants n=117)	Female	Male
Undergraduate	6%	5%	6%
Graduate	53%	66%	47%
Postgraduate	41%	27%	47%
Other	0%	2%	0%

Result 3: The majority of the participants were university graduates (53%) or held postgraduate degrees (40%). Only 6% did not hold a qualification that was higher than a High School Diploma.

Result 3 by gender: The vast majority of male and female participants held a graduate or postgraduate degree (90% of the entire sample). Among the male participants, 47% were graduates, while 47% were postgraduates, and 6% were undergraduates. Meanwhile, out of the female participants, 66% were graduates, 27% had postgraduate degrees, 5% were undergraduates, and 2% indicated the 'Other' option.

4.2.1.4 Years of Professional Public Relations (PR) Experience

Table 4: Demographic data – Work experience

Years of Professional Experience	All Participants (n=117)	Female	Male
<Less than 1	26%	37%	20%
1-5	32%	56%	20%
6-10	18%	5%	25%
>More than 10	24%	2%	35%

Result 4: In terms of the number of years of professional PR experience, the largest number of responses (33%) indicated less than five years, whereas 26% of the participants indicated less than one year. Meanwhile, 24% had over 10 years' experience, and 18% indicated 6-10 years.

Result 4 by gender: Among the male participants, 35% were found to have over 10 years' experience in the PR field, while 25% had 6-10 years. In contrast, 56% of female participants had less than five years' experience, and 37% had been in their profession for less than one year.

4.2.1.5 Employment Status

Table 5: Demographic data – Work status

Status	All Participants (n=117)	Female	Male
Freelance	35%	37%	34%
Part-time employed	10%	17%	7%
Full-time employed	55%	46%	60%

Result 5: Over half the participants (55%) were full-time employees, while 35% worked freelance, and just 10% were part-time employees.

Result 5 by gender: The majority of the male participants (60%) were full-time employees, while 7% were part-time employees, and 4% were freelance. In contrast, 46% of the female participants were employed full time, while 37% worked freelance, and 17% worked part-time.

4.2.1.6 Team Size

Table. 6: Demographic data – Strength of team

Strength of Team	All Participants (n=117)	Female	Male
1-5 members	35%	42%	32%
6-10 members	26%	24%	26%
11-20 members	13%	7%	16%
>20	17%	17%	17%
By myself	9%	10%	9%

Result 6: Out of all the participants surveyed, 35% indicated that they worked in a team of 1-5 members, whereas 26% were in a team of 6-10 members. Meanwhile, 17% indicated that they worked in a team of over 20 members, 13% worked in a team of 11-20 members, and 9% worked alone.

Result 6 by gender: Out of the male participants, 32% indicated that they worked in a team of 1-5 members, and 26% were in a team of 6-10 members. Meanwhile, 17% stated that they worked in a team of over 20 members; 16% worked in a team of 11-20 members, and 9% worked alone. Similarly, 42% of the female participants reported that they worked in a team of 1-5 members, while 24% worked in teams of 6-10 members, and 17% were in teams of over 20 members. Finally, 10% of the female participants indicated that they worked alone, and just 7% were in teams of 11-20 members.

Having set out the demographic data in the above paragraphs, the next sub-section will present the data on the participants' use of social media.

4.2.2 Section 2: Use of Social Media for Public Relations (PR) Communication

Table 7: Use of social media – Participants' social media accounts

Network	All Participants (n=117)	Female	Male
Facebook	74%	71%	75%
Twitter	88%	73%	96%
YouTube	68%	56%	75%

Result 7: Most of the participants (88%) indicated that they had created personal Twitter accounts, while 74% had created accounts for PR practice on Facebook, and 68% had PR accounts on YouTube.

Result 7 by gender: Out of the male participants, 96% had created a Twitter account for their PR practice, while 75% had created such an account on Facebook, and 75% on YouTube. Meanwhile, 73% of the female participants had created an account on Twitter for their PR practice, 71% had a PR account on Facebook, and 56% had a PR account on YouTube.

Table 8: Use of social media – Frequency of using social media for daily public relations (PR) practice (in hours)

Hours Spent	All Participants (n=117)	Female	Male
<-2	22%	20%	21%
2-5	40%	37%	38%
5-7	20%	24%	16%
>7	17%	10%	20%

Result 8: Out all the participants, 40% indicated that they spent 2-5 hours per day using social media for their PR practice, with 22% of the whole sample reporting that they spent less than 2 hours per day on social media for PR purposes, 20% reporting

5--7 hours, and 17% spending more than 7 hours daily on social media sites for their PR practice.

Result 8 by gender: Among the male participants, 38% indicated that they spent 2-5 hours per day using social media for PR purposes, while 21% spent less than 2 hours, 20% spent over 7 hours, and 16% spent 5-7 hours daily on social media for their PR practice, Similarly, 37% of the female participants spent 2-5 hours daily on social media for PR purposes, 24% spent 5-7 hours, 20% spent less than 2 hours, and 10% spent over 7 hours on social media for their PR practice.

4.2.2.1 Proficiency of All Participants in Using Facebook

Table 9.1: Participants' use of Facebook

Beginner	Competent	Advanced	Very Advanced
32%	34%	32%	17%
Total 117			

Result 9.1: Out of the entire sample, 34% of the participants indicated that they were 'Competent', with slightly fewer (32%) reporting that they were 'Beginners', 32% also reporting that they were 'Advanced', and just 17% indicating that they were 'Very advanced' in using Facebook for their PR practice.

4.2.2.1.1 Male Participants' Proficiency in Using Facebook

Table 9.1.1: Use of Facebook by the male participants

Beginner	Competent	Advanced	Very Advanced
33%	29%	16%	20%
Total 117			

Result 9.1.1: Out of the male participants, 33% indicated that they were 'Beginners', while 29% reported that they were 'Competent', and 20% described themselves as 'Very advanced', compared to 16% who indicated that they were 'Advanced' in using Facebook for their PR practice.

4.2.2.1.2 Female Participants' Proficiency in Using Facebook

Table 9.1.2: Use of Facebook by the female participants

Beginner	Competent	Advanced	Very Advanced
27%	42%	20%	10%
Total=117			

Result 9.1.2: Out Of the female participants, 42% indicated that they were 'Competent', whereas 27% described themselves as 'Beginners', 20% reported that they were 'Advanced', and 10% indicated that they were 'Very advanced' in using Facebook for their PR practice.

4.2.2.2 Participants' Proficiency in Using Twitter for Their PR Practice

The following charts and results illustrate the participants' proficiency in using Twitter for their PR communications.

Table 9.2: Participants' use of Twitter

Beginner	Competent	Advanced	Very Advanced
16%	22%	30%	32%
Total=117			

Result 9.2: Out of all the participants, 32% indicated that they were 'Very advanced' in using Twitter for their PR communications, with 30% describing themselves as 'Advanced', 22% as 'Competent', and 16% as 'Beginners'.

4.2.2.2.1 Male Participants' Proficiency in Using Twitter

Table 9.2.1: Male participants' Use of Twitter

Beginner	Competent	Advanced	Very Advanced
31%	25%	29%	32%
Total=117			

Result 9.2.1: Out of the male participants, 32% indicated that they were 'Very Advanced' in using Twitter for their PR communication, while 31% reported that they were 'Beginners', and 29% that they were 'Advanced', with 25% indicating that they were 'Competent' in this activity.

4.2.2.2.2 Female Participants' Proficiency in Using Twitter

Table 9.2.2: Female participants' use of Twitter

Beginner	Competent	Advanced	Very Advanced
20%	21%	27%	29%
Total=117			

Result 9.2.2: Out of the female participants, 29% indicated that they were 'Very advanced' in using Twitter for their PR communication, while 27% reported that they were 'Advanced', 21% that they were 'Competent', and 20% that they were 'Beginners' in this activity.

4.2.2.3 Participants' Proficiency in Using YouTube

The following Tables and results illustrate the participants' proficiency in using YouTube for their PR communication.

Table 9.3: Participants' use of YouTube

Beginner	Competent	Advanced	Very Advanced
15%	33%	34%	19%
Total=117			

Result 9.3: Out of all the participants, 34% indicated that they were 'Advanced' in using YouTube for PR communication, while 33% reported that they were 'Competent'. Meanwhile, 19% indicated that they were 'Very advanced', and just 15% that they were 'Beginners' in this activity.

4.2.2.3.1 Male Participants' Proficiency in Using YouTube

Table 9.3.1: Male participants' use of YouTube

Beginner	Competent	Advanced	Very Advanced
18%	32%	29%	17%
Total=117			

Result 9.3.1: Out of the male participants, 32% indicated that they were 'Competent', while 29% reported that they were 'Advanced' in the use of YouTube for their PR communication. Meanwhile, 18% of the male participants indicated that they were 'Beginners', and 17% that they were 'Very advanced' in using YouTube for this purpose.

4.2.2.3.2 Female Participants' Proficiency in Using YouTube

Table 9.3.2: Female participants' use of YouTube

Beginner	Competent	Advanced	Very Advanced
5%	29%	37%	20%
Total=117			

Result 9.3.2: Out of the female participants, 37% indicated that they were 'Advanced' in using YouTube for their PR activities, while 29% reported that they were 'Competent', 20% that they were 'Very advanced', and just 5% that they were 'Beginners' in this activity.

4.2.2.4 Frequency of Daily Social Media Use for Public Relations (PR) Practice

Table 10, below corresponds to Survey Q10, gathering data on the frequency of social media usage for PR practice.

Table 10: Frequency of participants' use of social media for PR purposes

Frequency of Use	All Participants	Female	Male
Every day	57%	37%	59%
Most of the time	22%	54%	18%
Sometimes	15%	29%	15%
Rarely	5%	15%	7%
Never	<1%	2%	<1%

Result 10: Most of the participants (57%) indicated that they used social media 'Every day', while 22% of the participants reported that they used it 'Most of the time', and 15% indicated 'Sometimes'. Just 5% indicated that 'Rarely' use social media for PR practice, and less than 1% reported that they never used these tools in their PR practice.

Result 10 by gender: Out of the male participants, the majority (59%) indicated that they used social media 'Every day', while 18% reported that they used it 'Most of the time', and 15% that they used it 'Sometimes'. However, just 7% indicated that they 'Rarely used' social media for their PR practice. Conversely, Table 10 shows that while 54% of the female participants used social media 'Every day' for their PR practice, 29% also indicated that they used it 'Most of the time', 15% used it 'Sometimes', and just 2% claimed that they 'Rarely' used social media for their PR practice.

4.2.2.5 Rationale for Social Media Use in Their Public Relations (PR) Practice

4.2.2.5.1 To Communicate with Existing Friends and Followers

Survey Q11 was worded as follows:

Indicate whether and how far you agree or disagree with the purpose of using social media for PR practice.

Table 11.1: Level of agreement with usage – Communication

All Participants	Male	Female
82%	76%	93%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.1: It was found that 82% of all the participants used social media to communicate with existing friends and followers.

Result 11.1 by gender: It was found that 76% of the male participants and 93% of the female participants used social media to communicate with existing friends and followers.

4.2.2.5.2 To Build New Relationships

Table 11.2: Level of agreement with usage – Building relationships

All Participants	Male	Female
45%	46%	44%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.2: Out of the entire sample, 45% of the participants indicated that they used social media to build new relationships in their PR practice.

Result 11.2 by gender: Out of the male participants, 46% reported that they used social media to build new relations in their PR practice, while 44% of the female participants indicated that they used social media for this purpose.

4.2.2.5.3 To Maintain Business Relations

Table 11.3: Level of agreement with usage – Maintaining relations

All Participants	Male	Female
61%	66%	51%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.3: Out of the entire sample, 61% of the participants indicated that they used social media to maintain business relations.

Result 11.3 by gender: Out of the male participants, 66% indicated that they used social media to maintain business relations, compared to 51% of the female participants for this activity.

4.2.2.5.4 To Communicate with Clients and Stakeholders

Table 11.4: Level of agreement with usage – Communication with stakeholders

All Participants	Male	Female
33%	34%	32%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.4: Out of the entire sample, 33% of the participants indicated that they used social media to communicate with clients and stakeholders.

Result 11.4 by gender: Out of the male participants, 34% reported that they used social media to communicate with clients and stakeholders, comparable to 32% of the female participants for this activity.

4.2.2.5.5 To Share Images and Videos

Table 11.5: Level of agreement with usage – Integration and engagement

All Participants	Male	Female
47%	39%	61%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.5: Out of the entire sample, 47% of the participants indicated that they used social media to share images and videos.

Result 11.5 by gender: Out of the male participants, 39% indicated that they used social media to share images and videos, in contrast to 61% of the female participants for this activity.

4.2.2.5.6 To Scan the Public and Find out More about Products and Consumers

Table 11.6: Level of agreement with usage – Gathering information

All Participants	Male	Female
66%	62%	56%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.6: Out of the entire sample, 66% of the participants used social media to scan the public and find out more about products and consumers.

Result 11.6 by gender: Out of the male participants, 62% indicated that they used social media to scan the public and find out more about products and consumers, while 56% of the female participants indicated that they used social media for this activity.

4.2.2.5.7 To Maintain the Good Reputation of Clients or Products

Table 11.7: Level of agreement with usage – Engagement and communication

All Participants	Male	Female
29%	26%	34%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.7: Out of the entire sample, 29% of the participants indicated that they used social media to maintain the good reputation of clients or products.

Result 11.7 by gender: Out of the male participants, 26% indicated that they used social media to maintain the good reputation of clients or products, compared to 34% of the female participants for this activity.

4.2.2.5.8 Because the Public Use Social media

Table 11.8: Level of agreement with usage – Remaining in the public eye

All Participants	Male	Female
30%	21%	46%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.8: Out of the entire sample, 30% of the participants indicated that they used social media because the public also use social media.

Result 11.8 by gender: Out of the male participants, 21% reported that they used social media because the public use social media, compared to 46% of the female participants for this activity.

The choice of responses to the above statements indicated levels of agreement or disagreement:

(1) Strongly agree, (2) Agree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly disagree.

The results for this item are presented below.

Table 12.1: Social media are an essential element of public relations (PR)

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	4	3%
Disagree	3	3%
Neutral/Don't know	12	10%
Agree	38	33%
Strongly agree	59	51%
Total	116	100.0

Result 12.1: Out of the entire sample, just over half (51%) of the participants 'Strongly agreed' that social media were an essential element of their PR practice, followed by 33% who 'Agreed' with this statement. Meanwhile, 10% were 'Neutral', 3% 'Disagreed', and 3% 'Strongly disagreed'.

4.2.2.5.9 Use of Social Media for Its Low Cost

Table 12.2: Use of social media for its low cost

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	1	< 1%
Disagree	7	6%
Neutral/Don't know	17	15%

	Frequency	%
Agree	57	49%
Strongly agree	34	39%
Total	116	100.0

Result 12.2: Out of the entire sample, 49% of the participants 'Strongly agreed' and 39% 'Agreed' that their use of social media was associated with the low cost of the tools. Meanwhile, 15% were 'Neutral', 6% 'Disagreed', and less than 1% 'Strongly disagreed' that this was the case.

4.2.2.5.10 Use of Social Media for Its Ease of Use

Table 12.3: Use of social media for its ease of use

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	2	2%
Disagree	17	15%
Neutral/Don't know	6	5%
Agree	43	37%
Strongly agree	47	41%
Total	116	100.0

Result 12.3: Out of the entire sample, 41% 'Strongly agreed' and 37% 'Agreed' that they used social media for its ease of use, while 15% 'Disagreed', 5% were 'Neutral', and 2% 'Strongly disagreed'.

4.2.2.5.11 Use of Social Media to Reach Target Audience

Table 12.4: Use of social media to reach a target audience

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	1	<1%
Disagree	4	3%
Neutral/Don't know	12	10%
Agree	42	36%
Strongly agree	57	49%
Total	116	100.0

Result 12.4: Out of the entire sample, 49% of the participants 'Strongly agreed', and 36% 'Agreed' that using social media enabled them to reach their target audience, while 10% were 'Neutral', 3% 'Disagreed', and less than 1% 'Strongly disagreed'.

4.2.2.5.12 Use of Social Media Allows Me to Be More Creative in My Public Relations (PR) Practice

Table 12.5: Social media and creativity

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	1	<1%
Disagree	5	4%
Neutral/Don't know	15	13%
Agree	46	40%
Strongly agree	48	42%
Total	116	100.0

Result 12.5: Out of the entire sample, 42% of the participants 'Strongly agreed', and 40% 'Agreed' that social media made them more creative, while 13% were 'Neutral', 4% 'Disagreed', and less than 1% 'Strongly disagreed'.

<u>4.2.2.5.13 Use of Social Media Because Clients and Organizations Are More</u>

<u>Comfortable with It</u>

Table 2.6: Use of social media because clients are comfortable with it

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	1	<1%
Disagree	5	4%
Neutral/Don't know	11	9%
Agree	50	43%
Strongly agree	49	42%
Total	116	100.0

Result 12.6: Out of the entire sample, 42% of the participants 'Strongly agreed', and 43% 'Agreed' that they used social media because clients and organizations were more comfortable with these media, while 9% of the participants were 'Neutral', 4% 'Disagreed', and less than 1% 'Strongly disagreed'.

4.2.2.6 What Is Understood by Public Relations (PR) and Its Functions in Saudi Arabia

The results derived from the responses to Q13 are presented below.

Table 13: The understanding of public relations (PR) in Saudi Arabia

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	5	4%
Disagree	1	<1%
Neutral/Don't know	17	15%
Agree	56	48%
Strongly agreed	37	32%
Total	116	100.0

Result 13: Out of the entire sample, 48% of the participants 'Agreed', and 32% 'Strongly Agreed' that there was an understanding of PR and its functions in Saudi Arabia, while 15% were 'Neutral', 4% 'Strongly disagreed', and less than 1% 'Disagreed' that this was the case.

4.2.2.7 Training and Guidelines for Social Media Use in Saudi Public Relations (PR)

The results derived from these responses are presented in the following sub-sections.

4.2.2.7.1 Statement 1: There Is a Lack of Training and Guidelines for Using Social Media in Public Relations (PR) Practice

Table 14.1: Statement 1 – Lack of training and guidelines

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	4	3%
Disagree	3	2%
Neutral/Don't know	14	12%
Agree	69	59%
Strongly agree	26	22%
Total	116	100.0

Result 14.1: Out of the entire sample, most of the participants (59%) 'Agreed' and 22% 'Strongly agreed' that there was a lack of training and guidelines for social media use in PR practice in Saudi Arabia, while 12% were 'Neutral', 2% 'Disagreed', and 3% 'Disagreed' with this statement.

<u>4.2.2.7.2 Statement 2: Social Media Are Easy to Adopt and There Is No Need for Training</u>

Table 14.2: Training Statement 2 – No training is required

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	7	6%
Disagree	34	29%
Neutral/Don't know	18	16%
Agree	38	33%
Strongly agree	19	16%
Total	116	100.0

Result 14.2: Out of the entire sample, 33% 'Agreed', and 16% 'Strongly agreed' that social media are easy to adopt and there is no need for training, while 29% 'Disagreed', 16% were 'Neutral', and 6% 'Strongly disagreed' with this statement.

<u>4.2.2.7.3 Statement 3: Training Should Be Provided Internally, Not by a Third Party</u>

Table 14.3. Training statement 3 – In-house training required

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	6	5%
Disagree	23	20%
Neutral/Don't know	26	22%
Agree	41	35%
Strongly agree	20	17%
Total	116	100.0

Result 14.3: Out of the entire sample, 35% 'Agreed', and 17% 'Strongly agreed' that training should be provided internally, rather than by a third party, while 22% were 'Neutral', 20% 'Disagreed', and 5% 'Strongly disagreed' with this statement.

4.2.2.8 Perceptions of Interaction with the Public via Social Media

4.2.2.8.1 Statement 1: When Using Social Media, I Must Set out a Strategy and Stick to It

Table 15.1: Statement 1 – Social media engagement

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	2	2%
Disagree	5	4%
Do not know	4	3%
Agree	71	61%
Strongly agree	34	29%
Total	116	100.0

Result 15.1: Out of the entire sample, most (61%) of the participants 'Agreed' and 29% 'Strongly agreed' that adherence to a strategy was necessary for using social media in PR, while 3% 'Did not know', 4% 'Disagreed', and 2% 'Strongly disagreed' with this statement.

4.2.2.8.2 Statement 2: It Is Dangerous to Interact with the Public via Social Media Networks

Table 15.2: Statement 2 – Dangers of social media engagement

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	5	4%
Disagree	26	22%
Do not know	24	21%
Agree	46	40%
Strongly agree	15	13%
Total	116	100.0

Result 15.2: Out of the entire sample, 40% 'Agreed', and 13% 'Strongly agreed' that it was dangerous to interact with the public via social media, while 21% 'Did not know', 22% 'Disagreed', and 4% 'Strongly disagreed' with this statement.

<u>4.2.2.8.3 Statement 3: I Must Refer to My Team before I Generate Any</u>

<u>Conversation in a Hashtag or Network Group.</u>

Table 15.3: Statement 3 – Referring to the team before engaging with the public via social media

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	2	2%
Disagree	15	13%
Do not know	12	10%
Agree	54	46%
Strongly agree	33	29%
Total	116	100.0

Result 15.3: Out of the entire sample, 49% of the participants 'Agreed', and 29% 'Strongly agreed' that they needed to refer to their team before engaging with the public via social media, while 10% 'Did not know', 13% 'Disagreed', and 2% 'Strongly disagreed' with this statement.

4.2.2.8.4 Statement 4: I Must Listen to the Conversation before Engaging or

Referring to My Team

Table 15.4: Statement 4 – Listening to conversation before engagement or referring
to team

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	1	<1%
Disagree	21	18%
Don't know	7	6%
Agree	56	49%
Strongly agree	30	26%
Total	116	100.0

Result 15.4: Out of the entire sample, 49% of the participants 'Agreed', and 26%
'Strongly agreed' that they needed to observe a social media conversation before
engaging with the public or referring to their team, while 6% of the participants 'Did
not know', 18% 'Disagreed', and less than 1% 'Strongly disagreed' with this
statement.

4.2.2.8.5 Statement 5: I Decide to Share Images or Other Posts Based on the Number

of Participants in Hashtag or Network Groups

Table 15.5 Statement 5 – Engagement based on number of participants in a group

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	3	4%
Disagree	19	17%
Don't know	14	12%
Agree	56	49%
Strongly agree	23	20%
Total	116	100.0

Result 15.5: Out of the entire sample, 49% of the participants 'Agreed', and 20% 'Strongly agreed' that they shared images and other posts based on the number of users in a particular social media group or under a hashtag, while 12% of the participants 'Did not know', 17% 'Disagreed', and 4% 'Strongly disagreed' with this statement.

4.2.2.8.6 Statement 6: I Just Share My Posts Anyway

Table 15.6: Statement 6 – Unconditional engagement

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	11	10%
Disagree	43	38%
Do not know	24	20%
Agree	29	25%
Strongly agree	8	7%
Total	116	100.0

Result 15.6: Out of the entire sample, 38% of the participants 'Disagreed' and 10% 'Strongly disagreed' that they shared their content, irrespective of factors such as the nature of the social networking group or conversation. Meanwhile, 20% of the participants indicated that they 'Did not know', while 25% 'Agreed', and 7% 'Strongly agreed' with this statement.

Table 15.7 Statement 6 – Assurance of engagement outcomes

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	3	<3%
Disagree	24	21%
Do not know	11	10%
Agree	46	40%
Strongly agree	31	27%
Total	116	100.0

Result 15.7: Out of the entire sample, 40% of the participants 'Agreed', and 27% 'Strongly agreed' that they were sure of gaining followers through their engagement. Meanwhile, 10% of the participants indicated that they 'Did not know', whereas 21% 'Disagreed', and 4% 'Strongly disagreed' with this statement.

4.2.3 Social Media versus Traditional Media in Public Relations (PR) Practice

4.2.3.1 Reasons for Including Social Media in Public Relations (PR) Campaigns

4.2.3.1.1 Statement 1: Social Media Are Not as Costly as Traditional Media Tools

Table 16.1: Social media versus the media trio – Low cost

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	4	3%
Disagree	14	12%
Neutral/Don't know	13	11%
Agree	38	33%
Strongly agree	47	41%
Total	116	100.0

Result 16.1: Out of the entire sample, 41% of the participants 'Strongly agreed', and 33% 'Agreed' that social media are less costly than traditional media, while 11% of the participants were 'Neutral', 12% 'Disagreed', and 3% 'Strongly disagreed' with this statement.

4.2.3.1.2 Statement 2: Social Media Ensure Better Results Than Traditional Media Tools

Table 16.2: Social media versus the media trio – Better results

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	2	2%
Disagree	7	6%
Neutral/Don't know	13	11%
Agree	38	33%
Strongly agree	56	48%
Total	116	100.0

Result 16.2: Out of the entire sample, 48% of the participants 'Strongly agreed', and 33% 'Agreed' that social media yield better results than traditional media, while 11% of the participants were 'Neutral', 6% 'Disagreed', and 2% 'Strongly disagreed' with this statement.

4.2.3.1.3 Statement 3: Social Media Are More Important Than the Print Version of Newspapers for My Public Relations (PR) Practice

Table 16.3: Social media versus the media trio - Newspapers

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	3	3%
Disagree	12	10%
Neutral/Don't know	16	14%
Agree	23	20%
Strongly agree	62	53%
Total	116	100.0

Result 16.3: Out of the entire sample, over half the participants (53%) 'Strongly agreed', and 20% 'Agreed' that social media were more important for their PR practice than print versions of newspapers, while 14% of the participants were 'Neutral', 10% 'Disagreed', and 3% 'Strongly disagreed' with this statement.

4.2.3.1.4 Statement 4: Social Media Are More Important Than TV Channels for My Public Relations (PR) Practice

Table 16.4: Social media versus the media trio – TV channels

	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	4	3%
Disagree	20	17%
Neutral/Don't know	23	20%
Agree	21	18%
Strongly agree	48	41%
Total	116	100.0

Result 16.4: Out of the entire sample, 41% of the participants 'Strongly agreed', and 18% 'Agreed' that social media were more important than TV channels for their PR

practice, while 20% of the participants were 'Neutral', 17% 'Disagreed', and 3% 'Strongly disagreed' with this statement.

4.2.3.2 Effectiveness of Social Media for Public Relations (PR) Practice

4.2.3.2.1 Facebook as a Tool of Public Relations (PR) Communication

Table 17.1: Effectiveness of Facebook for public relations (PR) practice

	Frequency	%
Very effective	11	10%
Effective	52	45%
Not effective	41	36%
Very ineffective	11	10%
Total	116	100.0

Result 17.1: Out of the entire sample, 45% of the participants found Facebook to be 'Effective', and 10% found it to be 'Very effective' for PR practice, while 36% reported it as 'Not effective' and 10% as 'Very ineffective'.

4.2.3.2.2 Effectiveness of Twitter as a Tool of Public Relations (PR) Communication

Table 17.2: Effectiveness of Twitter for Public Relations (PR) communication

	Frequency	%
Very effective	81	70%
Effective	30	26%
Not effective	2	<1%
Very ineffective	2	<1%
Total	116	100.0

Result 17.2: Out of the entire sample, most (70%) of the participants found Twitter to be 'Very effective', and 26% found it to be 'effective'. Meanwhile, less than 1% found it to be 'Not effective', and less than 1% found Twitter 'Very ineffective'.

4.2.3.2.3 Effectiveness of YouTube as a Tool of Public Relations (PR) Communication

Table 17.3: Effectiveness of YouTube as a public relations (PR) tool

	Frequency	%
Very effective	58	50%
Effective	53	46%
Not effective	4	3%
Very ineffective	1	<1%
Total	116	100.0

Result 17.3: Out of the entire sample, half (50%) of the participants indicated that they found YouTube to be 'Very effective', and 46% found it 'Effective', while 3% of the participants did not find YouTube 'Effective', and less than 1% found it 'Very ineffective'.

<u>4.2.3.2.4 Effectiveness of Daily Newspapers as a Tool of Public Relations (PR)</u>

<u>Communication</u>

Table 17.4: Effectiveness of newspapers as a public relations (PR) tool

	Frequency	**%**
Very effective	14	12%
Effective	59	51%
Not effective	39	34%
Very ineffective	4	3%
Total	116	100.0

Result 17.4: Out of the entire sample found, most of the participants (51%) found newspapers to be 'Effective' and 12% found them to be 'Very effective' for their PR practice, while 34% reported that they were 'Not effective', and 3% found them 'Very ineffective'.

