SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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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.

Dedication

To my lovely wife and the four amazing fruits of our love.

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I acknowledge the supremacy and providence of Allah (SWT) and remain eternally gracious for all the gifts He has endowed me including good health and adequate resources to complete this work.

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to study and compare the use of social media by public relations departments in the Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC) and The Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Saudi MCI). An integration of cross-sectional and archival research designs was implemented using both secondary and primary data.

Qualitative primary data was collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, with 12 purposively selected senior public relations and communications' officials PR and communication practitioners working at STC (n= 7) and Saudi MCI (n= 5). Quantitative primary data was collected through web-administered surveys designed using Google survey Forms (N= 511) and whose links were placed in the STC (n= 262) and Saudi MCI (n= 249) with Facebook pages and Twitter handles. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 21, after data preparation and arrangement in Microsoft Excel 2013 Interview and archival data were analysed using inductive content and thematic analysis, which led to the development of thematic maps.

The findings showed that both STC and Saudi MCI use social media to publicise their activities through public information, lobby public support for their positions, enhance information quality and provide a question and answer platform for their publics. Findings show that both STC and Saudi MCI were ethical in their PR practices. The usage of Facebook and Twitter changed the way STC and MCI PR practitioners engage with their publics and stakeholders by easing contacts between the organisation and the public, allowing the public access to important information and enabling the public a voice in the engagement especially through criticising the organisation. The findings also showed that the private and public organisations in Saudi Arabia exploit the social media affordances comprising visibility, editability, persistence, and association.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Subject to numerous influential factors, including globalisation and technological developments, various global practices are continuously adapting to the dynamics of changing roles by various practitioners. Such changes have not spared the practice of Public Relations (PR) and significant changes are happening, especially in terms of the relationship between organisations and their public. For example, Men and Tsai (2013) observed a seismic shift is evident within the relational capacity for influencing communication and symmetry flows between the organisation and their publics. This shift can render communication with their audiences more complex, especially in the advent of social technologies that have overarching control over the messages they receive, when they intend to receive such messages and from the senders of their choices (Hopkins 2014).

There is on-going growing recognition that the development and maintenance of relationships constitutes a vital paradigm in the PR practice and scholarship (Huang 2001). Longstanding evidence further indicates that this is likely to continue being at the epicentre of PR (Coombs 2001). Organisations willing to continue maintaining good relationships with different groups of stakeholders within their domain must continue exploiting the entire range of communication tools and channels thus ensuring that various audiences consume their messages. Such tools and channels included Social Networking Sites (SNS) like Facebook and channels of micro blogging including Twitter (Hopkins 2014). There are indications that social media scholars and analysts appreciate the significant impact attributed to social technologies on how organisations conduct business. It is imperative that social media and media relations are not the only significant PR aspects, but they constitute an area that is evidently a fundamental specialty in PR expertise. This makes more sense, especially when considering that “PR is the function that has the knowledge and experience for dealing with public sphere processes” (Asunta 2016, p.159). This means that the practice of PR is a crucial mediator between organisations and the processes that happen within the public domain.

Initially, it was projected that organisations using the Internet to relate with the public online would find this approach more beneficial and easy. However, existing evidence indicates that organisations have yet to understand the meaning and importance of social media experience to users, according to Heller-Baird and Parasnis (2011). While there is general acceptance that social media continues to force a revolution in numerous industries and professions, including PR (Hazelton, Harrison-Rexrode and Kennan 2008), PR practitioners continue to “apply old rules in a new game” (Hopkins 2014, p.1). According to Rust, Moorman and Bhalla (2010), a report released by the Harvard Business Review

Analytic Services indicated that the most outstanding gain for organisations that use social media is increased organisation and product/service visibility among the publics. Hopkins (2014) criticised this benefit by arguing that this has been accomplished through various conventional marketing and advertising. Therefore, the organisations seeking to accomplish more, beyond increasing awareness like building effective relationships, have demonstrated that applying old rules and achieving presence and visibility is not just enough (Hopkins 2014).

For an organisation to build relationships within the online social sphere, it is fundamental to understand the best approaches for utilising social technologies to meet the personal goals and needs of a user. Furthermore, there is increasing need for practitioners to continue working within the frameworks of established practices and culture of a given technology (Wang, Tucker and Rihll 2011). Further emphasis from PR scholarly domains indicates that social technologies need to comply with the provisions of the two-way symmetrical model, framed within the PR Excellence theory for dialogic communication (Jones, Temperley and Lima 2009). Nonetheless, social technologies assume a form characterised by users for having diverse expectations about what a relationship with an organisation entails. The principal shift within the power relationship between the organisations and their publics implies that the audience has the capacity to define the engagement rules. Navigation through such changes could be challenging for the organisation that does not understand the dynamics of the online culture, which is an ever-changing target without a definitive context or form (Miller 2008).

In fact, no approach suits every organisation's communication perfectly within the online social sphere. This explains the calls for the linking of strategies of online communication with the broader objectives and goals of an organisation. Yet the development of a social strategy remains experimental and largely ad hoc for numerous organisations (Stelzner 2013). Numerous communicators are employing similar offline tactics online, with even fewer users attempting to understand the communication and behaviours of audiences that use social technologies. It is evident that the communication techniques and styles employed offline differ from those required in online settings. For instance, face-to-face communication is synchronous in nature and depends on nonverbal cues. However, online communication emphasises written communication. Despite the differences, communication exchanges that take place online are equally significant to those that happen offline (Hopkins 2014). Thus, understanding and enhancing online communication through social technologies, even in the PR profession and practice, is now inevitable.

This research is about determining the extent to which organisations are using social media to engage in mutual dialogue with the public through social media. Normally, there are expectations from the public that an organisation will communicate with its stakeholders – including employees, suppliers, customers, investors, and so on – through different media. On the other hand, the stakeholders also expect that they will be listened to by the organisations when they communicate with the organisation. Communication is an essential element to any organisation and has been described as one of the most important aspects of any business strategy (Mathee 2011). However, the communication habits assumed by the public are increasingly volatile and continually evolving. When these communication habits by the public change, for example due to new technological developments, PR practitioners either are compelled or are voluntary attempts to shift their communication practices and align it to the changed public communication habits (Mathee 2011). Whereas this has been difficult in the past, the advent of the Internet, and especially social media, continues to redefine the manner in which various organisational practitioners, such as public relations (PR) practitioners communicate with the public. Social media continues to establish itself as a formidable force in both academic and non-academic fields and practices. The use of social media is gradually becoming an inevitable every day practice in many regions of the world and this trend is likely to continue as globalisation and technology join forces in symbiotic proliferation of the each other. Starting from as far back as 2005, Wright and Hinson (2012) have been conducting annual investigations on the use of social media and new media in general. Wright and Hinson (2012) consistently found that there are dramatic changes in public relations practise in the sense that changing technology continually empowers professionals to communicate strategically with external and internal audiences. Distaso and McCorkindale (2012) stated that the significance of social media in the PR field is impossible to ignore. This is because social media is now essential for organisational operations. This argument complimented an earlier assertion by Argenti (2011) indicating that embracement of “social media is no longer a strategic business option, but a necessity, and a huge opportunity” (p.1).

In the present-day digital world, social media constitutes a significant channel of communication through which organisations can build connections with the public. However, numerous organisations appear focused on social media fundamentally as a one-way channel for running promotions. This has made it difficult for organisations to use social media effectively, in spite of the potential they bear (Distaso and McCorkindale 2012). Through interviews conducted online, Distaso, McCorkindale, and Wright (2011) established that the most common challenge faced by public relations professionals who were yet to adopt social media was accepting control loss and the inability to predict what the public might do or say. This is because social media provides an avenue for communication from the organisation to the public, and from the public to the organisation, which translates to two-way communication.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) underscored the significance and value of two-way communication in developing mutual public-organisation understanding, both externally and internally. Grunig and Hunt (1984) theorised the two-way symmetrical PR model - based on the authoring works of PR practitioners like John Hill, Ivy Lee, and Edward Bernays (Grunig 1992). These PR practitioners pointed towards the potential importance of dialogue between organisations and publics. This is because the two-way symmetrical model engenders transparency in communication, which then implicates the development of public trust in the organisation and what it shares with them while communicating (Grunig 2009, 1992). Since then, most PR practitioners began striving towards creating mutual understanding in communication by developing tools of communication that help then in the delivery of targeted, accurate messages to their publics (Wilcox and Cameron 2006). PR practise had to adapt to the consistent evolution of the nature of communication channels and communication itself. Consequently, this triggered the need to develop and implement new tools of communication. In certain instances, this led to the replacement or even elimination of conventional tools of communication employed in the PR industry (Mathee 2011).

Research motivation

A multitude of research (e.g. Gandia 2011; Hallahan 2010; Curtis et al 2010; Kenny 2017) focused on the opportunities for two-way communication, via social media for business organisations. However, there is negligible evidence that such organisations presently use social media for this aim, despite the fact that two-way communication is proven to enhance trust and transparency in relationships between organisations and the publics. Researchers like Hallahan (2010) contend that public relations practitioners lack emphasis on online ethical conduct, since they do not consider online platforms as formal PR channels. This is because most PR practitioners believe that PR does not emphasise on online ethics. This means that PR practitioners do not practice PR ethically when executing PR roles online (Hallahan 2010). In other words, there are ethics that PR practitioners adhere to in conventional practice such as honesty, transparency, and accountability. However, they may not exercise these ethics when using online tools to practice PR. They also may overlook the ethics of Internet communication, such as privacy, in their endeavours to achieve their targets. Others, like Gandia (2011), argue that many organisations are yet to utilise social media to its fullest. This research will uncover social media opportunities that organisations are yet to exploit in terms of public relations. Besides, most research in this area focused on American contexts (for example, Curtis et al 2010) and mainland European settings (Ingenhoff and Koelling 2009) ignoring public relations in the Middle East.

Transparency and trust are increasingly vital for organisations in their quests to forge relationships and develop support (Coombs and Holladay 2010). In the public relations' context, various authors (including Kim, Hong and Cameron 2011; Sweetser 2010; Rawlins 2009) concur that transparency is synonymous with open communication that has a higher likelihood of being strategic. On the other hand, trust refers mainly to public trust in public relations in organisations (Poppo and Schepker 2010). Consequently, Poppo and Schepker (2010) argue that public trust is "readily defined as the degree to which external stakeholders, such as the public, hold a collective trust orientation toward an organisation, (which) is a relatively understudied area" (p.124). This implies that public trust is the scale to which parties outside the organisation, who have interest in the organisation, appear to collectively trust the organisation. Therefore, public trust appears to be the extent of collective public inclination towards an organisation.

On the other hand, Bowen (2004) contends that the ethical facets of public relations, which "typically include ethical advocacy, honesty, integrity, expertise, and loyalty" (Harrison and Galloway 2005, p.2), are critical in relation to the credibility of discipline in an organisation. Grunig (2009) recommends two-way communication, which involves communication from the organisation to the public and vice versa. In addition, he points to the importance social media could have for this type of dialogic communication. Both social media and public relations gravitate around exchange of information, which supports contentions from public relations practitioners claiming positive results through social media use (Phillips and Young 2009).

Saudi Arabia

Situated in the Middle East on the East of the Red Sea and neighbouring Yemen, Oman, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE, Saudi Arabia occupies a total land area of approximately 2.15 million square kilometres with a coastline that spans 2,640 kilometres). The total population in Saudi Arabia is about 31.85 million comprising 30 per cent non-Saudi nationals. An estimated 46.2 per cent of the population is below 25 years based on the 2015 estimates. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia boasts of a 94.7 per cent literacy level based on 2015 estimates and an unemployment rate of 11.6 per cent for males, only based on estimates made in 2014. Saudi Arabia's economy is largely dependent on its rich oil and natural gas reserves estimated at 268.3 billion barrels in 2015 and 8.235 trillion cubic metres in 2014. Based on 2015 estimates, Saudi Arabia Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was USD 1.68 while its GDP per capita was USD 54,600. The Kingdom's external debt was estimated at USD 166.1 billion in 2014, while estimates released in December 2015 placed its gold reserves and foreign exchange standing at USD 660.1 billion. Islam is the main religion practiced in Saudi Arabia (Blanchard 2016).

The incumbent king is King Salman bin Abd al Aziz Al Saud, who assumed power in January 2015 after the death of his half-brother King Abdullah bin Abd al Aziz.

Of the estimated 31.85 million people in Saudi Arabia, 20.29 million are active Internet users denoting a 64 per cent Internet penetration. About 35 per cent of the population comprises of active users of social media, which translates to 11 about million users (Wearesocial 2016). Although it is important to note that these figures represent active user accounts, and not necessarily unique persons, they indicate a growing penetration and adoption of social media in Saudi Arabia. According to Statista (2017), Facebook users in Saudi Arabia increased to 8.4 million in 2016 from 7.9 million in 2015 and were projected to reach 9.9 million by 2020. On the other hand, Twitter users reached 4.99 million in 2016, up from 4.57 million the previous year. While Whatsapp remains the most preferred social media tool with a penetration of 22 per cent, Facebook and Twitter follow closely with 21 per cent and 19 per cent penetration rates respectively. In terms of usage, Whatsapp, Facebook and Twitter recorded 91 per cent, 80 per cent and 53 per cent respectively (Behance 2016).

Saudi MCI and STC

The Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Saudi MCI) was founded on March 17 1954, as the Ministry of Commerce following the issuance of the Royal Decree 5703/5/22/10 (Saudi MCI 2017). The Ministry of Commerce was necessary at the time due to the growing and expanding commercial works and activities in the country. Its mandate comprised regulating both domestic and foreign trade, besides monitoring and guiding its development. Its mandate later expanded to include supervision of the industrial chambers inside the Kingdom. The Prime Minister endorsed the Saudi MCI system on December 2, 1954 through Decision Number 66, which allowed the Ministry to undertake the development of commercial policy in the Kingdom. Presently, Saudi MCI also sustains the commercial balance by regulating imports and exports, issues commercial and investment systems, and prepares statistics about commerce. Saudi MCI's Twitter handle (@SaudiMCI) began operation on July 12, 2011 and had 1,367,965 followers as at 1230 hours February 3, 2017

Saudi time. Based on the first profile picture uploaded on Facebook, Saudi MCI opened its Facebook page on April 15, 2012 and had 134,630 likes as at 1230 hours Saudi time on February 3, 2017.

Saudi Telecommunication Company (STC) began operation as a joint stock company on April 21, 1998 following the Royal Decree Number M/35 (STC 2016). The Royal Decree led to the transfer of the telegraph and telephone functions of the then Ministry of Post, Telegraph and Telephone (MoPTT) to the newly formed STC. Despite the Government being the initial sole owner of STC back then, a ministerial resolution issued on September 9, 2002 allowed the relinquishing of 30 per cent stake of the company. The core STC business is the delivery of fixed and mobile telecommunication networks and systems as well as Internet services. The headquarters of STC are in Riyadh and is the biggest telecommunications company in the entire Middle East and Africa region. It has operations in nine countries, employs more than 17,000 staff and boasts of a customer base in excess of 160 million. Currently, the STC group owns six associate firms and nine subsidiaries, in addition to joint venture firms. As of 1230 hours February 3, 2017 Saudi time, the STC main Twitter handle (@STC_KSA), which was started on 10 September 2009, had 3,256,785 followers. Based on the oldest profile picture accessible, the Facebook page was started on 13 September 2009 and had 2,032,113 likes as at 1230 hours on February 3, 2017.

Public Relations

The intention behind developing this section is to clarify the perspective from which the researcher approached this research. The definition of PR enables the development of knowledge concerning what PR entails in the context of this research, based on previous definitions. The relationship between the internet and PR, in addition to the impact of the internet technologies on the PR discipline, profession and practice is essential to forming a basis for the focus on social media, as internet-based tools in this research. Considering that this research is conducted in Saudi Arabia to test the application and applicability of the two-way symmetrical model, which is Western-based, the role of culture and Islam in PR is fundamental to understanding the research process and the findings obtained later on. The inclusion of Islamic ethics in this section also helps in understanding the operationalization of ethics during data collection and the interpretation of findings related to the testing of the ethical PR practice in PR communication.

1.1.1 Definition

After over 75 years of PR existence, Rex Harlow summarised the definition of the term based on nearly 500 definitions (Cernicova 2016). Despite such notable efforts, a universally acceptable definition of PR remains elusive. This elusiveness is not devoid of the understanding that definitions need to exhibit reasoning, clarity and transparency by featuring traits such as comprehensiveness, specificity and brevity. Moreover, definitions need to be accepted and acknowledged by professional communities. However, this is all different in the case of PR. Certain definitions consider the conceptual PR facets, concerning what PR is, while others focus on the instrumental PR aspects such as activities, practices and services that PR professionals offer. Other definitions assume a positive dimension describing PR, its characteristics, methods and features, in addition to the ways of identifying/recognising and standardising PR. Other definitions describe what PR is not or its differences or contrasts with other communication practices in different fields (Balaban and Abrudan 2008).

The founding PR father, Edward Bernays (1952), emphasised PR activity and its impact, besides discussing it from the dimension of engineering of consent. Engineering of consent implies assuming an action based exclusively on thorough knowledge about the situation, and on how the scientific principles apply and tested practices in tasks geared at persuading people to support programs or ideas (Cernicova 2016). Bernays (2013) underscored the importance of PR as a tool in adjustment, integration and interpretation between society and individuals or groups. He further indicated that public support and understanding is fundamental to survival in the current competitive system. L'Etang (2009) describes PR as "the occupation responsible for the management of organisational relationships and reputation" (p.13). In addition, L'Etang added that PR scopes issues concerning public affairs, stakeholder relations, management, corporate communications, risk Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and communication. Cutlip, Center and Broom (1985) defined PR as the function of management responsible for identifying, establishing and maintaining "mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends" (p.4).

According to Rus (2002), PR as a practice that emerges from two distinct yet complementary subsystems. The first one entails building and maintaining connections within the organisation to ensure a functional climate internally. The second subsystem is responsible for developing durable connections with the environment externally, and this includes all organisations or institutions and public opinion. From Bortun's (2005) view, trust is at the centre of PR, and the ultimate purpose of PR practice is subject to credibility. Newsom and Haynes (2010) emphasized that the key to achieving success in PR practice rests in maintaining credibility. From a European perspective, Verčič, Verhoeven and Zerfass (2014) focused on PR practice in Europe, and found that it played four main roles including:

educational, reflective, operational and managerial. These authors identified five issues European practitioners focus on in their practice. These included: building and maintenance of trust, connecting communication with business strategy, handling social web and digital revolution, meeting demands of active audiences and more transparency, and coping with information flow volume and speed (Verčič, Verhoeven and Zerfass 2014).

Although the different definitions of PR cover important aspects of the practice and its roles, the issue of founding and sustaining relationships within the organisation, and outside the organisation through communication, remain fundamental - and feature in most of the definitions (Balaban and Abrudan 2008; Cernicova 2016; Bernays 2013; L'Etang 2009; Rus 2002; Cutlip, Center and Broom 1985). The role of external stakeholders is further reiterated through trust and transparency, which are essential to the maintenance of the relationships. For the purposes of this research, the definitions of L'Etang (2009) and Verčič, Verhoeven and Zerfass (2014), respectively, are adopted. This is because the definition by L'Etang (2009) captures the element of relationships with the public as a management function. On the other hand, the definition by Verčič, Verhoeven and Zerfass (2014) encompasses social and digital relations as a function of relating with the public. Thus, the operational definition of PR in this research is the practice responsible for managing organisational reputation and relationships through trust building and maintenance, connection of communication with business strategy, handling social web and digital revolution, meeting demands of active audiences and more transparency, and coping with information flow volume and speed.

1.1.2 Internet and PR

In general, research demonstrates that the Internet is critical for PR professionals whose responsibility entails management of organisational communication with its publics (Vorvoreanu 2008). Dutton, di Gennaro and Hargrave (2005) published a report, which suggested that PR that fails in communicating effectively with the online community is incapable of shaping and maintaining the desired public reputation effectively. With increased Internet adoption, PR's role and the practice have changed (Petrovici 2014). PR professionals are now using the Internet in their roles concerning media relations, releasing video news for journalistic reviews and posting on company websites for the general audience (Al-Shohaib et al 2010). Research focused on Internet diffusion into organisations generally cites profitability, efficiency and utility as the determining factors for adoption in the Western economies (Ramdani, Kawalek and Lorenzo 2009). However, this presumption might not apply to the non-western organisations like in the Saudi public sector (Al-Shohaib et al 2010).

The significance of the impact of the Internet in PR practice is evident in the coining of new terms such as electronic PR (e-PR) or online PR to refer to PR practice over the Internet. According to Haig (2000), e-PR is the public relations conducted through the Internet. Fischer (2006) explained that e-PR practice supports the general PR objectives and helps in balancing the lasting relationships between organisations and their respective target groups. Petrovici (2014) argued that e-PR is the new PR form that constitutes the fundamental communication vector offering several significant benefits. Through online PR, audiences interact with organisations and receive immediate responses, thereby enabling a mutually beneficial and effective communication. Other notable benefits of e-PR include knowing the audiences and lowering the costs of reaching the audiences. Another relevant benefit of e-PR is the precision and accuracy with which PR practitioners share messages. This is contrary to the conventional PR practice that relied on mass media to relay external communication to the audience, thereby allowing opportunities for distorting the intended message. As a carry-on benefit, e-PR provides PR practitioners with the benefit of reducing the potential interferences such as misinterpretation or distortion of messages, which could emerge during communication with the audiences through other non-e-PR means (Haig 2000).