<u>4.2.3.2.5 Effectiveness of TV Channels as a Tool of Public Relations (PR)</u>

<u>Communication</u>

Table 17.5: Effectiveness of TV channels for public relations (PR) communication

	Frequency	**%**
Very effective	24	21%
Effective	77	66%
Not effective	13	11%
Very ineffective	2	<2%
Total	116	100.0

Result 17.5: Out of the entire sample, most (66%) of the participants indicated that TV channels were 'Effective', and 21% reported that they were 'Very effective' for their PR practice, while 11% found them 'Not effective', and less than 2% found them 'Very ineffective' for this purpose.

4.2.3.2.6 Effectiveness of Radio Stations as a Tool of Public Relations (PR) Communication

Table 17.6: Effectiveness of radio stations for public relations (PR) communication effectiveness

	Frequency	%
Very effective	16	14%
Effective	66	57%
Not effective	27	23%
Very ineffective	6	5%
Total	116	100.0

Result 17.6: Out of the entire sample, over half (57%) of the participants indicated that they found radio stations to be 'Effective', and 14% found them 'Very effective' for PR communication. Meanwhile, 23% of the participants reported that radio stations were 'Not effective', and 5% found them 'Very ineffective' for this purpose.

4.2.3.3 Importance of Each Media Tool for Public Relations (PR) Work

4.2.3.3.1 Importance of Facebook as a Public Relations (PR) Media Tools

Table 18.1: Importance of Facebook as a public relations (PR) media tool

	Frequency	%
Very important	19	17%
Important	52	45%
Not important	44	38%
Total	115	100

Result 18.1: Out of the entire sample, 45% found Facebook to be 'Important', and 17% found it 'Very important' for their PR work, while 38% found it 'Not important' for this purpose.

4.2.3.3.2 Importance of Twitter as a Public Relations (PR) Media Tools

Table 18.2: Importance of Twitter as a public relations (PR) media tool

	Frequency	%
Very important	82	72%
Important	29	25%
Not important	3	<3%
Total	115	100

Result 18.2: Out of the entire sample, the majority (72%) found Twitter to be 'Very important', and 25% found it 'Important' as a PR tool, while just 3% found it 'Not important' for this purpose.

4.2.3.3.3 Importance of YouTube as a Public Relations (PR) Media Tool

Table 18.3: Importance of YouTube as a public relations (PR) media tool

	Frequency	%
Very important	60	53%
Important	48	42%
Not important	6	5%
Total	115	100

Result 18.3: Out of the entire sample, over half (53%) of the participants found YouTube 'Very important', and 42% found it 'Important' for their PR work, while just 5% found YouTube 'Not important' for this purpose.

4.2.3.3.4 Importance of Daily Newspapers as Public Relations (PR) Media Tools

Table 18.4: Importance of daily newspapers as public relations (PR) tools

	Frequency	%
Very important	23	20%
Important	50	44%
Not important	41	36%
Total	115	100

Result 18.4: Out of the entire sample, 44% found newspapers to be 'Important', and 20% found them 'Very important' for their PR work, while 36% indicated that they found newspapers 'Not important' for this purpose.

4.2.3.3.5 Importance of TV channels as Public Relations (PR) Media Tools

Table 18.5: Importance of TV channels as public relations (PR) tools

	Frequency	%
Very important	35	31%
Important	68	60%
Not important	11	10%
Total	115	100

Result 18.5: Out of the entire sample, most of the participants (60%) found television to be 'Important', and 31% found it 'Very important' for their PR work, while 10% indicated that it was 'Not important' for this purpose.

4.2.3.3.6 Importance of Radio Stations as Public Relations (PR) Media Tools

Table 18.6: Importance of radio as a public relations (PR) tool

	Frequency	%
Very important	29	25%
Important	56	49%
Not important	30	26%
Total	115	100

Result 18.6: Out of the entire sample, 49% found radio to be 'Important'. and 25% found it 'Very important' for their PR work, while 26% of the participants indicated that radio was 'Not important' for this purpose.

4.2.3.4 Perceptions of the Shift towards Online Media

Table 19: Perceptions of improvement in public relations (PR) practice as a result of social media use

	Frequency	%
Social media	82	71%
No difference	19	16%
Traditional media	15	12%
Total	115	100

Result 19: Out of the entire sample, most (71%) of the participants perceived improvement in their PR practice as a result of the shift towards social media, whereas 16% perceived 'No difference' between social and traditional media, and 12% perceived that traditional media had improved their PR practice.

4.2.3.5 Satisfaction with the Use of New versus Traditional Tools in Public Relations (PR) Practice

4.2.3.5.1 Participants' General Satisfaction with the Use of New Public Relations (PR) Tools in Their Practice

Table 19.1: Participants' general satisfaction with the new public relations (PR) tools

	Frequency	%
Satisfied	43	37%
To some extent	60	52%
Not satisfied	12	11%
Total	115	100

Result 19.1: Out of the entire sample, over half (52%) of the participants indicated that they were generally satisfied 'To an extent' with the new PR, and 37% were 'Very satisfied', while 11% reported that they were 'Not satisfied' with the new PR.

4.2.3.5.2 Participants' General Satisfaction with the Use of Traditional Public Relations (PR) Tools

Table 19.2: Participants' satisfaction with traditional public relations (PR) tools

	Frequency	%
Satisfied	16	14%
To some extent	68	59%
Not satisfied	12	11%
Total	115	100

Result 19.2: Out of the entire sample, most of the participants were generally satisfied 'To some extent', and 14% were 'Satisfied' with traditional PR tools, while 11% of the participants indicated that they were 'Not satisfied' with these media.

4.2.3.5.3 Participants' Satisfaction with Using Facebook in Their Public Relations (PR) Practice

Table 19.3: Participants' satisfaction with using Facebook in their public relations (PR) practice

	Frequency	%
Satisfied	13	11%
To some extent	53	46%
Not satisfied	50	43%
Total	116	100

Result 19.3: Out of the entire sample, 46% of the participants indicated that they were satisfied 'To some extent', and 11% were 'Satisfied' with using Facebook in their PR practice, while 43% of the participants reported that they were 'Not satisfied' with Facebook as a PR tool.

4.2.3.5.4 Participants' Satisfaction with Using Twitter in Their Public Relations (PR) Practice

Table 19.4: Participants' satisfaction with using Twitter in their public relations (PR) practice

	Frequency	**%**
Satisfied	68	59%
To some extent	39	34%
Not satisfied	8	7%
Total	116	100

Result 19.4: Most of the sample (59%) reported that they were 'Satisfied' and 34% that they were satisfied 'To some extent' with using Twitter in their PR practice, while 7% of the participants reported that they were 'Not satisfied' with using Twitter for this purpose.

4.2.3.5.5 Participants' Satisfaction with Using YouTube in Their Public Relations (PR) Practice

Table 19.5: Participants' satisfaction with using YouTube in their public relations (PR) practice

	Frequency	**%**
Satisfied	57	49%
To some extent	50	43%
Not satisfied	9	8%
Total	116	100

Result 19.5: Out of the entire sample, 49% of the participants indicated that they were 'Satisfied', and 43% that they were satisfied 'To some extent' with using YouTube for their PR practice, while just 8% of the participants were 'Not satisfied' with YouTube for this purpose.

4.2.3.5.6 Participants' Satisfaction with Using Newspapers in Their Public Relations (PR) Practice

Table 19.6: Participants' satisfaction with using newspapers in their public relations (PR) practice

	Frequency	%
Satisfied	19	16%
To some extent	58	50%
Not satisfied	39	34%
Total	116	100

Result 19.6: Out of the entire sample, half (50%) of the participants indicated that they were satisfied 'To some extent', and 16% were 'Satisfied' with using newspapers in their PR practice, while 34% of the participants were 'Not satisfied' with newspapers for this purpose.

Participants' Satisfaction with Using TV Channels in Their Public Relations (PR) Practice

Table 19.7: Participants' satisfaction with using TV channels in their public relations (PR) practice

	Frequency	%
Satisfied	37	32%
To some extent	60	52%
Not satisfied	19	16%
Total	116	100

Result 19.7: Out of the entire sample, over half (52%) of the participants indicated that they were 'Satisfied', and 32% that they were satisfied 'To some extent' with using television in their PR practice, while 16% of the participants were 'Not satisfied' with using TV channels for this purpose.

4.2.3.5.8 Participants' Satisfaction with Using Radio Stations in Their Public Relations (PR) Practice

Table 19.8: Participants' satisfaction with using radio in their PR practice

	Frequency	%
Satisfied	31	27%
To some extent	56	49%
Not satisfied	28	24%
Total	116	100

Result 19.8: Out of the entire sample, 49% of the participants indicated that they were satisfied 'To some extent', and 27% that they were 'Satisfied' with using radio in their PR practice, while 24% of the participants were 'Not satisfied' with using radio stations for this purpose.

4.2.3.6 Ease of Use: Social Media versus Traditional Media

Table 20: Ease of use of social media versus the media trio

	Frequency	%
With social media	83	72%
With both	16	14%
With traditional media	17	14%
Total	116	100

Result 20: Out of the entire sample, most (72%) of the participants found PR easier with social media, while 14% found both types of tool offered the same ease of use, and 14% found PR easier with traditional media.

4.2.3.7 Importance of Digital versus Traditional Media

4.2.3.7.1 Option 1: Press Release in Two Major Print Newspapers, Shared on One Social Media Site

Table 21.1: Media campaign Option 1

	Frequency	%
Rated#1	34	30%
Rated#2	16	14%
Rated#3	28	25%
Rated#4	34	30%
Total	116	100

Result 21.1: Out of the entire sample, 30% of the participants rated Option 1 most highly, and 30% rated it least highly, while 25% rated it third, and 14% second. Therefore, the score for Option 1 is 2.45.

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4.2.3.7.2 Press Release in Digital Version of Daily Newspaper, Shared on Three Social Media Sites

Table 21.2: Media campaign Option 2

	Frequency	%
Rated#1	29	26%
Rated#2	40	36%
Rated#3	21	19%
Rated#4	21	19%
Total	116	100

Result 21.2: Out of the entire sample, 36% of the participants rated Option 2 second, and 26% rated it first. Meanwhile, 19% rated it third, and 19% rated it last. Therefore, the score for Option 2 is 2.69.

4.2.3.7.3 Coverage of News on One TV Channel, Shared on One Social Media Site

Table 21.3: Media campaign Option 3

	Frequency	%
Rated#1	30	26%
Rated#2	36	32%
Rated#3	30	26%
Rated#4	18	16%
Total	116	100

Result 21.3: Out of the entire sample, 32% of the participants rated Option 3 as their second choice, 26% rated it first, 26% rated it third, and 16% rated this option lowest. Therefore, the score for Option 3 is 2.68.

<u>4.2.3.7.4 Press Release in One Major Printed Newspaper, Shared on Two Social</u>

<u>Media Sites</u>

Table 21.4: Media campaign Option 4

	Frequency	%
Rated#1	19	16%
Rated#2	21	18%
Rated#3	35	30%
Rated#4	42	35%
Total	116	100

Result 21.4: Out of the entire sample, 35% rated this option least highly, 30% rated it

third, and 18% rated it second. Meanwhile, just 16% of the participants rated it as their

first choice. Therefore, the score for Option 4 is 2.16.

4.2.3.8 What are the function of the participants?

In the final survey item, Q22 the participants were asked the question:

Which of the following statements best describes your current line of work?

The participants were then given a series of possible responses, out of which they

could choose more than one if they felt it would provide greater accuracy:

(1) Public relations and media, (2) Public relations and advertising, (3) Advertising and marketing, (4) Advertising, (5) Public relations and digital communications, and (6) Digital communications.

4.2.3.9 Public Relations (PR) and Media

Table 22 Participants' role – Public relations (PR) and media

All Participants	Female	Male
61%	56%	64%

4.2.3.9.1 Public Relations (PR) and Advertising

Table 22.1: Participants' role – Public relations (PR) and advertising

All Participants	Female	Male
20%	27%	16%

4.2.3.9.2 Advertising and Marketing

Table 22.2: Participants' role – Advertising and marketing

All Participants	Female	Male
13%	7%	16%

4.2.3.9.3 Public Relations (PR) and Marketing

Table 22.3: Participants' role – Public relations and marketing

All Participants	Female	Male
20%	20%	20%

4.2.3.9.4 Public Relations (PR) and Digital Communications

Table 22.4: Participants' role – Public relations (PR) and digital communications

All Participants	Female	Male
30%	30%	30%

Result 22: Out of the entire sample, most of the participants (61%) associated their role with PR and media, and 30% associated their role with PR and digital communications. Meanwhile, 20% of the participants associated their role with PR and advertising, and 20% with PR and marketing. Finally, 16% of the participants associated their role with digital media, and 13% with advertising and marketing.

4.3 Findings

This part of the chapter presents the survey findings in three sections, beginning with the demographic data and including the participants' preferred social media, as well as the frequency with which they used these media in their PR practice. Next, the findings are presented for the use of social media in PR practice, relating to the participants' awareness of the benefits and challenges of using these tools. Finally, the findings from a comparison between social media and traditional media tools are explained, specifically with regard to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations.

4.3.1 Demographic Data and Social Media Usage

The participant sample in this study represents an educated and experienced class, with most of the participants holding a graduate degree and a large proportion holding a postgraduate degree. The majority of the participants (75%) were aged between 21 and 40 years, with the female participants tending to be younger than their male counterparts by at least one generation: female participants aged 21-30 years, and most of the male participants aged 30-40 years. Furthermore, most of the participants spent 2-5 hours per day using social media networks for their PR practice, with the male participants spending more hours than their female counterparts. The most frequently used social media channel by all the participants was Twitter, followed by YouTube, and then Facebook.

The use of social media among the female participants differed from that of the male participants, since the former mainly used a combination of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, Meanwhile, almost all the male participants (96%) used Twitter over other social media networks. However, participants of both genders indicated that they were

either advanced or very advanced in their ability to use Twitter in their PR practice, followed by YouTube, and they were least advanced in their ability to use Facebook for their PR practice.

4.3.2 Social Media Usage for Public Relations (PR) Practice

The participants indicated that they found Twitter to be the most effective and most important social media tool for their practice, with YouTube as the second most effective and important, following by a small margin. In contrast, the sample reported Facebook as the least effective and least important platform for their PR practice.

Overall, the participants indicated that they found social media networks to be advantageous for gathering information, with the majority reporting that they used these tools to scan the public and collect more information about products and consumers. Conversely, the participants indicated that they tended not to use social media to share posts and images with the public. Moreover, only a minority used social media to communicate with clients and stakeholders. Furthermore, although the participants used social media to communicate with existing followers and friends, the majority did not use these tools to build new professional relationships. In particular, the female participants tended to be active in using social media to share posts and content, but very inactive in using these tools to build new relationships or communicate with clients and stakeholders; instead, they favoured social media for engaging with existing contacts, including friends and followers. However, the vast majority of the participants did not appear to use social media to help their clients build or maintain a good reputation, and they viewed interaction with online communities as dangerous, in that the public could respond to them in negative ways. Here, the participants were generally aware of the benefits of strategic planning for

their social media engagement, with most preferring to track online conversations before engaging with the public. Moreover, the majority of the participants indicated that they tended to refer to their fellow team members before engaging in a conversation online.

Additionally, the participants appeared to be well aware of the benefits and challenges of adopting social media, and integrated various social media networks into their PR practice as an essential element of the mix of media tools. Most of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that low cost and ease of use were the main merits afforded by social media for PR practice. In addition, most of the participants indicated that they used social media to ensure that they reached their target audiences, and most agreed or strongly agreed that they used social media because their organizations or clients wished to do so. What is more, the vast majority of the participants agree that PR practice is widely misinterpreted in Saudi Arabia, and there is a lack of training and guidelines for using digital communications in PR practice. In contrast, the participants were split in their opinion of whether organizations should integrate in-house or third-party training in social media use for PR.

4.3.3 Use of Social Media versus Traditional Media for Public Relations (PR) Practice

The participants believed that in general, social media were more effective and easier to adopt than traditional media tools. When comparing social media tools as a bundle (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) with traditional media tools such as newspapers, TV channels and radio stations, the participants tended to find traditional media still valuable for their PR practice, favouring mixed methods in their campaigns. However, the majority of the participants were not satisfied with using traditional media tools,

but rather acknowledged the strong presence of these tools in PR practice, with TV channels found to be the most effective and important, followed by radio stations. However, newspapers were thought to be the least effective and least important.

4.4 Discussion

The social media platforms, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube differ in terms of the features and merits that they offer PR practice. For instance, Facebook permits posts, Twitter enables 140-character tweets, and YouTube allows video-sharing (Wright and Hinson, 2017). The use of these platform can vary according to gender (Curtis et al., 2010). Furthermore, social media networks differ in their nature, rules of use, and functionality. Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) identified important distinctions between different types of social media, describing these differences as the 'half-life' and 'depth' of information. The half-life of information refers to its longevity in generating engagement and discussion with the public. This is exemplified by Facebook being used by PR and communications professionals. Conversely, information appearing on Twitter usually passes quickly from the screen, and the opportunity for providing depth of information and generating discussion is narrow (Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011).

In the survey findings, it was revealed that the vast majority of male and female participants (97%) found Twitter very important for their PR practice and 96% found it very effective. In contrast, 57% of the participants viewed Facebook as important to their mix of PR tools, and 55% saw it as effective. In addition, the survey identified that most of the participants were beginners in using Facebook for their PR practice, but appeared to be advanced or very advanced in using Twitter for this purpose. Therefore, although the participants viewed Facebook as important and effective, they

tended not to adopt it for their PR practice. Instead, most of the participants selected Twitter and YouTube as their first and second most used platforms for PR, which also reflects their objectives for using social media. For instance, Facebook offers PR practitioners an opportunity to engage with the public using rich content, while Twitter does not provide the same opportunity for interaction (Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011).

An advantage of using social media for PR practice is that it informs organizations about what is being said about them by the public, so that they can respond quickly (Flew, 2018) and build better communication with the public (Lenze, 2017). Social media facilitate and enhance the creation and implementation of this process (Ferguson, 2018). The survey addressed the advantages of increased communication with the public and stakeholders, but the gathered data revealed that just 33% of the sampled practitioners communicated with stakeholders via social media, even though the data showed that 82% of the sample used social media to communicate with existing friends and followers. Furthermore, social media allowed the participants to simultaneously play the dual role of respondent and member of these platforms (Bivins, 2017). According to Ferguson (2018), social media enable PR practitioners to communicate directly between an organization and its internal and external audiences. For example, the hashtag tool on Twitter facilitates this engagement with the public (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, the survey data indicated that only 47% of the participants shared images and posts on social media, and only 29% used social media to build or maintain the good reputation of their clients or organizations. Furthermore, 35% of the participants were of the view that it was dangerous to interact with the public on social media, while 26% did not agree with this perception. The dangers of interacting on social media have been suggested by several researchers, such as Solis and

Breakenridge (2009: 159), who emphasise the hazards, stating that social media are "no place for real-time experimentation". Similarly, Philips and Young (2009) claim that the challenge for PR practitioners is to understand the nature and mechanism of communication, while Dwivedi et al. (2021) point out that social media have empowered individuals. Undoubtedly, PR practitioners need to listen to the public and become the people they want to reach (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009: 277). Furthermore, research has shown that the most common problem for PR professionals is accepting the lack of control associated with social media use, wherein public response is unpredictable (McCorkindale and Wright, 2011).

In terms of engaging with the public, most of the survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that interaction via social media requires adherence to a strategy. Moreover, 75% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they needed to consult other team members before engaging with a conversation on a social media network. Furthermore, 75% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they should observe an online conversation before referring to their team or engaging with that conversation. However, 69% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the number of users under a hashtag or social media thread was the main factor in deciding whether to interact.

Previous research has also associated social media with building relationships. For example, in the past, PR practitioners would build relationships by interacting face-to-face with organizations or their representatives (Theaker, 2020). In the era of digital communication, however, social media have brought PR practitioners, organizations and the public together, which can help PR professionals build new relationships (Dhanesh, 2017b). The survey participants were asked about this process from two perspectives. First, they rated their use of social media to build new relationships,

where the gathered data showed that only 45% used social media in this way. Second, the participants rated their use of social media to maintain existing business relations, whereby 61% responded positively. In terms of gender, it was also found that 44% of the female participants used social media to build new relationships, while 93% used social media to communicate with existing friends and followers.

Social media can enable organizations to understand the public and explore key elements in different areas (White and Boatwright, 2020). Likewise, social media provide PR practitioners with an opportunity to gather data and explore public opinion on specific issues (Ferguson, 2018). According to Dwivedi et al. (2021), Twitter allows practitioners to collect data via hashtags. The survey findings show that 66% of the participants used social media to scan the public and collect information about individuals and various products. Social media have also improved PR practitioners' performance, with PR becoming more professional and creative (Kent and Li, 2020). In the survey findings, most of the participants agreed that social media have enhanced PR practice and enabled them to be more creative. The data show that 85% of the sample agreed and strongly agreed that social media enabled them to achieve their targets. The data also show that 82% of the sample agreed and strongly agreed that the use of social media made them more creative. Besides, the survey showed that 71% of the participants believed that social media improved their PR practice, while 12% were of the opinion that traditional media improved their PR practice, and 16% reported that both types of media tool improved their PR practice.

According to Wright and Hinson (2008), most PR professionals believe that social media complement traditional media, and most of the participants agreed that social media affected traditional media coverage. Duhe (2015) revealed that social media complement traditional media and these types of media are mutually intertwined. For

the current study participants, traditional media tended to be a major player in their PR activities, particularly television and radio. In comparing social media with traditional media usage, nearly half the participants (47%) agreed or strongly agreed that the low cost of social media was a factor driving its adoption over traditional media, while only 15% of the sample disagreed that this was the case. Furthermore, 81% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that social media generate better overall results than traditional media.

Conversely, according to Almefleah (2017), traditional media dominated 20th century PR, for example, in the form of press releases. The survey data similarly showed that the vast majority of the participants (87%) viewed television as effective or very effective for their PR activities, followed by 71% who considered radio as effective or very effective, and 63% who found newspapers effective or very effective for this purpose. Additionally, in terms of the *importance* of traditional media tools in PR practice, the data showed that 91% of the participants considered TV channels as important or very important for their PR practice, while 74% indicated radio as very important among their mix of media tools for PR practice, and 64% believed newspapers to be important or very important for this purpose.

In terms of how the participants perceived the use of traditional PR in general, the data showed that most (59%) were satisfied to some extent, but 11% were not satisfied with these tools. In the study, the participants were asked about their perceptions of each tool, with results to show that half (50%) of the participants were satisfied to some extent, but 34% were not satisfied. Similarly, in terms of using TV channels for PR practice, just over half (53%) were satisfied to some extent, while only 32% were satisfied, and 16% were not satisfied. Furthermore, the data showed that 49% of the sample were satisfied to some extent with using radio for their PR practice, while 27%

were satisfied, and 24% were not satisfied with using radio for this purpose. Likewise, the survey enquired about social media's ease of use compared to traditional media for PR practice, with the data showing that the majority (72%) of the participants associated ease of use with social media, while just 14% found traditional media easy to use for this purpose.

Meanwhile, Alikilic and Umit Atabek (2012) found that traditional media play a critical role in disseminating messages for PR professionals, even though the above study concluded that social media have created new broadcasters to replace the old media. The current study survey presented statements on various combinations of media tools, in order to determine the importance of social media compared to traditional media. The second statement, 'Press release in the digital version of the daily newspaper, shared on three social media sites' scored highest (2.69), closely followed by the third statement, 'Coverage of the news on one TV channel, shared on one social media site', which scored 2.68. In contrast, the first statement, 'Press release in two major printed newspapers, shared on one social media site' scored 2.45, and the fourth statement, 'Press release in one major printed newspaper, shared on two social media sites' scored lowest (2.16). The highest scoring statements were oriented towards social media, but included traditional media. However, the lowest scoring statements were focused on print versions of newspapers, combined with minor social media exposure.

The survey also addressed overall understanding of the term 'public relations' (PR) and its functions in the Kingdom, as the definition of PR was widely misunderstood in Saudi Arabia until the early 21st century (Alanazi, 1996). Moreover, in research associated with 21st century PR, Almefleah (2017: 24) argues that "the roles of PR practitioners in public and private enterprises in Saudi Arabia remain ambiguous…

and appear trapped within the vague concept that organizations and people in Saudi Arabia have cast upon PR practices". The current research survey asked the participants about their overall understanding of PR in Saudi Arabia, as the data showed that 80% of the participants agreed that the functions of PR in Saudi Arabia have been misinterpreted, including the roles and objectives of PR and its practitioners, while only 4% disagreed on this point.

Additionally, the study survey addressed the lack of training and guidelines for PR practitioners in the use and selection of certain social media tools (Distaso, McCorkindale, and Wright, 2011). The data showed that 81% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that there was a lack of training and guidelines for using social media in PR practice. This point has likewise been raised in various research worldwide; for instance, Kuruc and Opiyo (2017) argued that PR practitioners in the era of social media should be empowered through ongoing in-service training, enabling them to master and adopt the new media, or alternatively, training at institutions of higher learning. However, the data demonstrated that just over half the participants (52%) agreed or strongly agreed that training should be provided internally, not by a third party. Nevertheless, despite the fact that most of the participants agreed that there was a need for training, the data revealed that 49% of the sample agreed that social media was easy to adopt and there was no need for any special training, although 34% of the participants strongly disagreed with this notion.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the survey results, obtained in the current study from PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia. It has showcased the participants' demographic data and use of social media in PR practice, as well as comparing their use of social and

traditional media in this practice. Also presented were the data in relation to gender, which added depth to the understanding of how social media were being used by the sample. Finally, the chapter presented the survey findings, followed by a discussion.

In Chapter Five, the results of interviews with representatives from four selected organizations in Saudi Arabia will be presented and explained. In addition, the results of the online questionnaires will be set out, these questionnaires having been completed by 20 PR practitioners. The relationship between these data and the focus of the study will subsequently be discussed. Furthermore, Chapter Five will address various issues related to the training, policies, and guidelines that are provided by organizations, and the challenges and obstacles encountered by PR practitioners when adopting social media for their PR practice.

Chapter 5: Interview Results and Findings – Use of Social Media in Public Relations (PR) Communication by Organizations and Practitioners

5.1 Introduction

This chapter of the thesis analyzes the data from the semi-structured interviews with the representatives from the four predetermined organizations (see Chapter Three on methodology). In addition, it analyzes the data gathered in online questionnaires with 20 PR practitioners (see Appendix: Interviews with Representatives of Organizations and Online Questionnaires for details and transcripts). The second part of this chapter presents the findings for each method. The final part of the chapter then discusses the findings in relation to the literature on the use of social media for PR communication, as discussed in Chapter Two, before concluding the chapter.

5.1.1 Frequent Use of Social Media for Public Relations (PR) Communication by Organizations

The interviewees from all four organizations confirmed that they used social media networks as an essential part of their daily PR practice. Participant #1 stated that 60-70% of the company's messages were disseminated through social media platforms. The most used social networks by the four organizations were identified as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. For example, Participant #1 stated: 'We mainly employ Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, but Facebook is not [so much our priority as] Twitter and Instagram', while Participant #3 clarified: 'The platforms we rely on are Twitter and Instagram.' In contrast, it was established in the interviews with Participants #2 and #4 from the two multinational companies that they relied more on

Facebook for communication, compared to the Saudi-based companies, ranking

Facebook second to Twitter. According to Participant #4, 'Twitter is the best platform

for us to utilize… Facebook is the second option for us', whereas Participant #2

emphasized the importance of Facebook as a communication tool that served the

corporation's purpose, but highlighted the power of Twitter for interacting with the

public:

> People who communicate with us using Twitter usually want to complain or make suggestions; they want to ensure their message reaches the company or the public… Twitter is more for written and serious content, whereas Instagram is very strategic for us… displaying images and videos that can be shared massively on the Internet and to generate traffic.

Furthermore, Participant #3 declared: 'Twitter is the best platform for us to utilize…

it is the platform that we believe will serve us the best. All leaders are there, and when

it comes to public relations, we are targeting leaders in the industry.' Conversely,

referring to the use of Facebook, Participant #3 stated that it '… might be good for

other international corporations to see how we are doing'. However, Participant #2

mentioned that YouTube was very popular and could be considered as an essential

platform that required strong strategic planning, because the kind of videos and

advertisements uploaded onto the platform needed to be attractive to consumers,

encouraging interaction.

5.1.2 Public Relations (PR) Agencies

All four of the organizations sampled worked with PR agencies to plan and execute

their PR activities. Moreover, all the interviewees stated that the internal PR

department within their organizations followed up these PR agencies very closely,

granting approval for almost all online initiatives. The four organizations also had

internal policies and guidelines for their PR staff working with external PR agencies,

regarding the monitoring of material and granting approval. Furthermore, the four organizations considered these PR agencies as intertwined with their own PR departments. Participant #2, from a multinational corporation, explained: 'The agency we work with has a community manager who works with us, and we provide them with approved responses for engagement with the public'. Meanwhile Participant #4 clarified: 'Our organization works hand in hand with our PR and digital agency, they keep us aware of their actions and send us a weekly report. For us, it is important to work with an agency that has experience in dealing with multinational corporations.'

The interviewees also confirmed their involvement in planning and implementation. For example, Participant #3 (from a Saudi-based organization) explained: 'The PR department pitches the idea of a press release and stories from us to digital media agencies. These companies then create stories and post them on social media platforms.' Participant #3, expanded upon the role of following up and granting approval, emphasizing that it extended to preparing news and announcements, inviting and urging journalists to publish stories online: 'this is always happening, and it is like the old days of traditional media relations.' Participant #3 also added: 'Our communication was not effective and there was a lot fired back at us when communication was managed solely by an external agency, because they did not engage in the same exercises.'

5.1.3 Impact of Social Media on the Use of Traditional Media

Participant #1, from one of the Saudi-based organizations, and Participants #2 and #4 from the two multinational organizations, confirmed that traditional media tools such as newspapers, TV channels, and radio were still essential for their PR communication. In particular, Participant #4 declared:

> Social media platforms provide efficient channels for communication [but] having said that, traditional media such as TV channels and radio will be essential for many initiatives and PR communication. I believe the future will favour social media communication tools, but traditional media will still share the pie.

Furthermore, the choice of communication tool will depend on the purpose of the campaign, whereby the interviewees from all four organizations confirmed that they saw social media dominating the future of PR communication. However, they still relied heavily on traditional media for various purposes, including branding. Participant #2 specified: 'We still use traditional media, but for different reasons now and mainly for branding. I see the communication agenda being dominated by social media tools such as online networks, but traditional media will always be, [just] used in a more limited [way].' Meanwhile, Participant #3 stated: 'We use roughly 50/50 …traditional media and social media channels; for our company, traditional media tools are part of the strategy by default, but social media tools are something we cannot neglect.' However, Participant #1 clarified: 'During our last campaign, we went 100% social media, using Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook to engage the public.'

It was also clear from the interviews that all four organizations used TV channels and radio stations, and the interviewees emphasized the importance of these tools, as they were prioritized and in high public demand. Participant #2 explained that 'The old media, especially TV channels and even radio stations [etc.] reflect how people change their priorities.' Participant #3 elaborated on this point, claiming: 'Social media networks are changing the communication agenda in various areas where these networks have a huge advantage over their counterpart, traditional media.' Furthermore, interviewees from three organizations showed high interest in using newspapers for their PR campaigns; for example, Participant #2 stated:

> The impact and change caused by social media are clear from how they are widely used in our communications and PR practice, but traditional media are

still essential in many aspects of our strategies, and maybe newspapers are still essential, even when social media are used in our PR.

Participant #3 supported this notion: 'We roughly use 50/50 traditional and social media channels. For our company, traditional media tools are part of the strategy by default, but social media tools are something we cannot neglect.'

Meanwhile, on whether social media have completely replaced traditional media, Participant #4 stated: 'I cannot just say they have replaced traditional media such as newspapers and TV channels, because somehow, they appear to have a strong presence in our company's communication agenda.' However, Participant #4 added: 'Social media communication currently receives a slightly larger share of our budget.' Similarly, Participant #1 indicated that the company would still spend money on traditional media tools:

> We still use traditional media but for different reasons now and mainly for branding. I see the communication agenda being dominated by social media tools such as online networks… traditional media will always be there but used in a more limited way.

5.1.4 Factors Driving Social Media within the Four Organizations

5.1.4.1 Scanning the Public

All interviewees from across the four organizations stated that they used social media for 'scanning the public', in order to better understand consumers. According to Participant #1, social media represent a 'massive step forward compared to traditional media tools when operating public and environmental scanning. There are consumer patterns and behaviors; I can fully understand what my consumers want and what they like and when they use the Internet'. Participant #4 also clarified that '[s]ocial media have enabled corporations and companies to scan the public for information, and this is a huge advantage for our PR practice and the way we reach our target'.

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Furthermore, each platform or network represents a different consumer target. Participant #3 explained:

> People who use Facebook are not the same as people who use Instagram or Twitter. Each platform has its own strategy because of the nature of its users, and we see it as each platform being used for a specific reason, so when we create our strategy, we develop our KPIs based on these facts.

Participant #2 claimed:

> It is essential to use social media for environmental scanning, let's say you start a campaign, but there are no responses from your audience; you should start analyzing, and maybe your timing is wrong, or the nature of your targeted clients… there are many factors that influence customers' behaviour on social media platforms, and those factors must be considered when you communicate.

Nevertheless, the representatives of all four organizations appeared comfortable about ensuring that their message was directed at their specific primary target, for example, Participant #2 stated:

> The tools that are made available for PR by Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, even Google, etc. provide facilities that make you target specific consumers and reach them… Instagram, for instance, enables you to narrow down your choice of targeted customers to the village that they live in.

5.1.4.2 Timing and Speed of Communication

All the interviewees emphasized the importance of time in their work and highlighted how social media had revolutionized the PR agenda in terms of reducing the time factor, which had conversely had a negative impact on the use of newspapers. Participant #3 declared that social media had enabled: 'Delivering news and announcements to a massive audience in record time [allowing them] to save time and reach a bigger target.' The speed of delivering a message is inevitably a factor related to time, as clarified by Participant #2:

> Now, newspapers are no longer effective because of the speed of delivering announcements. The news can be the same, but the time factor is the reason why we are gradually leaving behind newspapers and traditional media tools, and switching to social media tools.

Participant #4 also mentioned the advantage of speed that social media offer PR communication:

> The factors of speed and timing represent the main impact of social media on the industry. With a traditional press release, it can sometimes take up to two weeks between approval and sending it out to newspapers, but the shift to social media allows you to do things faster, so you have to be up to date with the audience. What I am saying is that in the end, it is not like a traditional press release where it takes two weeks to be approved, so it is about speed.

Furthermore, Participant #3 also cited speed as an advantage of social over traditional media: 'Social media have made the spread of news and announcements very fast and smooth.'

5.1.4.3 Building and Maintaining Relations

The relationship with stakeholders and the public at large is a point that was heavily emphasized during the interviews. For example, Participant #4 declared: 'Using social media platforms allows us to constantly be in touch with the community around us.' Moreover, Participant #2 stated: 'In general, the platforms have driven us very close to our consumers and investors and strengthened the relationship. We are getting closer and becoming easier to reach and more open to discussion.' Meanwhile, Participant #1 added: '[social media are] a tool for investor relations because they are all followers of our accounts, and they see live feedback, what our consumers say, and how they engage with us. [These media are] very effective when it comes to the relationship with shareholders.'

It would appear from the interviews that traditional media such as newspapers are not as effective as they once were for communicating with stakeholders, as Participant #2 explained: 'Even with our stakeholders, including government officials, we don't communicate with them in newspapers anymore; maybe we publish small press

releases, but we boost our announcements and news via an online platform.' Similarly, Participant #1 stated: 'Social media have brought companies closer to their customers' and Participant #2 added: 'We utilize social media to stay in touch with doctors and patients.'

5.1.4.4 Engagement

The word, 'engagement' or a similar emphasis on the purpose of interacting with the public was likewise addressed during the research interviews. For example, Participant #2 declared:

> We did not use any traditional or paid media; we used Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook to engage with the public and publicize our campaign. Facebook is a platform for dialogue and connection… Social media open up new possibilities for communication and PR; 60-70% of our success in reaching target consumers comes from sharing photos and videos.

Participant #3 also emphasized: 'We take interaction with the public very seriously; most followers like to exaggerate, but we have to follow each negative comment and be ready to answer requests and be in touch with our clients constantly.'

5.1.4.5 Budget

One of the main factors that drive organizations to utilize social media for PR communication is usually the budget or the best value obtained by these organizations for their lowest expenditure. Traditional media tend to be more costly than social media, which are generally affordable. On this point, Participant #2 clarified: 'The online budget is affordable; they used to call it "free media"; we can spend 100 riyals or one million riyals.' Participant #4 likewise commented on 'social media being very cost-efficient', adding: 'do not forget the huge difference in the budget that we have to dedicate, so social media are more useful, much cheaper and cost-efficient.' Furthermore, Participant #1 claimed that social media were '[m]uch easier and

cheaper, and nobody can afford to ignore social media', elaborating: 'During our last social media campaign, we did not spend a single Saudi riyal'.

In contrast, traditional media tended to be viewed as expensive tools for organizations, with Participant #2 stating: 'TV or outdoor advertising is costing us huge amounts of money', whereas Participant #3 declared: 'TV and newspapers are very costly compared to the new media tools.' Additionally, Participant #1 related the advantage of data collection or scanning the public to low cost: 'it requires money and time to conduct research via traditional media, while social media places this at our fingertips.'

5.1.5 Barriers and Challenges

5.1.5.1 Social Media Platforms

Participant #1 found social media platforms to be a challenge in themselves: 'It is very difficult to maintain communication on Facebook because it implements very greedy policies for companies.' Furthermore, Participant #2 speculated:

> Maybe, one day, social media will become very expensive to use as a communication tool, because it is becoming more like a bidding system or an auction, where two companies can bid for the same target or information… It is always possible for a new platform to come up and change the equation of our online communications.

5.1.5.2 Account Followers

Participant #1 stated: 'The barrier we find is how to find the balance between the followers of our accounts. Meeting the mad and angry, unsatisfied followers and loyal followers… how we find a balance between the two in communication.' Meanwhile, Participant #2, from a different organization, stated: 'There are people who create accounts to guarantee that they complain; it has empowered consumers to reach us

and spread any negative message they want and this is a challenge for us.' On this

point, Participant #3 added:

> most followers like to exaggerate, but we have to follow each negative comment
> and be ready to answer enquiries and stay in touch with our clients constantly.
> This time factor and level of interaction with the public presents us with a
> challenge… The challenge is to balance [our] interaction with followers and
> minimize any criticism or the potential for customers to fire back at us… we
> constantly face [customers] firing back, and we answer them by preparing
> potential questions and appropriate answers that represent our values.

5.1. 5.3 Language and Online Content

The participants from all four organizations mentioned or expressed concerns over the

Arabic dialogue and dialects that they used in their online communication, with

Participant #1 stating:

> Another challenge is the kind of language we use that represents the company;
> I mean you know how the accent differs in Saudi Arabia and in any other region
> in the Arab world… The accent we use in Arabic has been a challenge for our
> PR communication.

Moreover, Participant #2 explained:

> The accent is a major factor in our strategies; sometimes it causes us some
> trouble in reaching our targets. Foreigners can mostly read in Arabic, but the
> accent should be 'white' [neutral], meaning nobody will know where the person
> is from… I give you an example, someone is driving an old truck in the desert;
> it would be inappropriate for someone to speak Hejazi [an Arabic dialect] with
> a Jeddah accent. The accent here and the look of the person should be 'Bedouin',
> because our targets will see themselves in our promotions.

Similarly, Participant #4 clarified:

> We look for locals who can speak English… even for those who can speak
> Arabic. Sometimes, the kind of dialogue and creation of content is a challenging
> task.

Additionally, Participant #1 highlighted that

> it is difficult to find people who are very advanced or professionals in the digital
> world as Arabic speakers, because not everyone in Saudi [Arabia] speaks
> English properly or understands what is happening around the world and
> transfers this [information] to KSA."

5.1.5.4 Politics

Politics were mentioned by just one participant, Participant #1, who said:

> one of the main challenges is politics; it has been a major challenge for us with communication on social media when representing a country and wishing to speak to the world, but not everybody is in favour of our country. To overcome this barrier, we ignore any political comments and choose not to engage with or open any dialogue that involves politics on social media.

5.1.6 Policies and Guidelines

Concerning guidelines and policies, Participant #1 explained: 'Our policies are based on the culture and community we operate in, ….we ensure that we reflect the core values of the community we operate in.' Conversely, Participant #2 claimed: 'There is a lack of rules and guidelines in the market of social media communications at large', while Participant #3 clarified: 'Our policies are very structured, and they specify how external communication should be managed. We have detailed plans, and there are policies and guidelines, and it took time to establish that.' Participant #3 also declared: 'We use social media every day, and we follow the company's guidelines.' On this point, Participant #4, went into greater depth:

> There are various internal policies around what the company or an individual should tweet or not tweet. At the same time, there is a place within our organization where the content of each tweet is checked and approved before it is tweeted. We have implemented policies that apply to everyone who works for our organizations.

Participant #4 added:

> For the most part, what actually goes out is carefully approved at various levels of our organization, depending on the messages. People who work in the Communications Department are aware of the fact that content and interactions go through a process before they are tweeted or posted on social media platforms.

5.1.7 Social Media Budget

Participant #2, from one multinational company, stated: 'We do not have a specific budget for social media PR, because we are an international company, but we have

allocated 70-80% of the overall communication budget for the past year to digital communication.' Furthermore, Participant #1 from a Saudi-based company stated: 'I believe traditional media will take 40% of the communications budget, whereas 60% will go to digital communication.' Similarly, Participant #3 claimed: 'There is a high budget because digital media are taking a big share of the communications budget. I see digital media eating up more than 70% of the communications and PR budget.'

5.1.8 Training

Concerning training, Participant #1 stated: 'Usually, we take the normal standards, starting from the basics, the use of each platform, followed by how we increase engagement and keep followers engaged and entertained.' In contrast, Participant #2 declared:

> We do not provide training to our staff and we must reconsider this, but from time to time, Google invites our employees to attend conferences where updates on the new trends are presented, and they share with us how to best target our audience… and educate us about the new features, and advise us, provide us with insights into how they are developing.

Meanwhile, Participant #4 elaborated:

> People who work in social media communication go through the process to make sure they are carefully selected. We do not provide intensive training, but we do keep our staff up to date with social media development. I think we have conducted training sessions for people to explain the rules of the game when it comes to social media communication, and the company has to be ahead of the game and adapt to social media in the best way possible.

Furthermore, Participant #3 from a Saudi-based organization explained: 'In our corporation, we have a high budget and constant training for our staff. We provide updates on all new and existing social media platforms, and this is becoming more and more an essential part and at the top of our priorities.' Participant #3 also added: 'On-the-job training is the one [thing] we focus on, and we rely heavily on discovering the

services that the social media platforms constantly update us with and introduce into the communications industry.'

5.1.9 Measurement

Participant #1, from a Saudi-based organization, clarified: 'We have a set of KPIs that we apply to the number of impressions, number of visits, number of retweets, number of clicks, and conversations driven between followers.' Meanwhile, Participant #2 explained:

> Digital media are counted in clicks, whereas newspapers are counted by the volume of circulation. These clicks are counted and social media platforms charge us for that. We count the impressions, leads and clicks, and based on this, we make internal announcements and conduct an analysis of each campaign… we have a systematic approach to online media strategy.

Conversely, Participant #3 from one of the multinational organizations spoke about how traditional as opposed to social media are measured: 'You can never measure their impact and customer reach, and what you cannot measure you cannot manage, and if you compare the measurement of the digital media platforms to the measurement of newspapers you will be surprised.' Furthermore, Participant #3 added:

> When it comes to Twitter, the benefit is clear as crystal; I go straight to the point, bring me the reach, bring me the number of clicks, engagements, how many people have read my post, how many people commented, show me the comment, I can measure everything. Outsourcing to agencies saves us time in measuring and providing users with data.

Meanwhile, Participant #4 claimed:

> Social media have made it easier and clearer to count the number of impressions; traditional media, in general, were ambiguous if we think about their figures, circulation figures, etc. Social media platforms assist companies and PR agencies in measuring impact, which is a valuable addition to the equation.

Finally, Participant #2 stated: 'With traditional media, we have always measured our reach in a campaign by the sales that we make. Besides, social media are very tangible, and we deal with numbers.'

5.2 Findings of Interviews with Participants from Four Selected Organizations

All four organizations sampled used a mix of social media platforms. The most used platforms were Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, followed by YouTube, which was only mentioned by participants from just one of the selected organizations. Moreover, interest in the Facebook platform was not evident during the interviews, in that maintaining an interactive Facebook page did not appear to be a priority for any of the organizations, although some importance was attached to this platform by the multinational organizations.

Despite their different industry sectors, the sampled organizations all seemed to use the same platforms in a similar manner, working with external PR agencies who controlled all their online communications. However, all four organizations were found to work closely with PR agencies, giving their approval before disseminating messages. All the organizations mainly used social media to conduct more effective and cost-cutting consumer research. Scanning the public and gathering information about existing and potential customers or new trends were the main features accessed by organizations when they used social media for their PR practice.

The representatives from all four organizations also confirmed that social media networks had changed how they practiced PR and utilized traditional media tools. It was clear that social media had affected traditional media use, but the participants from all four organizations expressed their satisfaction with using traditional media, and all emphasized the importance of including traditional media in their PR

communications. Due to the long publishing process and time consumption, newspapers were the least used traditional media among the sampled organizations, while television and radio still had a strong presence in their PR communications. However, the organizations appeared to use social media as opposed to traditional media for the lower cost of the former.

The organizations in the present study apparently used social media tools to build and maintain relationships with their customers and stakeholders, as well as to engage with the public. However, their engagement tended to be reactive, meaning that it mostly consisted of answering questions and replying to customer complaints or enquiries. Some of the interviewees saw dealing with social media as a challenge, and believed training to be a priority for understanding these platforms. Furthermore, the social media followers of the sampled organizations also tended to be seen as a challenge, potentially leaving negative feedback for the organizations to manage. Another hurdle that was associated with social media use was the development of online content, where dialogue was necessary for communication. However, it was perhaps the use of Arabic that presented the main challenge to interacting and communicating with the target audience on social media.

In particular, the organizations were implementing policies and guidelines for responding to complaints or negative comments on social media. However, all four organizations appeared to generally lack training provision, other than a focus on using the platforms and their features. Another challenge cited was finding PR professionals who could speak both English and Arabic well enough to assist with understanding social media. In terms of measuring the impact of social media, all the organizations studied found that their activities were more efficient using KPIs, likes, dislikes,

impressions, and other features that social media platforms make available for their

users.

5.3 Online Questionnaires

5.3.1 Results of Online Questionnaires

5.3.1.1 Gender Composition of Sample

Q1: The first question asked the participants to indicate their gender.

Table 4.1: Gender of participants who completed the online questionnaire

		Frequency	%	Valid %
Valid	Male	12	60	60
	Female	8	40	60
	Total	20	100.0	100.0

Result 4.1: A total of 20 participants completed the online questionnaire. 12 male and 8

female.

5.3.1.2 Most Used Social Media Networks in the Sample

Q2: What social media networks do you use to practice public relations (PR)?

Table 4.2: Use of social media platforms by the public relations (PR) practitioners

Participants	Social Media Network	Frequent Usage
#1	Twitter and YouTube	Daily
#2	Twitter only	Daily
#3	Twitter and Instagram	Daily, Sometimes
#4	Instagram	Sometimes
#5	Twitter, Instagram and YouTube	Daily
#6	Twitter and Snapchat	Daily
#7	Twitter	Daily

#8	Twitter	Daily
#9	Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram	Daily
#10	I only use WhatsApp	Daily
#11	Twitter and Instagram	Daily
#12	Twitter and Instagram	Daily
#13	Twitter and WhatsApp	Daily
#14	Twitter and WhatsApp	Daily
#15	All social media platforms	Daily
#16	Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram	Daily
#17	Twitter and YouTube	Daily
#18	Twitter and Snapchat	Daily
#19	Instagram and Facebook	Daily, Sometimes
#20	Twitter and Instagram	Daily

Result 4.2: Most of the participants indicated Twitter as their first choice, with only two participants not doing so. Participant #10 stated: 'I only use WhatsApp', while Participant #19 reported using both Instagram and Facebook. Conversely, Participant #19 was the only survey respondent who reported using Facebook frequently for PR. Overall, Instagram was the participants' second most preferred platform, followed by YouTube.

5.3.1.3 Participants' Reasons for Selecting an Online Platform

Q3: What are the reasons behind using the above-mentioned social media networks for your PR practice?

Asked the participants the reasons behind them selecting these platforms for their PR practice.

Result 4.3: The participants' use of Twitter and other platforms, as shown in Table 4.2, tended to be driven by factors that included information-gathering, reaching a target audience, speed of message delivery, and the Saudi public's use of these

platforms. The following results are based on an analysis of each respondent's answer to the question of why they used these social media networks.

5.3.1.4 Scanning the Public and Gathering Information

The factor of gathering information about the public in general, as well as on specific issues, topics or individuals, was highly evident in the participants' responses. The majority of the participants found that social media served their need to collect data about various issues, with Participant #3 stating: 'Twitter allows me to compile a database of the target audience.' Similarly, Participant #4 reported: 'Social media provide me with information about viewers and followers, their impressions and what they desire', and Participant #6 explained that social media were useful 'to see the latest developments and follow the trends of public opinion in my country, and to research in some different areas that enrich my knowledge'. Additionally, Participant #7 claimed: 'social media enable you to collect information about consumers', while Participant #9 pointed out: 'All these platforms enable you to see what's new and to see the news that is being circulated to the public.' However, one participant highlighted the impact of social media on data collection, with Participant #10 clarifying: 'It enables PR practitioners to scan the environment and search the market quickly.' Likewise, Participant #14 declared: 'They provide me with a feature [that enables me to scan] the public to understand my target audience.' In contrast, Participant #15 indicated the benefit of social media platforms for following 'the news and watching public opinions and trends', which was supported by Participant #17, who added: 'Mainly to follow the news', while convenience was emphasized by Participant #15: 'They save the time and effort to get information.'

5.3.1.5 Reaching the Target Audience

The means of reaching a specific target or audience via social media networks was a factor that was identified by at least six of the participants, with Participant #1 stating: 'Twitter enables me to target the desired audience' and Participant #3 explaining: 'I use Twitter every day for the purpose of communicating with the public… Twitter offers me accuracy in choosing the target audience.' Meanwhile, Participant #7 declared: 'I also use Instagram because of the target audience', and Participant #12 indicated: 'I use Twitter to communicate with the target audience.' More broadly, Participant #13 added that social media have 'made it easier to reach a particular target and communicate with the public in general', which was supported by Participant #14, who said: 'Social media] enable me to communicate with my target quickly' and Participant #18, who claimed: 'Twitter can cover the demographic of our targets.'

5.3.1.6 Speed of Delivering Messages

The speed of disseminating and delivering messages was one of the reasons why the participants adopted social media for their PR practice, Participant #1 specified this as the most important factor, while Participant #3 highlighted: 'One of the most important reasons for using social media is the time and speed they offer to deliver the message to the audience'. Participant #12 also clarified: 'I use Twitter because of the speed in disseminating messages… Social media enable fast completion of tasks; delivery of information is guaranteed.' Participant #13 similarly stated: '[social media] ensure speed in delivering my message… [and] have impacted the work of PR positively; the speed of disseminating and delivering messages.' Likewise, Participant #16 declared: 'Twitter is smooth and fast, and this is the world of social

communication', with Participant #19 also suggesting that 'Social media allow fast access to information.'

5.3.1.7 Because the Saudi Public Use Social Media

It was also found in the interview data that the Saudi public influenced the participants' adoption of social media, with Participant #2 stating: 'I use Twitter because the entire Saudi public is there', while Participant #8 also claimed: 'I use Twitter because it is the most used application in Saudi society; all segments of society are on it and they are mostly active users.' Furthermore, Participant #11 revealed: 'I use Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. They are the most popular platforms in Saudi Arabia', which was supported by Participant #19, who claimed: 'everyone is on these platforms.' Likewise, Participant #20 clarified that social media were used in PR 'due to the high public demand for these platforms'. However, Participant #1 was the only participant who associated the use of television and radio to public demand: 'As for radio and television, they are still in high demand… simply because of the preferences of different followers.'

5.3.2 Impact of Social Media on the Use of Traditional Media

Q4: What is the impact of social media on your field of work in PR and use of traditional means of communication (daily newspapers, TV channels, radio stations)?

Result 4.4: One participant attributed the value of newspapers to their performance on social media platforms, with Participant #1 stating: 'Traditional channels are still present, but not daily newspapers, unless they are active on social media. As for radio and television, they are still in high demand.' The contribution of television, in contrast to that of YouTube, was further explained by Participant #1: 'YouTube does the same

thing as TV channels, but there are TV programmes that we, as PR practitioners, must participate in and approve for our work... and then we share the content via social media.' Participant #2 expanded on this point: 'Traditional methods are still present but less influential, and you can look at the amount of interest in social media compared to traditional media, and you will notice the impact.' Another participant viewed this impact as an added feature in the mix of media tools, with Participant #3 highlighting: 'The effect is more in the sense of newly added features, but traditional means such as television and radio are still present and have their fans and followers.' Similarly, Participant #4 pointed out: 'There is a whole lot more speed now, but the traditional methods remain present and strongly present.' The role of television was also explained in more detail, comparing it to that of social media video platforms such as YouTube, whereby Participant #5 declared:

> TV is still strong and influential; social media channels have definitely influenced the use of traditional media but have not ended the role of television. Programmes such as 'Sabah Al Arabia' are still standing and strong; PR practitioners need these programmes, where Instagram and Twitter can create interactions and publicity around them [the TV programmes].

Nevertheless, one participant predicted that traditional media would disappear because of their relationship with the older generation. Here, Participant #7 stated:

> The effect is very strong; social media sites have turned our thinking towards the creation of content that reflect our values and messages, rather than thinking about relying on traditional media channels where content is not unique. Traditional media will be here for some time, but as a complimentary tool, because they are related to the old generations.

Two-way communication was emphasized by at least two of the participants in relation to the impact of social media on traditional methods. Participant #8 associated this impact as faster dissemination, wider targets, more interaction in smaller timeframes, and with less effort. Conversely, Participant #14 claimed: 'Traditional media are credible and still highly in demand, but they can't produce two-way

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interaction with consumers. Traditional media are somewhat impaired…', while

Participant #17 pointed out: 'Social media allow fast communication with the public;

traditional media only distribute news.'

Nevertheless, one participant associated traditional media with accuracy, while others

associated credibility with traditional media over social media. For example,

Participant #11 claimed:

> Social media have affected the PR market in two aspects: the positive aspect is
> that social media have introduced speed, and the negative aspect is the lack of
> accuracy. Traditional media have been affected negatively, but still have more
> accuracy than the new media channels.

Additionally, Participant #18 declared:

> Social media have reduced all the expected effort; it is not costly to reach large
> or small targets, anywhere, anytime… traditional media have been affected, but
> they are still a credible source compared with social media news, from the
> perspective of news consumers.

5.3.2.1 Employment of Public Relations (PR) Practitioners

The effect of social media on employment was noticeable in most of the responses,

with regard to the characteristics of the PR practitioner's role that were associated with

the use of social media. Participant #1 explained:

> Social media have had a major and radical impact on the field; PR is no longer
> the same in terms of its practices, nor are PR employees. This impact includes
> current employment procedure. For example, what qualifies a person is no
> longer his PR experience, but his experience in using social media.

Participant #2 added: 'The effect includes several factors, including employment

strategy or the employment ladder, which has changed; the market now needs people

in PR… who are good at using social media; this is a fundamental change in the

industry.' Furthermore, Participant #3 clarified:

> The means of communication has changed job titles in the field of PR; it is no
> longer important to employ a person for media relations as before; what you

want now is to hire a person who is a social media guru; someone who knows the tricks and appreciates the significance of the new media tools.

5.3.3 Challenges and Obstacles to Using Social Media in Public Relations (PR) Practice

Q5: What are the challenges and obstacles you face in using social media?

The participants were asked about the challenges and obstacles that they encountered when using social media in their PR practice.

5.3.3.1 Online Content

The participants associated the development of online content with the lack of professional PR staff, viewing both factors as challenges. Participant #1 stated: 'The language I use with the audience is one of the challenges I face and the accent. I have to understand how to craft the content.' Participant #3 likewise stated: 'Amongst the challenges that come with the development of online communities are the writing of proper content in whatever language or dialect it should be... the difficulty of recruiting cadres who are skilled in content development is a big challenge.' Meanwhile, Participant #4 declared: 'The type of content presented is the biggest challenge in my view; in addition to the cadres who are good at dealing with the field of PR and digital media.' Additionally, Participant #16 stated:

> There are many initiatives to enrich content, and this is what we lack in making use of the means of communication as required... the lack of qualified and permanent full-time staff... the majority of social media experts who are present in the sector are collaborators. In addition, there are limited capabilities for producing media content that will elevate the game and keep pace with Vision 2030 – the Kingdom's vision.