According to Petrovici (2014), e-PR is an art that entails management and consolidation of an organisation's online reputation. Breakenridge (2008) stated that e-PR features dialogic communications, information and interactivity with diverse target audiences. With the implication of new technologies in the Web 2.0 era, PR has also matched the technological changes to evolve into PR 2.0 (Breakenridge 2008). Solis and Breakenridge (2009) argued that the new PR era changed monologue to dialogue. Their explanation is that PR 2.0 places relationships at the centre of PR practice, accompanied by an evolution from the conventional pitching to participation, and from story selling to storytelling. This shift is attributable to the strengthening power of the stakeholders coupled with the enhanced ability by the organisations to gather information, enhance corporate identity, monitor the opinion of the public and participate in dialogues with their most important publics (McAllister and Taylor 2007).

1.1.3 Culture and PR

Empirical and practice evidence has shown that culture influences communication (Sriramesh and Verčič 2003). Curtin and Gaither (2007) noted that culture is a representation of the various layers that PR must deal with to achieve shared status, especially in international PR. Hofstede (1984) stated that culture is the “collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (p.25). In the same, and subsequent research, Hofstede (1984) and Hofstede and Bond (1987) defined identified collectivism versus individualism, power distance, femininity versus masculinity, Confucian dynamism, and uncertainty avoidance as the five dimensions of societal culture. These cultural dimensions can offer useful insights into culture and enable practitioners to predict the general public opinion flow and prepare for issues worth their attention (Gaither and Curtin 2008). Sriramesh and Verčič (2003) concur that the identification of environmental variables on PR practice assists in increasing the capacity to predict the techniques and strategies that are most suitable for a specific organisational environment. Choi and Cameron (2005) indicated that some situations hinder the involvement in two-way symmetrical communication due to environmental and situation factors. These authors contend that some situations might render two-way symmetrical communication unethical or inappropriate.

With the intertwined nature of culture and language, language use - especially in messages that the recipients mistranslate or that are not translatable - are common challenges (Doole and Lowe 2001). Lack of culture sensitivity on the part of PR practitioners further aggravates the language challenge. Cultural unawareness could result in communication voids with respect to essential emotional content, which might require effective communication in different societies. Thus, understanding local culture is fundamental to relationship building, since cultural meaning is inherent in the content and format of PR materials, including text, colours and images. In low context cultures, clear message articulation in words is necessary. In high context cultures, uttered words, and those not uttered, inform the derivation of substantive meaning (Ihator 2000). In high context cultures, people tend to use vague, indirect and non-confrontational language with high dependence on the ability of the reader or listener to deduce meaning based on the context. On the other hand, low context cultures have tendencies of using language that is more explicit, direct and confrontational to make sure listeners receive messages exactly as the sender intended (Wurtz 2006).

Generally, Saudi culture is a high context culture. This means that even PR communicators in the Saudi context will often communicate vaguely, indirectly and in a non-confrontational manner, expecting that the public will understand the intended meaning of the message or even the intention of the communication altogether. Altogether, other factors could be more significant for adoption of the Internet in communications by organisations in the Arab states. For example, the conservative nature of the Arabian Peninsula countries informs their appreciation of the economic rewards associated with Internet adoption. However, Arab organisations and their governments fear the cultural, social and political repercussions of Internet adoption in organisations (Anderson 2000). A good example is how government officials in Saudi Arabia worry that allowing Internet access in public sector workplaces could expose employees to messages that the government deems undesirable. Moreover, Saudi Arabia being the cradle of Islam regards itself as under obligation to safeguard the religious teachings of Islam against foreign ideologies. This explains why, for example, the Saudi Ministry of Information censors any media that contains pornographic content or information that is religiously controversial (Al-Shohaib et al 2010).

Gaither and Curtin (2008) decried the tendencies by many international PR scholars of comparing PR in a given region or country to that in the US. These authors argued that such comparisons are improper and skewed, since numerous countries and regions do not perceive PR in the same light as North Americans. Besides, the connotation for PR in many countries differs from that in the US. Choi and Cameron (2005) underscored the cultural specificity of previous findings as outcomes of the domestic views of the PR practitioners interviewed. Ihator (2000) contested that the communication paradigms and models developed in the North American context tend to be ethnocentric in nature and might not apply abroad relevantly or adequately. Choi and Cameron (2005) found that few PR studies examine the role cultural dimensions exert especially in situations of conflict between local publics and multinational corporations.

Altogether, Grunig, Grunig and Verčič (1998) replicated the excellence study in the UK and Slovenia. This extension informed the development of a generic principles' theory with abstracts of specific applications that are the intersection of a polycentric theory and an ethnocentric theory. The polycentric theory presumes that PR varies everywhere while an ethnocentric theory supposes that PR is the same everywhere (Grunig 2006). According to Wakefield (2008), the theory differentiated between the generic excellences variables that ought to be universal from those specific factors with equal potential of affecting an organisation across different host locations around the globe. Verčič, Grunig and Grunig (1996) outlined nine generic principles for determining excellence in PR practice. They include PR involvement in strategic management, PR empowerment or direct reporting in the domineering coalition with senior management and integration of PR function. They also include PR as a management function that is distinct from the other functions, the PR practitioner’s role and the two-way symmetrical model of PR. The final set of generic principles includes internal communication with a symmetrical system, knowledge potential for symmetrical PR, and managerial role and embodiment of diversity across all roles (Verčič, Grunig and Grunig 1996).

From Grunig’s (2006) perspective, the excellence theory upholds that the generic excellence principles are applicable in various economic, media and political systems across various cultures, development levels and extent of activists’ activity, albeit in an abstract and broad way. Conversely, postmodern PR and communication scholars like Holtzhausen (2007) criticise the generalisation angle assumed in the framework and maintain that postmodern situations demand various PR forms in all settings. Yet, there is growing acknowledgement that new media dissolves time, space, language, boundaries, and conventional communication modes with enhanced connections between information and people (Curtin and Gaither 2007). The professional PR culture is intertwined with the realities of the profession, society and real life-world of the PR practitioner at the individual level. Therefore, universalistic approaches to what or how the PR profession and practice should be, is, or ought to be, tend to overlook the cultural and individual aspects involved. This is because personal perceptions and experiences of the practitioner, societal surroundings, and the local culture affect the practice of PR. Subsequently, these factors affect the local settings and define the structures of the PR profession by context (Asunta 2016). In Saudi Arabia, the local culture and societal surroundings all tie in to the practice of Islam (Kirat 2015).

1.1.4 Islam and PR

Despite the prominence of PR increasing in the Twentieth Century, religion had been a contributor to the evolution of PR practice for a long time. For example, the Catholic Church under Pope Gregory XV in the 1600s established a propaganda college intended to “help propagate the faith” (Seitel 2011, p.26). In the case of Islam, Kirat (2015) showed that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also used PR and communication to crystallise public opinion. The Prophet employed PR in persuading and convincing people to embrace Islam as a new religion with new rules, new principles and new lifestyle with respect for the human race, harmony, justice, equality and peace. In fact, there are indications that The Prophet might have not succeeded in propagating and conveying Islamic teachings to the global population starting with the Arabic peninsula and Kureish without PR. Thus, Muhammad’s success amid the difficulty characterising his mission was largely dependent upon his PR, communication skills, ethics, generosity and other virtues besides his command of reaching consent and crystallising the opinion of the public (Kirat 2015).

PR in the Islamic context has been described as revolving "around the individual and the community" (Kirat 2015, p.5). This is because PR in Islam pursues building up communities and individuals (the *Umma*) in the teachings and principles of Islam. According to Kirat (2015), the PR philosophy in Islam has three dimensions. First, PR in Islam is the responsibility and task of all Muslims in the Umma; having both a macro and holistic approach with a view to develop the Islamic Umma on the teachings and principles of Islam. Second, PR in Islam anchors on credibility, ethics and the welfare for all, with the understanding that having decent and healthy relations between organisations and the *Umma* will achieve a society that adheres to the principles and teachings of Islam. Third, PR in Islam commences from the family level. This micro approach applies to both Islamic PR practice and philosophy where family conduct is subject to the principles and teachings of Islam (Kirat 2015).

Concerning ethics, the Quranic Tafsir is rich with resources on the issue including verses passed on by The Prophet and jurisprudence (Haque and Ahmad 2016). Ethical teachings in Islam feature in both indirect and direct revelation forms. *Akhlaq* is the term used to refer to ethics in Islam and it translates to morality with the principal feature being *lm-ul-Akhlaq* (knowledge of morality) (Siddiqui 1997). The Quran has numerous terms describing ethics including goodness (*khayr*), righteousness (*birr*), public interest (*maslaha*), justice and equilibrium (*'adl*), equity (*qist*), piety (*taqwa*), truth and right (*haqq*), known, approved (*ma'ruf*) and avoidance of harm (*nahi anil munkar*). Arguably, Islam provides a complete life code on ethical values with the Quran forbidding all evil and encouraging good deeds (Haque and Ahmad 2016). Islam offers an equitable balance between the good of the *Umma* and the organisations (Abdallah 2010). Contemporary ethics borrowed from the West are considerably social, while Islamic ethics are both religious and social. Socially, Islamic ethics coordinate and regulate different social relations and resolve different discords that normally include interpersonal relationships between the society and individuals (Yueqin 2011). However, practising moral values is inadequate because practitioners must be driven by good intentions to ensure that they obtain happiness (Mehrandasht et al 2015).

In terms of Islamic ethics within PR practice, Wang and Ma (2013) listed persuasion, propagation and participation as the objectives of Islamic PR and identified four overarching principles. These include: reciprocal respect, peaceful coexistence, equality for humans and acknowledgement of the human dignity endowed by Allah. Haque, Shahnewaz and Siddikee (2013) indicated that brotherhood and Satisfaction of Allah is the benchmark of Islamic PR. From the perspective of communication management, Islam emphasises key relationships and *musyarawah*, which refers to negotiation and dialogue. This concept is related to the two-way symmetrical communication approach (Abdullah 2009). Islamic ethics are also specific in regard to promotional techniques, which tend to infiltrate PR practice in Islamic contexts. For instance, promotional activities must not use appeal for emotion, pseudo research, fear, sex and dishonest testimonies. Promotional activities must not inspire luxury or contribute towards dullness of the mind. This means that promotion of products in Islamic contexts should include financial benefits, yet focus on developing the human spirit and soul based on Islamic guidelines (Haque and Ahmad 2016).

Aims and Objectives of the Study

This research aims at studying the use of social media by a private company, Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC) and the Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Saudi MCI). The purpose is to understand to what extent the new media has changed patterns of public relations practices in Saudi Arabia.. The study investigates for what tasks and purposes STC and MCI are using Twitter and Facebook. The study seeks to reach the following objectives:

1) To investigate how private and public organisations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are using Facebook and Twitter in their communication with stakeholders and their publics.
2) To examine how the usage of Facebook and Twitter has changed the way organisations in the Saudi private and public sectors communicate.
3) To assess social media opportunities in relation to Facebook and Twitter that Saudi private and public organisations have yet to exploit in terms of public relations.

Research questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How are STC and Saudi MCI using Facebook and Twitter in their communication with stakeholders and their publics?

RQ2: To what extent are STC and Saudi MCI, as reflections of Saudi private and public organisations, using Facebook and Twitter etyhically?

RQ3: How has the usage of Facebook and Twitter changed the way STC and MCI PR practitioners and communicators engage their publics and stakeholders?

RQ4: What social media opportunities/affordances in relation to Facebook and Twitter have STC and Saudi MCI yet to exploit in terms of public relations?

RQ5: To what extent is the two-way symmetrical model applied by private and public organisations in the Saudi context?

Research contribution

This research contributes significantly to both the theory and practice of PR, especially in the Saudi context, and to the Arab world by extension. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this research is the first to investigate the application and applicability of the two-way symmetrical model in PR communication in the advent of social media in the Arab World. This research extends the scope of literature concerning both the Excellence theory and the two-way symmetrical model to the Middle East. By investigating its applicability in the Saudi context, this research contributes to the on-going theoretical debates among the PR scholarly realms about the practicability of the two-way symmetrical model in PR communication. By studying PR practice trends in the advent of social media in the Saudi context, this research contributes to the theory relating to the impact technological advancements and social networks have on PR practice.

This research also considers both the voices of PR practitioners and their publics on social media, with respect to the practice of two-way symmetrical model of communication. This introduces the importance of considering both sides of the two-way symmetrical model in PR communication; bringing out the differences in perspectives and perceptions of PR practitioners and their publics. The findings of this research also provide significant evidence about the influential role that culture has on PR practice across different contexts. More importantly, the findings of this research place Islam at the epicentre of PR practice and the lifestyles of the publics in Saudi Arabia. This informs the development of an empirically informed theoretical model for online PR (e-PR) practice in Saudi Arabia.

In terms of contribution to practice, the findings of this research provide insights into understanding the relationship between the publics and their organisations. PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia can refer to the findings of this research to understand the needs of the Saudi social media publics. This information is useful for organisations and PR practitioners seeking to develop strategies for engaging their stakeholders over social media. The public can also refer to the findings of this research, and appreciate the progress organisations in Saudi Arabia are making in engaging them. The expected practical outcomes are three. First, this is a major contribution to bridging the gap caused by the misunderstanding between organisations and their publics. Second, this informs the organisations about the content the publics are most interested in receiving from them based on the results of the archive tweets and Facebook posts, which showed the response to different content at different times. Third, this research culminates in the development of a new model of online PR in Saudi Arabia.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises eight chapters. The introductory chapter discusses the general topic and provides background information concerning the research location and the focus organisations. It discusses the motivation behind the research and the contribution made by this research to theory and practice are also covered. It provides an abstract and general overview of the issues relating to the current research topic. The research motivation section highlights the reasons that informed the choice of the research topic, especially based on previous studies that address nearly similar issues as the current study. Background information about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and briefs about Saudi MCI and STC, as the focus organisations in this research, also appear in this first chapter. Theoretical introduction into key issues related to this research including the definition of PR and its relationship with the Internet, culture and Islam precede the aim, objectives and research questions. The theoretical and practical contributions of this research appear in the previous section.

The second chapter presents a brief history of public relations in the Arab World and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia .The review of previous literature relevant to the current research topic appears in the third chapter. It focuses on the theories implicated in the current research and informs the direction of this research by identifying the gaps in existing literature with respect to the current topic.

Chapter four discusses social media, and the potential they have in PR practice, appears before literature - identifying the four social media affordances deduced from literature. The network theory and its relevance to the current research are also reviewed in this chapter. Change management and PR communication literature are highlighted before the theoretical foundations of this research are presented.

The fifth chapter highlights and justifies the research methodology and includes in-depth discussions about alternative research choices available to the researcher and the rationale for their exemption in this research. The methodology chapter also highlights the procedures and techniques employed towards the completion of this research. The Honeycomb of Research Methodology proposed by Wilson (2014) is adopted and justified to ensure the systematic presentation of the chapter. The choice of a pragmatic research philosophy and the ontological and axiological stances associated with this research are explained in the third section. The role of the deductive and inductive approaches in shaping the progress of this research precede the review of various research designs outlined in the Honeycomb of Research Methodology, which include action research, case study, experimental, longitudinal, cross-sectional, archival analysis and comparative research designs. Upon deliberations on the various research designs, the choice of the different research designs and the various data collection methods and techniques are before the different data analysis techniques.

The results obtained from the implementation of the quantitative phase of this research constitute the sixth chapter. The demographic profile of the respondents and the results of the respective research questions that were addressed based on quantitative data appear in respective order. Results about social media usage by both organisations dominates the subsequent sections, before an outline of the outcomes related to the extent to which both organisations applied the two-way symmetrical model in their usage of social media for communication. The results pertaining to the impact of social media on the engagement of the publics and stakeholders by organisations appear before the disclosure of social media opportunities/affordances that the two organisations optimise in their communication with their publics.

Chapter seven begins with the analysis and results of the semi-structured interview data. The profile of the twelve (N= 12) PR practitioners who were interviewees in this study precedes the disclosure of the procedures followed during the undertaking of the thematic analysis. Thematic maps are used to illustrate the identification of four themes from the interview data. By evaluating the tweets and posts archived from the Twitter handles and Facebook pages of both STC and Saudi MCI, three main trends are identified with respect to how the organisations use Twitter and Facebook. Of greater significance is the evaluation of the traits of the two-way symmetrical model in the tweets and Facebook based on criteria established in the current study and elaborated at Section 4.6.3 in the fourth chapter.

Chapter eight discusses the results, the conclusions and recommendations based on the findings. It helps in comparing and converging the quantitative and qualitative findings of this research. Moreover, the discussion chapter contextualises the findings of this research in relation to previous literature included and reviewed in this research. The discussion chapter also concludes with the introduction of a new model for online PR practice in Saudi Arabia based on the findings of this research. Chapter 8 also outlines the conclusions and practical suggestions made based on this research and its findings. It also presents the limitations encumbering the execution of the current research besides providing implications of the findings of this research.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY OF PR IN THE ARAB WORLD AND SAUDI ARABIA

PR in the Arab World: A Profession in the Making

Historically public relations in the Arab World dates back to 1400 years ago. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) used it extensively to convey the message and propagate a new religion that has changed the life of people throughout centuries and years across the world. In modern times public relations is profilirating at a very fast pace in all twenty Arab countries. Kirat argues:

> *Twenty two countries, 300 million inhabitants, an expanding economy, globalization, information technology, and an ongoing process of democratization, are all important reasons that make public relations an indispensable tool for Arab nations to respond to the requirements, challenges and demands of the twenty first century. The last two decades have seen a huge expansion of public relations in various domains of economic, political, social and cultural sectors in the Arab World. However, this profession still suffers from poor performance, lack of strategies, and absence of vision. (Kirat,2005).*

However, public relations in the Arab World is a profession in the making. It is emerging very fast but still suffers from a score of problems and misunderstanding. It is still conceived of as a press agent fostering the the image of the corporation while a neglecting the strategic role of image building and reputation management through research and strategic planning. Kirat shows a lot of optimism concerning the future of Public relations in the Arab World. He states:

> *The prominence of public relations in the Arab world has never been greater. With the advent of globalization, information technology and the information and digital society, organizations whether private or public are giving more importance to their publics and public opinion. The democratization process is underway requiring more transparency, two way communication and dialogue. Organizations are adapting themselves to a new environment that requires strong and effective public relations departments. (Kirat,2005).*

The knowledge body of PR in the Arab world appears to be considerably young and in the process of expanding. Numerous studies that analysed PR in the Saudi context are major contributions by American university graduates. Such studies contribute significantly to our understanding of PR in Arab countries like Saudi Arabia (Sriramesh 2003). Freitang and Stokes (2009) state that there are scholarly works indicating that the Middle East was the origin of PR dating as far back as several millennia. They contend that the Hammurabi of Babylonia gathered his people for “town hall meetings” during the sheep-shearing season. Freitang and Stokes (2009) add that Pharaohs celebrated the River Nile during the season of irrigation to pass news and information to farmers. In the case of the Middle East, Freitang and Stokes (2009) note that there are scholarly works that indicate that public relations have their origins there. These authors cite Iraq’s Cuneiform tables, which were in actual sense bulletins informing farmers on how best to grow crops, dating back to over four millennia ago as an example. Alanazi (1996) cites the *Okaz Souk*, an open market preceding Islam in the Arab Peninsula, as an example where speakers and poets contested for fame and glory in inter-tribal competitions and demonstrations. With Islam, Freitang and Stokes (2009) contend that concepts of communication were fortified, particularly for converting new followers and spreading Islamic teachings.

Al-Enad (1990) noticed that the Arab world widely uses ‘general relations’ in place of ‘public relations’. In fact, Al-Enad contends that the words ‘public relations,’ or even the word ‘public,’ feature nowhere in Arabic and not even in PR or ‘general relations’ textbooks. According to him, the word ‘public,’ in reference to groups of people, is literally translatable using several distinct Arabic words. Al-Enad (1990) argues that reference to PR as ‘general relations’ or ‘general affairs’ in the Arab world could be responsible for the consistent ambiguity of the PR objectives, nature, functions and roles.

Badran, Turk and Walters (2003) contend that job descriptions for PR practitioners in both Middle East private and public institutions still exhibit the out-dated press agentry model of PR practice. Moreover, Al-Enad (1990) argued that PR was used at times just for the sake of using it, or to feature merely in the hierarchies of management. He adds that PR was used to serve as a communication agent and/or receptionist. According to Al-Enad (1990), PR functions as an information office in government agencies and ministries, and pursues communication with the public to accomplish one or more objectives. The first objective entails educating the public on matters relevant to the client’s area of work; raising public knowledge and/or convincing the public to act or behave in a certain way - such as obeying traffic rules, going to school and getting immunization. The second objective involves publicizing accomplishments of the entire society and/or of a client, with the aim of making the public satisfied (Al-Enad 1990). The year 2000 saw the launch of the Middle East Public Relations Association (MEPRA). Badran, Turk and Walters (2003) assert that MEPRA’s objectives included raising awareness, increasing the professionalism level, offering a voice for the PR industry and ensuring that members observe the professional code of conduct. Additionally, MEPRA is responsible for the creation of educational forums for young practitioners in the Middle East who might opt to venture into PR as a career. According to Badran, Turk and Walters (2003) PR according to MEPRA is a discipline that takes care of reputation with the goal of accomplishing support and understanding while influencing behaviour and opinion. Recently, Saudi Arabia established the Saudi Association for Public Relations and Advertising (SAPRA) whose objectives resemble those of MEPRA (Alanazi 2013).

Badran, Turk and Walters (2003) cite MEPRA and state that most regional and local consultancies feature a high level of professionalism. However, Alanazi (2013) contends that public and private sectors in the Middle East have different professionalism levels in general. Altogether, most PR agencies uphold high professional standard levels, according to Badran, Turk and Walters (2003).