Furthermore, Participant #20 complained: 'Preparing a team is a challenge; there is a lack of qualified cadres.'

5.3.3.2 Interaction

The participants perceived interactions with followers on social media platforms as an obstacle, with Participant #3 stating: 'discussion with reckless followers is another

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kind of challenge for PR practitioners to overcome.' Moreover, Participant #6 explained: 'Direct communication with followers is a challenge in itself', while Participant #12 noted: 'Ignorance in some applications by a large segment of the public is a challenge.' Conversely, Participant #13 found fake accounts to be an obstacle, and Participant #14 identified a lack of credibility on social media. Meanwhile, Participant #16 further emphasized the relationship between content and interaction with followers: 'The content must be interactive, renewed and permanent. Many sectors produce news and then stop, but continuity is important to gain the confidence of the followers.'

5.3.3.3 Other Obstacles

The following obstacles were addressed by at least one of the participants. First, the lack of English-speaking staff was cited, with Participant #2 stating: 'English speakers are rare in this field of work and it is mainly a problem because all the means of communication that are approved are originally in the English language.' The participants also associated clients' perceptions of the use of social media with obstacles. For instance, Participant #2 emphasized:

> It is a challenge to convince the client that there is a large team working and formulating the content, and it is a challenge to persuade the client, because the initial thinking on the matter of using social media is based on the service being free and this is not true.

Furthermore, Participant #8 found that focusing on a specific topic when using social media was a challenge, especially diving 'into it, and not [being] distracted by the many other topics that you miss when you are switching between platforms.' The participants also viewed the government's control over online content and the lack of regulations as obstacles. According to Participant #3, 'the lack of regulations and laws governing work in social media communication is one of the obstacles', while Participant #17 claimed: 'The monitoring of some agencies or institutions that are

supported by the Ministry of Culture and Information is an obstacle; there is high media control over many websites.'

The participants also associated reliance on PR agencies as a barrier to the development of PR staff, with Participant #18 claiming that

> External PR agencies are good but bad at the same time. The only problem is that external PR agencies are in total control and the internal staff do not make any effort to train or develop their skills to understand social media networks; the agency does all the work.

Moreover, Participant #15 stated: 'Unfortunately, governmental organizations are still using external PR agencies to manage communication sites.' Finally, one participant associated the public's perspective of the credibility of social media as a challenge for PR practitioners, with Participant #9 indicating: 'We face an obstacle because some do not consider these methods as a reliable and official means of doing business.'

5.3.4 Training

Q6: Is there appropriate training provided by companies or in other sectors?

In response, Participant #2 stated: 'The provision of training is one of the most widely known obstacles that you openly face in the Saudi market and have to overcome.' Moreover, Participant #3 declared: 'Training is the biggest challenge', which was further supported by Participant #4, who said: 'Appropriate training and rules for using social media are what is needed.' Meanwhile, Participant #5 added:

> There are entities that offer courses but are far from knowing how to use these networks in specialized areas for PR; most of them focus on the general industry and general content and are not specialized in the practice or development of appropriate online content.

Moreover, Participant #6 emphasized: 'I don't think the training and controls are anchored… [they] are informal to some extent.' Conversely, Participant #10 clarified: 'The specific training does not solve the problem that lies in… winning the confidence

of the audience. Engagement is very important, but it needs to be based on more knowledge and protocols.' Participant #11 also noted: 'There is a Lack of adequate specialized training.'

5.3.5 Advantages of Using Social Media over Traditional Media

Q7: What are the advantages and contributions of social media platforms to your work and to the field of PR in Saudi Arabia?

5.3.5.1 Scanning and Gathering Information

The capacity to collect data was among the advantages of social media that were identified by the participants. Participant #4 cited the importance of '[r]eading their personal profiles and knowing what kind of person I am dealing with from the start', while Participant #7 highlighted: 'Knowledge and identification of the target audience… what distinguishes social media are the like and dislike buttons.' Furthermore, Participant #18 stated: 'Social media have made it faster to obtain information about the public.' In addition, Participant #17 mentioned '[s]canning the public and building constant relationships with consumers.'

5.3.5.2 Speed of Delivery and Rapid Communication

Participant #1 cited the social media advantage of 'speed and ease of access', while Participant #4 mentioned: 'Ease of use, speed and communication with people of all categories.' Conversely, Participant #5 clarified: 'As a PR practitioner, social media provide me with some hard-to-get news from their sources, and quickly spread the news and press stories.' Furthermore, Participant #6 acknowledged: 'The existence of these tools has facilitated the writing of reports, analysis of letters, and publishing of

content with complete ease.' Moreover, Participant #8 indicated: 'Easy access to information', whereas Participant #11 claimed that social media offered 'Fast communication', and Participant #12 pointed to 'Speed and direct communication with the whole world'. Finally, Participant #13 noted social media's 'ease of communication' and Participant #16 highlighted 'fast communication with the public.'

5.3.5.3 Creativity

Creativity was also identified by the participants in terms of social media enabling PR practitioners to become more creative in their work. Here, Participant #2 stated: 'Professionally speaking, I have gained more skills in dealing with technology.' Participant #3 also observed: 'Social media have excelled in developing users' skills in terms of concise as well as detailed information. On the other hand, social media have allowed users to learn and be constantly in learning mode to update their technical skill in dealing with these means.' Participant #13 also claimed that social media introduce 'creativity and development'.

5.3.5.4 Reaching the Target Audience

The ability to reach a target audience was identified as a further advantage that social media offered to the participants, with Participant #7 mentioning, 'knowledge and identification of the target audience and what distinguishes social media are the like and dislike buttons'. Participant #4 also indicated: 'communication with people of all categories.'

5.3.5.5 Other Advantages and Additional Input

Two of the participants associated low budget and low cost with the advantages of using social media. First, Participant #1 specified: 'Material value and budget savings', while Participant #10 highlighted 'Speed, time and budget savings.' Furthermore, the following were additional suggestions or statements gathered from the participants, with Participant #1 emphasizing: 'I think public relations are still not taking advantage of the integration of social media.' Participant #3 also stated: 'I see that traditional media are powerfully present and will be part of the whole now and always.' Similarly, Participant #5 declared:

> I see that in future, there will be more control and this area [social media] will be ranked highly… compared to traditional [media]… they will be different tools used for PR, depending on the plan or target audience.

Furthermore, Participant #12 added:

> Social media [represent] a new and distinct field for the PR sector; PR practitioners are advised about personal development in the field that relates to their work, for example, understanding and taking courses in computers and the electronic field, as well as development courses in the use of social media and how to define the target group.

Here, Participant #13 elaborated: 'Traditional media have lost much of the public's attention, but there is still room for traditional media if they can translate into social media.' However, Participant #15 warned:

> Communication networks should not be dealt with in a random manner. Rather, the principles should be based on the knowledge of the nature of the participants, and the nature of social media should be established accordingly. Based on these essentials, we can work in a more influential way.

5.3.6 Findings from the Online Questionnaires

Nearly all the survey participants indicated that they used social media for their PR practice, with only one participant stating otherwise. Most of the participants specified Twitter as their first choice, Instagram as their second, and YouTube as their third. In

contrast, Facebook was only mentioned once by one participant. Furthermore, the participants' decision to adopt a particular social media platform was mainly based on demand in Saudi Arabia, and the fact that the Saudi public use social media. Meanwhile, the majority of the participants mainly used social media to gather information, whereby they found these media to be especially useful, compared to traditional methods. In particular, the participants appreciated the speed afforded by social media in reaching a target audience and communicating messages. However, despite reaching a target audience being perceived as a benefit of social media, it also posed a challenge in the form of understanding how to engage with that audience. Furthermore, the development of online content and the lack of professional, bilingual English-Arabic PR staff were viewed by the participants as major challenges. In fact, the participants believed the use of Arabic and ability to engage in Arabic dialogue was a challenge in itself.

Another problematic factor cited was the lack of training available in Saudi Arabia, which affected the participants' performance. All the participants believed that the necessary training should relate to learning the mechanism of a particular social media platform such as Twitter. Furthermore, the participants indicated that they used social media for their speed and ease of communication, although they also noted that reliance on PR agencies had delayed the development of the profession in general. In addition, some emphasized that control over online content by various institutions remained an obstacle to their practice.

Nevertheless, the participants appreciated the value of television and radio, with television being important to most of the sample. However, the participants were least enthusiastic about the use of newspapers for PR but valued the credibility of traditional media among the Saudi public. They therefore viewed newspapers as an important

part of their mix of tools. Conversely, social media were not considered to be a reliable source of information by the Saudi public.

5.4 Discussion

Smith, Blazovich and Smith (2015) found PR to be doubly connected with social media, as these media are very valuable for large organizations, in terms of their cost-effectiveness for interpersonal communication with the market and the public at large. This also correlates with Wright and Hinson's (2014) finding that social media are rather complementary to traditional media tools. For the participants from all four organizations, traditional media also appeared to be very important, with the majority attaching greater credibility and reliability to their use, compared to social media communication. This also correlates with the findings of Wright and Hinson (2008), who found that traditional media were more highly valued than social media for their accuracy, reliability, truth, and ethics. Consequently, most of the PR professionals interviewed in the present study believed that social media complemented traditional media. In particular, the main factor behind the four organizations' use of social media for PR was 'gathering information' about their consumer demographic, trends, and other issues related to their business, which is similar to previous suggestions in the relevant literature (for example, Ferguson, 2018; Kent and Li, 2020; White and Boatwright, 2020). The participants clarified that they used social media in their organizations for speed and connectivity. Similar findings are reported by Bivins (2017) and Lacey (2017).

The most used social media networks among the four selected organizations were identified as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. However, as mentioned earlier, Facebook was less of a priority amongst these organizations, reflecting the findings of

Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) regarding the use of social media platforms. It also supports the claim by Wright and Hinson (2014) that in global organizations, Facebook was superseded by Twitter in 2014. However, the two multinational organizations sampled in the present study indicated that Facebook was still valuable for their PR communications, although the Saudi-based organizations disregarded it as a major network for their PR. Instead, all the participants across the selected organizations selected Twitter as the main social media tool, with only one highlighting Facebook. This finding may be examined against the variables for social media platforms, as presented by Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011): half-life and depth of information.

Aside from the above, one finding derived from both the interviews and online questionnaires was that the participants considered interaction with the public to be a challenge. Thus, it could be determined that the use of social media by organizations (represented by the sampled participants) to promote various products or disseminate messages is not intended to generate interaction with the public. In this sense, their social media use does not reflect the two-way communication required in exchanges with the public or understanding these exchanges (Philips and Young, 2009). Furthermore, the sample expressed concerns over the lack of scope to develop proper online content as a means of generating interaction, including the use of Arabic in dialogue with the public, which presented a challenge. Moreover, the nature of the followers on online networks tended to be a deterrent to social media interaction. Thus, despite the variation in industry sectors across the sample, all the practitioners used Twitter and did so in a similar manner, thereby contradicting Smith, Blazovich, and Smith (2015) who suggested that social media use differs across organizations based on industry type.

Nevertheless, all the organizations appeared to be well aware of their own guidelines and policies, with structured policies and guidelines for the dissemination of content and communication via social media networks. However, their strategies were shared with external agencies, which were integrated into their policies and guidelines. Moreover, the integration of internal training was an area of concern for all four organizations. Social media platforms such as Twitter provide their own training and establish a relationship with organizations, whereby the platform becomes more than a mere space for interacting with audiences, but rather a partner in the communication plan. In this regard, the sample declared that they used the training provided by social media networks.

Various perspectives have connected culture with communication as part of the same equation (for example, Hall, 1959; Sriramesh, 1992). Therefore, the PR policies of the four organizations sampled in this current study were designed to reflect public demand. Therefore, platforms were selected according to their popularity with the public, not due to any other value or feature that they afforded. Additionally, training was based on the use and features of social media. McCorkindale (2010) concludes that the focus of an organization should go beyond the use of social media merely as a tool of communication; instead, it should extend to understanding how to effectively measure the impact of these tools on the public or target audience. The measures that the study sample mentioned included KPIs, social media likes and dislikes, impressions, and other features provided by social media platforms for organizations. The participants from all four organizations expressed their satisfaction with the accuracy offered by social media networks in measuring the reach and impact of their PR communication. All the platforms studied (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram) appeared to provide accurate measurement tools for each initiative or

media campaign. Therefore, the whole sample indicated that they measured the exposure of their PR activities on each platform using various tools, but this did not reflect McCorkindale's (2010) view that measurement should address actual impact on the public.

5.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented the questions and analyzed the results of both methods of data collection, the one on one interviews with the four predetermined organizations and the online questionnaires with 20 PR practitioners. In addition, the chapter presented the findings, which were subsequently discussed in relations to research on the use of social media for PR communication that was discussed in Chapter Two. In the next chapter, the results and findings of the survey outlined in Chapter Three will be discussed, together with the findings from the one-to-one interviews and online questionnaires, relating them to the theoretical framework of the current study which was discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Chapter Six: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the overall findings of the current study in relation to the theoretical framework, and in light of the relevant literature, as discussed in Chapter Two and highlighted in Chapters Three and Four. In that, throughout this chapter, the researcher collects the dots from each data setting. This chapter also discusses the contribution of this research to current knowledge of social media use in Saudi PR practice. Furthermore, this chapter will explain the limitations of the study and make suggestions for further research and improvements to practice in the field. All three sets of data that were collected in the current study are combined and discussed in relations to Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four constructed models of PR, as illustrated in Chapter Three. Thus, this chapter discusses the use of social media to build a two-way, asymmetric/symmetric relationship with the public based on Grunig et al.'s work on excellence theory, together with the data on the challenges and obstacles encountered by PR practitioners and organizations when adopting the new media. The research aim here was to identify areas of PR practice in Saudi Arabia that demand more attention in the literature.

The first section of this chapter discusses the contribution of the current study in response to Research Question One: 1) How/Why do PR practitioners use social media for PR practice in Saudi Arabia?. Therefore, it ascertains the overall usage of social media networks by all participants, their level of engagement, communication, and building relations. This section also discusses data from all participants on the use of traditional media for PR practice to assess the overall usage of both traditional and new media for PR practice. The extracted data are therefore discussed in relation to the various functions that the study participants display in relation to the four proposed

PR models (Grunig and Hunt, 1984) (see Figure 3.1 in Chapter Three - Research Methodology).

In Part Two of this chapter, the study's contribution will be discussed in relation to Research Question Two: 2) How do organizations implement social media in their PR communication?, in that, this part of the chapter extends on previous work on the use of social media by organizations and addresses the policies and guidelines, training, challenges and obstacles among other factors that are interpreted from the data collection in relation to the focus of the current study.

Part One:

6.2 Use of Social Media for Public Relations (PR) Practice in the Kingdom

This section discusses the findings derived to answer the first research question, regarding the ways in which PR practitioners utilize social media for their PR practice in Saudi Arabia. It includes the most frequently used social media networks, and the ways in which these networks are used, namely, whether as one-way or two-way communication models. In that, this section discusses the findings from three sets of data: one consisting of survey data collected from a sample 117 PR practitioners, one set gathered in online questionnaires with 20 PR practitioners, and a third set gathered in four one-to-one interviews with representatives from four predetermined organizations. These data are presented and illustrated in Chapters Three and Four of this study.

The survey responses from 117 PR practitioners (see Chapter Three) showed that most of the participants spent 2-5 hours per day using social media networks for their PR practice. Meanwhile, these data also revealed that the most frequently used social

media channel across the sample was Twitter, followed by YouTube, and then Facebook. Furthermore, the vast majority of the PR practitioners surveyed indicated that they used social media on a daily basis, and these tools had become an essential part of their PR communication. Additionally, the survey data illustrated that nearly all the participants of both genders (97%) found Twitter to be very important for their PR practice, and 96% found it very effective. In contrast, 57% of the participants viewed Facebook as important to their mix of PR tools and 55% saw it as effective. In this regard, the survey identified that most of the participants were self-reported beginners in using Facebook for their PR practice, but appeared to be advanced or very advanced in using Twitter for this purpose. This was evident across much of the data collected. For example, regarding proficiency in using social media for PR practice, Tables 9.1b and 9.2b depict the use of Twitter and Facebook by the survey participants (n=117).

9.1b Proficiency in using Facebook among the survey participants

Beginner	Competent	Advanced	Very Advanced
32%	34%	32%	17%
Total 117			

9.2b Proficiency in using Twitter among the survey participants

Beginner	Competent	Advanced	Very Advanced
16%	22%	30%	32%
Total 117			

Similar findings for the use of social media were also derived from the interview data gathered from four organizations operating in KSA, and from the online questionnaire conducted with 20 PR practitioners (see Chapter Five). In the above samples, Twitter was identified as the most commonly used social media platform daily, with only one participant (among the 20 online questionnaire respondents) placing Facebook as second to Twitter in terms of preference. Similarly, the interviewees from the four selected organizations all declared that Twitter was their main tool of online PR communication. These findings for social media use in PR practice reflected those of previous studies. For instance, Smith, Blazovich, and Smith (2015) reported that more than 80% of Fortune 500 companies used social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Moreover, data on the use of social media among Fortune 2000 companies revealed that over 66% of organizations deployed social media platforms for their PR communication (Dahl, 2018). To an extent, the findings of the current study also resemble those of Almefleah (2017), where PR communication in the Saudi context tends to be in the form of sending tweets via Twitter, rather than posting text, images or video content on Facebook. Similarly, the findings of this current study show that Twitter is used much extensively more than Facebook for PR practice.

Nevertheless, it would appear that multinational companies are keener to use Facebook because of their international affiliates. As highlighted in Chapter Two, social media present an ideal platform to establish a two-way symmetrical model of PR (Grunig, 2009: 3). To assess the function of all participants and understand how and why they adopt a particular social media platform, an important explanation of the variation and functions among social media networks, presented by Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011), highlights two potentially differentiating factors between Twitter and Facebook social. These main factors consist of the half-life of information and the

depth of information. Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) explain that the latter is associated with the richness of the content and the number and diversity of perspectives. An example of this is Facebook because it can bring together extensive rich information on a particular topic. In contrast, Twitter is associated with the half-life of information, which refers to the information's longevity, in terms of its accessibility and presence on the screen. This is because the content that appears on Twitter can move very quickly off the screen, according to factors such as the number of followers calculated for that account by the platform. Therefore, this study interprets the use of Twitter as potentially generating less discussion with the public than Facebook. Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) also reveal that PR practitioners use social media to establish and maintain relations by engaging in conversations and making themselves available to interact. However, they may also use social media platforms to disseminate messages with minimal engagement with the public. Moreover, in Saudi Arabia, Almefleah (2017: 127) revealed that PR practitioners use Twitter and Facebook to target promotional and marketing messages towards their publics, based on national or regional origin. However, as a one-way communication tool for direct communication with the public, Twitter can be disappointing, because the fundamental affordance of social media is that it permits two-way communication. Kent and Lee (2020) point out that since newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations are primarily tools of one-way communication, with the exception of TV talk shows and radio phone-in shows, the use of social media as just another means of one-way communication limits its potential for strategic communication. According to Grunig (2009), social media provide a vehicle for strategic PR, because they have dialogical, interactive, relational, and global properties that make them a major player in the strategic management paradigm of PR. However, the author found that PR

practitioners used social media in the same way as traditional media, namely, as a platform to 'dump messages' on the public.

The current study findings show that PR practitioners and organizations view social media as an essential element of their PR activities, with 84% of the survey participants 'Agreeing' or 'Strongly agreeing' that social media were essential to their PR practice. Moreover, the interviewees from all four organizations and the vast majority of the 20 online questionnaire respondents reported that they used social media on a daily basis for their PR communication. Furthermore, the current study data revealed that the participants tended to use social media because the tools enabled them to reach a wider target audience. This was indicated by 85% of the survey participants, all the interviewees, and most of the 20 PR practitioners who completed the online questionnaire. The next sub-sections specifically discusses why PR practitioners attempt to reach their target audiences using social media networks, as well as the benefits of social media tools as opposed to traditional media.

6.2.1 Collecting Information

According to the survey findings from the sample of 117 respondents (see Table 11.6b), 66% of the PR practitioners surveyed used social media to scan the public and collect data. Similarly, the representatives of all four organizations stated that they used social media primarily to gather information and understand their target audience, while most of the responses from the 20 R practitioners completing the online questionnaire indicated that they used social media to collect data about consumers or the general public and trends, as well as to keep up to date with related issues.

11.6b: Use of social media to scan the public and find out more about products and consumers

All Participants	Male	Females
66%	62%	56%
Total	117	100.0

For the interviewees from the four organizations, collecting demographic data and patterns of consumer behaviour were the main factors driving their use of social media. However, it is important to clarify here that the enquiry about collecting information was not posed as a direct question, which could have merely led to a simple yes or no answer. Instead, the outcome was described by the interviewees as a benefit or an advantage that social media offered over traditional media tools. For example, Participant #1, when asked how social media had changed the landscape of PR in the organization, responded:

> It is a massive step forward compared to traditional media tools when operating public and environmental scanning. There are consumer patterns and behaviours… I can understand fully what my consumers want and what they like, and when they use the Internet. This requires money and time to conduct research via traditional media, whereas social media places this at our fingertips.

Conversely, Participant #2 emphasized that social media were 'essential' for scanning the environment, because if there is no response to a PR campaign, 'you should start analyzing, and maybe your timing is wrong, or the nature of your targeted clients… there are many factors that influence customers' behaviour on social media platforms'. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the PR practitioner to consider these factors when attempting to communicate with specific audiences or the general public.

Social media networks and digital media are ideal platforms for environmental scanning research (Grunig, 2009: 14). As previously discussed in Chapter Two, collecting information from the public has been a feature that many organizations and PR practitioners exploit when using social media for PR purposes (Kent and Li, 2020; White and Boatwright, 2020; Grunig, 2009). In particular, Dwivedi et al. (2021) refer to Twitter as a platform that allows practitioners to collect data through the hashtag function, which is the prevalent social media networks over all set of samples in the current study. In line with the above, an interviewee from one of the selected multinational corporations gave a similar response when asked about the advantages of social media:

> Social media has enabled corporations and companies to scan the public for information and this is a huge advantage for our PR practice and the way we reach our target. In addition, do not forget the huge difference in the budget that we have to allocate… so, social media are more useful and much cheaper and more cost-efficient. The main advantage of adopting social media for PR is to make sure that you are up to date with the rest of the world, because the whole world is gradually entering social media networks.

Furthermore, the findings of the online questionnaires conducted with the 20 PR practitioners indicated that the collection of information is the main reason for using social media. Again, the researcher did not pose a direct question about the benefits of social media for collecting data; instead, questions were aimed at addressing the impact of social media on PR practice.

In that, Kent and Lee (2020) argue that social media have primarily been used by organizations to collect data and generate profits. In this sense, the above authors suggest that social media use consists of managing communication for the benefit of the organizations concerned. Conversely, this limits the possibility of using social media for PR communication, and hinders the process of adopting social media to build and maintain A two-way symmetric communication model, as described by

Grunig and Hunt (1984) and Grunig (2009). Moreover, Kent and Lee (2020) identified various features of social media that have emerged from the relevant literature on the use of social media for PR purposes, arguing that social media represent a new communication paradigm. The above authors also concluded that the normative and positive features of social media, as well as the ways in which they work, form a fundamental part of developing an understanding of social media for PR. In the above study, the first normative principle was identified, namely, that social media should serve the interests of all stakeholders (including the public), not just the organizations. The next sub-section discusses the data of participants in relations to the use of social media to build relations.

6.2.2 Building Relationships

According to Kent and Lee (2020), social media have tremendous potential for persuasion and genuine relationship-building via dialogue and engagement. Kent and Lee (2020) also present another normative principle in that social media can be a relationship-building tool rather than a marketplace. According to this principle, social media are quite distinct from traditional media such as newspapers, television and radio, where no real community of viewers exists, and only demographic data can be gathered. In contrast, all communication via social media platforms leads to the formation of communities, and online communication encourages relationship-building. Moreover, Kent (2010: 645) states that 'any interactive communication channel that allows two-way interaction could be called a social media [channel]'. To elaborate further, Twitter and Facebook are considered as social media, 'because of the responsiveness of participants and the vastness of the networks' (Kent, 2010: 645). Therefore, engagement and dialogue are two elements that are associated with

relationship-building and potentially lead to the essential principle of two-way symmetric communication, as described by Grunig et al. (1994), and Grunig (2009). In fact, if the two-way symmetric communication model is adopted by PR practitioners and organizations, it should be evident in their use of social media networks (Macnamara, 2016: 337). Furthermore, Kent and Lane (2018: 61) describe this as 'engagement and dialogue [that] share an association to the idea of relationships—a focal concept in public relations, marketing, organizational communication, and other areas'. Therefore, the dominant discourse in PR is that 'using social media is good', because social media help organizations to develop dialogue and relationships with publics, thereby being able to engage them (Valentini, 2015: 175). Besides, according to Grunig (2009: 2), PR needs to draw upon research, listening, and dialogue to build relations with the public, and the new emergent social media tools have the necessary dialogical and interactive properties to facilitate this (Grunig, 2009: 2). However, the data in the current study revealed that the sampled PR practitioners and organizations rarely used social media to build relationships based on interaction or engagement. First, the survey data showed that just 33% of the sampled practitioners communicated with stakeholders via social media. However, the data presented in Table 11.1b illustrate that 82% of the sample used social media to communicate with existing friends and followers. Likewise, Table 11.2b shows that less than 50% of the participants used social media to build new relationships. There is consequently a notable difference in the data in Table 11.1b, which demonstrates that the majority of the participants were accustomed to communicating within an already established relationship. Moreover, Table 11.3b shows that 66% of the participants used social media to maintain existing business relationships, while Table 11.5b illustrates that only 47% of the participants used social media to share images

and news with the public. Finally, Table 11.6 shows that 29% of the participants used

social media to maintain a good reputation for their clients or products.

11.1b: Use of social media to communicate with existing friends and followers

All Participants	Male	Females
82%	76%	93%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.1b: Out of the whole sample, 82% of the participants stated that they used

social media to communicate with existing friends and followers.

11.2b: Use of social media to build new relationships

All Participants	Male	Females
45%	46%	44%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.2b: Out of the whole sample, 45% of the participants stated that they used

social media to build new relationships.

11.3b: Use of social media to maintain business relationships

All Participants	Male	Females
61%	66%	51%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.3b: Out of the whole sample, 61% of the participants stated that they used social media to maintain business relationships

11.4b: Use of social media to communicate with clients and stakeholders

All Participants	Male	Females
33%	34%	32%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.4b: Out of the whole sample, 33% of the participants stated that they used social media to communicate with clients and stakeholders.

11.5b: Use of social media to share images and videos

All Participants	Male	Females
47%	39%	61%
Total	117	100.0

Result 11.5b: Out of the whole sample, 47% of the participants stated that they used social media to share images and videos.

11.6b Use of social media to maintain a good reputation for clients or products

All Participants	Male	Females
29%	26%	34%

Total	117	100.0	

Result 11.7b: Out of the whole sample, 29% of the participants stated that they used social media to maintain the good reputation of their clients or products.

However, a gender difference was found among the participants in terms of communication and building relationships in their PR work, with the female participants tending to be active in using social media to share posts and content, but very inactive in using these tools to build new relationships or communicate with clients and stakeholders. Instead, the sampled female PR practitioners appeared to favour social media for engaging with existing contacts, including friends and followers. These findings correlate with or reflect an important aspect of being a woman in Saudi culture, namely, a reluctance to talk to a male stranger or mixed audience. In general, female PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia will only engage with an exclusively female audience (Al-dubaikhi, 2013).

Furthermore, the findings for the performance of women in the Saudi PR industry is expected to be low and still in a phase of development, due to the fact that the introduction of media and PR into the education of Saudi women is relatively recent in the Kingdom, as emphasized by KAU-Participant #2, an academic who described the changes that have taken place over the past decade. In particular, KAU-Participant #2 referred to the female sections opening up for media courses in universities across the Kingdom, where

> females always outnumber male students in public relations schools… there is more female than male representation in the PR school at the university. I would estimate the number of female students to be around 52 or 53%, which is higher than for male students.

However, while this is an interesting finding, the topic of gender in PR is not the focus of this study and so it will not be discussed in depth in this thesis, as already clarified in Chapter Two.