Being one of the world’s fastest growing professions and areas of study, public relations seems to have a challenging future in the Arab World. There is a strong need for an effective public relations in the Arab World to meet the challenges of economic, political and cultural globalization.(Al Enad,2004). Public opinion and democratization are gaining ground. Elections at all levels, as well, as the emancipation of women in political life, political diversity as well as the discussion of topics considered taboos in the near past are all signs of new era in the Middle East.

2.2 Public Relations in Saudi Arabia

Freitang and Stokes (2009) concur with Alanazi (1996) that it is impossible to deliberate on the onset of PR in Saudi Arabia without mentioning Saudi ARAMCO, a company that began searching for oil in Saudi Arabia. This is because workers and managers from the US did not successfully accommodate the cultural issue of Saudi Arabia leading to serious communication problems (Freitang and Stokes 2009). Later, ARAMCO established a PR arm to address two main issues. The first was to offer training to the Arabs to work with the Americans. The second one involved teaching the Americans about understanding, respecting and adapting to Saudi culture (Freitang and Stokes 2009).

Despite the PR professionalism in Saudi Arabia progressing rapidly, restricted backing from top management and constrained budgets continued to hamper this progress (Alanazi 2013). According to Freitang and Stokes (2009), most PR research in Saudi Arabia focuses on crises, and falls short of moving the discipline forward through the development and exploration of models and theories that suit the Saudi context. In fact, Alanazi (1996) contends that the perception of PR in Saudi Arabia is that of a “propaganda function” instead of as a contributor to the process of making decisions. The author further argues that practitioners were not included into the decision-making process, although in instances when they were, there was a tendency to be taken seriously. In reaction to this argument, the author of this paper is of the opinion that PR perception in Saudi Arabia is largely corrective and reactive as opposed to proactive. In other words, it is possible there is widespread perception of PR practice as a tool for damage control for rectifying derailed organisational reputation to the public.

Freitang and Stokes (2009) argue that there are four characteristics of PR in Saudi Arabia. The first characteristic is the misunderstanding of the function, concept and role of PR. The second one entails a lack of training and expertise, coupled with constrained financial resources. The third characteristic is a rapid growth in PR within higher education programs. The last characteristic is the existence of seeds of professional practice standards. Taking this for the current characterization means that PR in Saudi Arabia is misconstrued, with limited efforts and developing expertise, despite the paradoxical increase in higher education PR programs and extant standards of professional practice. This implies that PR is still in its infancy in Saudi Arabia, and there is a need to do more to advance its knowledge, application and recognition in the kingdom.

Generally, the Arab world has witnessed in the last twenty years or so a significant growth of PR in different areas like sociocultural, economic and political sectors (Alanazi 2013). However, Kirat (2005) faults the profession for poor performance, lack of vision and strategies. In terms of Internet adoption though, Alanazi (2013) notices an increased rate and use of PR. Al-Shohaib, Al-Kandari and Abdulrahim (2009) conducted a study and found that approximately 46 per cent of PR professionals in Saudi Arabia used the Internet for PR purposes. Alanazi (1996) argues that progress and innovation frequently collided with the views of a section of Saudi religious leaders. For instance, some of them termed the introduction of radio to Saudi Arabia as satanic. It took the intervention of the King to persuade them that the radio, automobiles and telephones were innovations that people could use to assist in religious endeavours too (Alanazi 1996). Sriramesh and Vercic (2003) have demonstrated that diversity in political systems across country also influence PR practice from one country to another. Building on this understanding, Alanazi (2013) argued that this underscores the significance of undertaking PR studies within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Alanazi (1996) noted that PR in Saudi Arabia has considerable ties to government institutions and that Saudis perceive it as publicity, a protocol, and a manipulation tool. Freitang and Stokes (2009) realized that transparency, when it comes to government activities, is almost non-existent when discussing PR in Saudi government institutions. According to Al-Enad (1990), communication in government institutions flows in one way, has an unbalanced purpose, and mass media are the tools. He adds that the mass media transmit and publish information from government PR and have the power to change any section in most situations. This has not changed much since the work of Al-Enad (1990), and the only notable change is with the advent of social media, where at times government officials engage with the citizenry on selected issues. Still, government determines what issues to discuss with whom at what time. Clarke (2007) portrays the Saudi government as strict; seeking to enhance its citizens' economic welfare, while at times ruthlessly reinforcing the traditions and customs of the country. Furthermore, Clarke argues that the reinforcement of social morals by the government is responsible for distinguishing Saudi Arabia as among the most traditional and strictest societies in the world.

The place of an individual in society is another important factor, as it determines the individual's freedom, strategies for communication, and the magnitude of his or her opinion, which matters significantly within society (Alanazi 2013). On one hand, the dominant theory of the press within a society is another condition that could affect PR goals, philosophies, practices and tools in Saudi Arabia (Alanazi 2013). On the other hand, Al-Enad (1990) contends that the authoritarian theory of the press is still effective, whereas developmental theory is applicable in other parts. The authoritarian theory of the press posits that influential bureaucrats, or the governing authorities, or the elite, control all communication forms (Al-Enad 1990).

With respect to the two objectives discussed in the previous paragraph, Al-Enad (1990) contends that managers, or individuals, consider the concept of cultural lag. Cultural lag refers to a situation where different aspects of modern culture fail to change at similar rates. In other words, some parts change more speedily than others, and because of interdependence and correlation of culture parts, rapid changes in a section calls for reformations via other adjustments in the different correlated aspects of culture (Al-Enad 1990). The two objectives could be justified if considering the cultural lag. However, Al-Enad (1990) disputes the second objective as propaganda that is not only questionable but also contravenes PR ethics. Fundamentally, cultural variations within societies influence the mode of PR practice by individuals across various societies, according to Badran, Turk and Walters (2003).

Al-Enad (1990) reached the conclusion that PR is situated between institutions and their environment or publics. Conversely, PR in developing nations appears situated between the nonmaterial, and the material cultural facets. According to Alanazi (2013), PR tries to adjust to either side, to the expectations and needs of the other side. Either way, the role of PR could fail to gratify the standards theorized in PR literature (Alanazi 2013). However, engaging in PR activities assists in sustaining the system's equilibrium (Al-Enad 1990). Alanazi (1996) demonstrated that PR departments in Saudi Arabia employ local employees when Saudis are their primary target audiences. In addition, Alanazi (1996) contends that the PR department of an organisation is amongst the most significant sources of information where Saudis are the target audience. However, when targeting non-Saudi audiences, organisations normally employ PR firms within the target country. This is an indication of the value afforded PR outside Saudi Arabia by Saudi organisations.

To sum up one can argue that the roles of PR practitioners in public and private enterprises in Saudi Arabia remain ambiguous - based on the knowledge garnered through literature discussed in this section. The roles of PR appear trapped within the vague concept that organisations and people in Saudi Arabia have cast upon PR practices. Consequently, the concept of true modern PR remains misconstrued, and therefore the roles of PR and PR practitioners are equally misunderstood and/or underestimated. In fact, Alsadhan (2007) contends that the understanding of PR roles in Saudi Arabia fails to surpass the scientific and theoretical concepts of strategic planning and PR, which are taught as a science in colleges of journalism and communication. However, it is necessary to investigate any new developments in PR roles amid the rapid proliferation, acceptance and usage of new media today. Besides, most of the key scholarly works that dare discuss PR in the Saudi Arabian context are somewhat old (for example, Al-Enad 1990; Alanazi 1996) and it is possible that their findings then do not apply today in their entirety.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies looked at social media use by public relations. Wright and Henson did a longitudinal study on the emerging media use in public relations between 2006 and 2013.Findings of the study suggest that public relations practitioners are using more and more social media in their activities. The new tools are providing unique opportunities for both PR professionals and for a wide variety of strategic publics.(Wright and Hinson,2013). They assert:

> *Results also indicate those who practice public relations believe social and other emerging media Continue to improve in terms of accuracy, credibility, honesty, trust and truth telling. They also Think these new media effectively serve as a watchdog for traditional news media, impacting corporate and organizational transparency and advocating a transparent and ethical culture. (Wright & Hinson, 2013:14).*

Ozlem Alikilic and Umit Atabek (2012) looked at "Social media adoption among Turkish public relations professionals: A survey of practitioners". The authors used an online questionnaire sent to 158 members of the Turkish Public Relations Association (TUHID.The authors concluded that:

> *Internet and social media tools in Turkey, like social networks, blogs, and online videos have revolutionized the dynamics of public relations and social media…This exponential rise in interest of social media seems to be pressuring PR professionals to integrate these tools into their work. Research findings show that public relations professionals in Turkey have started to facilitate dialogs with their publics by using social media.(Alikilic and Atabek,2012:62)*

Wilson and Supa looked at the effect of Twitter on the public relations-journalist relationship (Wilson and Supa,2013). The authors used a questionnaire which covered a sample of 340 journalists and 291 public relations practitioners. Of those that completed the survey 48 (14%) were journalists and 66 (22.6%) public relations practitioners. Findings of the study suggest that the benefits of Twitter as an information-sharing platform were clearly recognized as important for both journalism and public relations.

You and Kim (2013) examined the use of online newsrooms on U.S. state tourism websites. They did a content analysis of 50 state tourism websites to investigate the availability of online newsrooms as well as their contents and overall usability. Findings of the study show that "the average number of social media use by the 50 state tourism offices is 4.04, and the most often used social media are Facebook (50 States), Twitter (49 States), YouTube (36 States), and Flickr (29 States)". (Yoo and Kim, 2013:539).

Many PR practitioners continue to struggle with the impact caused by new media, and particularly the Internet. This is despite the general perception that corporate websites, email response facilities to customers, distribution of news release and chat rooms are now standard PR practice aspects (Galloway 2005). According to van der Merwe, Pitt and Abratt (2005), the terrain of PR practice is fast changing with the introduction of new media. The change in PR practice advances the strength of stakeholders by facilitating communication across stakeholder groups and between them. Considering that the PR practice in Saudi Arabia has mainly been employed as an emulation of the practice in West, it would be imperative to investigate whether the supposed facilitation of communication across stakeholder groups and between them is applicable in the Saudi context. Besides, it is still unclear whether the terrain of PR practice would differ in Saudi public and private organisations, hence the need for this study.

Stephens (2007) contends that information "pours out of spigots [sic]" and the arrival of news is "astoundingly fast from an astounding number of directions (p.35). This is an indication of the countless sources and amount of information that stakeholders of an organisation have access to without much control by the organisation. This is because anyone with an Internet-connected computer has the capacity to publish information for possible worldwide consumption (Taylor and Kent 2006). Consequently, these authors contend that the Internet is largely responsible for revolutionising numerous facets of PR practice and research. McAllister and Taylor (2007) contend that the internet provides PR practitioners a unique opportunity for collecting information, monitoring public opinion on numerous matters, and engaging in straightforward dialogue with their respective publics concerning diverse issues.

These studies were both based in the Western context, where immense literature on PR practice and research exists. However, in the case of the Arab world, and especially in Saudi Arabia, there is scant research to substantiate the argument that the Internet has revolutionised much PR practice and research facets in the region and country. In any case, the suggestion by McAllister and Taylor (2007) that the Internet provides PR practitioners a great opportunity for collecting information, monitoring public opinion on numerous matters, and engaging in straightforward dialogue with their respective publics concerning diverse issues is not an assurance in itself that PR practitioners actually take advantage of the Internet in the manner stated. Besides, their study does not offer empirical backing for the arguments and the scope of their study is in the context of college websites and not from the more rigorous business organisations' context. Altogether, a majority of extant academic literature laments that PR practitioners were merely shifting conventional PR practice models and approaches to the web without developing their practice. Developing their practice to match up to the shift in PR practice models is necessary in matching up the drastic changes in PR practice. Unlike the other models of communication, the two-way symmetrical model of communication is not restrained to blogging and online press releases. This is because it allows PR practitioners to build relationships without abolishing the importance of expression through words, especially in this social media era. Previous evidence by Porter and Sallot (2003) suggests that PR practitioners were open to the use of new technology. Apparently, it is inconsistent that even a conventional PR practice mainstay, such as media relations, is not capitalising on the potential that the web offers (Alfonso and Miguel 2006). These authors do not clearly distinguish between new technology and new media in this regard, considering that the former is general and all-inclusive, whereas the latter is about communication using the Internet as the platform. The researcher is of the opinion that there is need to distinguish new media as covered in this research from new technology in general, in order to avoid ambiguity in research concerning social media and its impact on PR practice. In addition, the inconsistencies in previous research over whether PR practitioners adopt and capitalise on the potentials of the web, as argued here, cements the need for research on this in the largely neglected Saudi context. Therefore, this is in line with the research objective on uncovering social media opportunities that Saudi Telecom Company and Saudi MCI have yet to exploit in terms of public relations.

The study by Alfonso and Miguel (2006) involved 120 corporate websites across six countries in Europe, Singapore and the US. They found that using Internet tools for building steady and compact "relationships with the media is far from ideal" (Alfonso and Miguel 2006, p.274). In other words, the companies did not have the capacity to forge and sustain steady relationships with their publics through the media. The considerable weaknesses identified indicated that the companies lacked both comprehensive, well-structured, PR strategies and adequate resources for executing them. Furthermore, the weaknesses hinted at the possibility that the Internet propagated the evidence of any shortcomings within PR practices in organisations (Alfonso and Miguel 2006). In other words, the Internet brought out limitations in PR practice in a clearer manner than did PR practice without the Internet. This could be attributable to the fact that the Internet allows the publics some level of control over what PR practitioners communicate online. It is highly likely that the findings by Alfonso and Miguel (2006) concerning use of internet tools for the development of relationships in the European, Asian and American contexts are not generalizable to the Saudi context, due to possible variations in the dedication of resources towards PR strategies.

Jo and Jung (2005) undertook a study to investigate the key components of home pages of websites belonging to top South Korean and US companies. They established that there was little proof of PR practices that one could categorise as illustrations of symmetrical two-way communications. Press agentry largely characterised most of the South Korean website elements, while those of the US websites were mainly public information. According to Jo and Jung (2005), their findings were consistent with those of other research studies in the field that showed that PR "practitioners do not yet use the internet to increase interaction between organisations and their publics" (p.27). This means that PR practitioners are yet to optimise Internet usage to favour organisational interaction with the publics. Although the study by Jo and Jung (2005) focused on the South Korean and US contexts, their findings could be transferrable, and are perhaps applicable in the Saudi context, especially considering that Saudi PR practices borrow a lot from the US PR practices. However, the researcher acknowledges that it is likely that there have been significant shifts in PR practice in organisations situated in different countries since the studies discussed here were conducted. In this regard, the researcher would test the applicability of Jo and Jung's (2005) argument in the Saudi context, despite the likelihood of significant variations in the PR practices since then.

Bekhit looked at "Elctronic Public Relations in Arab Governments Sites".(Bekhit,2009). The study analysed the use of Internet by most nineteen Arab countries offices of presidents, prime ministers, governments departments, mimistries of defense, foreign affairs and information.A total of eighty one sites were analysed to assess to what extent public relations departments are using Internet to establish a dialogue between ministries and the public. Main findings of the study suggest that public relations departments didn't make good use of Internet and adopted the press agentry and public information model.

Carim and Warwick conducted a study on "The usuage of social media for corporate communications by research-funding organisations in the UK". Findings of the study suggest that despite the fact that most communication/public relations executives understood the importance and continued use of social media, they had many questions uanswered such as how to measure behavioural outcomes, how to connect media metrics to corporate communication strategy, how to measure impact, how to measure credibility…etc. (Carim and Warwick, 2013:327).

Paek, Hove Jung and Cole studied a social media campaign promoting child welfare to explore the associations amomg people's social media use , their engagement with different social media platforms namely blog, Facebook page and twitter account. The study revealed that users' engagement played a significant mediating role in the relationship between their social media use and their offline communication behavior. (Paek, Hove Jung and Cole, 2013:526). The study also suggested that people's use of each social media platform- blog, Facebook, twitter- was for the most part in relation with the campaign's behavioral goals.

Eyrich, Padman and Sweetser conducted a study on "PR practitioners' use of social media tools and communication technology" (2008). The authors surveyed working public relations practitioners about their adoption of 18 social media tools and their perception on the growth of social media trends in public relations practice. Findings of the study suggest that practioners have adopted nearly six different social media tools professionally.

Deborah Agostino (2013) did a study on "Using Social media to engage citizens: A study of Italian municipalities". To examine how social media contribute to public engagement, the author analyzed 119 Italian municipalities. The author concluded that facebook and Twitter were used by municipalities to engage citizens.she argues that " The different contributions of social media to public engagement identify the need for public administrations to move from a general isomorphic social media adoption to a thoughtful media strategy". (Agostino, 2013: 234).

To sum up, past studies reveal that the use of social media by PR departments is growing tremendously and at a fst pace over the years. As more forms of social media emerge, organisations are adopting new techniques of communication with their employees, publics, competitors, suppliers , investors and stakeholders. Spreading a message in the digital age can be easier, faster and more efficient. Social media have been adopted from its inception by public relations, PR practitioners perceive social media positively with respect to strategic communication. Social media are the creation of platforms that connect people together, provide an opportunity to produce and share content with others, extract and process community knowledge and share it back. Face book, Youtube, MySpace, Twitter, Linkedin, Foursquare and Flicker are among the most popular social network services.

CHAPTER 4: PUBLIC RELATIONS USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

4.1-Online Public Relations

Social media is reorganizing the profession of public relations. Since the advent of the Internet, PR is becoming more and more online and virtual; many of its activities are done through the net. Modern technology transforms the way we send, receive and process information. Social media or online networking sites, have been heralded as groundbreaking interactions which allow for networked communication to occur instantaneously. Social media enable PR practitioners to share content, opinions, experiences, insights, views, and media themselves. Social media sites encourage and foster two-symmetrical communication among its participants. Using social media by PR practitioners allows them to reach and interact with multiple publics and stakeholders, thus opening the opportunities and possibilities for mutually beneficial relationships.

Most social media sites offer news, information, comments, data and story ideas that PR practitioners may use to perform their tasks and activities such as media relations, communications with various publics and stakeholders, performing social corporate responsibility, publicity and image building. The rise of social media has affected more than just communication practices – it has provided a substantial new platform for the democratization of interests and ideas by dramatically expanding the opportunity for expression of competing and controversial ideas in society. In doing so it has also expanded and altered the importance of public relations. No longer are individuals and groups hindered by lack of access to print media or the limited dissemination of such collateral. Today, individuals and organizations may promote and persuade using the various platforms and tools of social media, potentially reaching anyone in cyberspace. And within organizations, the task of understanding and making use of such technologies to promote and persuade frequently falls under the guise of public relations.

4.2-Engagement in Social Media

An increasing number of organizations and individuals are using social media to find either an audience or find individuals who complement their own talents [10].While previous literature indicates the problems associated with growing social media usage, including negative word -of- mouth information proliferation across networks due to isolated events, as well as mistrust and reduction of social capital, these concerns have not stopped companies from using social media as a way to enhance, sustain, and defend corporate image. IBM estimates that during 2015–2018, the number of companies that use social media to interact with customers had more than tripled . Despite concerns, social media users in business and consumer markets are increasingly employing social media to advertise and communicate. The emergence of social media has changed the way firms manage relationships and impressions of their audiences. Social media in the forms of online word-of-mouth forums, blogs, discussion boards, e-mail, chat rooms, product or service review websites and social networking websites like Twitter and Facebook provide an inexpensive and easyway to increase the flow of information to a variety of internal and external stakeholders . This perpetuates both transparency and accountability, which are vital to building, maintaining, and defending a corporate image in an environment where individuals are actively engaging in online conversations . With the emergence and growth of social media, it is essential that organizations understand the dynamics of not only how it can be used as a platform to sustain a corporate image , but also how it may impact financial performance.

According to Fidler (1997), new media is every emerging kind of communication media such as: social media, websites, chat rooms, mobile computing, virtual realities, and email among others. This definition lacks comprehensiveness and is seldom practised in reference. However, it insinuates direct linkage between emerging media and new media by pointing towards synonymy of the two. Olise (2008) extends this definition by adding that new media entail the convergence of telecommunications technology and computer technology. In other words, this means that new media are new technologies of communication that involve the combination of telecommunication and computer technologies, and are useful as channels for information dissemination to heterogeneous audiences, irrespective of distance, time and space (Ikpe and Olise 2010).

Dewdney and Ride (2006) argue that new media is now a favoured term when referring to a variety of media practices that apply the computer and digital technologies in diverse ways. They further contend that new media in educational settings is used to refer to some practices in art, university courses and departments. This portrays new media as a practice, an intellectual and academic subject. Dewdney and Ride (2006) acknowledge that definitions of new media continue to evolve with some of them exclusively focusing on the production of digital content and computer technologies. However, other definitions underscore the cultural contexts and forms within which technologies are employed. Unfortunately, Dewdney and Ride (2006) do not disclose the definitions they discuss and make generalised statements.

4.3- New media

As opposed to making attempts at defining the terms ‘new media’ and ‘emerging media’ most authors (for example Ikpe and Olise 2010; James 2007; Lievrouw and

Livingstone 2006) opt to discuss what they offer. However, Ikpe and Olise (2010) offer examples of new media. These include: mobile phones, the Internet, chat rooms, videoconferencing, email, online magazines and online newspapers. A more comprehensive description of new media by James (2007) outlines the principal feature of emerging media and new media. This feature is that the two technologies are mostly portable and enhance agility in communications. In terms of the benefits of new and emerging media, Ikpe and Olise (2010) argue that they offer the advantage of making two-way symmetrical communication possible. It is not clear though, whether the two authors point this out as a superiority of emerging and new media in comparison to old media or not. Moreover, the said benefits associated with the application of two-way symmetrical communication have not been tested especially in relation to PR and communication practices in Saudi organisations.

Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006) contend that new media provides users with ways to seek, share and generate content in a selective manner. In addition, new media enables interactions between groups and individuals to an extent that traditional means were not practicable. This implies that the responsiveness, social presence and immediacy of interactions in a majority of new media constitute a massive chance for the practice of media relations and PR. An emergent question would be whether this postulation could be substantiated empirically in the case of interactions between organisations and individuals. In line with the media relations practice, Rodney (2005) argues that new media ease, hasten and reduce the cost of the media relations' process. For instance, this author argues that electronic bulletin boards and emails have the capacity to convey messages back to the source in a few seconds. The researcher concurs with the likelihood of these benefits, but cannot argue with firmness that communication and PR practitioners in organisations in Saudi Arabia actually perceive these benefits as practical realities and whether they indeed use new media to pursue them. If Saudi PR practice is to keep up with the changing landscape of PR practice and engage with their public in productive interactions that would foster trust and transparency, it is then necessary that they pursue these benefits and this form of communication. Altogether, it is likely that some organisations have no interest in pursuing these benefits that are associated with the use of new media in PR practice. In the case of Saudi organisations, Al Khayat (2015) asserted that the public organisations that have failed to adopt new media have found themselves isolated from the masses. In addition, such organisations have lost their impact on the public opinion, which implies decline in their reputation (Al Khayat 2015). Similarly, James (2007) argues that new media are allowing delivery of content on demand by consumers. An example of new media in this context is the use of RSS (Really Simple

Syndication) feeds, which allow delivery of preferred information and news updates to consumers the moment they are available online without the need for consumers to search for such content (James 2007). However, one would question whether organisations use these platforms to supply their public or consumers with the information and news preferred by the public. It would be interesting to test whether this is true especially, and whether Saudi public and private organisations use the potential of new media to interact with their consumers or public in a two-way symmetrical, yet prompt, manner - hence the importance of this research.

Whereas the attempts to define new media and emerging media are not common, it is easy to infer from extant literature that technology and the Internet especially, are key constituents of the two. Without doubt, literature portrays new media and emerging media as better and more efficient communication means than the traditional media forms. Perhaps, this could be the only reason why most scholars plunge directly into discussing the superiority of new and emerging media over traditional media without first defining the terms or considering whether such superiority actually exists. Electronic transmission is central to new and emerging media communication processes based on the literature reviewed in this section. The portrayal of new and emerging media as better in terms of speed, cost and efficiency in comparison to old media begs inquiry into why organisations are not taking full advantage of it in their PR practices as shown in the previous section.

4.3.1 PR theory and new media

Academic works continue to witness dominance of attempts in applying Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical model of communication in the examination of new media's potential towards building constructive relationships among organisations and their respective public. Alfonso and Miguel (2006) inferred that new media does provide a means for increasing two-way symmetrical communication. However, these authors contend that present-day practice has failed to achieve this, especially compared to the achievement associated with online pressrooms. In pursuit of the two-way symmetrical communication theme, McAllister and Taylor (2007) conducted research on websites owned by community colleges. Their intention was to find out whether these websites promoted dialogic relationships. Their findings revealed a general absence of interactive features with the capacity to solicit input, or feedback, from key stakeholders. These researchers inferred that this absence was a limiter of opportunities for PR practitioners to garner information as well as monitor public opinion from federal, state, regional and individual entities. McAllister and Taylor's (2007) evaluation of the offerings of the websites portrayed them as exemplars of fundamentally one-way symmetrical communication. They also equated the websites' roles to those of brochures whose focus is on the sender-to-receiver communication transmission model.

In summary, the conclusion was that the websites did not foster building of relationships with key publics. Whereas the findings of the study by McAllister and Taylor (2007) provide good hints into the application of the two-way symmetrical communication through websites, the same may only have to be tested in the context of social media platforms, where organisations can extend the capabilities of their company websites and perhaps build enhanced perpetual relationships. Additionally, McAllister and Taylor (2007) do not distinguish the applicability of their findings between public and private organisations, as does the current research in the case of new media.

In their research, Hassink, Bollen and Steggink (2007) cite numerous studies that consider symmetrical two-way communications as an important component in first-rate corporate communication. These authors also employed the symmetrical two-way communication approach to their research, which involved online investor relations. They concluded that when websites owned by corporations featured mechanisms that allowed investors to make inquiries through email, this was not equal to symmetrical communication. Hassink, Bollen and Steggink (2007) further determined that two-way symmetrical communication was only possible when the corporations replied at all, or the quality and timeliness of response was present. In other words, it is the quality and timeliness of response to investor queries by corporations that determined whether the communication was two-way symmetrical. This finding is relevant to this study since it inspires the need to investigate the quality and timeliness of Saudi Telecom Company and Saudi MCI's responses to enquiries by the public. Further, Hassink, Bollen and Steggink (2007) established that corporations in general did not perform well in the area of two-way symmetrical communication via websites and email. As a result, these authors concluded that arranging a symmetrical dialogue with investors requires a structure that is considerably distinct from the conventional process of supply-driven asymmetrical communication. The supply-driven asymmetrical communication entailed vertical flow of information from the suppliers to the consumers without information flow to the suppliers from their consumers. This underscores the importance of sent, received and replied-to information for PR practitioners in different organisations. The question that begs response would be whether public and private organisations in Saudi Arabia provide quality and timely responses to their stakeholders and public. However, the findings reported by Hassink, Bollen and Steggink (2007) cannot be extended to the Saudi context in the case of social media, since theirs was a study on websites and not on social media platforms per se.

The other theoretical theme in literature is the cross-cultural analysis one. This is especially common in research studies that compare Asian PR practices and US practices, and to a lesser magnitude the Middle Eastern and European PR practices (James 2007). This observation hints at the extent to which PR practice research has left out Middle East PR practice. The description of blogging in the Middle Eastern context by Beckerman (2007) provides valuable insights on the role played by blog both as “a personal op-ed page” (p.19) and as diary that reveals “a hidden trove of multiple perspectives in a world that the West often imagines as having only one perspective” (p. 18). Op-ed in this case refers to a page that users can open and edit content in, in a manner that resembles diary operations. This diary-like functionality is beneficial in revealing different views towards new media and other issues that Western literature often portrays as having a single and ideal view.

The theoretical argument by Galushkin (2003) concerning the challenging facets of social presence theory and media richness theory (as discussed extensively in another section of this paper on pages 68 and 69), are of interest to this research. Galushkin (2003) contends that the said challenges inherent in these two theories inform and influence organisational communication, since new media affects the richness and social relations between organisations and their publics. Hermann (2007) explored Weick’s process of sense making as means for examining online communications in the discussion boards of investors. According to Maitlis and Lawrence (2007), sense making refers to an “interpretative process in which actors influence each other through persuasive or evocative language” (p.57). In other words, various parties to the communication (senders and receivers) interpret the same message differently and attempt to convince others to draw a certain meaning out of the same message. Hermann hints at various theoretical approaches for research in future including employing network analysis, investigating strategic ambiguity and drawing comparisons between topologies of interaction analysis. In this study, the researcher will employ network analysis, as informed through the network theory, whose review appears in a section on its own in this chapter.

Dewdney and Ride (2006) also recommended a new approach for theorising new media based on the cultural concept. They define the cultural concept as an active and defining collection of ideas, as well as the broader discourses or fundamental theories that they belong to, which inform the actions of the practitioner. This means that the cultural concept actively influences the actions of the practitioner, determining how the practitioner perceives theories and discourses associated with the ideas s/he collects. Amongst the most intriguing approaches towards theorisation of new media and PR is Galloway's (2005) appeal for the development of a new cultural literacy form by professional communicators. Galloway contends "negotiating meaning systems in the mobile communications context demands use of a new language - 'txt' -and a knowledge of the protocols of this environment" (2005, p.572). This underscores the need for professional communicators to update their knowledge and enhance their familiarity with the evolving new media platforms and settings. However, it does not merely imply possession of technical knowledge. It also entails having the knowhow concerning the abbreviated, direct and swift response conventions that seize communicative instances as opposed to lengthened discussions. By testing the applicability of the two-way symmetrical model in Saudi organisations and in the context of new media, the current research will check for how often communicators in these organisations use abbreviated, direct and swift response conventions in Facebook and Twitter.

In his view, Galloway (2005) perceives these communicative instances as more spontaneous instead of structured. Moreover, they are utilised mainly for coordination and sustenance of social relations and form gratifying emotional needs, like feelings of belonging, as opposed to merely achieving task-related results. Galloway proceeds to offer the dynamic aspect of communication as a possible way of conceptualising all his arguments. This points to the consistent changes in communicative practices brought about by using new media. On assumption that Galloway is right and therefore new media communication is spontaneous and dynamic and has the capacity to instil feelings, the paradigms of PR management founded on strategic planning and assessment require to be re-examined comprehensively. Altogether, it is important to verify how applicable the comprehensive re-examination of existing PR management paradigms in the context of new media is because the theory is incomplete without the inclusion of other contexts emanating from diverse cultures, and different socio-economic environments.The next section is focused on reviewing extant literature on this.

4.3.2 PR practice and new media

Fitch (2009a) contends that there is general consideration of PR as dynamic and ever shifting in reaction to digital technology and new media. Various authors confirm this view. For instance, Hazelton, Harrison-Rexrode and Kennan (2008) contend that PR is "undergoing a revolution" (p.91). Fawkes and Gregory (2000) consider PR to be experiencing a "paradigm shift" (p.122). Hazelton, Harrison-Rexrode and Kennan (2008) agree with Fawkes and

Gregory's (2000) observation although it is unclear whether this paradigm shift is still on-going today. Solis (2008) describes PR evolution in the advent of new media as the greatest in PR history. Owyang and Toll (2007) contend that the impact of the Internet on organisational communications will be both far-reaching and instantaneous. Research by Wright and Hinson (2008) indicates that practitioners hold the belief that PR is transforming into being increasingly dialogic in reaction to new media. However, they contend that the rising number of communication channels presents a challenge to the communication management by practitioners. What is unclear is whether the said shifts, revolution and transformative beliefs by PR practitioners are universal, and therefore eminent in the Saudi private and public sectors. An absolute response to this supposition in the case of Saudi Arabia would be largely misguided, as the Saudi culture and PR practice cannot be equated to the Western contexts where the studies cited above were conducted.

In her research, Gregory (2004) defines an interesting approach to the Internet in PR. The first one originates mainly from discussions with practitioners. This approach also largely considers and utilises the different internet-based communication elements as additions of conventional methods. Therefore, email, for instance, appears to be a contemporary incarnation of the letter or memo, while a website, most of the times, appears to be a place for posting the corporate brochure in electronic form. This approach by Gregory (2004) has the capacity to account for the reason why some corporations are at fault for not optimising on the use of new media in enhancing communications and PR relations with stakeholders.

Other literature insinuates that most PR practitioners regard the Internet as another channel for effecting one-way, top-down dissemination of information in spite of recognising its capacity to increase dialogue opportunities (Dougall, Fox and Burton 2001). Practitioner surveys in different countries (Dougall, Fox and Burton 2001; Sun, Lau and Kuo 2002; Weaver, Schoenberger-Orgad and Pope 2003) hint at the probability of new media having yet to achieve complete realisation in mainstream PR. It astonishes that US research in 2006 by Goodman (2006) indicated that almost two-thirds of corporate executives in Fortune 1000 corporations were not persuaded that blogs served as a credible medium of communication. If such a timeline difference between the studies discussed in this paragraph is anything to go by, it is possible that there are not significant advancements towards new media appreciation by PR practitioners today. However, this is a far-fetched presumption and the researcher treats it as a hint that requires further research, albeit in the Saudi Telecom Company and Saudi MCI's context.

Gregory (2004) further contends that a substitute approach to the Internet acknowledges the potency, its unpopular features, and the opportunities it presents for improved, "two-way communication between an organisation and its publics" (p.246). This reveals that there are those organisations that appreciate the potency of and opportunities presented by the Internet towards enhancing communication between them and their stakeholders. Fitch (2009a) contends that the inconsistency toward new media encompasses both facets supposed by Gregory is common between practitioners. For example, practitioners could utilise the Internet for dissemination of information instead of exploiting its latency, in order to respond to the public in eloquent manners in spite of acknowledging its potential for transforming PR (Chia 2002; James 2007; Fitch 2009b). Barriers that hinder the exploitation of new media's dialogic latency include the generational gap and the digital divide - according to Hazelton, Harrison-Rexrode and Kennan (2008). One can define "generation gap" as the opinion difference that exists between individuals in different generations (Sutton 2005). On the other hand, the term "digital divide" is the variance in ICT access and use across regions, firms, households or individuals (Vehovar et al 2006). In addition, Theaker (2008) cites lack of confidence and training on the practitioners' part.

Fitch (2009a) acknowledges that this lack of new media knowledge, and especially the inadequacy of social media understanding that stresses on engagement, interactivity and participation among seasoned practitioners has repercussions for PR. Unfortunately, Fitch does not disclose what the said repercussions are, and whether they are positive and/or negative. Kelleher (2009) argues that social media platforms offer novel probabilities for PR via their authentic style of communication, and the conversational human voice. According to Owyang and Toll (2007), conventional concepts of PR, like evaluating and measuring PR activity, have yet to apply completely social media's conversation and real-time nature. These findings are relevant to the research objectives that involve finding out whether Saudi Telecom Company and Saudi MCI, as a reflection of Saudi organisations, is using social media in an ethical and two-way symmetric manner and how the usage of social media has changed the way Saudi organisations communicate. However, all these studies are of Western context, and especially the US yet organisational structures, PR mechanisms and social media reception by publics in Saudi Arabia is likely to be different.

Hazelton, Harrison-Rexrode and Kennan (2008) argue that there are three main impacts that new media has on PR. The first one is that of fragmenting mass audiences. This makes PR relatively more economical than advertising because it does not require heavy investments as are required in advertising, such as setting up of billboards and outsourcing advertising firms. The second impact is that users of new media tend to be active instead of passive. Finally, it is fundamental that practitioners have more diverse skills and knowledge for using new media in comparison to those needed in conventional PR. This last impact bears considerable implications for reputable practitioners and requires proactivity to ensure that they capitalise on new media benefits in PR. Consequently, Fitch (2009b) points out that the challenge that PR faces is to determine ways of utilising social media for the creation of better chances for participation for consultation with and by the public. The researcher in this study contends that PR practitioners must understand what social media is before they can begin to determine the best ways of utilising it for enhanced engagement of the public. The next section focuses on literature concerning social media, which together with PR form the central focus of this research.

4.4 Social media and Social Networking

According to White et al (2009), social media is synonymous with Social Networking Sites (SNSs). They further contend that SNSs are all web-based applications that enable communication, collaboration and connection between people. Usually, this is possible through the creation of user profiles making it possible for a user to share information and join networks depending on similarity in geographical positioning or interests (Mansour 2012). The researcher contends that users may refer to corporate entities and organisations without restrictions to people for the sake of this research. In an explanation by Brogan (2010), social media refers to a tool for communicating and collaborating, whereby different forms of interactions - that are otherwise impossible or difficult to undertake in the conventional way, such as talking, directly occur.

Treem and Leonardi (2012) argue that it is imperative to trace social media technologies' history in order to determine whether there are distinctions between other Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) forms that organisations often use today and social media technologies. Bercovici (2010) contends that social media first appeared in print around the year 1997. This followed Ted Leonsis', an American Online (AOL) executive, comment that it is necessary for organisations to offer customers social media. In Leonsis' perspective, social media were places offering consumer entertainment, communication and participation in a social setting (Bercovici 2010). Boyd and Ellison (2007) contend that the first publicly famous social media was SixDegrees.com, which allowed its users to create personal profiles online and make friends' lists in 1997.

Vitkauskaité (2011) agrees with Boyd and Ellison (2007), but adds that the name SixDegrees originated from the six degrees of separation concept. The concept presumes that all people are connectable with one another through a chain comprising of acquaintances that has less than five intermediaries. SixDegrees.com made it possible for users to contribute information to their network communities. Although SixDegrees.com appealed to users in there millions, it faced the challenge of transforming into a sustainable business. This prompted its closure in the year 2000 (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Pallis et al (2011) argues that a revolution in terms of social media uptake happened three years after the closure of SixDegrees.com. Rapid shifts on the World Wide Web's (WWW) global research, business and cultural contexts emerged from the revolution (Pallis et al 2011). Although it is inappropriate to discredit Pallis et al's idea of a revolution, these authors skip important occurrences in the social media history.

The establishment of Blogger and LiveJournal blogging platforms in 1999, Wikipedia in 2001, del.icio.us in 2003, MySpace in 2003, Twitter and Facebook in 2004 (Treem and Leonardi 2012) caused significant revolutions in social media history. Shirky (2008) contends that with the growth in the uptake of these technologies, social media advanced rapidly from the tech-savvy domain to the ordinary. Zickuhr (2010) reports on the findings of the American Life Project and the Pew Internet, which show that 61 per cent of individuals aged 18 and over have an experience with SNSs while at least 32 per cent have read at least one blog. From this brief history, it is clear that different authors refer to social media using diverse terminologies interchangeably.

For example, Richter et al (2009) refer to social media as Internet social networking. They proceed to contend that this is the same as the phenomenon of social networking on the Internet. Thus, the concept Richter et al (2009) introduce encompasses all activities that users of the Internet undertake in relation to extending or maintaining their social networks. In their study, Kim et al (2010) discuss social websites. They define them as platforms that make it possible for people to found online communities and share the different content that they develop. Despite these variations in terminology, Vitskauskaité (2011) contends that various researchers in the social media sites and SNSs' context have treated the two as distinct social website categories. Altogether, there is brewing consensus gradually with recent literature insinuating the rapid diminishment of distinct terminology in reference to social media. Vitkauskaité (2011) argues that despite the looseness in definition of social media, it does not include some website sections that allow people to post content they generate and share. According to Marcus and Krishnamurthi (2009), social networking services are online communities that stress on bringing people who share common interests together, in order to allow them to explore further the interests and activities of their friends.

Social media comprises three factors, which include community, Web 2.0 and content (Ahlqvist et al 2008). Web 2.0 is second generation of services that use the web as a platform and are characterised by openness for interactivity and collaboration, whose central principle is harnessing collective intelligence (O'Reilly 2005). Web 2.0 in this case serves as a tool facilitating content making or communication. User-created content comes in the form of videos, text, photos or other types of content published online account for the content factor. Creation, sharing and publishing of content often becomes more interesting when other individuals engage in the same activity, which brings about the community factor. The community factor allows members to interact, and enables them to familiarise themselves with each other and exchange information (Ahlqvist et al 2008). Social media is also defined as "internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 62). Keen inquiry into this definition reveals the Web 2.0, community and content factors discussed by Ahlqvist et al (2008).

Referential approaches to defining social media emphasise the attention people afford the potential or acts done through technology or its failure to do some things, as opposed to the means through which technology ends up being instituted jointly with the context of organisation within which it is entrenched (Leonardi 2009). Furthermore, literature focusing on the characteristics of particular technologies within organisations offers constrained understanding concerning why usage of a given technology generated certain influences (Nass and Mason 1990). Treem and Leonardi (2012) contend that numerous social media usage studies give insights concerning a particular tool in a given organisational context, but fail to underpin the outcome of social media usage theoretically.

Current social media definitions are either considerably broad as to obscure the means through which technology could affect behaviours, or they focus more on application. Ultimately, this prevents generalisations in different contexts (Treem and Leonardi 2012). However, this focus on application of social media is central to this research since the objectives gravitate around developing an understanding of social media usage for PR in Saudi public organisations, with emphasis on Saudi Telecom Company and Saudi MCI. Concerning the challenge of preventing generalisations in different contexts, the findings of this study may as well be unique to the Saudi public organisations' context with possible extension to the Gulf regions that share similar PR structures and practices. Altogether, the characterisation by Ahlqvist et al (2008) informs the definition of social media in the context of this research. Consequently, the researcher refers to social media as internet-based sites characterised by the interdependent factors including user-created content, a sense of community and Web 2.0 technology. The next section presents review of literature concerning the potential of social media with respect to PR.

4.4.1 Social media's potential in PR

Grunig (2009) applies the four PR models[1] to social media. He states that social media utilised to its full potential could offer public relations with a more interactive, strategic, global, and socially responsible and a two-way approach. Moreover, Grunig highlights the significance of the various publics. He contends that the relations an organisation builds with the immediate public matter the most, adding that organisations are not in need of relationships with the rest of the public. The immediate public in this case refers to the individuals and groups of individuals that the organisation has direct links with such as their shareholders and direct consumers. Arguably, this is a controversial stance, particularly with respect to the social media context, where Phillips and Young (2009) contend that majority of content is in the open for all the public. It is difficult to conceal information from the public once it is shared on social media considering that each individual within the public domain has a separate network that the organisation does not share in. Thus, a user with access to exclusive information from an organisation (perhaps because the privacy settings of the message only allow a certain group of social media users to access it) could still use the share function and disseminate the information to unintended audiences.

Jensen (2001) critiques this stance and argues that audiences that may not appear to be key but the public may still be vital because they participate in deliberations that eventually influence the interests of the key public. Consistent with this criticism, Ihlen (2008) is of the opinion that individuals who do not qualify as stakeholders currently might have interest in the organisation later. These arguments prompt interest to inquire into other academic works like the one by Ferber, Foltz and Pugliese (2007), which insinuate that social media actually facilitates a three-way communication model because it enables receipt of information by third parties. The term 'third parties' in this case means receipt of information by other publics in addition to the intended recipient exclusively.