In contrast, with regard to social media use, the interviewees from the four selected organizations emphasized that they used social media tools to communicate with followers and customers, but not to the extent where relationships were built through this engagement and dialogue in the manner described by Grunig and Hunt (1984), Grunig (2009), Kent and Lane (2018), and Kent and Lee (2020). Specifically, Participant #1 described communication with the public via various social media platforms, describing them as tools for 'investor relations', since investors can access live consumer feedback and observe engagement between PR practitioners and the public. Therefore, Participant #1 noted that '[i]n general, the platforms have driven us very close to our consumers and investors, and strengthen the relationship. We are getting closer and becoming easier to reach and more open to discuss'. Participant #4, from one of the multinational organizations, also stated that social media 'enabled [the organization] to interact with consumers if necessary'. Moreover, Participant #3 commented that 'social media have also introduced interaction with customers, which is another factor that has revolutionized the industry at large'.

More specifically, the data showed that all the sampled organizations used Twitter for a similar reason, which was to collect data and target an audience. This finding corroborates some of those published by Smith, Blazovich, and Smith (2015) on the adoption of social media by Fortune 500 companies, where no significant difference was found between industry type in relation to the mean adoption of social media. However, the current study findings contradict Smith, Blazovich, and Smith (2015) in other ways, as differences were found in the platforms adopted. For instance,

manufacturing firms tended to favour Facebook and Twitter, followed by YouTube, whereas retail firms used Facebook most frequently (Smith, Blazovich, and Smith, 2015).

Furthermore, the use of social media to build relationships with the public was not evident in the results of the online questionnaires (completed by 20 PR practitioners). Instead, the respondents mentioned the use of social media for communication or to share comments that could help reach a target audience. For example, Participant #6 explained that using social media for PR had:

> …increased the audience interaction, facilitated access to different segments, and broke[n] down the barriers between the social, cultural and governmental status, so it [has become] easier to communicate with Ministers, writers, artists, celebrities and other specialists, and it [has] also opened [up] the way for exchanging experiences in the field of public relations and to develop these experiences.

Moreover, Participant #8 referred to the impact of social media as 'faster dissemination, wider target, more interactions in less time and with less effort'. Participant #12 also commented that 'the impact of social media on the PR market is huge', adding that 'social media enabled fast completion of tasks', while guaranteeing 'delivery of information'. However, Participant #12 highlighted that the most important role of social media in PR was that it informed practitioners of 'the latest developments in the industry and also in other industries', as well as providing PR practitioners with the 'tools… to understand their audiences and their preferences'. Moreover, Participant #14 pointed out that social media had 'facilitated the process of communicating with the external audience', especially as it is more interactive, enabling two-way communication and 'changing the entire function of the practice as we know it'.

However, the type of interaction found in the current study corroborates the findings of Almefleah (2017), wherein the power in relationships between both private and public organizations appeared to be aimed purely at gaining an advantage for the organization concerned. However, the genuine social media communication should be based on dialogic rather than faux engagement or message reception (Kent and Lee, 2020), and the use of social media for reasons other than interaction will mean that the platforms are not being utilized to their full advantage (Kent and Lee, 2020).

The current research further investigated all the participants' communication with their target audience, in order to understand how they viewed the process of interacting. For example, in response to a question about whether their social media use was strategic or based on an ad-hoc approach, 90% of the survey participants 'Agreed' or 'Strongly agreed' that they only used social media to interact if they had a planned strategy. Additionally, the majority of the survey participants (78%) 'Agreed' or 'Strongly agreed' that they did not engage in any conversations on social media without first referring to their team or manager. This survey finding was also emphasized by a representative from one of the multinational companies, Participant #4, who stated: 'The people who work in the Communications Department are aware of the fact that content and interaction go through a process before they are tweeted or posted on social media platforms'. In that sense, most of the survey participants viewed interaction with the public via social media as potentially dangerous, with the risk of it backfiring on them. Here, just over half the survey sample (53%) 'Agreed' or 'Strongly agreed' on this point, while 26% 'Disagreed' or 'Strongly disagreed'.

The high level of awareness of the issues of social media interaction among the participants was likewise deduced from the interview results gathered from the four sampled organizations. For example, Participant #1 (from a Saudi-based company)

cited the audience as a barrier to using social media in PR work, in that it was difficult to balance 'the mad, angry and dissatisfied followers' with the 'loyal followers' when communicating with them, while also maintaining an appropriate distance. It was observed to be difficult to keep all sides happy. In the same vein, Participant #2 (from a multinational organization) stated that 'there are people who create accounts to guarantee that they complain'. As a result, PR social media platforms had apparently become a means of consumers accessing organizations for negative and destructive reasons. Moreover, malicious comments about organizations can be disseminated via social media, and this poses a challenge. Participant #2 pointed out: 'You have to be very careful on social media because when you answer one person you are actually answering the entire public'. Meanwhile, Participant #3 also mentioned followers on social media as the main challenge to interaction, give that this highly visible interaction with the public was something that was taken 'very seriously' by companies. Therefore, even though followers tended to 'exaggerate' in their criticisms and complaints, all negative comments had to be followed up by the PR practitioner, who needed to be prepared for any type of enquiry, while at the same time maintaining contact with the client.

Among the participants in the online questionnaire, Participant #18 referred to 'fake accounts on social media' and the 'ignorance of how to use some applications in a large segment of the public' as the main factors discouraging interaction with the public. Hence, these findings are similar to those of Almefleah (2017), who examined the Saudi public's boycotting of private and public organizations, revealing that the public tended to use social media to find fault with an organization or to complain about a move it had made. As a result, the participants appeared to lack knowledge of how to deal with communication on an online platform, especially where it involved

criticism from the public (Almefleah, 2017). This chapter will later discuss the reasons why the participants found it difficult to interact with their audience.

Furthermore, in the results relating to communication between the PR practitioners and their stakeholders, it was demonstrated that 85% of the participants chose to observe public conversations on social media before engaging with them. However, 69% of the survey participants chose to share posts and announcements based on the number of participants in a hashtag or group network. Most of these participants (67%) were also aware that interactions would lead to the development of relationships.

In this sub-section, it has been clarified that the use of social media by PR practitioners in the Saudi context mainly consists of data collection and the promotion of activities by sharing posts and images. These findings point to the fact that the study participants did not adopt social media to fulfil the essential principle of building two-way symmetric communication with their public, as described by Grunig (2009); instead, they tended to use social media in the same way as traditional media, with the exception of data-gathering and scanning the public. These findings corroborate Grunig (2009), with PR practitioners using social media to 'dump' content on the public, rather than building two-way symmetric communication. However, the data also showed that the participants were aware of the benefits of social media for building relations, but also faced challenges and obstacles that were likely to hinder their adoption of social media. According to the previous discussion, the data indicated that the participants tended to function according to the two-way asymmetric model of PR when using social media networks, where public solely receive information, rather than participating in the exchange of information, and organizations establish their communication based on online feedback by their target audience or the public (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Furthermore, the data also indicate that the participants in

the current study are guided by strategic planning that does not encourage the integrations of organizations with their public (Macnamara, 2016: 340). Here, the data show that the participants do not exploit the opportunities that are fundamentally offered by social media tools, interaction, dialogue, co-orientation, and symmetric communication (Macnamara, 2016: 341).

The following section will now discuss the use of traditional media by PR practitioners and organizations in the Kingdom.

6.3 Use of Traditional Media for Public Relations (PR) Practice in the Kingdom

The data gathered using the three methods adopted in this current study showed that traditional media are generally still valued for PR practice in Saudi Arabia. Specifically, the majority of the survey participants valued the use of newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations, but were also dissatisfied with these tools, despite acknowledging their importance for their PR practice. Here, TV channels were found to be the most effective and important, followed by radio stations. In contrast, newspapers were thought to be the least effective and least important by the survey respondents. Moreover, the findings from the one-to-one interviews with representatives from the selected organizations illustrated that these professionals viewed TV channels and radio stations as important in their PR communications. Similarly, the data gathered in the online questionnaires showed that the participants appreciated the value of television and radio, with television being the most important tool for their PR practice and newspapers being the least important. However, the data from all three methods showed that traditional media were still valuable for PR practice, due to their credibility with the Saudi public, but these media remained important for official announcements rather than for promotional purposes. However,

Participant #3 from one of the sampled organizations associated traditional media with building brand recognition, which implies that traditional media are still strong and fundamental to the new PR as part of the media mix. Nevertheless, traditional media were being used differently, and interest in them was reduced.

In this vein, academic participant, KAU-Participant #4 clarified:

> Traditional media will always be an aspect of public relations… Traditional media are the official media; students have to understand the essentiality of daily newspapers and TV programs. Traditional media have relied heavily on written materials or narrative content such as on the radio, for example.

These findings corroborate those of a 12-year study on the use of social media by American and international PR practitioners, conducted by Wright and Hinson (2014) and highlighting that while the use of social media has continued to increase, traditional and social media complement each other as part of the same domain. Therefore, traditional media are still found to be significant for PR practitioners (Wright and Hinson, 2014). Moreover, in their previous study, Wright and Hinson (2008) reported on a three-year international survey of PR practitioners, examining the impact of blogs and other social media on PR practice, revealing that the new media were dramatically changing the field. Their results indicate that blogs and social media have enhanced the way in which PR is conducted, as well as its outcomes, and social media and traditional mainstream media are complementary to each other. The above study also found that the emergence of blogs and social media had changed the way in which organizations communicate, especially to external audiences. Furthermore, traditional news media had been supplemented and even supplanted by blogs and social media coverage.

Wright and Hinson's (2008) study likewise reported that blogs and social media platforms had made communication instantaneous, thereby encouraging organizations

to respond more promptly to criticism. Meanwhile, Duhe (2015) found PR to be doubly connected with traditional media, with traditional media being very valuable for large organizations. In Saudi Arabia, during the 20th century, practitioners naturally relied on traditional media such as radio, television, and printed content in the absence of social media. Therefore, Saudi PR practitioners depended on press releases, board reputation, and participation in exhibitions (Almefleah, 2017). The following section therefore discusses the data gathered from the current research participants on using both traditional and social media tools for PR practice, in order to identify the advantages of social media over traditional tools in Saudi PR practice. Hence, the research seeks to further understand the function of PR in relation to the four proposed PR models (Grunig and Hunt, 1984), and particularly to the two-way symmetric PR model (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Grunig et al, 1992).

6.4 Traditional Media versus Social Media for Public Relations (PR) Practice

As already deduced from the overall data in this study, traditional media remain a major player in Saudi PR communications, particularly television and radio. In comparing social and traditional media usage, one survey item presented a series of statements on combinations of media tools, so that the importance of social media compared to traditional media could be determined, as follows:

1. 'Press release in two major printed newspapers, shared on one social media site'

2. 'Press release in the digital version of the daily newspaper, shared on three social media sites'

3. 'Coverage of the news on one TV channel, shared on one social media site'

4. 'Press release in one major printed newspaper, shared on two social media sites'.

The second statement, 'Press release in the digital version of the daily newspaper, shared on three social media sites' scored highest (2.69), closely followed by the third statement, 'Coverage of the news on one TV channel, shared on one social media site' (2.68). This finding implies that the participants' preferences were oriented towards social media, while the lowest scoring statements related the use of print versions of newspapers. Moreover, the findings from the four interviews showed that the use of social media had continued to increase, but traditional media were still being used for PR purposes. Here, Participant #1 (from a Saudi-based organization) and Participants #2 and #4 (from the two multinational organizations) confirmed that traditional media such as newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations were still essential for their PR communication. Meanwhile, Participant #3 from a Saudi-based organization stated that the company used traditional media by default. Moreover, the interviewees from all four organizations claimed that they saw social media dominating the future of PR communication. The following sub-section interprets the data on the advantages and benefits identified by all the participants in their use of social media, as compared to traditional tools.

6.4.1 Low Cost

Almefleah (2017: 142) states that organizations in Saudi Arabia continue to use social media for the benefits of its low cost and wider reach. The survey data showed that a large majority of the participants used social media because it was less expensive than traditional methods, whereupon 88% (see Table 16.1) 'Agreed' or 'Strongly agreed' that their use of social media was associated with the low cost of the tools. In addition,

the interviewees from all four organizations identified the low cost of social media as an advantage over traditional media tools. For example, in the multinational corporations, Participant #4 emphasized that social media were 'more useful, much cheaper, and cost efficient', while Participant #3 claimed that in general, social media had facilitated major advances in PR practice, especially with regard to time and budget, which are pivotal in the communications industry. This factor of low cost was also deduced from the responses of at least two of the online questionnaire respondents. Similarly, KAU-Participant #2 cited cost as 'the main factor' when comparing traditional with social media', emphasizing that it had transformed PR practice and overtaken traditional media tools, due to its cost-effectiveness.

6.4.2 Ease of Use

In addition, the use of social media tends to be driven by their ease of use, which was indicated by 78% of the survey participants. In another survey question, the participants were asked if it was easier for them to perform their PR tasks with social or traditional media, whereupon 71% (see Table 20), stated that social media made their PR tasks much easier. This ease of use was also emphasized by two of the interviewees, with Participant #1 describing social media as 'much easier and cheaper' and as a toolset that no one could 'afford to ignore'. Participant #3 also claimed: 'It is easier for us to generate digital leads via social media networks than with traditional tools such as newspapers. Furthermore, the ease of use of social media was emphasized as a motivating factor for using social media in PR by at least five of the online questionnaire respondents.

6.4.3 Creativity, Improved Practice, and Better Results for Public Relations (PR) Communication

Overall, the participants appeared to view their use of social media as having improved their PR practice, indicated by the majority of the survey respondents. Moreover, most of these respondents (82%, see Table 16.2) claimed that their outcomes were better as a result, while 82% (see Table 12.5) found that social media allowed them to be more creative, compared to using traditional methods. Additionally, the interviewees from the four organizations associated the improvement in their PR communication with the way that social media had radically reduced the time required to perform their tasks. However, this had exerted a negative impact on their use of traditional media, particularly newspapers. Furthermore, at least six of the online questionnaire respondents stated that social media had improved their PR communication, due to the speed of disseminating and delivering messages. Likewise, KAU-Participant #3 stated that 'traditional media such as newspapers and radio channels are still there' but 'they have shifted onto social media platforms' which has accelerated the rate of communication.

In Part Two of this chapter, the impact of social media on PR functions will be outlined, based on the data collected using the three methods adopted in this study.

Part 2:

6.5 Integration of Social Media into Public Relations (PR) Communication

Part Two of this chapter attempts to answer the second research question in this thesis, concerning the ways in which organizations integrate social media into their PR communication. As a result, data relating to the impact of social media on PR functions

will be discussed, specifically with reference to the advantages, challenges, and barriers that it presents, as well as the accompanying policies and guidelines, training, and education established to enable, govern and enhance the PR field. This Part Two endeavours to fill a gap in the literature by determining how organizations implement social media into their PR communication, and identifying the policies and guidelines that are attached to their adoption, as discussed in the literature framework in Chapter Two. Moreover, this part of the chapter will also include contributions from five academics from KAU to shed more light on PR education and training (see Chapters One and Three).

6.6 Impact of Social Media on the Employment of Public Relations (PR) Staff in the Kingdom

The data gathered in interviews with representatives from the four organizations selected in this study revealed that the use of social media had especially impacted the employment of PR practitioners. This effect was noted by most of the interviewees, due to the characteristics that are required of PR practitioners for the effective use of social media in their role. Here, Participant #1 explained:

> Social media have had a major and radical impact on the field; PR is no longer the same in terms of its practices, nor are PR employees. This impact includes current employment procedure. For example, what qualifies a person is no longer his PR experience, but his experience in using social media.

Participant #2 added that there were 'several factors, including employment strategy or the employment ladder', which had evolved because 'the market now needs people in PR… who are good at using social media; this is a fundamental change in the industry'. Entry into the PR professions was also addressed by one of the academics interviewed, KAU-Participant #1, who recalled that previously, being able to speak a

'little English and [use] Microsoft Office' was sufficient to 'land you a job in public relations' but 'now, it is about knowing the platform and understanding what content to produce and how to publish it and where'.

In addition, specific to the Gulf context in general and Saudi Arabia in particular, Almahraj (2017: 216) explains the problem of negative *wasta,* which translates literally as 'connection'. This is a concept relating to the question of whether knowledge is important to professional PR practice in KSA and which could represent an obstacle in the path of producing professional PR practitioners. Here, KAU-Participant #2 stated:

> Practicing PR and [using] digital [media] do not require a degree or diploma, because it is not like [being] a doctor or engineer… as a matter of fact, most PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia have not studied Public Relations.

The recent availability of internships with firms operating in Saudi Arabia are likely appeal to fresh PR graduates and continuing students (Almefleah 2017: 146). Internationally, especially in Europe, Distaso, McCorkindale, and Wright (2011: 326) found that it was difficult for staff to stay up to date with the rapidly changing social media environment, and it is especially a challenge for 'older employees who are less familiar with the medium', with teams having to 'learn as they go'. Thus, one academic, KAU-Participant #3, commented:

> Employment in the PR industry has been affected immensely by the emergence of social media, to the extent that during interviews for PR jobs, organizations now ask about candidates' proficiency in using Twitter, for example, before they decide to hire new graduates.

Moreover, KAU-Participant #4 remarked that it has become 'easy for students to contact organizations and generate job opportunities…'. However, he added: 'there is no training provided that I'm aware of, but new graduates have to do it the hard way.'

Nevertheless, Almahraj (2017) concludes that 'educational institutions have an

important role in influencing PR and its practitioners, and their failure to impart useful knowledge will explain the confusion that relates to PR duties in this field'.

Therefore, by reviewing the literature and analyzing the data obtained from the four organizations and Saudi academics, it would appear that the Saudi PR market is in need of official, government-backed professional associations or a private institution that will understand the market's needs, while developing the implementation of new technology. This would imply the allocation of a training budget and the recruitment of staff, including academics who are specialized in PR and can influence the ladder of employment. In addition, the involvement of PR agencies would facilitate the growth of the sector and initiate job placements for undergraduates and graduates.

The study data also showed that the suggested professional associations should consider and reflect Saudi culture, in order for PR practitioners to be able to benefit the PR market and organizations. Moreover, these associations should not overlook the importance of the international context in developing PR practitioners' knowledge in Saudi Arabia, as highlighted by KAU-Participant #1:

> …the change is from traditional PR to digital PR, and the goal now is to catch up with the change… we develop new modules and introduce new studies about new technologies, mostly from the United States and the United Kingdom, but also from Saudi contexts… all the social media tools come from the United States, thus, part of the education in these new technologies reflects Western education.

Linked to the above comment, Participant #2 from the sample of 20 PR practitioners stated: 'English speakers are rare in this field of work and it's mainly a problem because all the means of communication that are approved are originally in the English language.'

Meanwhile, KAU-Participant #3 emphasized the 'unique' identity of Saudi Arabia, whereby

the culture has affected its entry into the [PR] market at large… before, there was no interest in jobs like public relations, especially among Saudi women, but now there is noticeable interest among young male and female Saudis in enrolling on Public Relations courses and attending PR colleges all over the Kingdom. The field was previously occupied by foreigners working in Saudi Arabia, especially from Lebanon and Egypt, in addition to some Western PR practitioners who were affiliated with multinational companies operating here… but now the situation is different, because PR requires local practitioners, this is always the case… for example, foreign workers who were born in Saudi Arabia or have been here for a long time are better at PR, in contrast to foreign workers who do not understand Saudi culture. PR is different from marketing, branding, advertising, etc., because PR requires an understanding of your target audiences including their behaviour, and this is a challenge in PR in general.

Wiesenberg, Verčič, and Zerfass (2016) also compare the use of mass media to owned media, concluding that the media transition affects media relations to cause transition in the function of media relations between organizations and journalists. The finding for changes in employment correspond to the above findings because organizations are constantly addressing changes in employment in the PR industry. Later in this thesis, practical recommendations will be made based on these findings.

Finally, Almahraj (2017: 240) ascertained that the influence of state organizations on the knowledge possessed by PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia, their routes of entry into PR employment, and the work duties that they are assigned, had led to a lack of understanding of the PR concept, resulting in weak knowledge of PR in the market.

6.6 Challenges and Obstacles

This current research focuses on understanding the challenges and obstacles that PR practitioners encounter when seeking to adopt social media for PR purposes in Saudi Arabia. As discussed in the literature in Chapter Two, and also highlighted in Chapters Three, Four, and Five; Macnamara and Zerfass (2012:289) state that 'significant gaps remain in knowledge of how organizations are utilizing social media for public

relations communication'. In addition, Robson (2013) indicates that significant knowledge gaps remain in terms of how organisations are using social media and why they are failing to embrace the dialogic, collaborative and engagement features of social media to build relationships with their publics. Furthermore, Robson and James (2013: 12) call for further investigation to help PR practitioners overcome barriers and challenges to progress towards social media adoption, with the aim of building two-way communication with their public.

Aside from above, Bashir and Aldaihani (2017: 781-783) observed a lack of strategy among organizations and PR practitioners in their approach to social media use, and PR practitioners lack basic knowledge of how to use these new tools. Other findings in the literature suggest that few of these claims are exaggerated. For example, the lack of policies and guidelines for employees' use of social media, the lack of monitoring of social media content, and the absence of training and support for PR practitioners in using most types of social media, not only significantly and empirically highlight how companies currently use social media in their PR, but also how these tools could be used to enhance corporate communication with the public (Almefleah, 2017).

Although there is evidence of a keen interest in social media among PR and corporate communications professionals, McNamara and Zerfass (2012: 304) determined that the lack of strategy, policy, employee guidance, training, monitoring and evaluation in this area implied poor or only very basic skills in its use. The training of PR and corporate communication professionals, specifically in social media, rather than in technology alone, would be an important step towards achieving a balance in organizational communication via social media.

To extend on these previous research on the potential hindrances to the progress of social media adoption by PR practitioners and organizations, this section presents and discusses the relevant data gathered in this current study. The corresponding challenges and obstacles are categorised according to their frequency in the data gathered through interviews, online questionnaires, and the survey. The data collected in the interviews and online questionnaires revealed primary and secondary challenges in the adoption of social media for PR communication. For example, data based on feedback from at least one of the interviewees or PR practitioners are viewed as secondary in this section, while data on the challenges and obstacles encountered by more than one organization or at least two PR practitioners are considered primary. The challenges described below are mostly considered to be primary because they were addressed by at least two of the interviewees and a number of respondents to the online questionnaires.

6.6.1 Primary Challenges and Barriers

6.6.1.1 Social Media Platforms

Interviewees from two of the organizations appeared to view social media platforms in themselves as presenting challenges to their adoption of PR communication. These challenges related to social media platforms becoming partners in the PR and communication agenda, rather than facilitating online communication. To illustrate this, in reference to Facebook, Participant #1 complained that the platform 'implements very greedy policies for companies. Moreover, Participant #2 predicted that social media platforms would eventually 'become very expensive to use as a communication tool, because they are becoming more like a bidding system or an auction, where two companies can bid for the same target or information'. This

indicates dependence on social media platforms organizations, with these platforms gaining greater control over the communication agenda, rather than merely facilitating the communication process online. This finding represents a basic contradiction of the core nature of social media platforms, which is to facilitate communication. It was observed in Saudi Arabia by Almefleah (2017), where Facebook and Twitter had changed the way in which contact was facilitated between these organizations and their stakeholders.

Aside from the above, social media has facilitated political participation in Saudi Arabia (Al-Saggaf and Simmons, 2015), as well as enabling relationships to be built between organizations and the public (Grunig, 2009; Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011). Likewise, in Turkey, Alikilic and Atabek (2012) noted that PR practitioners were using social media to engage in dialogue with the public, and generally, social media had enabled faster communication, due to the speed at which different types of content could be delivered (Bivins, 2017). In this sense, Participants #1 and #2 viewed social media as more than a mere facilitator of information-sharing, depicting it rather as an agent of communication, possibly manipulating the process of that communication.

6.6.1.2 Interaction with Account Followers

Social media account followers (audiences) tended to be indicated as a primary challenge for the participants, in terms of how they could communicate with them. The survey data showed that most of the participants viewed interaction with their audience as risky, in that the public could give negative feedback or even launch verbal attacks (see Table 15.2). Thus, the majority of the survey participants tended to exercise caution over engaging with the public (see Table 15.3). Furthermore, data from the interviews with representatives from all four organizations showed that their

social media followers presented a barrier to their PR communication. Specifically, Participant #1 cited the need to strike a happy medium in communicating with two extremes on social media: the loyal, satisfied follower and the angry, dissatisfied follower. Participant #3 echoed this need for a balanced approach to avoid escalating situations where PR practitioners were confronted with negative feedback from the public. Here, Participant #3 stressed the importance of PR practitioners being prepared for the kind of questions that they might receive on social media platforms, and to have answers at the ready, which would reflect the company's values.

Furthermore, the 20 PR practitioners who completed the online questionnaire also perceived interactions with social media followers as an obstacle, with Participant #3 describing them as 'reckless' and therefore risky to engage with on a public platform. Meanwhile, Participant #6 declared that 'Direct communication with followers is a challenge in itself'. Participant #12 also pointed to the widespread 'ignorance' displayed by many members of the public when using some applications, and Participant #13 mentioned the problem of fake social media accounts. More broadly, Participant #14 highlighted the general lack of credibility attached to social media content, while Participant #16 further emphasized the relationship between content and interaction with followers: 'content must be interactive, updated and permanent', stressing the need for 'continuity… to gain the confidence of the followers'.

Likewise, one of the academics interviewed, KAU-Participant #3, emphasized that

> Eengagement is a challenge and will remain a challenge because you cannot make rules for engagement. In fact, online or elsewhere… students who can easily engage in a normal atmosphere in coffeeshops, restaurants, events, etc., they are not necessarily good in online engagement, so the matter of engagement and how to ensure students understand the engagement protocols is still very ambiguous from both an academic and professional point of view.

The set of findings cited in the previous paragraphs may be associated with the dearth of relationship-building through dialogue and interaction, as discussed in the first section of this chapter (and illustrated in Chapters Four and Five). The findings also contradict the assumption that PR practitioners aim to attract large numbers of social media followers by engaging in chat and creating their own company pages (Baccarella et al., 2018) to enhance the exchange between their organizations and the public (Lenze, 2017). Additionally, the findings run counter to the idea that social media enable organizations to better understand their public and explore key elements or topics (Macnamar, 2016; Grunig, 2009; White and Boatwright, 2020). However, these findings do correlate with those derived for to European PR professionals, who consider open dialogue without control, and the ease of disseminating information as possible threats to organizations (Verhoeven et al., 2012: 164).

Nevertheless, Saroj and Pal (2020) found that social media can witness a sudden increase in the number of posts during a crisis, where 'people share emotions, thoughts, images, audio and video to their near and dear ones as well as to wider public in general'. In times of crisis, PR has a big responsibility to, for example, establish communication plans, provide information, and prevent negative public opinions of an institution (Civelek, Çemberci, and Eralp, 2016). For organizations, crises can be defined as unexpected events with the potential to produce negative results. However, it is hard for organisations to be fully prepared for crises, which occur unexpectedly and can result in the deterioration of organizational structure, along with negative outcomes for employees, products, services, financial states, and organizational fame (Civelek, Çemberci, and Eralp, 2016). However, it should be added here that the use of PR in crisis management this is not the focus of this study and is not developed

further, although it could pave the way for future research in this area of PR engagement.

6.6.1.3 Online Content and Use of Language

One major challenge that tends to hinder online communication, thereby obstructing relationship-building through dialogue, lies in the creation of appropriate and effective online content, especially regarding the language of that content. Interviewees from all four of the selected organizations mentioned or expressed concerns over the Arabic dialogue or accent that they used in their online communications, with Participant #1 stating:

> Another challenge is the kind of language we use that represents the company; I mean, you know how the accent differs in Saudi Arabia and in all other regions in the Arab world… The accent we use in Arabic has been a challenge for our PR communication.

Participant #2 also raised this issue, specifying the power of an accent in ensuring the relatability of audio-visual content to its audience. This does not pose a problem in text, where the audience can read Arabic, but it becomes much more complex with the spoken word, where the target audience must be able to identify with the characters used in promotions.

Along these lines, Participant #4 clarified: 'We look for locals who can speak English… even for those who can speak Arabic', due to the difficulty involved in hitting the right note in the dialogue and content produced. Additionally, Participant #1 highlighted the scarcity of Arabic-speaking professionals working at an advanced level in the digital world in Saudi Arabia, because relatively few Saudis have sufficient command of the English language to relay information from around the world to KSA. Moreover, among the 20 PR practitioners who completed the online questionnaire, at

least six of the respondents mentioned the lack of professional PR staff who could generate reliable discussion on social media platforms, and described how this lack affected the development of online content. Participant #1 stated: 'The language I use with the audience is one of the challenges I face, and the accent. I have to understand how to craft the content.' This issue was likewise revealed by Participant #3: 'Amongst the challenges that come with the development of online communities is the writing of proper content in whatever language or dialect it should be…' Additionally, the use of language was addressed by one of the academics interviewed, KAU-Participant #1, who clarified that in PR where social media are used, 'you must use simple language so you can engage successfully with the audience; successful PR practitioners understand the value of content'.