The concept of third parties in the said communication model could also explain the fear of control loss over messages upon spreading them online. However, Kanter and Fine

[1] Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four PR models include the press agentry/publicity, public information ,two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical models, whose review appears at another section later.

(2010) find third party access to online information as beneficial in the sense that it broadens conversations, which is important in PR. Altogether, it is important to point out that not all broadening of conversations may be advantageous to organisations. For instance, information revealing a negative side of an organisation may best remain exclusive to immediate stakeholders and not third parties. Grunig (2009) contends that academic research concerning social media potential has undergone major developments during the previous decade, which is mainly attributable to speedy growth in Internet usage. Nonetheless, Kent and Taylor (1998) documented the potential of building relationships through the web referring to it as the “dialogic communication medium” (p.331). In other words, this means that the web is a medium of communication that promotes dialogue. However, these authors made valuable emphasis by stating that technology on its own does not have the capacity to build relationships. Instead, the outcome will be determined by the manner in which technology is used.

Breakenridge (2008) argues that focusing on essential influencers is vital. Essential influencers command a certain level of following in the online social media spheres, which makes them important links to an otherwise unreachable public. However, Marshall (2004) is of the opinion that interactivity in situations characterised by two-way information flow could be important, as any public has the potential to surpass the level of mere viewers into participants and immediate public. Online interactivity denotes stakeholder contribution and participation by the public to whom the site appeals inadvertently, or by key members of the public that organisations aim to target with novel communication tools available online (Motion 2000). There have been arguments by Quiring (2009) that interactivity involves communication exchange and that users gain increasing control over the process of communication in interactive communication. Moreover, there exist possibilities for organisations to appear more human when they engage in online communication via channels like blogs (Scoble and Israel 2006). However, it is fundamental that an organisation maintains a high authenticity level via real people deliberating on real issues in order for them to appear more human when communicating online (Kanter and Fine 2010).

Hitherto, literature reviewed in relation to social media potential largely inclines towards positive outcomes through enhanced communication between organisations and their public, particularly the key public. In this regard, literature shows that social media has the capacity to promote two-way communication between organisations and their public. There are also suggestions from literature indicating that social media usage by organisations in communication processes promotes a three-way communication model through engagement of third party public. The capacity to broaden conversation and enhance interactivity is a significant potential of social media. If this were the case, it would be interesting to substantiate the arguments through research, by investigating how the Saudi Telecom Company and Saudi MCI are using social media in their communication with stakeholders. This subsequently triggers the need to find out whether Saudi Telecom Company and Saudi MCI, as a reflection of Saudi organisations, is using social media in a two-way symmetrical manner besides uncovering social media opportunities that organisations are yet to exploit in terms of PR. In the next section, review of literature on organisational communication processes and social media use appears.

4.5 Organisational communication and affordances of social media usage

In the recent past, several commentators (Steinhuser, Smolnik and Hoppe 2011; McAfee 2006; Grudin 2006) have hinted that social media has the capacity to promote communication practices within organisations that are distinct from those related to conventional CMC technologies such as: intranets, emails, teleconferencing, instant messaging and decision support systems. Besides scholarly and academic literatures concerning the role played by social media usage in organisations, the press in the business world is on record making several bold assertions like the capacity by social media to change businesses (Baker and Green 2008). Business press has also been daring enough to ask questions like whether social apps have the potential to substitute enterprise software (DuBois 2010). This is due to the increased popularisation of social media and online social apps for provision of business solutions.

Regardless of whether people discount or believe such sentiments, the adoption of social media in organisations is happening speedily (Treem and Leonardi 2012). McKinsey, a worldwide consulting company, administered a survey whose results revealed that 65 per cent of firms reported using Web 2.0 technologies (Bughin and Chui 2010). Young et al (2008) report of another research conducted by Forrester Research in which the research firm projects that corporate expenditure on enterprise social media will exceed $4.6 billion per year by the end of 2013. These two studies indicate that corporations have realised the importance of social media use in organisations in general. However, these studies do not indicate what and how corporations are using enterprise social media for, since it is possible that organisations adopt social media for one purpose only, such as marketing alone, while ignoring other organisational aspects like communication with publics.

In spite of increased social media adoption by organisations, communication researchers have yet to understand their consequences for organisational processes (Treem and Leonardi 2012). The understanding among communication and PR researchers is even more wanting in the case of Saudi Arabia, which positions this research uniquely in the quest to establish how the usage of social media has changed the way organisations communicate. Scholars are of the opinion that adoption of social media in organisations is fast outdoing empirical understanding on the usage of social media technologies, as well as the theories concerning why they have the potential to change different organisational processes (Raeth et al 2009).

In light of the little understanding of how and why social media technologies can change organisational communication processes both empirically and theoretically, it is imperative to take a different approach to the review of extant literature to enable in-depth enquiry into what social media technologies offer organisations. In line with this approach, Treem and Leonardi (2010) contend that defining social media through the behaviour forms that they characteristically afford throughout various organisations constitutes one of the ways researchers could transcend any technologies' particularities and features. This has the advantage of enabling focus by researchers on communicative outcomes. Furthermore, defining social media through enumeration of its affordances could perhaps enable a nuanced understanding of why, how and when social media cause change within organisational practice (Treem and Leonardi 2012). These authors identify persistence, visibility, association and edit ability as the four affordances, which combined could assist in characterising that which is new and consequential, concerning social media, for processes of organisational communication. A review of literature on these four affordances of social media usage in organisations in accordance with the fourth research objective and the fourth research question appears in the next section.

4.5.1 Social Media and Visibility

In their review of literature preceding their study, Treem and Leonardi (2012) established that social media give their users the capacity to make visible their once-invisible knowledge, preferences, communication network links and behaviours to others within the organisation. These authors portray visibility as tied to the effort individuals need to expend to find information. Consistent with this notion, Brown and Duguid (2001) contend that people are unlikely to seek out information if they perceive that there is difficulty in accessing it, or they are unaware that it is available for their access. In the context of PR, the researcher in this study postulates that the public must be aware that certain organisational aspects exist in order for them to express interest in them. Therefore, the organisation is solely responsible for increasing accessibility and reaching out to the publics in effort to promote two-way symmetrical communication through social media usage. In fact, it is possible that organisations are functionally invisible to their public since even those in the same location may lack knowledge in the domain to distinguish the organisation's work from different specialties (Nardi and Engeström 1999; Cross, Borgatti and Parker 2003).

Bregman and Haythornthwaite (2001) argue that visibility is definable as the methods, opportunities and means for presentation. This is possible through comments, status updates, friending, photos, and posts, which increase visibility to everyone with access to the platform (Treem and Leonardi 2012). Boyd (2010) concurs with Grudin (2006) that the potential of social media to offer increased visibility into information and behaviours sets them apart from other technologies. This distinction is what leads to the creation of unique outcomes by social media. It is noteworthy that other CMC forms that organisations use, like instant messaging and email, increase information visibility too although not in the communal way that social media affords. For instance, communication through emails and instant messaging is somewhat restricted to designated recipients with relatively less opportunities for broadening the conversation to include undesignated recipients.

4.5.2 Social Media and Persistence

Different authors refer to persistence as an affordance of social media interchangeably as recordability (Hanckock, Toma and Ellison 2007), reviewability (Clark and Brennan 1991) or as permanence (Whitaker 2003). In the social media context, this persistence features in the sense that when the information poster logs out, the information posted remains accessible and neither disappears nor expires. Treem and Leonardi (2012) contend that in competitor technologies like videoconferencing and instant messaging, communication remains time bound and that there is no record of interaction beyond the recollection of participants. However, the researcher contends that this argument is misleading since videoconferencing technologies like Skype have features that allow recording of conversations. In this regard, social media has relatively higher potential to increase the persistence of communication by extending the continuation of conversation of communicative acts to long after the original presentation point.

Erickson and Kellogg (2000) portrayed persistence as a door opener to numerous new practices and uses. For instance, these authors argued that it is possible to search, browse, replay, annotate, visualise, restructure and re-contextualise persistent conversations with possible profound effects on social, institutional and persona practices. Clark and Brennan (1991) perceive persistence as having the capacity to assist in the establishment of shared ground in communicative environments. They argue that this shared ground has been shown to assist in transmitting multifarious ideas. Various authors (McCarthy, Miles and Monk 1991; Gergle et al 2004) agree that keeping records of previous conversations can foster proper contextualisation, allowing people ample time to understand conversations better.

The researcher concurs with this position, but faults previous works for failing to establish significance of persistence in relation to social media and public relations. However, it is possible to draw three inferences from the review of literature on social media's persistence affordance and its effect on actions of an organisation. First, social media's persistence promotes the sustenance of knowledge with time. Second, social media's persistence affords organisations robust communication forms. Finally, social media persistence affords organisations the capacity to grow content. In the context of this research, social media persistence could assist Saudi public organisations in taking advantage of the three social media potentials.

4.5.3 Social Media and Editability

Editability as a social media affordance relates to the fact that people can spend considerable amounts of effort and time in creating and recreating a communicative action prior to making it available to others (Walther 1993). Similarly, Dennis, Fuller and Valacich (2008) discuss a similar concept, which they call 'rehearsability'. They assert that 'rehearsability' makes it possible for senders to compose messages with the precise meanings that they intend. Treem and Leonardi (2012) contend that editability encompasses a function of two facets of an interaction. These include, formation of communication away from others and asynchronicity. In other words, speakers do not need to worry about controlling involuntary reactions or nonverbal cues when utilising an asynchronous CMC. Alternatively, they can pay attention to the message form that they intend to convey. However, it would be inappropriate for PR practitioners to infer carefree attitude with respect to nonverbal cues when using social media tools, as they may often be called upon to respond to stakeholder reactions to some messages sent by or on behalf of the organisation physically. In other words, some interactions through social media may extend to other communication forms especially if they trigger journalistic and mass media interest.

Editability may also mean the capacity of a person to revise or modify content that they have communicated already (Rice, 1987). This includes direct actions like erasing content and editing spelling. For instance, Facebook allows users to edit comments, statuses and posts that they have sent out already. Conversely, it is practically impossible to edit errors in other CMC media like emails once users hit the send button. Therefore, it is safe to contend that social media allows the communicator to retain a certain level of control over content after displaying it initially. To this end, editability enables the occurrence of more resolute communication, which could promote better understanding and fidelity of the message. This is achieved through allowing people the time to compose and create messages.

According to Dennis, Fuller and Valacich (2008), communication medium characterised by low synchronicity is especially beneficial when the goal of the organisation is to share previously unknown knowledge or convey information. In addition, Treem and Leonardi (2012) contend that editability enables communicators to consider the context within which the message they send is likely to be seen. This provides communicators an opportunity to customise and suit their ideas in accordance with the respective viewing context. Based on the review of literature relating to editability as a social media affordance for organisations, the researcher infers three major ways in which literature insinuates editability could shape behaviour. These include, regulation of personal expressions, enhancing quality of information and targeting content.

4.5.4 Social Media and Association

Associations refer to established links among individual persons, between content and individuals or between a presentation and an actor (Treem and Leonardi 2012). In social media, there are two forms of associations according to Treem and Leonardi (2012). The first form is that of an individual to another and is renowned as a social tie. One can best express social ties in social media through friends on social media, following micro bloggers or subscription to another individual's tags. This association type insinuates an explicit relationship between two individuals. Boyd and Ellison (2007) contend that one of the defining features of SNSs is emphasis on relations. These authors further argue that the uniqueness of SNSs rests in their capacity to enable users to express and bring to visibility their social networks.

The second association form is that of a person to an information piece. Contributions to a blog, a wiki or tagging of articles are exemplars of this association form (Treem and Leonardi 2012). Various authors (Chen et al 2009; Ferron et al 2010; Wu et al 2010) write about countless features of SNS that afford association, these include relations with friends and followers, opinion and comments such as the 'Like' buttons and activity logs of relations. The people-to-people, people-to-content or content-to-content associations that social media affords its users have possible implications for both potential audiences and users. First, research (Wellman et al 2001; DiMaggio et al 2001; Blanchard and Horan 1998) has revealed that relationships developed through various CMC media could offer individuals a social capital form. Social capital is a type of capital that is created when individuals develop relationships through engagements such as cultural groups, recreational activities and professional associations (Taylor 2010).

Contrary to arguments that online communication is likely to isolate users, this research line demonstrates that the connectivity that CMC affords has the capacity to bring individuals together, aid in building a greater community sense and supplement extant relationships. Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) established that Facebook use gave college students elevated social capital among colleagues. Although their study was not in an organisational context, their findings confirm that social media affordances include various associations via both active associations and those proposed via various features of social media technology. Following the review of literature concerning association as an affordance of social media, the researcher infers three outcomes. First, social media supports social connection. Second, social media affords access to pertinent information. Third, social media enables emergent connection, which means that individuals and organisations have access to potential, but non-extant associations. There is need however, to fill the gap in literature concerning social media opportunities that organisations are yet to exploit in terms of public relations in Saudi Arabia. Literature reviewed on social media affordances to organisations will be crucial in informing research on Saudi Telecom Company and Saudi MCI in this respect. In the next section, the focus shifts to literature concerning the network theory.

4.6 Network theory

In "The Information Age" trilogy by Castells (2001), the author refers to the society today as a network society. He proceeds to suggest a hypothesis contending that every essential change tendencies that comprise the 'confusing' new world correlate with one another. In addition, he argues that there exists a notable significance in the said interrelations. Castells (2001) is of the opinion that technology processes information, which is more important as opposed to information that enables the processing of technology as it was with former technological evolutions. Therefore, a determining aspect of network society is the factual premise that information stands out as the most vital commodity. Based on this new society form, Castells (2001) assumes the evolution of a novel economic system that is global, networked and informational. Hepp (2011), as cited in Sievert and Nelke (2012), criticises that both the network society theory and the work completed by other scientists in relation to this topic offering substantive proof about the importance of incorporating the theories of communication network culture. This entails how people within the network society act and communicate.

Jansen and Diaz-Bone (2011) argue that the network theory assumes the existence of connections between all individuals via an astoundingly short chain of relations and/or friends. These authors contend that a small count of cosmopolitans who have a large network of information known within a regional network and that are available to be contacted for a transfer account for this instance. The author of the current study agrees that few individuals with large networks act as links/ties to many individuals with small networks. In the case of Facebook, for instance, individuals with larger numbers of friends tend to have more mutual friends with users that have smaller number of friends (Das and Sahoo 2011).

Crowdsourcing, another network theory (Gassmann 2007), postulates that consumers actively engage in designing the products that they consume. Through the crowdsourcing approach, the discovery of new ideologies happens by applying mass intelligence or existence in clusters. Mass intelligence entails combining the information from mass feedback from users for the purposes of extracting patterns and trends that are impossible to extract using single content items (Solachidis et al 2008). Sievert and Nelke (2012) contend that online communication is responsible for making crowdsourcing an effective tool for product development. However, a question arises as to whether and how, if so, crowdsourcing would be beneficial to PR practice without involving product development and/or consumption.

Altogether, Surowiecki (2005) espouses the position by Sievert and Nelke in voicing the crowds'wisdom. Surowiecki presumes that groups possess more knowledge in comparison to clever individuals. Consequently, decisions profit from numerous contributions of opinions by different people. However, Surowiecki (2005) fails to factor in that although decisions may be richer when factoring in numerous opinions, time taken in making some decisions should be as short as possible in some practices like PR. Therefore, involving crowd wisdom in the process of making a decision could hamper the effectiveness of the decision in long run. An example of time-bound decisions in PR could be response to negative propaganda about an organisation, where practitioners must act swiftly to counteract the possible virulence of negative publicity.

In brief, all the network theories and approaches discussed in this section have their foundation on the importance of technical innovations, the impact they have on communication and on the global networks of people with access to online media. Essentially, all the network theories commonly uphold the intrinsic presumption that sharing of opinions and information could result in an anticipated new element. They also share in common that organisations have the capacity to utilise the new opportunities provided by the networks for their own benefit. Understanding this from theoretical premises constitutes a substantially beneficial asset for internal communication's strategic practice. Ultimately, network theories tied in with the affordances of social media, as discussed in the previous section, are crucial to the current research's investigation on uncovering the social media opportunities that organisations are yet to exploit in terms of public relations.

4.7 Change management and PR communication

Undoubtedly, and as mentioned earlier on, social media is causing significant changes in public communications and PR practice in the public sphere. However, it is unclear how PR practitioners, especially in Saudi Arabia, are managing or surviving through the change in public communications and PR practice and the impact such management of change would have on the applicability and/or application of the two-way symmetrical model. Understanding change management in the context of PR communication in this section is important in bringing out possible explanations as to why Saudi PR practitioners and organisations are handling PR communication in ethical and two-way communication. Gadd and Einbinder (2010) define change management as a systematic approach for transitioning organisations, teams and individuals from a present state to a projected state in future. This definition insinuates that change management encompasses both management processes of organisation change and models of individual change management. Together, these two are employed in managing the people aspect of change (Sievert and Nelke 2012). However, it is unfortunate that in this context, as is the case in many others, there is no explicit mention of communication, despite communication becoming crucial. Consequently, extant literature does not mention explicitly the impact of communication change on organisations with respect to such change being because of social media.

Thus, communication and leadership are decisive indicators within the change process (Sievert and Nelke 2012). According to Grunig et al (2002), internal communication is an important component of complete communication management. Sievert and Westermann (2009) also found similar results through an interview survey that involved 235 general managers and 265 PR professionals, all from Germany. The findings showed that communication executives and professionals in general management held considerably divergent perceptions concerning their respective roles within the change process. Of the communication professionals, 23 per cent indicated that company communicators should also take up roles of controlling the change processes. However, only 11 per cent of general management concurred with this. Additionally, only 16 per cent of general management respondents associated communication with the leading role in change processes. Conversely, 25 per cent among the communication professionals thought otherwise (Sievert and Westermann 2009). This means that most of the practitioners perceive communication in an organisation as a reserve of a certain clique of professionals. The impact is that the communication intended to flow from one organisation in a unitary manner often suffers disintegration because it leaves out some important actors such as communicators in the organisation. On the other hand, management might not always have a clear understanding of how to frame communication, yet controls the change processes within an organisation. Thus, the change processes might not always be received as they would if the communicators were involved in the control of change processes.

4.8 Theoretical foundations for current research

The cross-cultural analysis is another supportive theoretical premise, especially considering public relations practice in the KSA context and the larger Middle Eastern region that seemingly shares commonness of culture although the impact of new media is significant. In the context of Middle Eastern blogging, for instance, Beckerman (2007) portrays blogs as diaries and personal op-ed pages, which reveal “a hidden trove of multiple perspectives in a world that the West often imagines as having only one perspective” (p.18). This argument points at the diversity of perspectives that differ from the perspective by the West alone. Additionally, Dewdney and Ride (2006) suggest the theorisation of new media usage from a cultural concept perspective that refers to “an active and shaping set of ideas, and the underlying theories or wider discourses to which they belong, informs what the practitioner does” (p.8). Therefore, it is highly likely that culture plays a significant role in informing what practitioners do. In addition, this position insinuates that theoretical applications could differ across various cultures.

With respect to organisational communication, Galushkin (2003) theorises the challenging facets of social presence theory and media richness theory. Short, Williams and Christie (1976) pioneered the social presence theory and defined it as “the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships” (p.65). They hypothesised that social presence constitutes a significant communication medium’s factor, which implies that social presence influences the choice of the medium of communication. Wong and Lai (2005) acknowledge that social presence theory is important in explaining the impact of communication media. On the other hand, the media richness theory pioneered by Daft and Lengel (1986), in the course of their investigation, attempts to explain why organisations undertake information processing. They established that organisations do this to decrease ambiguity and uncertainty. Social presence theory and media richness theory are critical in the context of this research. This is because an understanding based on these two theories will relate closely to the response to the research question concerning how social media has changed the way organisations communicate.

Castells (2001) refers to the society today as a network society. In addition, he postulates that all the core likelihoods of change that form the new world and which confuses him associate with each other and that there is a notable significance across these interrelations. As such, information is the most crucial commodity as a defining network society feature and this theoretical stance will prove significant in understanding how organisations like Saudi Telecom Company and Saudi MCI achieve information communication symmetry, if at all.

In relation to the change introduced in organisational communication and public relations by the emergence and application of new media and especially social media, it is imperative to investigate the general reception of social networks and social media in external communication. Topical works focusing on one medium and within interdisciplinary texts social media are overlooked frequently, notwithstanding the comparatively recent publication dates on the applied PR theory (Sievert and Nelke 2012). Botan and Taylor (2004) pointed out that research driven by theory in public relations has assumed a co-creational dimension in which case groups and publics play the role of meaning co-creators. This co-creational approach investigates the development of meaning via communication and as the formulation of relationships across organisations and groups. Generally, co-creational theories perceive communication, co-constructed meaning and relationships as essential presumptions of the manner in which public relations functions within society (Taylor 2010).