Linked with this is the problem of recruiting talent who can develop content of an appropriate quality, with Participant #4 declaring: 'The type of content presented is the biggest challenge in my view; in addition to [recruiting] the cadres who are good at dealing with the field of PR and digital media.' Correspondingly, Participant #16 cited the numerous 'initiatives to enrich content', which encountered obstacles in KSA, due to the 'lack of qualified and permanent full-time staff', since most 'social media experts who are present in the sector are collaborators'. The outcome of this, according to Participant #16 consisted of 'limited capabilities for producing media content that [would] elevate the game and keep pace with Vision 2030 – the Kingdom's vision'. In particular, Participant #20 complained that it was difficult to prepare skilled PR teams, because of the 'lack of qualified cadres'.

Specifically, KAU-Participant #1 referred to the use of Twitter, which differed from using traditional tools; for example, newspapers target high profile figures, government officials, or company CEOs, whereas all segments of society can be

reached via social media. However, 'there must be content production that suits the simple language of the public'. Here, KAU-Participant #1 highlighted that the 'production of content' and the language used to engage the public via social media represented a major challenge. This was echoed by KAU-Participant #3, who pointed out: 'Our language [Arabic] is unique and it has its own character and meanings of words; PR practitioners must understand what voice to use with the public.'

To understand the challenge of using a proper dialogue in Arabic, it is important to note that it is the official language of 22 countries (Elmaghraby et al., 2016: 165)., and the fourth most commonly spoken language in the world after Chinese, Spanish, and English. There are consequently over 230 million native Arabic speakers worldwide, in addition to over one billion Muslims who use Arabic as the language of their religion (Elmaghraby et al., 2016: 165). Moreover, written Arabic differs quite significantly from spoken Arabic, and modern Arabic is usually used in publications, books, and newspapers (Elmaghraby, et al., 2016: 165).

6.6.1.4 Politics

Politics were mentioned by just one of the interviewees, Participant #1, who cited this area as a 'major challenge' for the organization when seeking to 'speak to the world' as a representative of a country that not everyone approves of in political terms. However, Participant #1 explained that the organization's strategy for negotiating this issue was to 'ignore any political comments and choose not to engage with or open any dialogue that involves politics on social media'.

However, within KSA itself, the participants viewed the government's control over online content and the lack of regulations as obstacles. Participant #3 referred to the 'lack of regulations and laws governing work in social media communication' and

Participant #17 claimed that being monitored by 'agencies or institutions that are supported by the Ministry of Culture and Information' presented a barrier, with 'high media control over many websites'.

The findings presented in this sub-section indicate that social media are still being tightly controlled by the Saudi government within the Kingdom, and so the participants preferred not to engage in political discussions on social media. This contradicts other findings in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. For instance, Al-Saggaf and Simmons (2015) found that social media created more space for the Saudi public to participate in political and public life, and that Saudis used social media platforms for political and social purposes, with high motivation to seek information. Social media in general have also changed fundamental aspects of communication for Saudis (Alothman, 2013), whereby they now have a platform for discussing contentious social issues that cannot be disseminated via the government-controlled traditional media. Saudis are also known to post tweets on Twitter that cannot be expressed using traditional methods of communication (Alothman, 2013).

6.6.1.5 Public Relations (PR) Agencies

The four organizations sampled for this study work with external PR agencies. However, at least three of the 20 practitioners who completed the online questionnaire cited working with PR agencies as an obstacle that hindered the progress and development of the PR industry in KSA, with Participant #18 claiming that

> External PR agencies are good but bad at the same time. The only problem is that external PR agencies are in total control and the internal staff do not make any effort to train or develop their skills to understand social media networks; the agency does all the work.

Moreover, Participant #15 explained that 'unfortunately, government organizations are still using external PR agencies to manage communication sites', and Participant #9 identified the public's perspective of the credibility of social media as a challenge for PR practitioners, in that social media were not always regarded as 'reliable and official means of doing business'. It should also be clarified here that the enquiry about working with a PR agency was not posed as a direct question, but opinions were rather deducted from responses to a question on the obstacles and barriers that PR practitioners encounter.

6.7 Secondary Challenges and Obstacles

The following challenges and barriers are categorized as secondary, although they were mentioned by at least one participant in the whole sample. First, a lack of English-speaking PR personnel was cited, with Participant #2 stating that in Saudi Arabia, 'English speakers are rare in this field of work and it is mainly a problem because all the means of communication that are approved are originally in the English language'. As mentioned in the previous sub-section, some of the participants also saw clients' perceptions of the use of social media as obstacles. For instance, Participant #2 emphasized:

> It is a challenge to convince the client that there is a large team working on and formulating the content, and it is a challenge to persuade the client, because the initial thinking on the matter of using social media is based on the service being free and this is not true.

Furthermore, Participant #8 found it difficult to focus on a single topic when using social media, due to the many distractions presented while browsing these sites and 'many other topics that you miss when you are switching between platforms'.

Aside from the above, the provision of proper training was emphasized as a challenge or obstacle by two of the 20 PR practitioners who responded to the online questionnaire, with Participant #2 commenting: 'The provision of training is one of the most widely known obstacles that you openly face in the Saudi market and have to overcome', which was likewise mentioned by Participant #3, who declared: 'Training is the biggest challenge.'

The obstacles and challenges discussed in this section were ascertained from the collected study data. The following section will now examine the policies and guidelines that have been formulated by various entities to control the use of social media in PR. It will also look at the nature, extent and quality of training that is provided by organizations to prepare their PR practitioners and teams.

6.8 Policies and Guidelines

Concerning guidelines and policies, the study data revealed similar rules and codes of practice in place across the four sampled organizations, although the two multinational organizations tended to be stricter about the kind of content and comments that could be circulated online. All the policies and guidelines examined in this study related to the communication process, namely, what should be communicated via online platforms in general. Moreover, these policies and guidelines were specific to the local culture and took the form of company structures, rather than guidelines. For example, Participant #4 revealed that the organization had its own 'internal policies around what the company or an individual should tweet or not tweet', but there was also a section of the company dedicated to checking, approving or rejecting the content of every tweet before it was sent. From one of the Saudi-based organizations, Participant #1 emphasized that the organization's policies were oriented towards the local context to

'reflect the core values of the community' in which it operated. Conversely, one of interviewees, Participant #2, claimed that the social media communications industry in general was largely unregulated and lacked proper guidelines.

6.9 Training

Out of the entire survey sample, 81% of the participants either 'Agreed' or 'Strongly agreed' that there was a lack of training in the use of social media for PR practice. However, the interviewees from selected organizations explained that any training that was provided or deemed necessary was determined by the platform concerned. For example, Participant #1 stated that it was usually a case of adopting 'the normal standards, starting from the basics [for] the use of each platform'. This was then followed by training in how to 'increase engagement and keep followers engaged and entertained'.

In contrast, Participant #2 declared that no training was provided in the organization, which was an issue to be addressed in future. Instead, the organization's personnel are occasionally invited to attend conferences organized by Google, where they hear about the latest trends and receive information on strategies for effectively targeting a wider or more specific audience. These conferences are educational and offer some guidance and new knowledge. Meanwhile, Participant #4 emphasized the careful selection process for PR practitioners dealing with social media, whereupon the organization in question did not offer 'intensive training, but [kept] staff up to date with social media development through 'training sessions… to explain the rules of the game when it comes to social media communication'. Participant #4 added that it had become important for 'the company… to be ahead of the game and adapt to social media in the best way possible'.

Furthermore, in the relevant literature, international PR associations are indicated as helpful in providing useful updated information. They are also presented as a good networking and learning platform for those seeking to succeed in the PR field (Almahraj, 2017: 165). However, in order to develop PR practice in Saudi Arabia, PR must be defined for the Saudi context. Conversely, attempting to import PR practices directly from a Western context will obstruct the progress of PR in KSA (Almefleah, 2017: 146).

In this sense, KAU-Participant #1 clarified that the curriculum

> of the Public Relations College at KAU has been developed by Saudis, but mainly influenced by Western knowledge. This is because the West is very advanced in terms of public relations, and more importantly, in digital communication.

KAU-Participant #1 also added that PR was first introduced as a profession in Saudi Arabia by the US company, ARAMCO in 1954, which

> gave the impression that this field is for American and Western companies and local companies do not necessarily need to conduct public relations. This is also reflected in the late development of public relations education, especially for females.

KAU-Participant #5 also commented on this point, mentioning that

> There are many Saudis who have done research in this area, so Master's programmes and others at PhD level… we still need more of this research coming from the West, but as far as now, we are using a mix of Saudi and Western knowledge.

KAU-Participant #1 supported the notion expressed above, claiming: 'Saudi Arabia is far behind compared to Europe because we do not conduct studies.' A substantial body of Saudi literature on the use of social media for PR would contribute to the suitability and consequent effectiveness of PR practice in the Kingdom, building trust in two-

way communication and promoting mutual understanding between practitioners and their audiences.

Referring to the financial aspect, Participant #3 from a Saudi-based organization explained that a generous training budget and ongoing professional development was provided for the organization's staff, 'with updates on all new and existing social media platforms, and this is becoming more and more an essential part and at the top of our priorities'.

In the case of the 20 PR practitioners who completed the online questionnaires, further supported by Participant #4, a need for suitable training and regulation in the use of social media for PR purposes was highlighted. Meanwhile, Participant #5 raised the point that while there are training providers who run courses in using social media networks, this training is rarely specialized. Instead, it tends to be focused on the PR industry in general, relating to the management and creation of generalized content. Likewise, Participant #11 remarked on the 'lack of adequate specialized training'. Similarly, Participant #6 did not consider 'the training and controls [to be] anchored', but rather 'informal to some extent'. However, Participant #10 warned that 'specific training' as such was not the answer for 'winning the confidence of the audience', because despite the importance of engaging with the audience, 'it needs to be based on more knowledge and protocols'.

Finally, among the academics interviewed, KAU-Participant #1 was very clear that

> companies should have a budget for training and actually, constant training because the market is becoming very competitive and professionalism requires digital and PR training across the board, but there are no facilities for training and no proper training budgets... it is always up to the PR practitioners to invest in themselves.

Comparably, Bashir and Aldaihani (2017) found that in Kuwait, PR practitioners indicated that their educational background contributed to their reluctance to use social

media, as it lagged far behind in teaching students how to use communication technologies. This was likewise reflected in the Saudi context by KAU-Participant #3, who described how the teaching received on Saudi university PR courses covers 'traditional techniques such as press conferences, and press releases, which are fundamental to the practice of PR. But mostly, the students are naturally equipped with skills in using social media'. KAU-Participant #4 was unequivocal on this point, stating:

> The challenges among academics in Saudi Arabia [consist of] the fact that very few are qualified as experts in social media communications… most of the time, students are way more skilled than some of the academics… the employment of academics must start to be based on the needs of the market, not only on their doctoral degrees, which is the case now.

KAU-Participant #2 also highlighted that 'training should be available and… implemented by relevant associations, backed by local and international research', adding:

> In Saudi Arabia, we do have academics and associations where they share ideas and training to develop the field from an academic perspective, but we have never had public relations associations or even media associations to develop the field for practitioners, and this is a major problem or obstacle that has caused a major delay in understanding public relations.

Hence, Almefleah's (2017: 145) claim is supported, namely that the continued lack of strong professional PR bodies hinders the standardization of PR practice in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, KAU-Participant #4 declared: 'I believe organizations should spend more on training, especially large international and local corporations, because they need staff for their communication with the public, and their staff must be equipped through training.'

More specifically, KAU-Participant #1 proposed that, ideally, '[t]raining should be from inside organizations if they have someone who can actually train PR practitioners'. However, KAU-Participant #1 acknowledged that usually, 'it is better

to seek training from outside organizations to add more diversity', since in many cases, 'organizations do not provide training [but] expect staff to be professionals by nature'. Nevertheless, KAU-Participant #5 offered a different perspective, pointing out that '[s]ocial media networks have policies in terms of what to say or not say…', which all students are made aware of, but no specific training in the use of social media for PR was offered on the University's PR programme.

However, a different perspective is presented in the literature by Kent (2010: 654), who questions the current emphasis on using social media in PR, which is promoted by the heads of some professional associations and editors of global PR practitioner journals, due to the 'fun factor' of these media. Kent (2010) regards this factor as slight justification for assuming that social media use is essential for PR practice, and exhorts leaders of professional associations to exercise more critical judgement, in order to avoid this bias driving newly qualified PR practitioners.

Almahraj (2017) also suggests that educational institutions could develop knowledge that is specifically tailored towards Saudi culture, taking into account that Islam is central to the way of life among the Kingdom's native population. Nevertheless, KAU-Participant #5 highlighted the complexity of this issue, emphasizing that

> culture is an important part when we develop new modules, but eventually all modules have to be influenced to some degree by Western education because these technologies originated in the West… As for public relations as a field, that was founded in the United States.

Therefore, Almefleah (2017: 145) suggests the establishment of strong PR bodies to pursue the standardization of PR practice in Saudi Arabia and across the Arab world overall, which could 'commence at both organizational and university levels to encourage PR students to take up membership'. In relation to the above topic, KAU-Participant #2 referred to professional PR bodies elsewhere in the world:

> For example, in the UK, they have the Charted Institute and PR Consultant Associations and other associations that are related to public relations… in the Gulf, we only have a branch of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA); we do have academic research associations for academic research, but we do not have an association that supports PR research and practitioners.

In the relevant literature, Almahraj (2017) interviewed 27 PR practitioners to examine their perceptions of knowledge, culture, and public communication. He revealed that PR practitioners are aware that academic trainers display no real perception of the changing times. Neither are they cognizant of the outdated information that they present. Several participants in the above study even stated that the local Saudi PR Association did not seem to know what practitioners wanted or needed, and this was why practitioners preferred to attend overseas conferences and events hosted by international PR associations (Almahraj, 2017: 165). Almahraj (2017) likewise examined the knowledge acquired by PR practitioners from their diverse educational backgrounds, finding a discrepancy between the importance attached to experience and the value attributed to theoretical knowledge. He concluded that professional associations do not offer relevant training or support for PR practitioners, finding that it is rather the government that shapes education and employment in the Saudi PR industry (Almahraj, 2017: 240).

Almaharaj (2017: 146) consequently suggests that for PR practitioners to adopt new technologies, they need to attend regular seminars and workshops within organizations. Here, KAU-Participant #3 explained:

> Some studies have urged public relations foundations and associations to be advanced and alert, in order to deal with the changes that are occurring in the communications field. Also, university education should work towards understanding the economic and cultural factors in the Kingdom. We do work on developing modules to keep up with the progress of new technologies, but further on-the-ground training is essential for graduates. Social media have influenced the culture of teaching in general.

6.10 Social Media Budget

The data demonstrated that the social media PR budget across the sampled organizations was part of the budget for traditional PR media. Therefore, none of the organizations had a specific budget for social media, as supported by Participant #2 (from one multinational company), who declared: 'We do not have a specific budget for social media PR, because we are an international company, but we have allocated 70-80% of the overall communication budget for the past year to digital communication.' Similarly, Participant #1 from a Saudi-based company stated that traditional media would 'take 40% of the communications budget' compared to 60% for 'digital communication'. This was also reflected by Participant #3, who explained that the organization's PR budget was high, due to 'digital media… taking a big share of the communications budget'. Moreover, Participant #3 predicted that digital media would consume over '70% of the communications and PR budget' in future. This was in stark contrast to remarks made by KAU-Participant #1, who observed: 'Companies and government institutions in Saudi Arabia provide little budget for social media compared to traditional media tools such as newspapers, even now.'

6.11 Measurement

The results derived from the interview data showed that the measurement of social media use and outcomes was of benefit to all four organizations, but this measurement was still very superficial and based solely on the tools provided by each platform. Therefore, the data revealed that there was no actual measurement of the impact of online communication, other than counting clicks and reactions. For example, Participant #1, from a Saudi-based organization, clarified that the organization applied its own set of KPIs 'to the number of impressions… visits… retweets… clicks, and

conversations driven between followers'. Meanwhile, Participant #2 explained that while 'digital media are counted in clicks… newspapers are counted by the volume of circulation'. However, Participant #2 added that social media platforms charge a fee for counting clicks. The organization then counts 'the impressions, leads and clicks' and announces the outcomes internally to enable campaigns to be analyzed. Therefore, the organization was described as having 'a systematic approach to online media strategy'.

Conversely, Participant #3 from one of the Saudi-based organizations compared the measurement of traditional and social media use for PR, claiming that it was impossible to measure the impact or customer reach of traditional media, 'and what you cannot measure you cannot manage'. Thus, there is an astonishing difference between measuring online media platforms and measuring the PR impact of newspapers. Furthermore, Participant #3 added:

> When it comes to Twitter, the benefit is clear as crystal; I go straight to the point…'bring me the reach, bring me the number of clicks, engagements, how many people have read my post? How many people commented? Show me the comment…' I can measure everything. Outsourcing to agencies saves us time in measuring and providing users with data.

Meanwhile, Participant #4 claimed:

> Social media have made it easier and clearer to count the number of impressions; traditional media, in general, were ambiguous if we think about their figures, circulation figures, etc. Social media platforms assist companies and PR agencies in measuring impact, which is a valuable addition to the equation.

Participant #2 clarified that the campaign reach of traditional media is measured in terms of sales, but 'social media are very tangible, and we deal with numbers'. However, one problematic aspect of measurement was raised by one of the academics interviewed, KAU-Participant #1, who said:

> One point represents an obstacle … the measurement and target audience, because in our society people create accounts for each other, for example, most

women have their profiles created by other family members, so who you talking to online is not necessarily who you think they are.

6.12 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine and analyse how social media are currently being used for PR practice in Saudi Arabia, and how organizations integrate social media into their PR communication. The tools used to gather data for this study consisted of a survey conducted with a sample of 117 participants, in order to determine their usage of the social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, in contrast to their use of traditional media tools, namely, newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations. In addition, one-to-one interviews were conducted with representatives from four organizations in Saudi Arabia, and an online questionnaire was completed by 20 PR practitioners.

Concerning the use of social media platforms, Twitter was found to be the most important and frequently used platform among PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia, followed by YouTube. In contrast, Facebook was found to be the least effective and least important platform for PR practice. Furthermore, the main reason why PR practitioners and organizations used social media in the Kingdom was to collect information about customers and products. However, the PR practitioners and organizations studied appeared to be very inactive in using social media to build relations and communicate with clients and stakeholders. This study also found that the use of social media platforms did not differ across organizations of different sizes and sectors. Thus, all the organizations demonstrated a tendency to use the same platforms for similar purposes: to collect information and disseminate promotional messages, accordingly.

Concerning the use of traditional media, the sampled PR practitioners and interviewees from organizations indicated that they viewed TV channels as important and effective for PR communication, followed by radio stations. Hence, this study revealed that social and traditional media are parts of the same pie, sharing the budget and common strategies.

Furthermore, it was identified that PR practitioners, as well as the sampled organizations, generally avoided interaction with online communities, due to their limitations in developing suitable content and their inability to use a proper Arabic accent or dialogue as means of engaging with the public to build and maintain relationships. In that, it was clarified that the function of PR practitioners tends to fits in the framework of the two-way asymmetric PR model. Therefore, the main challenge encountered by the PR practitioners and organizations was identified as interaction and exchange with the public online. Here, although the PR practitioners stated that they communicated with existing clients and stakeholders via social media, very few responded that they used these media to build new relationships or maintain existing relationships with the public. In fact, a major obstacle for practitioners in the Kingdom seemed to be understanding how to maintain communication with a third party, especially with an unfamiliar audience, where there was no previous connection to the PR practitioner. The majority of the PR practitioners were suspicious of interacting with their audiences, for fear that it would backfire on them. However, most of the PR practitioners stated that they used social media to share images, posts, and videos. In addition, all the practitioners agreed on the necessity for training.

In contrast, the interviewees from the sampled organizations reported intensive social media use, mainly to collect data and respond accordingly. The methods of social media use corresponded closely to the use of traditional media tools in this case, with

the main benefit of low cost and greater scope of social media networks to disseminate information widely. The main interaction engaged in by the sampled PR practitioners and organizations revolved around the collection of data to target potential customers. Stakeholders also appeared to play an important role in the use of Twitter, because stakeholders were also audiences on this platform.

In addition, this study concludes that among the barriers facing PR practitioners and organizations is the capacity to develop effective content and communicate appropriately in Arabic dialogue: the language naturally required for PR practice on social media platforms in Saudi Arabia. The use of Arabic was identified by a significant proportion of all the participants as a challenge, due to the diverse Arabic accents and dialects that characterize the various regions of the Kingdom, as well as the diversity of the Arabic-speaking world. This was described as demanding either a completely neutral approach, with no defining accent or dialect to avoid identification with a specific group, or a specifically targeted approach, using the accents and linguistic variations of the target audience to render the content more relatable.

Ultimately, this study found that the main factor driving the adoption of social media by PR practitioners and organizations consisted of the low cost and ease of use, compared to traditional media, which require far longer timeframes and a much higher budget, while being harder to measure and manage for their effectiveness.

6.12.1 Practical Suggestions

Based on the current study findings, the researcher devised the following practical suggestions:

1- The findings show that the use of social media has impacted the employment of PR staff within organizations, shifting the focus away from PR skills alone. However, difficulty has been encountered in finding sufficiently qualified PR professionals who are also expert in using online social networks in their practice. It is therefore recommended that social media communication be handled by a designated social media spokesperson for the organization, who can represent the company and remain open to media and public enquiries. The social media page of an organization should contain a link to an active account in the name of this social media spokesperson, indicating their position. The role should function in the same manner as that of a traditional media spokesperson, except with a specialization in the new media tools.

2- The research findings also show that reliance on PR agencies often conflicts with developing the skills of PR practitioners who work in organizations. Public relations practice within organizations cannot and will not progress if organizations continue to rely wholly on external PR agencies. Therefore, organizations need to ensure that their own PR staff become heavily involved in online communication, assigning more important tasks to their PR departments than the simple approval of online content and monitoring of news.

3- Additionally, the data from the current study revealed that training was linked to specific social media platforms, mainly provided by internal or external parties to develop employees' skills in using a specific social media network feature. The current researcher therefore suggests that training should be provided in building online relationships on any social media platform. In this sense, social media platforms should be treated as a venue rather than a target, and content should be the focus of the training.

4- Meanwhile, the research data revealed that the use of Arabic dialogue presents one of the main challenges for PR practitioners and organizations, as it tends to be a barrier to engagement and dialogue with the public. This barrier has hindered the process of building and maintaining relationships with followers and audiences – a new problem, given that Modern Arabic is used in traditional media such as newspapers, and there is no regional variation. In contrast, audio-visual content posted on social media platforms is characterized by different accents and dialects. Consequently, this study suggests providing intensive training in the appropriate, localized and targeted use of Arabic to ensure that accents and dialects are audience- and content-appropriate. There is an urgent need to address this matter, so as to increase the chances of engagement and interaction between PR practitioners and their audiences on social media.

5- A further inhibiting factor found in relation to interaction between PR practitioners and their audiences is the fear of negative feedback or verbal attacks on public platforms. A national framework of guidelines for best PR practice could include a code of practice for PR practitioners using social media. These guidelines could then be integrated into organizational policy to support practitioners in their engagement with the public online.

6- The data likewise demonstrated variation in the size of PR budgets across organizations, with some participants reporting a high proportion of the media and communications budget being allocated to digital PR, while others referred to a general PR budget for all types of media. Given the long-term cost-effectiveness of social media used in PR, together with its measurable outcomes, a concerted investment on the part of organizations in developing this aspect of PR practice would seem reasonable.

7- Finally, the research data indicated the absence of PR associations in the Saudi PR market. Thus, the researcher recommends that academics and professionals in the PR field work on establishing such an association, or developing an existing one to work alongside PR agencies and provide training for new graduates, based on the needs of the PR market in Saudi Arabia.

6.12.2 Research Implications

1. Perhaps the most outstanding implication of this study is that since the building of online relations between PR practitioners and the public will not be possible without two-way dialogue, it is essential to choose an appropriate language for that dialogue. In the Saudi context, it follows that this language should be Arabic. However, given the diversity of regional variations of Arabic amongst native speakers, the development of online relationships may be facilitated or hindered by the localization of content. Given the speed of technology development, the ability to use the current platforms will not necessarily be advantageous in the future. However, the ability to interact with audiences based on their local culture, with an accent or dialect that they can relate to, is a key factor in building and maintaining online relations between organizations and their publics. The language of online communication in a PR context therefore needs to be explored, so that it can be emphasized in the training of PR practitioners. This will instill confidence in practitioners and equip them to engage in two-way communication with the public,

thereby maximizing the affordances of social media platforms and growing the audiences.

2. Meanwhile, it was indicated in the interviews with academics that although they acknowledged the importance of social media to the future of PR and remarked that the availability of PR courses in Saudi universities had greatly increased; the need for appropriately qualified practitioners had not yet been adequately met to keep pace with contemporary developments into the digital age. This was due to the continued low credibility attached by clients and the general public to social media as a source of information and means of communication with organizations.

3. In contrast, print and broadcasting media (traditional media) were regarded as more 'official' and therefore trustworthy. This gives rise to a twofold problem. Firstly, it ignores the fact that social media use has become increasingly widespread in the Kingdom and worldwide, resulting in a growing audience that can be accessed via these means, sometimes to the detriment of traditional media. Secondly, traditional media, apart from interactive shows such as radio phone-ins and TV talk shows, only offer one-way communication from the PR practitioner to the audience. The implications for research therefore point to a need to study perceptions of social media from multiple perspectives, including that of the public or audience.

4. The results of this current study reveal that PR practitioners and organizations measure the impact of their online communication with the public based on KPIs, clicks, impressions, shares (retweets), etc. However, the current researcher ventures that this measurement is still

very much on the surface, relating solely to the online community and not necessarily reflecting the true impact of PR on audiences. Therefore, the actual effect of PR conducted via social media needs to measured qualitatively by generating conversations and eliciting feedback from individuals, opening up a research area that can influence practice.

5. Linked with the points made previously, local culture inevitably bears upon communication via social media. This has implications for the public's trust in social media platforms in terms of the security of their information, reliability of the information sourced from social media sites, user-friendliness, and attitudes to gender. Lifestyle habits and culturally embedded preferences could point to the prevalence of television and radio as sources of news and other information. Accessibility may also be a factor, given that social media sites are designed very much with portable devices in mind – implying small screens, some skill in using the technology, possession of such a device, and the need for a consistent Internet connection. This was not specifically covered in the current research, but along with technology acceptance, it gives rise to important questions about how people choose to communicate and why. Additionally, given the Saudi context and its conservatism in relation to gender, the role of women in PR, specifically in online communication with the public, is a significant research topic in itself, especially as more and more women are entering the workplace in the Kingdom, including in the field of PR.

6. Finally, it is clear that this study has exclusively examined the opinions and experiences of practitioners, organizations and academics, without considering the perspectives of the public or audience. An exploration of

public perceptions of social media as a means of communication with companies and organizations is essential for informing PR approaches via these media; it will impact the entire industry in the Kingdom, from the education and training of practitioners, right through to the sites that are selected and the guidelines established for the profession.

6.12.3 Limitations of the Current Research

The focus of this study was to obtain data directly from PR practitioners, academics, and organizations, in order to try and understand their views of social media use in PR practice. However, no actual online content was analyzed and no audience or trainee perspectives were examined. Moreover, the data were either self-reported or qualitative, based on interviews, with no objective measurement of usage, and no examination of the impact of usage on effectiveness and reach. Furthermore, although gender was touched upon as an important aspect of the PR profession in Saudi Arabia – as more workplaces and university departments open up to women – the findings for gender were not explored in any depth in the discussion, as they fell outside the scope of the study.

5.13.4 Future Research

In light of the above, future research is required to address the topic of social media use for PR purposes in five main dimensions:

- The perspective of the audience and general public in the Saudi context, taking into account regional and demographic variables.

- The nature of the content and communication generated by PR practitioners and organizations, including the localization of language and projection of a positive national image to the world in cross-border communication.

- The impact of gender on the use of social media in the PR professions in Saudi Arabia, where customary gender segregation is undergoing radical change through government policy, leading to more educational and career opportunities for women, and an increasingly globalized culture.

- Social media and government controls or censorship, these being factors that can bear upon two-way communication from both the organizational/practitioner and audience side. In the social media context, this is also an issue of global significance at a time when social media platforms are being strongly implicated in the dissemination of 'fake news' and as facilitators of libelous or defamatory 'cancel culture'.

- The acceptance of social media itself as a phenomenon of technology, especially from the target audience side.

- The avoidance of communication with online communities among Saudi PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic, when such engagement with the public could have afforded a form of crisis management, rather than merely generating new content in one-way communication.

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Appendix:

Appendix 1: UEL Ethics Approval Letter

3 May 2016

Dear Salih,

Project Title:	The adoption and usage of digital communications by public relations practitioners in Saudi Arabia
Principal Investigator:	Professor Jonathan Hardy
Researcher:	Salih Alhamamy
Reference Number:	UREC 1516 91

I am writing to confirm the outcome of your application to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), which was considered by UREC **on Wednesday 16th March 2016.**

The decision made by members of the Committee is **Approved**. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Your study has received ethical approval from the date of this letter.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with your research project, this must be reported immediately to UREC. A Notification of Amendment form should be submitted for approval, accompanied by any additional or amended documents:
http://www.uel.ac.uk/wwwmedia/schools/graduate/documents/Notification-of-Amendment-to-Approved-Ethics-App-150115.doc

Any adverse events that occur in connection with this research project must be reported immediately to UREC.

Approved Research Site

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research Site	Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator
Place of participants' choosing	Professor Jonathan Hardy

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UEL Ethics Approval of Amendment Letter

![University of East London logo]

Dear Salih Nasser A

Application ID: ETH2122-0023

Original application ID: UREC 1516 91

Project title: The use of Social Media by PR Practitioners and Organizations in Saudi Arabia

Lead researcher: Mr Salih Nasser A Alhamamy

Your application to Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee was considered on the 21st of October 2021.

The decision is: **Approved**

The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation.

Your project has received ethical approval for 4 years from the approval date.

If you have any questions regarding this application please contact your supervisor or the secretary for the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee.

Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly.

Should you wish to make any changes in connection with this research project you must complete 'An application for approval of an amendment to an existing application'.

Approval is given on the understanding that the UEL Code of Practice for Research and the Code of Practice for Research Ethics is adhered to.☐☐

Any adverse events or reactions that occur in connection with this research project should be reported using the University's form for Reporting an Adverse/Serious Adverse Event/Reaction.

The University will periodically audit a random sample of approved applications for ethical approval, to ensure that the research projects are conducted in compliance with the consent given by the Research Ethics Committee and to the highest standards of rigour and integrity.

Please note, it is your responsibility to retain this letter for your records.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of the project

Yours sincerely

Fernanda Silva

Administrative Officer for Research Governance

UEL Ethics Amendment Form

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (UREC)

Notification of Amendment to Approved Ethics Application

To apply for an amendment to an existing study please complete the form, attach all appendices and send one PDF file to researchethics@uel.ac.uk. A hard, ink-signed copy of the application form and attachments must be forwarded to Rosalind Eccles, UREC Servicing Officer, University of East London, Graduate School, Docklands Campus, Room EB1.43, London, E16 2RD. Applications submitted without an ink-signed signature will not be approved.

Please ensure that the application form is presented in language comprehensible to the lay person.

Please contact the above email address for further guidance.

1. Details of Principal Investigator / Supervisor

Name:	Professor Jonathan Hardy
School:	School of Arts and Digital Industries
Telephone:	+44 (0)20 8223 6266
Email:	j.hardy@uel.ac.uk
Reference no of study (if applicable)	

2. Details of Researcher / Student (if applicable)

Name:	
	Salih N Alhamamy

Notification of Amendment to
Approved Ethics Application
(Adapted from NRES)
Updated 5th September 2014

Appendix 2: Participants' Consent and Invitation Letter

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)

University of East London

[Dockland Campus]

Research Integrity

The University adheres to its responsibility to promote and support the highest standard of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research; observing the appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks.

The University is committed to preserving your dignity, rights, safety and well-being and as such it is a mandatory requirement of the University that formal ethical approval, from the appropriate Research Ethics Committee, is granted before research with human participants or human data commences.

The Principal Investigator/Director of Studies

Professor Jonathan Hardy

j.hardy@uel.ac.uk ,

 Professor Paul Springer

P.springer@uel.ac.uk ,

Student researcher

[Salih Alhamamy]

salhmamy@gmail.com,

Sponsor of the research: Saudi Culture Bureau in London United Kingdom

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

Project Title

The use of social media by PR practitioners and organizations in Saudi Arabia

Project Description

This project aims to investigate and explore the links between public relations and the use of digital communications and social media in Saudi Arabia.

Digital communications and social media have become unique platforms for corporate communications and PR practitioners, in which most PR practitioners have developed certain skills to be able to utilise different elements of the digital media for their PR activities.

As a recognized academic in King Abdulaziz University in the media and communications faculty, this research invites you to participate in a one-to-one interview that is expected to provide an indication of:

- The level of usage of digital communications and social media by PR practitioners for PR activities.

- Which social media sites are the most useful for daily use PR communications.

- How is the future of PR and communications in Saudi Arabia from an academic point of view?

Confidentiality of the Data

Please note that all data provided will be confidential and it is no subject to be shared with any third party

Location

King Abdulaziz University – Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Disclaimer

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time during the research. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason. Please note that your data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis – after this point it may not be possible.

University Research Ethics Committee

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

Catherine Fieulleteau, Research Integrity and Ethics Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43

University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD

(Telephone: 020 8223 6683, Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

For general enquiries about the research please contact the Principal Investigator on the contact details at the top of this sheet.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

………………………………………………………………….

Participant's Signature

………………………………………………………………………………..

Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…………………………………………………………………..

Investigator's Signature

………………………………………………………………………………

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Date: ………………………

جامعة إيست لندن – لندن , المملكة المتحدة

(UREC) لجنة أخلاقيات البحث بالجامعة

النزاهة البحثية

تعتز جامعة إيست لندن بمسؤوليتها إتجاة المحافظة ودعم أعلى معايير النزاهة والصراحة المتعلقة ببحث رسالة الدكتوراة، والأخلاقيات المتبعة، والعناصر القانونية والمهنية في هذا الإطار. وتلتزم الجامعة بالمحافظة على المشاركين، وترى الجامعة أن موافقة المشاركين شيء أساسي قبل البدء في إجراء أي حوار أكان في صورة مقابلة شخصية ، أو أي شكل اخر. ولذلك تقوم الجامعة بالسماح للباحث بالقيام بجمع المعلومات بشرط ألحصول على موافقة رسمية من لجنة أخلاقيات البحث.

أسماء القائمين على البحث

بروفوسور جاناثون هاردي

j.hardy@uel.ac.uk ,

بروفوسور بوول سيرينقر

P.springer@uel.ac.uk ,

الباحث

صالح الهمامي

salhmamy@gmail.com,

الداعم للبحث: وزارة التعليم العالي

موضوع رسالة الدكوراة

إعتماد الإعلام الرقمي و وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي في ممارسة العلاقات العامة والإتصال في المملكة العربية السعودية

أهداف وتفاصيل رسالة الدكتوراة

تهدف رسالة الدكتوراة إلى التحقيق واستخلاص معلومات عن العلاقة بين إستخدام الإعلام الرقمي بما في ذلك وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي وبين مجال العلاقات العامة والإتصال في المملكة. لقد أصبحت وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي والإعلام الرقمي تمثل قنوات تواصل مع الجمهور وأصبحت وسيلة أساسية لقطاع العلاقات العامة والإتصال بالكثير من الشركات والمؤسسات، مما أدى إلى تطور مواهب العاملين والعاملات في مجال العلاقات العامة والإتصال حتى يتمكنون من التأقلم والمحافظة على بقائهم في مجال يشهد تغيير كبير في عناصر أساسية من تكوينته. تهدف الية البحث في جمع المعلومات إلى الوصول لنتائج عن التالي:

مدى إستخدام وإعتماد وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي والإعلام الرقمي في ممارسة العلاقات العامة والإتصال بالمملكة؟

ما أهمية إستخدام الإعلام الجديد ووسائل التواصل الإجتماعي للمارسة العلاقات العامة والإتصال بالمملكة ؟

ما هي الصورة المكونة من نظرة أكاديمية لمستقبل العلاقات العامة والإتصال في ظل التغيير في وسائل التواصل؟

المحافظة على سرية المعلومات

جميع المعلومات الناتجة من المقابلة هي لسبب الإستخدام الأكاديمي وغير متاحة لأي طرف اخر

موقع المقابلات الشخصية

المملكة العربية السعودية ـ مدينة جدة

إخلاء مسؤولية

المشاركة في البحث تطوعية ولغرض المساهمة في تقديم نتائج يستفيد منها مجال الإعلام والعلاقات العامة, وباستطاعتك الإنسحاب من المقابلة الشخصية بدون أي إلتزامات أو إشعار، ويمكنك طلب إلغاء المقابلة حتى بعد إنتهائها وذلك إلى وقت بدء تحليل المعلومات حيث لا يمكنني الإلغاء أو التغيير وقتها. وتوقيت تحليل المعلومات يبدأ في 20 من شهر يناير 2019

لجنة أخلاقيات البحث بالجامعة (UREC)

أذا كان لديك أي سؤول أو ملاحظة أو إستفسار الرجاء التواصل معنا

Catherine Fieulleteau, Research Integrity and Ethics Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43

University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD

(Telephone: 020 8223 6683, Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk)

إسم المشارك

التوقيع

أسم الباحث : صالح ناصر الهمامي

التوقيع

التاريخ:

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to Participate

Title of the study: The adoption of social media by PR practitioners and organizations in Saudi Arabia

By: Salih Nasser Alhamamy

Please tick as appropriate:

	YES	NO
I have read the information leaflet relating to the above title of the research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.		
I agreed to the use of audio recorded interview, I hereby confirm my acceptance		
I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential as far as possible. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data.		

I understand that maintaining strict confidentiality is subject to the following limitations: If the sample size is small, or focus groups are used state that this may have implications for confidentiality / anonymity, if applicable [A clear statement that, where possible, participants' confidentiality will be maintained unless a disclosure is made that indicates that the participant or someone else is at serious risk of harm. Such disclosures may be reported to the relevant authority]		
Anonymized quotes will be used in publications		
The participant has the option to be named in publications		
[Give proposed method(s) of publication dissemination of research findings]		
I grant a permission to use my data in future research		
[If applicable, obtain participants' permission to be contacted for future research studies by your team]		

It has been explained to me what will happen once the programme has been completed.		
I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time during the research without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I understand that my data can be withdrawn up to the point of data analysis and that after this point it may not be possible.		
I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me and for the information obtained to be used in relevant research publications.		

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) ………………………………………………………………….

Participant's Signature …………………………………………………………………………..

Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) …………………………………………………………..

Investigator's Signature …………………………………………………………………………

Date: …………………………

جامعة إيست لندن – لندن , المملكة المتحدة

موافقة على المشاركة في رسالة الدكتوراة

موضوع الرسالة: إعتماد الإعلام الرقمي و وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي في ممارسة العلاقات العامة والإتصال في المملكة العربية السعودية

الباحث: صالح ناصر الهمامي

الرجاء التأشير على نعم أو لا حسب ما تراه مناسبا

	لا	نعم
لقد قمت بقرائة معلومات البحث المذكور أعلاة وما يتعلق بأسباب البحث وقدم لي الباحث نسخة ورقية عن معلومات البحث باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية وقام بفسح المجال للإجابة عن أي أسئلة متعلقة عن البحث قبل وخلال المقابلة الشخصية.		
أوافق على إستخدام التسجيل الصوتي خلال المقابلة وذلك لإستخدامة للبحث		
أتفق أن جميع معلوماتي والمعلومات الناتجة من المقابلة هي لسبب الإستخدام الأكاديمي ولمساعدة البحث المذكور أعلاة وغير معلنة ومتاحة فقط للباحثين والقائمين على البحوث الأكاديمية وما فيه فائدة للدراسات والبحوث المستقبلية		
أتفق أنه قد يتم إستخدام بعض الإجابات دون ذكر الأسماء		

		يمكن للمشارك طلب ذكر إسمه ظمن البحث
		أعلم عن طريقة جمع المعلومات المستخدمة في هذا البحث
		أوافق على إستخدام المعلومات في بحوث ودراسات مستقبلية
		أوافق على إمكانية التواصل معي من قبل الفريق القائم على البحث
		قام الباحث بشرح ما هو المتوقع بعد أنتهاء الدراسة
		أفهم أن مشاركتي تطوعية ولغرض المساهمة في تقديم نتائج يستفيد منها مجال الإعلام والعلاقات العامة, وأعلم أن باستطاعتي الإنسحاب من المقابلة الشخصية بدون أي إلتزامات أو إشعار، وأفهم أن باستطاعتي طلب إلغاء المقابلة حتى بعد إنتهائها وذلك إلى وقت بدء تحليل المعلومات حيث لا يمكنني الإلغاء أو التغيير وقتها
		أوافق على المشاركة في المقابلة واستخدام المعلومات الناتجة لتطوير الدراسات والأبحاث الأكاديمية

إسم المشارك

التوقيع

أسم الباحث : صالح ناصر الهمامي

التوقيع

التاريخ:

Appendix 3: Survey Invitation letter

هذه الأسئلة جزء									
	نعم ، موافق على المشاركة في البحث		لا أوافق على المشاركة		Total				
Q2: ذكر	100.00%	76	0.00%	0	100.00%	76			
Total	100.00%	76	0.00%	0	100.00%	76			
					Answered	76			
					Skipped	0			

هذه الأسئلة جزء مهم من رسالة الدكتوراة التي تناقش مدئ أهمية وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي في ممارسة العلاقات العامة والاتصال في المملكة العربية السعودية.
وتهدف الدراسة الئ الوصول إلئ نتائج تساعد في فهم مدئ تأقلم ممارسة العلاقات العامة والإتصال مع التغيير في طرق التواصل من الإعلام التقليدي إلئ الإعلام الجديد وعليه ، أقدم لكم جزيل الشكر علئ مشاركتكم
أخوكم صالح ناصر الهمامي
من قسم الإعلام في جامعة ايست لندن
Twitter: @Sal_eh Email:

■ نعم ، موافق علئ المشاركة في البحث
■ لا أوافق علئ المشاركة

Appendix 4: Survey Questions

Timestamp	الرجاء تحديد الجنس	الرجاء تحديد الجنس وتطويرها	.أوافق علئ المشاركة واعلم ان النتائج ستستخدم لأغراض اكاديمية لخدمة البحث العلمي وتطويرها	التي تجعلك تستخدم وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي؟
2020/02/11 4:09:03 pm GMT	أنثى		أوافق	تويتر
2020/02/11 4:13:02 pm GMT	ذكر		أوافق	تويتر
2020/02/11 4:18:40 pm GMT	ذكر		أوافق	ت . بالإضافة الى ذك وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي غير مكلفة
2020/02/11 4:31:51 pm GMT	ذكر		أوافق	المشاركة في عرض وجهة نظري والتعليق على بعض الأحداث
2020/02/11 4:34:33 pm GMT	أنثى		أوافق	بعض الأحيان اعرف وين هم مسافرين فقط من المحادثة معهم
2020/02/11 5:28:25 pm GMT	ذكر		أوافق	تويتر،سناب، السرعة
2020/02/11 5:31:12 pm GMT	ذكر		أوافق	تويتر وانيتجرام وسناب شات
2020/02/11 5:40:03 pm GMT	أنثى		أوافق	+ للأب والشعر+ لتعلم المهارات +متابعة الحكومات والأنظمة انستقرام: للمتعة والثقافة البصرية تيليقرام: لاستقبال رسائل تطوير الذات واتساب: للتواصل مع الأهل والأصدقاء اليوتيب : الدروس العلمية والثقافية
2020/02/11 5:42:50 pm GMT	أنثى		أوافق	What's up ..easy communication
2020/02/11 6:02:14 pm GMT	ذكر		أوافق	تويتر
2020/02/11 6:02:22 pm GMT	ذكر		أوافق	Twitter, watsup
2020/02/11 6:09:16 pm GMT	ذكر		أوافق	ا في أوساط المجتمع السعودي جميع فئات المجتمع توجد فيه
2020/02/11 7:35:12 pm GMT	ذكر		أوافق	إيصال الرسائل وتجميع قاعدة بيانات عن الجمهور المستهدف
2020/02/12 6:14:47 am GMT	أنثى		أوافق	الواتساب وتويتر
2020/02/12 7:35:36 am GMT	ذكر		أوافق	يمكنك من جمع معلومات عن المستهلكين والجمهور المستهدف إنستغرام وذاك لسهولة مشاركة الفيديوهات
2020/02/12 9:23:57 am GMT	أنثى		أوافق	يتر ، سناب شات ، انستقرام / الاطلاع على الجديد والاخبار
2020/02/14 4:45:04 pm GMT	ذكر		أوافق	لمتابعة الأخبار
2020/02/14 7:43:00 pm GMT	ذكر		أوافق	واتس اب لانها سلسه وسريعة وهذا عالم التواصل الاجتماعي

2020/02/11 5:40:03 pm GMT

ما هي المزايا والإضافات التي قدمتها وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لمجال عملك؟
سهولة الحصوله ع المعلومه والتواصل وكذلك سهولة التعامل مع ردود الافعال المختلفه للجمهور
سرعة التواصل
النشر والتعرض للجمهور
التسويق الرقمي للمحتوى
السرعة والتواصل المباشر مع العالم اجمع
كصحافي، تزويدي ببعض الأخبار التي يصعب الحصول عليها من مصادرها، سرعة نشر الخبر والقصص الصحافية، تبادل الآراء حول مسائل مهنية، التواصل مع خبراء في المجال وتلقي تعليقاتهم حول عملي
سهولة الاستخدام ، السرعة والتواصل مع الناس بكل اطيافهم ،، وقراءة ملفاتهم الشخصية ومعرفة أي نوع من الزبائن اللي اتعامل معاه قبل حتى ما ارد عليهم .. سهولة قياس التأثير من اهم المزايا
ليس بالكثير
. السرعة ، التواصل المباشر ، معرفة وتحديد الجمهور المستهدف وما يميزه وما يحب وما لا يحب
.نظريا: تثري بالمعلومات لكن ليس بالضروري تكون معلومات مكتملة .مهاريا: أكسبتني مهارات أكثر في التعامل مع التكنولوجيا في أكثر من جهاز لأني اتعامل مع أجهزة محسوسة تجسدت فيها برمجيات التواصل الاجتماعي
Quick respond and Documenting the work by keeping and saving it
ارشيف خاص متوفر إلكترونيا
التعرف علي العملاء المحتملين
وجود الكثير من الأدوات التي سهلت في كتابة التقارير وتحليل الخطابات ونشر اي تقرير بسهوله تامه ووصوله للفئة المحددة او المطلوبة
السرعة ، معرفة الجمهور وبناء علاقة معهم ، سهولة الوصول والقيمة المادية وتوفير الميزانية
امتازت بتطوير المهارات لدى المستخدمين سواء من حيث ايجاز المعلومات وعدم الاسهاب السريع ووصولها السريع ومن ناحية اخرى اضافت تعلم مهارات تقنية وفنية للتعامل مع هذه الوسائل
السرعة ، توفير الوقت والميزانية ، التواصل المباشر مع الجمهور
سهولة التواصل ، الإبداع والتطوير
سرعة التواصل الجمهور
اخذ المعلومات بشكل اسرع
Easy, fast, instantaneous, reliable
العدد و عدم توفر كوادر مؤهلة تمكنا من نشر اللعبة وزيادة عدد المارسين من الجنسين وخصوصا السيدات من بداية ٢٠١٨ وحتى الآن و تميز المحتوى مقارنة بباقي ٦٤ اتحاد رياضي اخر بقوة واستمراريته وانتشاره باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية

Appendix 5: Letter from King Abdulaziz University KAU

English Version of KAU invitation letter

TO: Mr Salih Alhamamy

From: Faculty of media and communications at KAU

Greetings Dear Salih

This letter is to confirm that we are welcoming you to the faculty of Media and Communications for the purpose of data collections concerning the PhD research titled: The adoption of digital communications and social media by PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia, which are being undertaken in University of East London. The main supervisor for your data collections will be Dr Ali Algarni and you should arrange all communications through him.

The period of the data collections will start in October 25th 2018 and should end in January 20th 2019

We wish you the best of luck and the faculty of media and communications holds no legal or financial responsibility towards your trip for the data collections.

Signed by the dean of the school

Dr. Aiman Bajonaid

Appendix 6: One-to-one interviews with four organizations

Research interview number 1 Semi-structured interview with Participants 1

Researcher Q1: How has social media changed or impacted the atmosphere and landscape of Public relations practice at your organization?

Interviewee1 Q1:

"*The emerge of social media has totally changed the landscape of how our corporation plans to reach our customers. 14 years ago, all communications used to be through traditional media tools such as newspapers and TV channels etc., and now our organization has shifted totally. By 2018, 60 per cent to 70 per cent of our communication and messages are disseminated through social media channels.*"

Researcher Q2: How often does your organization use social media for PR practice and which social media platforms does your organization utilize?

Interviewee1 A2:

"*We use social media for PR practice on daily bases. Traditional media still there but we are giving more weight to digital and increasing the spending more and more every year on the digital world. We mainly employ Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, but Facebook is not as Twitter and Instagram in terms of our priority.*"

Researcher Q3: Where do you see the future of digital communication in your organization?

Interviewee1 A3:

"*The company will spend on the traditional media still. I believe traditional media will be taking 40 per cent of the budget on communication where the 60 per cent will go to digital communication.*"

Researcher Q4: What are the policies which your organization implement or follow for the adoption of social media for PR practice? What training does your organization provide?

Interviewee1 A4:

"*Mostly, our policies are based on the culture and the community we operate in, we ensure that we are reflecting the main values of the community we operate in, beside we ensure not to interfere with the consumers preferences and behaviors, more often we try to engage with consumers and let them take the lead and we become only facilitator through the social media and we are become friends as human with our consumers in the digital world.*"

I don't believe that we are very far behind in the digital world, maybe because we are a developing country we find it difficult to find people who are very advanced or professionals in the digital world as Arabic speaker because not everyone is Saudi speaks English in proper way and understand what is happening around the world and transfer them to KSA. So, what is happening is that we are lacking the people who have the expertise in the digital and social communication but we are not far behind, so what is happening in the developed countries usually is about 2 to 3 years until we find it emerging in our country. So, in terms of training, usually we take the normal standards starting from the basic, the usage of each platform, followed by how we increase the engagement and keep the followers engaged and entertained. To make the consumer loyal to the brand, we make our platform stands for something, is to make the entire media and communication we use in each platform pour in one pool where it represents an identity for the company and something valuable for the consumers. The whole objective is to make the company stands for something.

Researcher Q5: How does social media impact traditional media tools?

Interviewee1 A5:

During our last social media campaign, we did not spend any single Saudi riyal in publicizing this campaign. We did not use any traditional and paid media, we went 100 per cent social media, we used Instagram, Twitter and Facebook to engage with the pubic and publicize the campaign. We did not use YouTube because we did not create any videos and we engaged consumers by using images and contents which we created in house. The followers of each platform have their own identity and characters that we need to meet, each platform has it is unique users and followers, there are always different form one platform to another. People who use Facebook are not the same as the people who use Instagram or Twitter. Each platform has its own strategy because of the nature of its users, and we see it as each platform is used for a specific reason, so when we make our strategy, we develop our KPIs based on these facts.

Social media that meet our purposes are Facebook, twitter, and Instagram. For example, people who communicate with us using twitter usually want to complain or suggest, they want to ensure their message reach the company or the public. People who follow us on Instagram, they want to watch videos and maybe have fun. Furthermore, Facebook, is a platform for dialogues and connection but we find it very difficult to maintain our communication in Facebook because they implement very greedy policies for companies.

Researcher Q6: What are the challenges and barriers for adopting social media networks for PR practice?

Interviewee1 A6:

The barrier we find is how to find the balance between the followers of our accounts. Meeting the mad and angry unsatisfied followers and loyal followers, how we find the balance between the two in communication and keep the distance between them is a challenge to keep them both happy.

Another challenge is the kind of language we use that represent the company, I mean you know the accent in Saudi Arabia or any other area in the Arab world is not the same, maybe you use one word and it means different meaning to the followers based on their background. Your followers are from different parts around the world, they can have different accents, different values, and the accent we use in Arabic has been a challenge for our PR communication

One of the main challenges is the politics, it has been a major challenge for us with communication using social media, when you are representing a country and you want to speak to the world, not everybody is in favor of your country. To overcome this barrier, we ignore any political comment and choose not to engage or open any dialogue that involves politics in big manners, maybe I highlight something which could be positive for everyone but I will not open a discussion.

Researcher Q7: What are the benefits of adopting social media for PR practice

Interviewee1 A7:

It is a massive step forward compare to traditional media tools when operating public and environmental scanning. There is a consumer patterns and behaviors, I can understand fully what my consumers want and what they like, and when do they use the internet. This requires money and time to conduct researches via the traditional media, where social media provide you this with a fingertip.

We are not taking social media as main factor in managing employees, but it is a tool for investors relations, because they are all followers of our accounts and they see live feedback and what our consumers say and how they engage with us. It is very effective when it comes to the relation with shareholders. In general, the platforms have driven us very close to our consumers and investors, and strengthen the relationship. We are getting closer and becoming easier to reach and more open to discuss.

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Researcher Q8: How does your organization measure the impact of using social media for PR and communication

Interviewee1 A8:

We have KPIs set that we put for the number of impressions, number of visits, number of retweets, number of clicks, and conversations driven between followers. Much easier and cheaper and nobody can afford to ignore social media, it is a booming trend and we believe it will continue because the growth is in double digit yearly. I say trend because some will grow and some will fade away and be replaced by other platforms.

Research interview number 2 Semi-structured interview with Participants 2

Researcher Q1: How has social media changed or impacted the atmosphere and landscape of Public relations practice?

Participant2 A1:

The impact and change that are caused by social media is clear by how they are being widely used in our communication and PR practice, but still traditional media is essential in many aspects of our strategies, and maybe newspapers are still essential even when you use the social media in your PR. Honestly, for social media followers, they only follow videos and infographics more than normal texts, social media you have to be more interactive and a live. These platform differs from one platform to another, if it is a press release than Twitter should be the platform, when you say features and promotion and messages you want to deliver then you must use infographics and videos to interact in social media, and this goes for Facebook and Instagram and other social media online.

"Above the line communications" gain massive exposure in Saudi, for example TV or outdoor advertising is costing us huge amounts of money, in addition to TV channels, and the big problem and the challenge is the measurement of those so-called traditional media. We work in very dynamic market and it is very significant for us to be able to have reliable measurement tools, honestly

speaking, with the traditional media we have always measured our reach in the campaign by the sales that we make, if there was no sales than we conclude that there was no media exposure and our message did not reach the target audience.

The marketing should bring trafficking and generate leads, it is easier for us to generate digital leads via social media networks than with the traditional tools such as newspapers, and it's very measurable too. In addition, social media is very tangible and we deal with numbers. Social media is more dynamic you can shift directions by changing from one platform to another. Now all online channels including Instagram and Facebook allow consumers to keep our announcement and promotional videos forever, and they can always come back to our materials to review

Researcher Q2: How often does your organization use social media for PR practice and which social media platforms does your organization utilize?

Participant2 A2:

We use social media every day. The agency we work with have a community manager that works with us and we provide them with approved answers to engage with the public. They have to ask us and we do have a process in handling online interactions and complain. We have guidelines for the agency to follow. The platforms we rely on are Twitter and Instagram where Twitter is more of written and serious contents where Instagram is very strategic for us to display images and videos that could be shared massively on the internet and generate traffic.

Researcher Q3: Where do you see the future of digital communication in your organization?

Participant2 A3:

The old media especially TV channels and even radio channels and other similar tools are related to how people change their priorities. Traditional media is still available and we are still utilizing them in many different PR strategies and we use them but more into branding not tactic. We use the social media for more

tactic strategies and we use them every day. We still use traditional media but for different reasons now and mainly for branding. I see the communication agenda being dominated by social media tools such as online networks but traditional media will always be there but will be used in more limited fashion.

Researcher Q4: What are the policies which your organization implement or follow for the adoption of social media for PR practice? what training does your organization provide?

Participant 2 A4:

There is a lack of rules and guidelines in the market of social media communication at large. Anyone can be famous and most people are not specialized.