In reference to the objectives and literature reviewed, the first research objective in this study forms the foundation for establishing the possibility of social media usage in communication with stakeholders. According to Hird (2011), the trend towards social media usage for communication in business arenas is expanding as the users of social media concurrently continue to rise. The various kinds of social media give organisations a chance to participate in conversations through the Internet and debates about organisations occur online consistently (Brown 2009). However, there is still an unexplored research area of how organisations actually use social media when communicating with stakeholders, especially in the Saudi Arabian context. Therefore, it would be important to find out how private and public organisations use Facebook and Twitter when communicating with stakeholders. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H$_1$: There is a significant difference in terms of how Saudi private and public organisations engage their publics

As for the second research objective, Bowen (2004) notes that academics contend that ethics ought to be a generic excellence principle in public relations. In other words, ethics should be a central component of PR practice. Coombs and Holladay (2010) reiterate this significance and mention the poor reputation that public relations have with respect to ethics. Through the demonstration of authenticity, organisations are likely to obtain vital trust from their publics according to L'Etang (2008). In fact, Coombs and Holladay (2010) contend that open conversations stand out as essential facets of modern public relations for the purposes of pursuing interactivity, ethical behaviour and transparency. By examining whether STC and Saudi MCI, as reflections of Saudi private and public organisations, are using Facebook and Twitter in ethical and two-way symmetric manners, the researcher will be in a better position to make proper recommendations for enhancement or sustenance of ethical and two-way symmetrical social media usage. To respond to the second research question from an informed position, the following hypotheses were developed:

H$_2$: Ethical usage of Facebook and Twitter between private and public organisations differs significantly

H$_3$: A significant difference exists in the extent to which private and public organisations use Facebook and Twitter in two-way symmetric manners

In the past, many commentators have stated the opinion that social media technologies have the capacity to enhance communication practices within organisations that are distinct from those using classical computer-mediated communication technologies such as teleconferencing, email and intranets (Smolnik and Hoppe 2011; McAfee 2006; Grudin 2006). Interestingly, Raeth et al (2009) contend that the adoption of social media in organisations consistently surpasses empirical understanding on their usage, and our theoretical suggestions concerning why they could change a variety of organisational processes. These inconsistencies and raging debates inform the need for the researcher in the current study to investigate how the usage of social media has changed the way organisations in the Saudi private and public sectors communicate, as addressed through the third research objective. In line with the third objective, the researcher formulated the following research hypothesis:

H$_4$: Private and public organisations differ significantly in how the use of social media has enhanced the communication practices within these organisations

Various literatures in the context of optimal social media usage in organisations inform the need for the fourth research objective, which entails uncovering social media opportunities that organisations are yet to exploit in terms of public relations. For example, Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012) conducted a research investigating how 73 US not-for-profit organisations used Twitter in engaging stakeholders through tweets and other various methods. They analysed 4,655 tweets and the findings showed that the largest not-for-profit organisations were not making use of Twitter to optimise stakeholder engagement. This was an indication that organisations were yet to embrace social media platforms such as Twitter. They instead utilise social media as a one-way channel of communication, which oftentimes inhibits the chances of participation by stakeholders in important communications. Although the study by Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012) was on US non-profit organisations, it would be interesting to investigate the matter on for-profit private and public organisations within a Saudi Arabian context. This is because findings on this objective are likely to contribute significantly to extant literature on social media usage, public relations and stakeholder involvement from a non-western context. In the context of this research, stakeholders comprise anyone that can be affected by or affect an organisation including customers, employees, suppliers, and investors. The findings by Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012) inspire the following hypothesis in this research whereby engagement refers to involving stakeholders in active dialogic conversations:

H_5: Both STC and Saudi MCI are using Twitter and Facebook to optimise stakeholder engagement

There has been widespread application of the two-way symmetrical communication model proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984) and further endorsed by Grunig (2009) in different research contexts and particularly in the West. However, the application of this model in the Gulf and particularly in the Saudi context is not validated through empirical research to the best of the researcher's knowledge. On the other hand, Alfonso and Miguel (2006) argue that that new media does provide a means for increasing two-way symmetrical communication. However, PR practitioners have yet to completely embrace new media, appear ill equipped for such an adoption, and are afraid of the technology involved. In this regard, it remains unclear as to whether new media and especially Twitter and Facebook have been used ethically in Saudi Arabia, especially in line with the two-way symmetrical communication model. This is especially important considering that Saudi Arabians are among the largest internet adopters (Al-Saggaf 2012) with equally acceptable representation on both Facebook and Twitter (Al-Saggaf 2012; Muhammad 2013).

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1Research Strategy

5.1.1 Qualitative research

This research strategy involves the understanding of meanings, behaviours and opinions to reach tentative theories and hypotheses or to develop artefacts, inventions and computer systems (Håkansson 2013). Usually, qualitative research utilises smaller sets of data that are adequate to accomplishing dependable results, through consistent data analysis until saturation (Håkansson 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) contended that qualitative research comprises a situated task, which situates the observer within the world. In addition, these authors added that qualitative research entails “an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p.3). Thus, qualitative researchers investigate people and things in their natural environments, trying to interpret or make sense of phenomena in relation to the meanings humans accord them. In the context of this study, this would imply studying PR practice and social media usage in Saudi public and private organisations within the organisational settings (natural world). It would also mean determining the meanings PR practitioners and the public accord two-way symmetrical communication.

Qualitative research is advantageous over the quantitative research strategy for allowing detailed exploration of the topic of interest whereby the researcher garners information using studies, interviews, observations, ethnographic works and so on (Harwell 2011). Furthermore, qualitative research enables interactions between the researcher and the participants within the naturalistic environments of the latter with hardly any restrictions. Consequently, this leads to enhanced flexibility and openness in the research process (Harwell 2011). However, this also implies that divergent findings may be realised from one participant subject to whom the researcher is. This is because both the research and the participant ‘create’ the findings within a given situation and this affects the generalizability of and the ability to replicate findings of qualitative research (Creswell 2014).

The other demerit associated with qualitative research, especially in comparison to quantitative methods is that the data collection process demands high interpersonal skills level and creativity on the researcher’s part. Additionally, data accessing opportunities may cause researchers emotional/psychological stresses, limitations and dangers on certain instances (Tewksbury 2009). Most of these challenges were especially significant in the context of this study since getting research consent from Saudi MCI and STC was particularly cumbersome and at times required the researcher to make personal appearances at the organisations, which turned out expensive and time-consuming. Indeed, it took months of pursuit and persuasion to get the consent of the respective organisations for the researcher to conduct interviews with their employees. Tewksbury (2009) has indicated that the establishment, maintenances and at times termination of relationships between the participants being studied and the researcher could prove quite challenging, as was the case in this research. However, the researcher successfully managed to master the extra challenges of building friendships, managing relationships and hoped to exit from the organisations upon completion of research without any hindrances that would deter the research process as recommended by Tewksbury (2009).

5.1.2Quantitative research

MacDonald and Headlam (2011) describe quantitative research techniques as those that are used for gathering numerical/quantitative data that one can sort, classify and measure. The rationale behind and the purpose of quantitative research methods is to try to optimise objectivity, generalizability and replicability of findings. Quantitative researchers normally show interest in making predictions and the expectations that they will set aside their perceptions, biases and experiences to make sure of objectivity in the study conduct and conclusions reached (Harwell 2011). Data are usually collected through instruments that are more structured than those used in qualitative research and the findings are based on bigger samples (Babbie 2013). Quantitative research has been broadly associated with the classification of features, development of variables, counting them, and constructing statistical models in a manner to elucidate on observations made (Wilson 2014; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2012). The importance of this characterisation of quantitative research to the current study was threefold. First, it was necessary for the researcher to identify the features of the two-way symmetrical model as applied in previous studies and as particularly explained by Grunig (2009) and Grunig and Hunt (1984). This further assisted in the testing of the hypotheses based on extant literature in PR, media, communication and journalism fields introduced in the first chapter concerning the PR communication use of Facebook and Twitter in PR in Saudi MCI and STC. It was also necessary to determine underlying relationships between the variables that explain the use of Facebook and Twitter in Saudi organisations for PR and communication with the publics. This is because quantitative methods utilise hypothetical-deductive models that are key to revealing statistically significant relationships across variables and general testing (Pratt 2009). Second, it was vital that the findings of this study be replicable and generalizable especially considering that this is the first research to investigate the application and applicability of the two-way symmetrical model in PR practice in the wake of proliferate use of Facebook and Twitter in Saudi Arabia. Third, employing quantitative research was necessary in quantifying observations, responding to the research questions seeking to establish whether and the extent to which the use of Facebook and Twitter by STC and Saudi MCI in communicating with their publics is ethical and two-way symmetric.

5.1.3Contextual criticism of quantitative and qualitative research strategies

Nonetheless, employing the quantitative research strategy exclusively would have denied the researcher an opportunity to interact with the PR practitioners at Saudi MCI and STC. This was essential in the development of deeper insights concerning how much the practice of PR in the organisational environments was integrated with the development of social media tools. This is because quantitative research has been faulted because of its comparatively limited ability to address issues concerning describing, interpreting and explaining results as well as the qualitative research strategy (Bluhm et al 2010). This implies the possibility of excluding crucial descriptions of phenomena such as why PR communication in Saudi public and private organisations is or is not two-way, symmetrical and/or ethical. In addition, probing for explanations from participants concerning the responses they give is not normally associated with the quantitative research strategy due to its inclination towards positivism/post-positivism, which entails objectivity through autonomy of the researcher from the study. Conversely and fortunately so, qualitative research especially when using semi-structured interviews to collect data enables the researcher an opportunity to probe interviewees for explanations and clarifications of their responses for better understanding (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2012).

Employing qualitative research methods was helpful in this research since it allowed the researcher an experience into the real world of PR practice at Saudi MCI and STC for the examination of how these two organisations were utilising social media in PR practice. In addition, qualitative data collected from their Facebook and Twitter sites were useful in understanding the public view of social media use for communication and PR practice with their organisations. However, employing qualitative research methods would have been limiting in terms of achieving replicability and generalizability of the findings of this study. For example, qualitative research was beneficial in establishing patterns and trends of data. However, relying on qualitative research methods alone would have made it difficult to measure the strength of underlying causal associations, patterns and trends of Facebook and Twitter use and the two-way symmetrical communication. The extent to which the two-way symmetrical model was applicable at Saudi MCI and STC as a reflection of the public and private organisations in Saudi Arabia would also have been difficult to determine. Therefore, it was necessary to incorporate quantitative research to compensate for these limitations, which optimise replicability, generalizability and objectivity as indicated earlier.

5.1.4 Implementation of mixed methods in this study

The research process in this study followed a combination of parallel and sequential mixed methods research strategy concepts of an exploratory and explanatory nature. This entailed a single phased design where both quantitative and qualitative data collection were executed independent of the other. In other words, as questionnaire data was being gathered online, the researcher was conducting interviews at STC and Saudi MCI at the same time. However, data analyses were conducted in two phases, starting with quantitative survey data followed by the analyses of social media data and interview data respectively as shall be explained at Section 4.6.

5.1.5 Cross-sectional research design

Cross-sectional research designs are also known as survey designs. They entail data collection from numerous cases “at a single point in time” (Wilson 2014, p.112). This enables the completion of research over a comparatively short period. Gravetter and Forzano (2012) cite the major benefit of cross-sectional research design as being time and cost efficiency. This is because researchers do not need to incur expense and time while tracking down participants and encouraging their continued participation in the research. Based on this argument, one would then contend that cross-sectional research designs have comparatively fewer chances of participants dropping out of research than in longitudinal studies. Moreover, it is highly likely that the impact of participants dropping out of a cross-sectional study is less compared to when participants drop out of longitudinal research designs as finding replacements in the latter case could even prove impossible.

On their down side, Gravetter and Forzano (2012) argued that the internal validity of cross-sectional studies has been questioned, because a cross-sectional design may not fully account for generation or cohort effects (environmental factors distinguishing one age group from another). Whereas there are no grounds for disputing this in the context of the current research, these two factors were deemed unlikely to affect the outcome of this study, as it was not individual-, cohort-, or generation-based research as much as it was practice-based.

Thus, a cross-sectional research design was adopted to address the research questions and ultimately accomplish the research objectives based on four major reasons. Firstly, the research questions were more inclined towards a cross-sectional research design being what, how and how much type of questions that required participation by numerous individuals over a short period of time (Wilson 2014). Secondly, the purpose of this study was to provide a snapshot investigation on the use of social media to understand the magnitude of ethical implementation of two-way symmetrical communications by the companies with their publics through social media in addition to offering guidelines on the increasingly famed public relations' area. Thirdly, the researcher was more conversant with cross-sectional research designs having conducted a survey-based study for his Masters' thesis and the need to advance knowledge in this research design was most appealing. Fourthly, a cross-sectional research design allowed for the successful completion of this study within the university and the researcher's doctoral research timeline and within budget.

5.1.6 Archival research design

Archival research design, interchangeably called raw data is related to public documents or records (Wilson 2014). This design entails access to secondary data appearing as it was originally intended. It may also include country reports, business reports, minutes of meetings, and staff records (Wilson 2014). Gravetter and Forzano (2012) defined archival research as entailing recording of behaviours from records of history. This definition is perhaps enough to account for why Wilson (2014) found archival research to be highly favoured by historians. However, the author of this paper is of the opinion that one might question what the term 'history' in this case means, and how far back in time history can be called history in archival research. For example, this study entailed the collection of tweets and Facebook posts made minutes, hours, days and months ago on the STC and Saudi MCI Twitter handles and Facebook pages. Would this constitute historical records and therefore qualify as archival data? Vogt et al (2014) resolved this dilemma by including social media messages as types of archive. This explains why it is possible for researchers in non-historical fields or disciplines to utilise archival data to conduct archival analysis in an exploratory research before undertaking a more detailed study (Wilson 2014). Additionally, archival research comprises literature reviews (Vogt et al 2014), which constitute the second and the third chapters of this dissertation. Thus, aspects of archival research design and particularly archival data as will be explained under the data collection section were used to supplement the survey cross-sectional research design although the latter was predominant.

1.1.4.1 Comparative research design

Wilson (2014) contended, "A comparative research design compares two or more groups on one variable" (p.113). It has the potential to generate interesting findings concerning two groups or organisations and is especially beneficial when the researcher intends to compare and make conclusions from findings. On the other hand, comparative research designs are likely to pose problems when the subject groups interpret the variable of comparison differently (Wilson 2014). For example, it is likely that the way Saudi private organisations e.g. STC interpret trust, reputation and transparency as elements of two-way symmetrical communication differs from how government/public organisations e.g. Saudi MCI interpret the variables. Although the aim and purpose of this study were not designed to compare the use of Facebook and Twitter in PR practice and the application/applicability of the two-way symmetrical model at STC and Saudi MCI, the findings may render themselves comparable. Therefore, the comparative research design was not the original intention of the researcher, but the nature of the organisations under investigation rendered the findings or research outcome comparative.

In brief, the overarching research design for this study was cross-sectional, supplemented by aspects of archival data and resulting in comparative research outcomes. The study was designed as cross-sectional using surveys and archival data from STC and Saudi MCI Facebook pages and Twitter handles. The rationale was to identify the use of social media by companies in the Saudi Private and Public sectors and to understand the magnitude of ethical implementation of two-way symmetrical communications by the companies with their publics through social media in addition to offering guidelines on the increasingly famed public relations' area. The findings rendered themselves comparable because the choice of organisations was from the public and private sectors. In the next section, the data collection methods employed in this research are explained.

5.2 Data collection

The Honeycomb of Research Methodology identifies four methods of data collection, which include interviews, questionnaires, observation and secondary data (Wilson 2014). It is imperative to point out that the first three methods are primary data collection methods whereas secondary data involves collection of data that was intended for other purposes other than the purpose of the current research (Wilson 2014; Creswell 2014; Bryman 2012). On the other hand, document analysis; literature reviews, big data and archival data such as social media messages, posts or comments are secondary data collection methods (Vogt et al 2014). The researcher used interviews to collect primary qualitative data, questionnaires to collect primary quantitative data and qualitative archival secondary data collected from the STC and Saudi MCI Facebook pages and Twitter handles as explained in the next subsequent section.

5.2.1 Interviews

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) discussed three types of interviews. These include semi-structured, structured and unstructured interviews. Whereas unstructured interviews allow interviewees the liberty of responding freely as in a conversation, structured interviews contain a set of stringently designed questions/prompts in an inflexible order that an interviewer guides an interviewee into responding without allowing for further probing or clarification by the interviewer (Bryman 2012). Furthermore, an interviewer employing structured interviews only poses the questions/prompts as outlined in the interview guide. As for semi-structured interviews, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) describe them as the convergence between structured and unstructured interviews. This is because semi-structured interview types allow the interviewer to follow the interview guide when posing questions/prompts although the interviewer may also ask questions that are not necessarily outlined in the interview guide such as seeking clarifications and probing the interviewee for more information without being coercive (Bryman 2012).

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data because they allowed for the flexibility of the researcher to follow an interview guide in a non-rigid manner and the ability to ask questions that were not necessarily in the interview guide yet were necessary depending on the response given by the interviewee. This allowed for the generation of deeper and richer insights from the interviewees that would have been left out had the researcher employed structured interviews. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to interject politely and steer the interview sessions towards addressing the research objectives when he felt that interviewees were digressing from them. This may not have been possible had the researcher opted for unstructured interviews.

5.2.2 Target population and sampling

The target population for the qualitative interviews' phase comprised the PR practitioners and communication officers at STC and Saudi MCI respectively. In order to ensure the identification of an informed sample for the study, the researcher employed non-random, non-probability purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is synonymous with judgmental sampling and entails the selection of participants or cases in a strategic manner to ensure that those qualifying in the sample gratify a given criteria that makes them more relevant to the research questions than their counterparts in the population (Bryman 2012). Purposive sampling has the benefit of ensuring the selection of information-rich participants (Patton 2002) that are relevant in addressing the research objectives (Bryman 2012) and therefore most likely to ensure insightful contributions to research findings. However, purposive sampling has been faulted for not allowing the generalization of a population by the researcher (Bryman 2012). To counteract the possible negative impact of this limitation, criteria were set to ensure that the interviewees selected had more experience with the two organisations featured in this study in their respective fields of practice.

The criterion used for selection was that all interviewees participating in this research from STC must have been working with the organisation at least by March 2009, which was six months prior to the creation of the STC Twitter handle (@STC_KSA) and the STC Facebook page in September 2009. For interviewees drawn from Saudi MCI, they had to have been working with the organisation at least six months before the creation of the @SaudiMCI Twitter handle in July 2011 i.e. by end of January 2011. The choice of the Saudi MCI Twitter handle as the criterion for interviewee selection was based on the realisation that the Ministry's Facebook page was created on 15 April 2012, which was after the creation of the Twitter handle. The researcher figured that six months was enough time for a PR or communication practitioner to develop conversance with a PR and communication system before the adoption of social media by the respective organisations.

5.2.3 The interview process

The interview process began with the researcher establishing contact with the senior management in charge of PR and communication at STC and Saudi MCI prior to contacting the individual potential interviewees. The researcher then went ahead to issue the participant invitation letters (see Appendix 1). All potential interviewees who honoured the invitation were then issued with the participant information sheet (see Appendix 2) and the participant consent form (see Appendix 3). The researcher then scheduled interviews with each of the potential interviewees based on the availability of the interviewees. All interviews were conducted in Arabic face-to-face at agreed venues and the sessions were audio-recorded for transcription, coding and eventual analysis. The interview sessions lasted between 30 and 55 minutes. The interview guide (see Appendix 4) had identical questions except that the names of the organisations were altered from STC to Saudi MCI. The interviews were then translated from Arabic to English by the researcher through an iterative process to verify accurateness and representation of facts provided by the interviewees in the reporting of findings.

5.2.4 Questionnaires

Questionnaires comprise of sets of structured, close-ended or open-ended statements that serve as prompts those respondents respond to (Bryman 2012; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2012). Wilson (2014) argued that questionnaires differ from interviews based only on the mode of administration whereby the former entails self-administration and in the latter, the interviewer administers the questionnaire. However, the author of this paper refutes this as being the sole difference between interviews and questionnaires especially considering that the former are intended to collect qualitative data while the latter are designed to collect quantifiable or quantitative data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2012). Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that both interviews and questionnaires are data collection instruments used in survey research designs (Vogt et al 2014). The merits associated with the use of questionnaires to collect quantitative data including cost efficiency, and the ability to allow the researcher to work on other research areas while the respondents complete the survey (Bryman 2012) appealed to the researcher the most.

5.2.5 The data collection instrument

Two questionnaires were developed whereby one was made for collecting data related to Facebook and the other one related to Twitter (see Appendix 5a and Appendix 5b respectively). The questionnaire used to collect data in this study contained three sections. The first section sourced for demographic data including gender, age and a question on whether the respondents were Saudi nationals. The last question was to ensure that only questionnaires from Saudi nationals were used in the final data analysis. The researcher figured that collecting data from Saudi nationals would help in mitigating any potential risks of cross-cultural impact as culture plays an important role in reception and usage of technology including new media like Facebook and Twitter (James 2007; Beckerman 2007).

The second section of the questionnaire contained two Boolean type (Yes/No) questions. These questions prompted the respondents for information concerning their Twitter/Facebook usage including whether they were Twitter followers or Facebook likers of STC and/or Saudi MCI. The second question in this section required the respondents to indicate whether they had interacted with the organisation in question through the two social media platforms. The purpose of these two questions was to serve as checks for misrepresentation of facts by respondents who had not had any experience with STC/Saudi MCI's public relations via Facebook/Twitter.

The third section of the questionnaire contained 25 prompts drawn from postulations and arguments in literature and aligned to the research objectives. Respondents were required to score the item against a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The Likert scale was chosen because of the various advantages associated with it as outlined by Monette et al (2014). First, the Likert scale ranks highly in popularity among the most common multiple item scales. Second, using the Likert scale provided the respondents with more choices than the constrained Yes/No responses. Third, the researcher was convinced that data generated from the Likert scale prompts would allow for more powerful inferential statistical operations than would be possible with nominal data. Finally, using Likert scale prompts were comparatively straightforward for respondents considering that they were not personally interacting with the researcher when completing the survey based on the mode of administration. On the other hand, the researcher was cautious in presenting the findings and making inferences based on the Likert scale data based on the understanding that Likert scale responses are summaries of data with underlying information that could be lost or hidden. In other words, "the summary score might hide information about patterns of variation in responses" (Monette et al 2014, p.352). Thus, the prompts were drawn out of literature reviewed in the literature review to ensure that results obtained thereof may be accounted for in extant literature already or offer more insights to existing literature albeit in a Saudi context.

5.2.6 Questionnaire administration

The questionnaire was designed using Google forms, which are free applications that allow for the design and collection of data through online surveys. The main reason for the choice of a web-based survey was the fact that the research centred on web-based social media platforms and the aim was to identify the use of social media in PR practice in Saudi organisations. In addition, web surveys are faster ways of reaching larger populations and their cost is considerably minimal (Jugenheimer et al 2014).

On the downside, Jugenheimer et al (2014) have termed the generation of random samples for the purposes of making research findings generalizable is not possible. This limitation was true to this study because there was no way the researcher could conduct random sampling of the public through the STC and Saudi MCI Facebook pages and Twitter handles as he did not have administrative rights to these social media platforms. Lack of control over respondents is another limitation associated with web surveys and attributable to the open nature of online networks (Vehovar and Manfred 2008). As delimitation, the researcher convinced the administrators of STC and Saudi MCI's Facebook pages and Twitter handles to pin the link to the survey on the Facebook pages and Twitter handles of the two organisations. While it is true that it was not possible to control who completes the questionnaire, the researcher only analysed data obtained from Saudi nationals who were likers or followers of STC and Saudi MCI on Facebook or Twitter respectively. Moreover, questionnaires from respondents that had not interacted with STC or Saudi MCI through their Facebook pages and Twitter handles at least once were not considered for further analyses.

The need to contextualise each questionnaire based on the organisation and the social media platform being addressed emerged during discussions between the researcher and a friend that had just completed his doctorate. This led to the development of two questionnaires with the same questions for the organisations' Facebook/Twitter platforms. In other words, the researcher made a universal questionnaire for data collection through the organisations' Facebook pages and the Twitter handles. These questionnaires appear at Appendices 5a and 5b in the order mentioned. For example, it would not make sense to post a questionnaire about STC's Facebook usage in relation to PR on its Twitter handle as this could get participants confused.

5.2.7 Reliability

Reliability is about the capacity of a study to generate consistent findings with those of the original study when repeated (Jugenheimer et al 2014; Monette et al 2014). Reliability of quantitative findings in this study was ensured in three ways. The first one was in the questionnaire prompts that allowed for the selection of respondents who had to be Saudi nationals, were likers or followers of STC and MCI on Facebook and/or Twitter respectively and had interacted with the organisations at least on one occasion through the social media platforms. Secondly, an internal reliability test was conducted for all questionnaire items based on Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha is relevant in multiple-item measures as it measures the stability, validity and internal consistency of numerous variables (Bryman 2012). All questionnaire items scoring a Cronbach's coefficient below the recommended 0.70 score by Bryman (2012) were exempted from further analysis.

Thirdly, the split-half method of testing for reliability of responses was employed where questionnaires were divided based on every fifth questionnaire. For example, the fifth questionnaire was placed in the first group, the tenth questionnaire in the second group, the fifteenth questionnaire in the first group and so on. The split-half method entails random division of questions concerning one topic between two groups and the researcher then compares the responses (Jugenheimer et al 2014). Three sets of paired samples t-test on the means of the responses in the two randomly divided questionnaires were then conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the responses between the scores of the two sets of questionnaires based on three questions drawn from the third section of the questionnaire.

5.2.8 Validity

Validity deals with whether the study achieved its intended purpose (Jugenheimer et al 2014). Internal and external validity are the two types of validity. Internal validity tests whether the research found out what it was designed to establish. In the context of this research, internal validity was about whether the research established the magnitude of ethical implementation of two-way symmetrical communications by STC and Saudi MCI with their publics through social media in addition to offering guidelines on the increasingly important public relations'areas. To ensure internal validity, the questionnaire used in this study contained custom-made prompts that were traceable to the respective research objectives and the research questions. Secondly, incomplete questionnaires were excluded from analysis of data.

On the other hand, external validity deals with how valid generalised statements are based on inadequate studies or insinuating that a certain variable caused variation in another, without substantive evidence to back that up (Jugenheimer et al 2014). The majority of external validity problems in studies involving human participants are said to be traceable to three major issues. The first issue entails employing small samples recruited from one geographic locale. The second issue involves recruiting samples characterised by idiosyncratic traits such as going for volunteer participation instead of sample representativeness. Finally, coercing reluctant respondents to offer information also creates external validity problems (Jugenheimer et al 2014). For this study, external validity was ensured through web administration of the questionnaire, which overcame the possible problem of constrained geographic boundaries for respondents. Although questionnaire respondents were allowed to self-select voluntarily into the sample through convenience sampling, this served to eliminate any chances of respondent coercion by the researcher. To determine how suitable the questionnaire was in terms of relevance and ease of understanding the prompts, the researcher conducted a pilot test with five respondents including two doctorate students from the Saudi Community in Salford, one lecturer and two PR practitioners in Salford. Questions that appeared redundant or irrelevant were deleted whereas those that appeared ambiguous were rephrased.

5.2.9 Archival data

For this research, archival data was collected in the form of wall posts, comments and Facebook statuses from the STC and Saudi MCI Facebook pages during the entire month of November 2014. Tweets, hash tag discussions and conversations on the two organisations' Twitter handles were also copied into a Microsoft Excel worksheet. The intention behind the archival data was to determine how STC and Saudi MCI use Facebook and Twitter to communicate with their publics, what issues they addressed, and the extent to which such conversations could be termed two-way symmetrical and/or how ethical they appeared. The researcher was following and had liked both STC and Saudi MCI on Twitter and Facebook to ensure that he had access to conversations between these organisations and their publics. The collected tweets and posts were in Arabic in their raw form. Thus, the researcher translated each of the tweets and posts obtained from the respective Twitter and Facebook handles for the purposes of reporting the findings in this study.

5.2.10 Data operationalization

The development of the questionnaire prompts was guided by the need to collect data that could directly address at least one research question, and/or one research hypothesis, one research objective, and ultimately a section of the research aim. The sixth prompt on the questionnaire sourced for information concerning how STC and Saudi MCI use social media to promote dialogue with their publics. This question addressed the first research question fully and the second research question partially as well as the third and fourth hypothesis. The data collected through this question would provide insights into usage of social media as dialogue tools (R1) thereby determining the extent to which they are using social media in two-way symmetrical communication (R2 and H3). In the event that respondents strongly agreed with the prompt, this would be an indication that the two organisations use social media to create/promote dialogue (R1), which is consistent with the provisions of the two-way symmetrical model (R2 – partially) and therefore confirm that both organisations use Facebook and Twitter in two-way symmetric manners (H3).

Data collected through prompt 7 of the questionnaire was meant to offer responses to the first and second research questions and contribute towards the testing of H2 and H3. However, this was approached from a negative dimension. This is in the sense that the more the respondents agreed with the fact that either organisation uses either Facebook and/or Twitter to only publicise their activities, then this would mean that they use these social media platforms for publicity (R1), in an unethical and asymmetrical manners (R2 and H2+H3).

Similarly, prompt 8 provided data, which contributed towards resolving R1, R2, H2, and H3 from a negated perspective. For example, if respondents strongly indicated that the organisations only used Facebook/Twitter to send information to the public without responding to the views of the public, it would bring out two major meanings. First, this would show that the organisations use Facebook and Twitter to disseminate information to stakeholders and their publics (R1). Second, it would mean that the organisations do not use Twitter and Facebook in ethical and two-way symmetrical manners thereby addressing R2, H2, and H3).

Prompt 9's data helped in responding to the R3 and H3. This is because the possibility that feedback by public through social media would make the organisation change a position or decision made would be interpreted as an indication of engagement with their publics in online debates about them consistently (H1). This would also be an indication that the organisations use Facebook and Twitter in two-way symmetric manners, which partially addresses R2 and provides evidence for confirming or rejecting H3.

Data from the tenth prompt was useful in responding to R1 because respondents agreeing with the prompt strongly would imply the use of Facebook and Twitter to advance organisational agenda (R1), and in a one-way manner, as is the case with the press agentry model (Grunig and Hunt 1984; Grunig 2009) and vice versa. This would be controversial to the application of two-way symmetrical model and therefore contribute towards the rejection of H3. Prompt 11 partially addressed R2 and H2 in terms of ethical usage of Facebook and Twitter by the organisations because truthful information dissemination qualifies as ethical and the converse is true. Similarly, prompts 12 to 17 addressed the ethical aspect of R2 and therefore data collected from these prompts would lead to the rejection or confirmation of H2.

For prompt 18, data collected was meant to address R1, R2, H1, H3, and H5. An indication from the data that the organisations respond to challenges by the public meant that the organisations use Facebook and Twitter to respond to public opinion thereby addressing R1. Consequently, this would contribute data towards confirming H1 by showing that the organisations engage their publics in online debates about them. Likewise, it would mean that the organisations use Facebook and Twitter to in two-way symmetric manners, which would partially address R2 in terms of symmetrical use of social media. Consequently, this would offer support for H3 and H5.

Data collected through prompt 19 helped in determining how the organisations use Twitter and Facebook to influence public opinion about them (R1), which would be deemed unethical (R2 partially) and therefore contribute to the rejection of H2. In prompt 20, the researcher approached the issue of how the organisations use Facebook and Twitter in their communication with their stakeholders and their publics from a public-oriented approach, which addressed both R1 and H1. For example, an indication that the public mainly uses Facebook and Twitter to criticise the organisations would mean that the organisations use the two social media platforms to collect feedback in the form of criticism from the public about them.

Data collected through prompt 21 was a negation of prompt 8 and therefore addressed R1, R2, H2, and H3 from a negated perspective. For prompt 22, the researcher geared towards collecting data helpful in resolving R3 and towards either rejecting, or confirming, H4. This is because an indication that Twitter and/or Facebook made it easier for respondents to contact the organisations would be interpreted as an indication of change in terms of how STC and MCI PR practitioners and communicators engage their publics and stakeholders (R3) and enhanced communication practices (H4).

Prompt 23 was important in providing data concerning social media affordances in terms of organisational reputation (R4). If the data collected indicated that the tweets and conversations made the organisations become known to more individuals in the public, this would be interpreted as increased visibility, which as cited in literature is synonymous with the visibility social media affordance (Treem and Leonardi 2012; Boyd 2010; Grudin 2006). Similarly, prompts 24, 25, and 26 addressed R4 in terms of persistence, editability, and association respectively.

Through prompt 27, the researcher aimed at collecting data related to R1, R3 and H4. Suppose respondents indicated that the organisation gives access to pertinent information concerning the organisation, this would have three meanings. First, it would mean that the two organisations use Facebook and Twitter to disclose relevant information to the publics and stakeholders (R1). Second, this would be an indication that Facebook and Twitter have changed the way STC and MCI PR practitioners and communicators engage their publics and stakeholders by sharing relevant information as opposed to broadcasting general information to untargeted audiences. Finally, this would offer support for H4 as it would offer proof indicating that the use of social media by private and public organisations has enhanced the communication practices within these organisations in terms of information relevance.

The data collected through prompt 28 was useful in responding to R2 since the encouragement of conversations about the organisations by the organisations would be an indication of two-way symmetric Facebook and Twitter usage. In addition, this would offer data directly useful in testing H3, but also provide data for H4, and H5 testing. H4 would be addressed in the sense that an indication of encouragement of conversations with the publics by the organisations would be an indication of enhanced communication practices. Subsequently, the implication would be optimised stakeholder engagement (H5).

If the respondents indicated that the organisations send informative links via Facebook and Twitter as prompted in prompt 29, this would imply that association as a social media affordability would be promoted and thus increase organisational visibility (R4). This would be an indication that the organisations use social media to promote information sharing (R1) and point towards change in the way the organisations' PR practitioners and communicators engage their publics and stakeholders. Consequently, data to support H4 and

H5 would be availed. Similarly, prompt 30 would address R1, R4, H4, and H5 in the same manner stated for prompt 29.

A summary of the data operationalization and the relationship between the questionnaire prompts, the research questions and the hypotheses addressed by data collected through each prompt appear in Table 5.6.4a below.

Table 5.6.4a. *Questionnaire prompt data, research questions and/or hypotheses' relationship*

Prompt	**Research Question Addressed**	**Hypothesis/Hypotheses Addressed**
Q6	R1	H3
Q7	R1,R2	H3
Q8	R1,R2	H1,H2,H3
Q9	R2,R3	
Q10	R1	H3
Q11	R2	H2
Q12	R2	H2
Q13	R2	H2
Q14	R2	H2
Q15	R2	H2
Q16	R2	H2
Q17	R2	H2
Q18	R1,R2	H1,H3,H4
Q19	R1,R2	H2
Q20	R1,	H1
Q21	R1,R2	H2,H3
Q22	R3	H5
Q23	R4	H5
Q24	R4	H5
Q25	R4	H5
Q26	R4	H5
Q27	R1,R3	H4
Q28	R2	H2,H3,H4,H5

Q29	R1,R4	H4,H5
Q30	R1,R4	H5

For the interview guide prompts, the first research question was addressed through the tenth prompt and partially through data collected from the eleventh prompt. The second research question was responded to using data collected partially from prompt 11. This is because by stating the types of information that STC and MCI disseminate to their publics over the Twitter and/or Facebook platforms would offer information on how STC and MCI use Facebook and Twitter in their communication with stakeholders and their publics. Data about ethical behaviour in PR practice in KSA and the role of culture in defining such ethical behaviour were collected through prompts 16 up to 21 collected.

Data collected through prompt 12 was useful in explaining how ready PR practice is to embrace change in PR practice through social media (R3). Similarly, prompt 14's data helped in explaining the kind of affordances that the organisations are not exploiting and therefore are affected negatively by the advent of social media. Data collected from responses to prompt 15 offered direct responses to social media usage has changed the way the organisations' practitioners and communicators engage their publics and stakeholders (R3). Data collected from responses in prompt 13 provided information on the social media affordances through the identification of the potential social media benefits to PR practice, which was relevant to R4. A summary of the research questions addressed by the different interview prompts appears in Table 5.6.4b below.

Table 5.6.4b. *Interview prompts and research questions addressed*

Research Questions	**Prompts**
R1	10 and 11
R2	11, 16-21
R3	12, 14, and 15
R4	13

Concerning the operationalization of the features of the two-way symmetrical model of PR practice, balance in power relationships shall be deemed to be apparent when the organisation can start discussions and the public comments or likes/favourites the organisation's posts/tweets. In a similar manner, the balance in power relationships will be deemed to be present if the organisation also comments, shares/retweets, likes/favourites posts and tweets made by members of the public.

Mutual understanding would appear, for example, when the public seems to contribute to posts/tweets by the organisations and vice versa and the conversation exhibits a level of understanding. For example, STC may tweet about a new service or tariff that they have introduced and the public engages them in a discussion over what such a service or tariff entails. If at the end of the replies to tweets the public appears to have received responses to all these questions from STC, this would be taken for mutual understanding. This will also be an example of PR practitioners exhibiting need for and working to enable mutual communication, which is another feature of the two-way symmetrical PR model.

Organisations listening to stakeholder opinions and survival will be checked if, for example, the organisation appears to include an additional feature to their posts/tweets or edit a post/tweet because of the opinions of the public. For example, a member of the public may lodge a complaint concerning the poor state of security officers' residences through a Facebook post on Saudi MCI's Facebook page. If Saudi MCI responds to such a post with an explanation about what is being made to improve the situation, for example, this will be an indication that the organisation listens to stakeholder opinions and survival needs. The response may also take the form of a link to an external page showing the progress to address the issue.

An example of mutual learning would be when the organisation informs the public about its event, services or products and the public informs the organisation about their experiences of the event, service and/or products. For example, the STC may post photos and briefs about their exhibition or customer service open day in Dubai and one or more members of the public from Jeddah comment by stating that they would want such an event in Jeddah and the others like the comment. This will mean that the public learnt about the exhibition or open day and the organisation learns that the public in Jeddah would be interested in having a similar experience.

Mutual dialogue is simply exhibited when the organisation likes, comments, retweets or shares public posts or tweets and the public does the same. Mutual dialogue will also be evident when an organisation posts on Facebook, members of the public comment and some of the comments require the organisation to comment on the same thread of comments and they actually do so. This mutual dialogue may also be triggered by a post or tweet by members of the public and one that requires response from the organisation and the organisation responds.

Relationship building will, for example, be assumed when both the organisation and the public copy each other in their tweets and posts. For example, STC may post a tweet and copy (CC) a member of the public. Similarly, members of the public may tweet and CC @STC. The fact that members of the public will share and retweet an organisation's posts and tweets and the organisation reciprocates is an indication of relationship building.

5.3 Data analysis

In this section, the various approaches employed to analyse data are explained. To ensure ease of readership and understanding, the data analysis processes and techniques are discussed based on the different types of data i.e. qualitative and quantitative data.

5.3.1 Qualitative data analysis

Upon transcription, interview and archival data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis. Inductive thematic analysis involves the identification of themes with strong link to the data themselves. Consequently, inductive thematic analysis somehow resembles grounded theory (Patton 1990). The benefit of inductive analysis is that the researcher performs coding openly without attempting to suit a pre-existent coding frame of analytic preconception. This renders inductive thematic analysis data-driven (Braun and Clarke 2006). During the open coding process, headings and notes were written within the transcribed texts while the researcher read them. The researcher also read each transcript repeatedly, developing as many headings as were perceived necessary to describe the content, which were recorded in the margins of the transcripts. This process was in line with the recommendations made by Burnard (1991) and echoed by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). Subsequently, the researcher collected the headings from the margins of the coding sheets/transcripts, which was followed by the generation of categories as advised by Burnard (1991).

Grouping of the lists of categories under higher order headings followed with the view to reduce the count of categories by collapsing similar categories or dissimilar ones into wider higher order categories as advised by Burnard (1991). Categories created provided a way of describing emergent phenomena concerning social media usage in PR practice in Saudi Arabia in private and public organisations. For example, it was possible to develop categories indicating how public and private organisations in Saudi Arabia perceive social media usage in PR practice.

Abstraction entails the formulation of a general description concerning the research topic through the generation of categories (Burnard 1996). Each category was labelled using words that were characteristic of the content and borrowed from the research objectives. For example, a category labelled ‘affordances’ contained interview content describing the affordances of social media to STC and Saudi MCI. The abstraction process was repeated as many times as was necessary for each of the interview transcripts until saturation. Following the abstraction process, thematic maps were developed through various stages, as guided by Braun and Clarke (2006).

5.3.2 Quantitative data analysis

Raw questionnaire data was keyed in to Microsoft Excel 2013 in numerical format reflective of the response options provided for in the questionnaire. For example, for the gender variable, male was coded as 1 whereas female was keyed in as 2. For the Likert-scale type questions, 1 represented ‘Strongly Disagree’ whereas 4 denoted ‘Strongly Agree’. The rationale behind this was to ensure that the data was readily exportable to SPSS where all descriptive and inferential statistics were performed. Upon data cleaning in Microsoft Excel 2013, data were then exported to SPSS version 21.

In SPSS, variable coding was performed and variables were assigned labels. Descriptive statistics included computations of means and standard deviation. T-tests and correlation tests were conducted as inferential statistics that were used for the formulation of inferences and testing of hypotheses. Details and results of the statistical operations are presented in detail in the next chapter.

5.4 Ethical considerations

The Association of International Researchers ethics code was the reference code used to guide the research ethics in the current study. Several ethical considerations were made prior, during and after completion of this research. Prior to commencement of research, the researcher completed the ethical approval form, which was submitted to the university research ethics board along with the participant invitation letter (see Appendix 1), participant informed consent and the data collection instruments for approval. All potential interview participants who honoured the invitation to participate in this research were served with the participant information sheet (see Appendix 2) and an informed consent form (see Appendix 3) was attached. For the interviewees, the researcher informed them that participation was voluntary and withdrawal at any stage would be inconsequential. The section also assured the participants that their confidentiality would be maintained, data kept secure under password protection and only accessed by the researcher, before and after data analyses. Specifically, the informed consent form outlined that participation was voluntary and attracted no incentives and that withdrawal of participation from this study would have no repercussions on the participants. All interviewees appended their signatures on the informed consent form prior to the interview sessions.

For the questionnaire respondents, information placed at the beginning explained to potential respondents that their responses, suggestions, or opinions would be treated with utmost anonymity, integrity and confidentiality and only for the intended research purposes of this study. The section also indicated that all questionnaires would be trashed permanently after completion of data analysis. The rationale behind placing the ethical information on the questionnaire was that the potential respondents were unknown to the researcher and it was impractical to have the respondents sign informed consent forms as would the interviewees because the survey was web-based and self-administered.

In conclusion, the choice of mixed methods research guided by abductive reasoning was necessary for this study as has been explained earlier. An integration of cross-sectional and archival research designs was also deemed necessary to ensure the accomplishment of the research objectives.

Both secondary and primary data were collected during the course of this research. Secondary data were collected from extant literature and archived data from STC and Saudi MCI's Facebook pages and Twitter handles to determine the level of symmetry and conversations with the organisations and their publics and stakeholders. Qualitative primary data was collected through face-to-face interviews with purposively selected PR and communication practitioners at both STC and Saudi MCI. The criterion used for selection was that all interviewees drawn from STC must have been working with the organisation at least by March 2009, which was six months prior to the creation of the STC Twitter handle (@STC_KSA) and the STC Facebook page in September 2009. For interviewees drawn from Saudi MCI, they had to have been working with the organisation at least six months before the creation of the @SaudiMCI Twitter handle in July 2011 i.e. by end of January 2011.