We do not provide training to our staff and we must think of this again, but google itself from time to time call us and invite our employees to attend a conference and update us on the new trends and share with us how to best target your audience, and that educate you on the new features and they advise you and provide you with an insight on how they are developing. In addition, platforms such as Instagram provides you many features to specify your target male or Females age location and their interest and we go by these categories to ensure more efficiency.

In term of budget, we honestly do not have specific budget for social media PR because we are an international company, but we allocate 70 to 80 per cent of the overall communication budget for the past year on digital communication, beside we are understaff and we rely on social media sites more because it does not need a big team.

Researcher Q5: How does social media impact traditional media tools?

Participant2 A5:

We are using all traditional media tools including telephones calls and text message, but newspapers are not priority anymore, the newspapers even look different

and carries less weight. Now the newspapers are no longer effective because of the speed in delivering announcements. The news could be the same, but the time factor is the reason we are gradually leaving newspapers and traditional media tools and switching to social media tools.

Even with our stakeholders including government officials, we do not communicate with them in newspapers anymore, maybe we publish small press release, but we boost our announcements and news via online platforms. Furthermore, the Saudi government is working heavily on developing the infrastructure of social media communication. Online budget is affordable, they used to call it free media, we can spend 100 riyal or 1 million riyals, but now platforms are becoming smarter by assisting and offering their updates for revenue return. Maybe, one day, social media will become very expensive to use as a communication tool because it is becoming more like bedding system or more like an auction where two companies can bid for the same target and only one of them gets to use the space. In addition, it is always possible for new platform to come up and change the equation of our online communications. This industry is very dynamic and facing rapid developing.

Researcher Q6: What are the challenges and barriers for adopting social media networks for PR practice?

Participant 2 A6:

The accent is major factor in our strategies, sometimes it causes us some troubles with reaching our targets. Foreigners can mostly read in Arabia, but the Accent should be white, meaning no body would nowhere is the person is from. There are no rules for this, but we take it into consideration, and we hear every voice or audio that we use for communication very carefully before they are being posted. Simply, there are no rules once we hear the voice over, we decide upon that. The language factor is part of the multimedia protocol, there is languages, words, accents that are being used in our communication, I give you an example, "One person is driving an old truck in the desert, it would not be proper to have someone speak in Hijazi (from Jeddah" accent." The accent here and the look

of the person should be a "Bedwin" accent, because our target sees themselves in our promotions.

Social media opens new possibilities for communication and PR, 60 to 70 per cent of our success in reaching target consumers come from sharing photos and videos, and mostly between the two I would say videos and it has to be moderated with the environment surrounding us. We have to respect the consumers on our contents and be aware of the culture of our audiences.

It is very important to use social media for environmental scanning, let's say you start a campaign but there were no responses from your audience, you should start analyzing, and maybe your timing is wrong, or the nature of your targeted clients, there are many factors that influence the behaviors of the customers on the social media platforms, and those factors must be considered when you communicate. There are people who create accounts to guarantee that they complain, it became a force for consumers to reach you and spread any negative message and that is a challenge for us. You have to be very careful on social media because when you answer one person you are actually answering the entire public.

Researcher Q7: What are the benefits of adopting social media for PR practice

Participant2 A7:

Honestly, the tools that are made available for PR by Twitter, Facebook, Instagram even google etc. are providing facilities that make you target the specific consumers and reach them. Twitter is not as advanced in making the platform more helpful for PR campaigns. I agree that in Saudi Arabia Twitter is very popular, but it does not provide you as a PR practitioner to be more specific with your customers, Instagram for instance makes you narrow down your choices for targeted customers up until the village they live in. Instagram and YouTube are one company, and they follow the same mechanism to work with PR and communication.

YouTube on the other hand, is very popular and must be one of the essential platforms with high strategic planning because of the kind of videos and ads you wish to place must be attractive to interact with consumers.

Researcher Q8: How does your organization measure the impact of using social media for PR and communication?

Participant2 A8:

Measurements compare to traditional media is simply that Digital are counted by clicks where newspapers are by the number of circulations.

The click provides impressions. These clicks are Bing counted and social media platforms charge you for it. We count how many impressions, leads and clicks and based on this we have internal announcements and analysis of each campaign and we have a systematic approach to online media strategies.

Research interview number 3 Semi-structured interview with Participants 3

Researcher Q1: How has social media changed or impacted the atmosphere and landscape of Public relations practice?

Participant3 A1:

Social media platforms in general have contributed to assisting PR practice to jump far ahead effecting two factors in the industry of communication, time and budget. Social media has made it very quick and smooth for news and announcements to spread, of course with strategy that are put in place to guarantee no conflict with the audience. Also, the budget, TV and newspapers are very highly costly compared to new media tools. Social media has also introduced interaction with costumers which is an also another factor that revolutionized the industry at large.

Researcher Q2: How often does your organization use social media for PR practice and what social media platforms does your organization utilize?

Participant3 A2:

The PR department pitch the idea of our press release and stories to digital media agencies, these companies create stories and post it on social media platforms. The selection of platforms is based on our recommendations. For us and based on our research, Twitter is the best platform for us to utilize ad it is the platform that we believe will serve us the best in reaching our objective of each campaign or initiative. It is a good communication tool when it comes to corporate news. All leaders are there and when it comes to public relations, we are targeting leaders in the industry. Facebook is the second option for us, it might be good for other international corporations to see how we are doing.

Researcher Q3: Where do you see the future of digital communication in your organization?

Participant3 A3:

I see digital media grasping more than 70 per cent of the communication and PR budget, same platforms will not be the future but social networks as a concept will dominate the future of our PR communication.

Researcher Q4: What are the policies which your organization implement or follow for the adoption of social media for PR practice? What training does your organization provide?

Participant3 A4:

Our policies are very structured and they specify how external communication should be managed.

We have detailed plans and there is policies and guidelines and it took time to establish this. It was not effective and it fired back many times when it was managed solely by an external agency because they do not have the same

exercise. We use social media every day and we follow the company's guidelines. We constantly face fire back and we answer them by preparing potential questions and proper answers that represent our values.

In our corporation we have high budget and we have constant training for our staff, we provide update on all new and existing social media platforms, and this is becoming more and more an essential part and on top of our priority. There is a high budget because digital is taking the big share of the budget of communication.

On job training is the one we focus on and we rely heavily on discovering the services that the social media platforms constantly update us with and introduce to the industry of communication.

Researcher Q5: How does social media impact traditional media tools?

Participant3 A5:

Roughly we use 50/50 between traditional media channels and social media channels, for our company, traditional media tools are being part of the strategy by default, but social media tools are something we cannot negligent. Social media has obviously effected Newspapers, in which they are no longer one of our main media channels to target, because we believe newspapers are slowly fading away and the value they use to generate as a tool for PR practice is falling sharply unless they change dramatically and become interactive somehow.

We utilize social media to be in touch with doctors and patients. For news, we prepare our news and announcements, than we invite journalists and we urged them to publish the news online, this is always happening and it's like the old days of traditional media relations, but its bothering me and it does not serve our strategy well, than, we start to bring social media influencers that can be very expensive and tiring to select and decide upon who to work with on which campaign. We usually chose them based on their expertise and filed. One time we look for influencers who are expected to be funny and have a sense of humor

towards the public, other time we need an influencer who can reach
pharmacists, and doctors. We have our media influencers that works based on
the agenda of our companies.

Researcher Q6: What are the challenges and barriers for adopting social media networks for PR practice?

Participant3 A6:

We take interacting with the public very seriously, most followers like to exaggerate,
but we have to follow each negative comment and be ready to constantly answer
requests and be in touch with our clients. This time factor and the level of
interaction with the public brings a challenge for us. Our team and the agency
that we work with have to be on alert. Our field requires us to be up to date with
the new technology and be in touch with our stakeholders via online
communities, the challenge is to balance the interaction with the followers and
participants and to minimize any criticism or potential fire back from any
customer.

Researcher Q7: What are the benefits of adopting social media for PR practice

Participant3 A7: Delivering news and announcements to a massive audience in a record timing, so social media allows you to save time and reach bigger target. I say time mainly is the main benefit, in addition to social media being very cost efficient. Using social media platforms allows us to constantly being touch with the community around us.

Researcher Q8: How does your organization measure the impact of using social media for PR and communication

Participant3 A8:

Newspapers cannot bring me a buzz, where one social media influencer can bring
double the publicity that any newspaper can bring. We were actually thinking

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and considering to cut using newspapers and other traditional media tools because they do not serve our communication objectives whatsoever, and that is because you can never measure their impact and reach of customers, and what you cannot measure you cannot manage, and if you compare the measurement of the digital media platforms to the measurement of the newspapers you will be surprised.

If you want to measure the impact, let's say you we have an announcement and we send it to one of the newspapers, they tell you our circulation is .... I still do not know what circulation means, really. They should wrap the word "circulation" is a sandwich paper or just get rid of it. Even if they tell me the circulation of this newspaper is over one million, I really would not change my approach to use it as an effective tool for my PR practice, but when it comes to Twitter, the benefit is clear as crystal, I go straight to the point, bring me the reach, bring me the number of clicks, engagements, how many people have read my post, how many people commented, show me the comment, I can measure everything. Outsource agencies save us the time to measure and provide use with the data.

Research interview number 4 Semi-structured interview with Participants 4

Researcher Q1: How has social media changed or impacted the atmosphere and landscape of Public relations practice?

Participant4 A1:

Social media has changed how we work in communication departments and how we practice public relations in many terms, PR used to be more of a relation between PR practitioners and journalists that are based on mutual interests and benefits, social media has changed that and enabled companies and corporations to directly communicate their messages with mass audiences at any time. Social media has brought companies closer to their customers.

Researcher Q2: How often does your organization use social media for PR practice and what social media platforms does your organization utilize?

Participant4 A2: *We use social media on daily bases for all PR communication. Our corporation uses Twitter and Facebook mostly. Our organization works hand in hand with our PR and digital agency, they keep us aware of their actions and they send us a weekly report. For us it is important to work with an agency that has experience in dealing with multinational corporations.*

Researcher Q3: *Where do you see the future of digital communication in your organization?*

Participant4 A3:

The future of communication is digital and interaction with stakeholders, social media platforms provide efficient channels for communication, having said that, traditional media such as TV channels and radios are going to be essentials for many initiatives and PR communication. I believe the future will favor the social media communication tools but traditional media will still have a share of the pie.

Researcher Q4: What are the policies which your organization implement or follow for the adoption of social media for PR practice? What training does your organization provide?

Participant4 A4:

There are various internal policies around what the company or an individual should tweet or not tweet, at the same time there is a place like inside our organizations where the content of each tweet is checked and approved before it is being tweeted. We have implemented policies that go on everyone who work for our organizations.

For the most part, what does go out is carefully approved by various level of people it depends on the messages. People who work in the communication department

are aware of the face that contents and interaction go through a process before they are being tweeted or posted on social media platforms.

People who work in social media communication go through process to make sure they are carefully selected. We do not provide intensive training but we do keep our staff up to date with the development of social media. We have to have people who are living and breathing digital to perform in the social media industry, we aim at young people who are already integrated to social media, some old PR executives do not even know how to use social media.

I think we have conducted training sessions for people to explain the rules of the game when it comes to social media communication, and the company has to be ahead of the game and adapt to social media in the best way possible.

Researcher Q5: How does social media impact traditional media tools?

Participant4 A5:

I cannot just say it has replaced traditional media such as newspapers and TV channels because somehow, they appear to have strong presence in our company's communication agenda. Having said that, social media communication is slightly obtaining a bigger share of our budget.

The factor of speed and timing is the main impact that social media has caused in the industry. With the traditional press release there is time where it may take up to two weeks sometimes between approval and sending out to newspapers, but with the shift to social media, it allows you to do things faster, so you have to be up to date as well with the audience. What I'm saying, at the end, it not like a traditional press release where it gets two weeks to be approved, so it is speed.

Researcher Q6: What are the challenges and barriers for adopting social media networks for PR practice?

Participant4 A6:

*To keep up to date is kind of challenging and require heavy follow ups and training,
we look for locals who can speak English and eat and breath digital, even for
those who can speak Arabic, sometimes the kind of dialogue and creation of
contents is a challenge task.*

Researcher Q7: What are the benefits of adopting social media for PR practice

Participant4 A7:

*Social media has enabled corporation and companies to scan the public for
information and this is a huge advantage for our PR practice and the way we
reach our target. In addition, do not forget the huge difference in the budget that
we have to dedicate, so social media is more useful and much cheaper and cost
efficient. Main advantage of adopting social media for PR is to make sure that
you are up to date with the rest of the world because the whole world is
becoming on social media networks*

Researcher Q8: How does your organization measure the impact of using social media
for PR and communication

Participant4 A8:

*"Social media has made it easier and obvious to count the number of impressions,
and not even that, but also enabled us to interact with consumers if necessary.
Traditional media in general was kind of ambiguous if we think about the figures
they provide. number of circulations etc.*

*Social media platforms are assisting companies and PR agencies in the measurement
of the impact and this is a very valuable addition to the equation."*

Appendix 7: Online questionnaires with 20 PR practitioners

Female participants n=8; Participant #1, #5, #8, #9, #14, #16, #19.

2.1 RQ1: What social media networks do you use to practice public relations? What are the reasons behind using the mentioned social media?

- Participant 1: I use Twitter and YouTube on daily bases. It enables me to target the desired audience, and most importantly the speed in disseminating messages and compile of database of the target audience.

- Participant 2: I use Twitter only. It serves my objective because the entire Saudi public is there.

- Participant 3: I use Twitter mostly and Instagram sometimes. I use Twitter every day for the purpose of communicating with the public. One of the most important reasons for social media is the provision of time and speed to deliver the message to the audience, and also social media gives me accuracy in choosing the target audience and provides better methods for spreading the news and announcement. For example, I can post pictures and videos. In addition, social media is inexpensive.

- Participant 4: I use only Instagram for my PR and communication practice. This networks site serves me in my field of public relations because my target are mostly women and the majority of viewers in Instagram are women, and more importantly this site provides me with information about the viewers and followers: Their impression and their desire in terms of the clothes they like, and the fashion they follow, and what they love and even what people want to wear either in Saudi Arabia or during their travel for any reason, and sometimes I even know where are they traveling and what cloths they should have

- Participant 5: I use Twitter and I use Instagram for my PR on daily bases:

Twitter: To find out new general news + for literature and poetry + to learn skills + Follow up on governments and regulations

Instagram: For fun and visual culture Telegram: To receive self-development messages

YouTube: To obtain Scientific and cultural lessons

- Participant 6: I use Twitter and Snapchat, to see the latest developments and follow the trends of public opinion in my country, and to research in some different areas that enrich my knowledge, and also to participate in presenting my point of view and commenting on some events

- Participant 7: I use Twitter because it provides easy access to all people in the Kingdom, and enables you to collect information about consumers. I use also Instagram because of the target audience and because of the feature of sharing videos

- Participant 8: I use Twitter because it is the most used application in the Saudi society, all segments of society are in it and they are mostly active users.

- Participant 9: I use Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram. All these platforms enable you to see what's new and the news that are being circulated in the public

- Participant 10: I use WhatsApp because it provides me with easy communication

- Participant 11: I use Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. They are the most popular platforms in Saudi Arabia

- Participant 12: I use Twitter and Snapchat because of the speed in disseminating messages and communicate with the target audience

- Participant 13: I use Twitter and WhatsApp. These two platforms suit the purpose of my communication, they ensure the speed in delivering my message and they are very popular amongst the public in Saudi Arabia

- Participant 14: I use WhatsApp and Twitter. They enable me to communicate with my target quickly, and they provide me with the feature of scanning the public to understand my target audience.

- Participant 15: I use all social media platforms to follow the news and watch the public opinions and trends

- Participant 16: Twitter, Snapchat, and WhatsApp because it is smooth and fast and this is the world of social communication

- Participant 17: Twitter and YouTube, mainly to follow the news

- Participant 18:Twitter and Snapchat because they both can cover the demographic of our targets, Twitter for the official and mature audiences, but you need snapchat to target the young as well.

- Participant 19: Instagram, Facebook, because they are easy to use, everyone is on these platforms.

- Participant 20: Twitter and Instagram, due to the high public demand for these two platforms and they keep you in the game, we publish news about our organizations and images, we are satisfied with publishing only written news and pictures, and therefore we do not use other platforms as instructed by the organization.

2.2 RQ2: What is the impact of social media on your field of work in public relations, and the use of traditional means of communication (daily newspapers, TV channels, radio channels)?

- Participant 1: Social media had a major and radical impact on the field, PR are no longer the same in term of practice, nor are public relations employees. The impact includes the current way of employment. For example, what qualifies a person is no longer his experience in public relations, but his experience in using social media. As for the traditional channels, they are still present, but not the daily newspapers unless the newspaper is active on social media. As for radios and television, they still have a high demand, simply because of the desire of the followers. YouTube does the same thing that TV channels do, but there are television programs that we, as public relations practitioners, must participate in and approve them for our work ... and then we share the content via social media.

- Participant 2: It is a leap forward in terms of affecting the work environment. Now you can communicate directly with the public without the mediator without the trouble of arranging with newspapers and sending the news and the same thing to TV channels. The affect includes several factors, including the employment strategy or the ladder that has changed, the market now needs good people in public relations and needs those who are good at using social media, this is a fundamental change in the industry. Traditional methods are still present but less influential, and you can look at the amount of interest in social media compared to traditional media and you will notice the impact.

- Participant 3: The means of communication added speed and saved time, the affect was more in the sense of a new additions of features, but traditional means such as television and radio are still present and have their fans and followers. The means of communication changed job titles in the field of public relations, meaning: It is no longer important to employ a person for media relations as before, or it is no longer important that you employ a person with experience in this field of PR, and what you want now is to employ a person who is a guru in using social media platforms, someone who knows the tricks and appreciate the significance of these new media tools.

- Participant 4: Social media enables me to be more in touch and closer to the public and changed the field in its distribution of data and even the job titles changed. I cannot say that it did not affect the traditional media channels because it actually affected the use of traditional media. There is a whole deal of speed now, but the traditional methods remain present and present strongly ... even the budget that is allocated to traditional media are shared between the two.

- Participant 5: For me personally, the TV is still strong and influential. Social media channels have definitely influenced the use of traditional media but did not end the role of television. Programs such as "Sabah Al Arabia" are still standing and strong, PR practitioners need these programs, then what happens, is I work on publishing the programs I utilize through social media, the work is more of a combination between the two. For example, I use a program in the TV by participating or have my client be a guest in it, then I take the clip or part of it, then post it and let it circulate in a site like Instagram and Twitter and create interactions and publicity

- Participant 6: It increased the audience interaction, facilitated access to different segments, and broke down the barriers between the social, cultural and governmental status, so it became easier to communicate with ministers, writers, artists, celebrities and other specialists, and it also opened the way for exchanging experiences in the field of public relations and to develop theses experiences.

- Participant 7: The affect is very large. Social media sites have turned our thinking towards the creation of contents that reflect our values and messages, rather than thinking about relying on traditional media channels where contents are not as a unique element of the mix. Traditional media will be here for sometimes but as a complimentarily tool, because its related to old generations.

- Participant 8: I think social media networks have undoubtedly had a positive impact because these tools have developed the field of public relations entirely and made the field more sophisticated, yet easier for PR practitioners. Meaning: faster dissemination, wider target, more interactions with less timing and less effort

- Participant 9: Social media has Motivated PR in the short term. The main affect is that social media keep me informed of the latest updates around me and around the target audience.

- Participant 10: Social media has changed the PR market. The impact of Social media is the fact that it is faster, and can be consulted and enables PR practitioners to scan the environment and search the market quickly. The impact on traditional media is large and noticed through the massive number of messages and campaigns that are being executed via social media networks.

- Practitioner 11: Social media has affected the PR market in two aspects, the positive aspect is that social media has brought speed, and the negative is the lack of accuracy. Traditional media was affected negatively, but still it has more accuracy then the new media channels.

- Participant 12: The impact on the PR market is huge, Social media enabled fast completion of tasks, delivery of information is guaranteed. Most importantly, social media provide knowledge of the latest developments in the industry and

other industry as well, and they feature tools that enable PR practitioners to understand their audiences and their preferences.

- Participant 13: Social media networks have impacted the work of PR positively; they added the speed of disseminating and delivering messages. They also made it easier to reach particular target and to communicate with the public generally. In addition, social media allowed us to get information about our potential target and to search the market on any related news, events, clients, etc

- Participant 14: Social media has facilitated the process of communicating with the external audience and allow for more interaction two ways communication. This has changed the entire function of the practice as we know it. Traditional media is credible and still highly on demand, but they can't produce two-way interactions with consumers. Traditional media is somewhat unimpaired completely.

- Participant 15: they saved the time and effort to get the information.

- Participant 16: I no longer care, as in the previous years, social media has shortened all the distances.

- Participant 17: The time and effort to get the information I no longer an issue. Social media allow fast communication with the public, traditional media only distribute news.

- Participant 18:Social media has reduced all of the expected efforts, it is not costly to each large or small target anywhere anytime, traditional media was affected but it is still credible source if compared with social media news, from news consumers perspective.

- Participant 19: Social media allow fast access to information. They made PR easy, fast, instantaneous, and reliable sources as well

- Participant 20: By virtue of reserving women's exercise, we find that Twitter and Instagram are the fastest way to document events and accomplishments while maintaining the system's controls that we operate in. It is also the fastest way to reach young men and women, and this helped us to spread the game and

communicate with the concerned authorities to support us, and support the game from a private sector or embassies and consulates inside and outside the Kingdom.

2.3 RQ3: What are the challenges and obstacles you face in using social media? Is there appropriate training provided by companies or other sectors?

- Participant 1: The language I use with the audience is one of the challenges I face and the accent. I have to understand how to craft the content. There is no training or rules on which how to practice public relations using social media and this is another type of obstacle. As for the budget, the majority of clients expect to pay a few sums compared to traditional media and this is not true in all cases. Social media may be very expensive if you work with well-known and global public relations agencies and this is a challenge to convince the customer that there is a large team working and formulating the content., and it is a challenge to persuade the client because the initial thinking in the matter of using social media is based on the basis that the service is free and this is not true.

- Participant 2: Providing training is one of the most known obstacles that you face openly and have to overcome. English speakers are rare in the field of work and this is mainly a problem because all the means of communications that are approved are originally in the English language. Unfortunately, there are currently no recognized rules and regulations in the adoption of social media in general, but what generally happens is personal jurisprudence and attempts to understand the picture and keep pace with the development of social media. Furthermore, social media platforms have become partners or rather coaches who serve you and provide you with services that help you as PR practitioner.

- Participant 3: Training is the biggest challenge. Also, amongst the challenges that come with the development of online communities are writing proper contents (in whatever language or dialect it should be), discussion with reckless followers are another form of challenge for PR practitioners to overcome. There

are many types of challenges, but the difficulty of obtaining cadres who are skilled in the contents developments is the big challenge. Also, the lack of regulations and laws governing work on these communications is one of the obstacles.

- Participant 4: Appropriate training and rules for using social media is what is needed. Sometimes you have a feeling that dealing on social media is random, and this is a big challenge. The type of content presented is the biggest challenge in my view, in addition to the cadres who are good at dealing in the field of public relations and digital media

- Participant 5: Time and practical stress, there are entities that offer courses but are far from how to use networks in areas of specialization for PR, most of them focus on the general industry and the contents in general, without focusing on specialization of the practice or developing appropriate contents.

- Participant 6: Direct communication with the followers is a challenge in itself. On the one hand, I think that the training and controls are not anchored and informal to some extent.

- Participant 7: Data explosion and frequent applications made it difficult to keep pace with this new technology, especially for PR practitioners.

- Participant 8: The challenge is to try to focus on one topic, and dive into it, and not to be distracted by the many other topics that you miss when you are switching between platforms.

- Participant 9: There is no training for this, but we face an obstacle because some do not consider these methods as reliable and official means of business.

- Participant 10: The specific training does not unite the difficulty lies in the extent of winning the confidence of the audience. Engagement is very important, but it needs to be based on more knowledge and protocols.

- Participant 11: Lack of adequate specialized training.

- Participant 12: Ignorance in some applications by large segment of the public.

- Participant 13: Fake accounts

- Participant 14: Lack of credibility

- Participant 15: Unfortunately, government agencies are still using companies to manage communication sites.

- Participant 16: There are many initiatives to enrich the content, and this is what we lack to make use of the means of communication as required. The content must be interactive, renewed and permanent. Many sectors produce news and stop, and continuity is important to gain the confidence of the follower.

- Participant 17: The monitoring of some agencies or institutions that are supported by the ministry of culture and information is an obstacle, there is high media control over many websites.

- Participant 18: External PR agencies are good but bad at the same time, the only problem is the fact that the external PR agency is in total control and the internal staff do not make any effort to train and develop their skills to understand social media networks. The agency does all the work.

- Participant 19: Training for using social media platforms is a challenge. The lack of qualified and permanent full-time staff, the majority of social media experts who are present in the sector are collaborators, in addition to there are limited capabilities to produce media contents that elevate the game and keep pace with Vision 2030 – the Kingdom's vision.

- Participant 20: Preparing a team is a challenge, there is a lack of qualified cadres, we were able to change the atmosphere we increased the number of practitioners of both sexes, especially women from the beginning of 2018 until now, and the contents production was distinguished compared to the rest of the other 64 sports federations by its strength, continuity and spread in both Arabic and English.

2.4 RQ4: What are the advantages and additions provided by social media platforms to your work and the field of PR in Saudi Arabia?

- Participant 1: Speed, knowledge of the audience and building a relationship with them, ease of access, material value and budget savings

- Participant 2: Theoretically: enrich the information, but not necessarily to ensure complete information. Professionally speaking: I gained more skills in dealing with technology in more than one device because I deal with physical devices in which social media software is embodied.

- Participant 3: Social media excelled in developing the skills of users both in terms of information briefness and details, on the other hand, social media allowed users to learn and be constantly in the mode of learning to update their technical skills to deal with these means.

- Participant 4: Ease of use, speed and communication with people of all shades, reading their personal files and knowing what kind of a person I deal with from the start. Ease of measuring the impact is the most important advantage.

- Participant 5: As a PR practitioners, social media provide me with some hard-to-get news from its sources, quickly spread the news and press stories, exchange opinions on professional issues, communicate with experts in the field and receive comments about my work

- Participant 6: The existence of these tools have facilitated writing reports, analyzing letters, and publishing contents with complete ease, and also these social media tools ensure reaching the specified or required category.

- Participant 7: Speed, rootedness, knowledge and identification of the target audience and what distinguishes social media is the likes and dislikes buttons.

- Participant 8: Easy access to information and communication, as well as the ease of dealing with different reactions of the public.

- Participant 9: Quick respond from audiences, and documenting all work by saving it.

- Participant 10: Speed, time and budget savings, direct communication with the public.

- Participant 11: Fast communication, publishing and exposure to many digital contents that are distributed by the audience.

- Participant 12: Speed and direct communication with the whole world

- Participant 13: Ease of communication, creativity and development

- Participant 14: Identify potential customers

- Participant 15: Online archive available

- Participant 16: Fast communication with the public.

- Participant 17: Scanning the public, and build constant relationships with consumers

- Participant 18: Made it faster to obtain information about the public

- Participant 19: The system provides some workshops for the media, but the attendance is not compulsory, and many do not care to be present, unfortunately.

- Participant 20: There are many initiatives to enrich the contents that get distributed through online networks, there is a lack of the creative contents that eventually allow us to benefit from the means of communication as required. The content must be interactive, renewed and permanent.

2.5 Additional inputs:

- Participant 20: Many sectors produce news and stop. Continuity is important to gain the follower's trust with positive or negative news (for example, defeating a team or losing a team). The follower is always keen to know what is emerging and not respecting his presence will contribute to his loss).

- Participant 13: Traditional media has lost much of the public's attention, but there is still a room for traditional media if they are able to transformed into social media.

- Participant 12: Social media is a new and distinct field for the public relations sector. Public relations practitioners are advised of personal development in the field that are related to their work, for example: understanding and taking courses in the computer and the electronic field as well as development courses in the use of social media and how to define the target group.

- Participant 5: I see that in the future there will be more control and there will be a high ranking for this topic, for social media compared to the traditional one, they will be different parts that will be used depending on the plan or the target audience.

- Participant 15: Communication networks should not be dealt with in a random manner. Rather, the principles should be based on the knowledge of the nature of participants, and the nature of social media should be established accordingly. Based on these essentials, we can work in a more influential manner.

- Participant 1: I think public relations are still not taking the advantage of the integration of social media.

- Participant 3: I see that the traditional media is powerfully present and will be part of the piece now and always.