Quantitative primary data was collected through web-administered surveys designed using Google survey forms, whose links were placed in the STC and Saudi MCI Facebook pages, and Twitter handles. Although the sampling technique used for this phase was convenience sampling, which allowed respondents to self-select into the sample, the researcher only analysed data obtained from Saudi nationals who were likers or followers of STC and Saudi MCI on Facebook or Twitter respectively. Moreover, questionnaires from respondents that had not interacted with STC or Saudi MCI through their Facebook pages and Twitter handles at least once were not considered for further analyses.

Interview and archival data were analysed using inductive content analysis, which involves open coding, creation of categories and abstraction. Quantitative data were arranged in Microsoft Excel 2013 and later copied to SPSS version 21 to generate descriptive and inferential statistics. The results of these qualitative and quantitative data analyses formed the findings of this study which will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX : QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter contains the quantitative data analysis procedures and the results obtained using SPSS. The demographic profiling of the questionnaire respondents participants precedes the analyses and results related to the research questions. The third section of this chapter contains analysis and results pertaining to how STC and Saudi MCI use social media. The fourth and fifth sections have results about the extent of ethical and two-way symmetrical usage of social media by STC and Saudi MCI. In the fifth section, the results concerning the impact of social media on organisation engagement with publics and stakeholders appear. Finally, section seven comprises the results concerning the social media affordances/opportunities in the two organisations.

6.1 Demographic profiling of questionnaire respondents

At the end of the data collection period, the four questionnaire versions (STC Twitter, STC Facebook, Saudi MCI Twitter and Saudi MCI Facebook) appealed to 603 respondents. However, the exclusion criteria questions in the questionnaire (items 4 through 7) led to the exemption of 92 respondents from further analysis. This resulted in a total valid sample of 511 respondents (N= 511). Descriptive statistics were generated using SPSS to illustrate the demographic profile of the questionnaire respondents. The respondents were predominantly male (n= 313, 61.3%) aged between 20 and 30 years (n= 192, 37.6%) and of Saudi nationality (n= 432, 84.5%). The STC questionnaires appealed to majority of respondents (n= 262, 51.3%) with the questionnaires sent via Twitter appealing to more respondents (n= 262, 51.3%). Table 6.2 in the next page illustrates the questionnaire demographic results described in this paragraph.

Table 6.1. *Demographic data for questionnaire respondents*

Gender				
Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	313	61.3	61.3	61.3
Female	198	38.7	38.7	100.0
Total	511	100.0	100.0	
Age				
Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Below 20	50	9.8	9.8	9.8
20-30	192	37.6	37.6	47.4
31-40	156	30.5	30.5	77.9
41-50	83	16.2	16.2	94.1
Above 50	30	5.9	5.9	100.0
Total	511	100.0	100.0	
Nationality				
Nationality	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Saudi	432	84.5	84.5	84.5
Non-Saudi	79	15.5	15.5	100.0
Total	511	100.0	100.0	
Organisation				
Organisation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
STC	262	51.3	51.3	51.3
MCI	249	48.7	48.7	100.0
Total	511	100.0	100.0	
Social Media Platform				
Social Media Platform	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Facebook	249	48.7	48.7	48.7
Twitter	262	51.3	51.3	100.0
Total	511	100.0	100.0	

6.2 How STC and Saudi MCI use Social Media

The first research question entailed investigating how STC and Saudi MCI are using Facebook and Twitter in their communication with stakeholders and their public. For this question, the prompts addressing the question included questionnaire items 8 (publicising of activities), 9 (sending public information), 13 (lobbying public support), 19 (changing public opinion), 24 (enhancing quality of information) and 28 (question and answer platform). It was expected that there would be variations in terms of social media usage between STC and Saudi MCI. Series of independent samples t-tests were performed to determine whether there were any underlying differences in social media usage. All six variables from the prompts were loaded as the test variables while organisation was used as the grouping variable with cases excluded list wise. An acceptable Cronbach's Alpha of .825 was realised for the six prompts. This was an indication that the respondents tended to use Facebook and Twitter coherently for all purposes. The high Cronbach's Alpha score demonstrates that all the six motives for social media use were highly correlated to each other.

The group statistics, as illustrated at Table 6.3 below, revealed that STC had higher means for all prompts than Saudi MCI. This was a rather perplexing outcome. This is because some prompts registered results that revealed social media usage leaning more towards the negative side than towards the positive side of the prompt. For example, STC scored higher means than Saudi MCI on the variables pertaining to the issue of changing public opinion and sending public information. Altogether, the likelihood that the organisations use social media for both positive and negative PR practices cannot be overruled. Upon undertaking an outlier test, the results did not reveal tendencies by the respondents to score the prompts considerably different from others. Thus, the potential impact of outliers influencing the results was also exempted from this study and the standard deviation scores were big, which meant distributed responses.

Table 6.2. *Group statistics describing social media usage differences between STC and Saudi MCI*

Variable	Organisation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Organisation uses SM to publicise their activities	STC	262	2.14	.970	.060
	MCI	249	1.67	.716	.045
Organisation uses SM to send public information	STC	262	2.15	1.008	.062
	MCI	249	1.60	.718	.045
Organisation uses SM to lobby public support for its position	STC	262	2.36	.952	.059
	MCI	249	2.15	.851	.054
Org seeks to change public opinion via SM more to have it	STC	262	2.36	.872	.054
	MCI	249	2.13	.784	.050
Organisation uses SM to enhance info quality	STC	262	2.34	.881	.054
	MCI	249	1.92	.708	.045
Organisation's SM is also a Q&A platform for publics	STC	262	2.51	.834	.052
	MCI	249	2.13	.735	.047

Upon reference to independent samples test results, equal variances were not assumed for all six variables since the F statistic for all variables violated the hypothetical assumption of equal variances under the Levene's test of equality of variances ($p < .001$). For all variables, statistically significant differences were reported between the means of STC and Saudi MCI (all $t > 2.682$, all $p < .05$). Taking note that the means for STC were higher than those of Saudi MCI were for all the prompts (see Table 6.3 above), it was then determined that STC used social media in a significantly different manner than Saudi MCI. Thus, it was found that STC uses social media to publicise their activities, send public information, lobby public support for its position, change public opinion than to have it, enhance information quality and provide a question and answer platform for public than Saudi MCI does.

The results obtained and discussed in the previous paragraph pertained to the social media usage differences in both Facebook and Twitter combined. It was deemed important to determine whether the variations in social media usage between the two organisations were dependent on the social media platform considered. Thus, data were filtered using the social media platform variable to analyse any differences between the two organisations. In total, there were 143 and 119 Facebook responses for STC and Saudi MCI respectively. Upon performing an independent samples t-test, a similar trend with the combined social media platform statistics replayed with STC scoring higher means than Saudi MCI across all six variables. The differences in means were also statistically significant for all the six variables (all $t > 2.543$, all $p < .05$).

With respect to Twitter usage, similar trends as the previous results on the group statistics manifested with STC recording higher means than Saudi MCI for all six constructs. However, equal variances were assumed, as the Levene's test for equality of means was supported ($p > .001$). Two interesting results emerged. First, the STC and Saudi MCI means ($M = 2.320$, $SD = .908$ and $M = 2.20$, $SD = .971$ respectively) pertaining to the variable on Twitter usage to lobby public support for organisation's position were not statistically significantly different ($p = .303$). Second, the STC and Saudi MCI means on the organisation seeking to change the opinion of the public through Twitter more than to have it ($M = 2.290$, $SD = .836$ and $M = 2.220$, $SD = .931$ respectively) were not statistically significantly different ($p = .533$). The initial expectations were that the means for all the six variables as was the case with the previous results. This quantitative result is a preliminary indication that both STC and Saudi MCI use Twitter at an equal level to lobby public support for their positions and to change public opinion. This result also signals the possibility of convergence at PR practice fundamentals for private and public organisations in Saudi Arabia.

6.3 Quantitative results for extent of social media usage in ethical and two-way symmetric manners

6.3.1 Ethical usage of social media

For this question, variables about ethical usage of social media were derived from prompts 14 through 17 about posting of truthful and fair information, taking of responsibility for information sent, showing respect, and exhibiting high moral uprightness through posts. Since the second research question pertained to determining the extent to which STC and

Saudi MCI were ethical in their usage of social media, the mean for all prompts was computed and two sets of a one-sample t-test performed to determine the extent to which each of the organisations were considered ethical in their social media engagement with the public. Considering that the respondents scored the prompts against a four-point Likert scale, means greater than the midpoint (2.5) were considered an indication of ethical social media usage.

Finally, a new variable was computed as the mean of all the ethical prompts. Subsequently, an independent samples t-test was performed to compare the ethical usage of social media between the two organisations. As expected, the results revealed that STC (M= 2.30) had a statistically significantly higher mean than Saudi MCI (M= 1.87) in terms of overall ethical social media usage (p= .000). This implied that the STC public perceived it as using social media in a manner that is more ethical than the MCI public perceived MCI to be. Table 6.4.1 below displays the results described in this paragraph.

Table 6.4.1. *Independent samples t-test results comparing STC and Saudi MCI on overall ethical usage of social media*

	Organisation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Significance
Mean of prompts of ethical social media usage	STC	2.30	.710	.044	6.818	.000
	Saudi MCI	1.87	.686	.043	6.825	

6.3.2 Two-way symmetrical usage of social media

The two-way symmetric manner was measured through different prompts associated with the characterisation of the seven traits of the two-way symmetrical model as illustrated in Figure 2.8 previously. Table 5.6.4 in the methodology chapter shows the operationalization of the various traits of the two-way symmetrical model. Table 6.4.2a below shows the two-way symmetrical model s and prompts associated with the test for the presence or absence of the traits. Prompts entered in the third column imply the absence of a trait. In other words, the higher the scores in the prompts in the third column, the lower the presence of the trait.

Table 6.4.2a. *Operationalization of the two-way symmetrical model's traits*

Two-way symmetrical model trait	Questionnaire prompts denoting positive presence of the trait	Questionnaire prompts denoting negative presence of the trait
Balance in Power Relationships	10: Organisation responds to negative comments 11: Organisation responds to positive comments 12: Public can make organisation	8: Organisation uses social media to publicise their activities 9: Organisation uses social media to send public information 19: Organisation seeks to change

Two-way symmetrical model trait	Questionnaire prompts denoting positive presence of the trait	Questionnaire prompts denoting negative presence of the trait
	change its position 13: Organisation uses social media to lobby public support for its position	public opinion via social media more than to have it
Mutual Understanding	10: Organisation responds to negative comments 11: Organisation responds to positive comments 12: Public can make organisation change its position 26: Organisation's social media allows access to important information about it 27: Organisation has used public criticism to improve its public services 28: Through the organisation's social media platform, the public asks questions and the organisation responds as well	
Organisations listen to stakeholder opinions and survival needs	10: Organisation responds to negative comments 11: Organisation responds to positive comments 12: Public can make organisation change its position	8: Organisation uses social media to publicise their activities 19: Organisation seeks to change public opinion via social media more than to have it
PR practitioners need and work to enable the mutual communicatio n	14: I consider information posted on social media to be truthful 15: Organisation shares information via social media in a fair manner 16: Organisation takes full responsibility for all information sent through social media 17: Organisation shows respect for public social media conversations 18: Organisation shows a high level of moral uprightness in social media posts 20: Public mainly uses organisation's social media to criticise than to commend it social media has made it easier and faster to contact organisation 26: Organisation's social media allows	13: Organisation uses social media to lobby public support for its position

Two-way symmetrical model trait	Questionnaire prompts denoting positive presence of the trait	Questionnaire prompts denoting negative presence of the trait
	access to important information about it 27: Organisation has used public criticism to improve its public services 28: Through the organisation's social media platform, the public asks questions and the organisation responds as well	
Mutual learning	26: Organisation's SM allows access to important information about it 27: Organisation has used public criticism to improve its public services 28: Through the organisation's social media platform, the public asks questions and the organisation responds as well	13: Organisation uses social media to lobby public support for its position
Mutual dialogue		8: Organisation uses social media to publicise their activities 9: Organisation uses social media to send public information 13: Organisation uses social media to lobby public support for its position 19: Organisation seeks to change public opinion via social media more than to have it
Relationship building	14: I consider information posted on social media to be truthful 15: Organisation shares information via social media in a fair manner 16: Organisation takes full responsibility for all information sent through social media 17: Organisation shows respect for public social media conversations 18: Organisation shows a high level of moral uprightness in social media posts 21: social media has made it easier and faster to contact organisation 22: Visibility: social media has made organisation more popular to public 23: Persistence: I can access information sent through organisation's	

Two-way symmetrical model trait	Questionnaire prompts denoting positive presence of the trait	Questionnaire prompts denoting negative presence of the trait
	social media long after posting 24: Editability: Organisation uses social media to enhance info quality 25: Association: Organisation's social media has led to an online social connection with the public 26: Organisation's social media allows access to important information about it 27: Organisation has used public criticism to improve its public services 28: Through the organisation's social media platform, the public asks questions and the organisation responds as well	

Concerning the presence of balance of power in relationships a new variable was computed as the sum of prompts 10 to 13 and prompt 19 less the total of prompts 8 and 9 divided by 7 (total number of prompts addressing this trait of the two-way symmetrical model). Upon performing an independent samples t-test, the results showed that STC (M= 1.161) had a higher mean than Saudi MCI (M= 1.099) where the mean difference was .0621. However, the independent samples test results revealed that the mean difference was not statistically significant (t (508.174) = 1.748, p= .081). The interpretation is that both STC and MCI exhibit relatively equal trends on balance of power in relationships. The results of a one-sample test revealed that the means for STC (M= 1.161) and MCI (M= 1.099) were significantly lower than the test value of 2.5 computed as the midpoint for the 4-point Likert scale (t (261) = -57.643), p= .000) and (t (249) = -57.643), p= .000) respectively. The interpretation was that the social media usage by both STC and Saudi MCI did not exhibit balance of power in relationships as a trait.

To test for the presence of mutual understanding, the average of the six prompts addressing this trait was computed into a new variable. An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the means of STC and Saudi MCI on mutual understanding. The results demonstrated that STC had a higher mean (M= 2.587) that Saudi MCI (M= 2.124) and this was statistically significant (t (501.838) = 8.406, p= .000). This meant that STC exhibited higher mutual understanding than Saudi MCI did. Two sets of one-sample tests were performed for each organisation on this trait with 2.5 as the test value. The results revealed that the means for both organisations were significantly different from the test value. However, the interpretation of the results differed on this trait in the case of the two organisations. For STC (t (261) = 2.080, p= .038), this meant that the organisation exhibited mutual understanding because its mean was higher than the test value. However, the result meant that Saudi MCI (t (248) = -10.449, p= .000) did not exhibit mutual understanding since its mean was significantly lower than the test value.

For the trait on organisation listening to stakeholder opinions and survival needs, a new variable was computed by adding the four positive indicators and deducting the negative one then dividing the result by five (number of indicators for this trait). An independent samples t-test was performed comparing STC against Saudi MCI on the newly computed variable. The results revealed low means for both STC (M= .535) and Saudi MCI (M= .472). However, the means were significantly different (p= .034) implying that STC was performing better than Saudi MCI on listening to stakeholder opinions and survival needs. However, a one-sample t-test revealed that neither STC (t (261) = -90.301, p= .000) nor Saudi MCI (t (248) = -102.559, p= .000) exhibited the trait of listening to stakeholder opinions and their needs for survival. This is because both means were statistically significantly lower than the test value of 2.5.

On the PR practitioners needing and working towards enabling the mutual communication trait, a new variable was computed. Upon performing an independent samples t-test on this trait, STC (M= 1.937) had a significantly higher mean than Saudi MCI (M= 1.562) based on the results (t (509) = 2.130, p= .000). The interpretation is that STC's PR practitioners need and work to enable mutual communication with the public whereas this was not the case with Saudi MCI. A one-sample test performed with a test value of 2.5 showed that the means for both STC (t (261) = -17.362, p= .000) and (t (248) = -30.019, p= .000) were significantly lower than the test value. This meant that PR practitioners in both organisations did not strike their social media publics as needing and working to enable mutual communication.

Mutual learning was computed as a new variable involving the summing of prompts 26 and 27, subtracting prompt 13 and dividing the result by four. STC's mean on mutual learning (M= 1.290) was significantly higher than Saudi MCI's (M= .987). This is an indication that STC performed better in mutual learning than Saudi MCI. To ascertain whether the public agreed with this indication, a one-sample t-test was performed for each organisation with a test value of 2.5 for the mutual learning trait. The results showed that both STC (t (261) = -39.719, p= .000) and Saudi MCI (t (248) = -61.078, p= .000) means were significantly lower than the test value. The implication was that neither STC nor Saudi MCI exhibited the mutual learning trait to the respondents.

Mutual dialogue was computed as a new variable on the mean of prompts 8, 9, 13 and 19. Since these were considered ‘negative’ indicators of the presence of mutual dialogue, the lower the mean the better an organisation would appear to be exhibiting this trait. The results of the independent samples t-test performed for this variable revealed that STC (M= 2.254) was performing poorly than Saudi MCI (M= 1.888) and the difference was statistically significant (t (491.434) = 6.368, p= .000). Two one-sample t-tests were also performed to determine the extent to which respondents depicted the existence/absence of mutual dialogue in the social media usage of both STC and Saudi MCI. The results revealed that STC’s mean was significantly higher than the test value of 2.5 (t (261) = -5.493, p=.000) meaning that the organisation exhibited an acceptable level of mutual dialogue. As for Saudi MCI, the mean was significantly lower than the test value (t (248) = -16.992, p= .000). Since the mean was lower than the test value and a lower mean implied better mutual dialogue, the implication is that Saudi MCI exhibited a high level of mutual dialogue.

Thirteen prompts in the questionnaire indicated social media usage that enhances the flourishing of all the other traits of the two-way symmetrical model, and this denotes the presence of relationship building. Thus, the mean of the thirteen prompts was computed into the new relationship building. Subsequently, an independent samples t-test was performed to compare STC and Saudi MCI on relationship building. The results showed that STC’s usage of social media promoted relationship building (M= 2.367) significantly higher than Saudi MCI’s (M= 1.910 (t (509) = 8.230, p= .000) did. To determine whether the presence of relationship building was significant, two sets of one sample t-test for each organisation were performed with a test value of 2.5, which was the mid-point of the 4-point Likert scale used in the questionnaire during data collection. The results demonstrated that both STC (t (261) = -3.352, p= .001) and Saudi MCI (t (248) = -15.277, p= .000) means were statistically significantly lower than the test value. However, this meant that STC’s usage of social media enhanced relationship building more than Saudi MCI’s usage supported an environment where the other traits of the two-way symmetrical model flourish based on the arithmetic mean differences. Tables 6.4.2b and 6.4.2c below present the independent samples and one-sample test results pertaining to the two-way symmetrical model, as discussed in this section.

Table 6.4.2b. *Independent samples test for two-way symmetrical traits*

Two-way symmetrical traits	Organisation	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	t	Significance
Balance of power in relationships	STC	1.161	.4201	.0260	1.744	0.082
	MCI	1.099	.3835	.0243		
Mutual Understanding	STC	2.587	.673	.042	8.406	.000
	MCI	2.124	.567	.036		
Organisation listening to stakeholder opinions and survival needs	STC	.535	.352	.022	2.13	0.034
	MCI	.472	.312	.020		
PR practitioners need and work to enable the mutual communication	STC	1.937	.525	.032	8.316	.000
	MCI	1.562	.493	.031		
Mutual Learning	STC	1.290	.493	.030	7.72	.000
	MCI	.987	.391	.025		
Mutual Dialogue	STC	2.254	.725	.045	6.368	.000
	MCI	1.888	.569	.036		
Relationship Building	STC	2.367	.644	.040	8.23	.000
	MCI	1.910	.610	.039		

Table 6.4.2c. *One sample test for two-way symmetrical traits*

	STC			Saudi MCI		
Two-way symmetrical traits (test value = 2.5)	**Mean**	**T**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**Mean**	**t**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
Balance of power in relationships	1.161	-51.570	.000	1.099	-57.643	.000
Mutual Understanding	2.587	2.080	.038	2.124	-10.449	.000
Organisation listening to stakeholder opinions and survival needs	.535	-90.301	.000	.472	-102.559	.000
PR practitioners need and work to enable the mutual communication	1.937	-17.362	.000	1.562	-30.019	.000
Mutual Learning	1.290	-39.719	.000	.987	-61.078	.000
Mutual Dialogue	2.254	-5.493	.000	1.888	-16.992	.000
Relationship Building	2.367	-3.352	.001	1.910	-15.277	.000
Overall two-way symmetrical usage of social media	1.733	-28.746	.000	1.435	-44.541	.000

6.4 Extent of two-way symmetrical model application

After testing for the presence of the different traits of the two-way symmetrical model and compared the results of STC against those of Saudi MCI, it was important to determine the extent to which the two organisations would be deemed to be applying the two-way symmetrical model. To do so, the mean of all the newly computed variables denoting the traits of the two-way symmetrical model was computed into a new variable. The sum of the seven traits of the two-way symmetrical model (balance in power relationships, mutual understanding, organisations listen to stakeholder opinions and survival needs, PR practitioners need and work to enable the mutual communication, mutual learning, mutual dialogue and relationship building) divided by seven were computed into the overall two-way symmetrical model variable. The seven computed variables recorded a valid Cronbach's alpha of .895 and were all included in the tests.

An independent samples t-test was then performed to determine the extent of the two-way symmetrical model of PR in STC and Saudi MCI's usage of social media. The results obtained from the independent samples t-test revealed that STC had a statistically significantly higher mean (M= 1.733) than Saudi MCI (M= 1.435) had (t (505.994) = 8.241, p= .000). This is an indication that STC had higher levels of two-way symmetrical usage of social media than Saudi MCI does, as shown in Table 6.5a below.

Table 6.5a. *Independent samples t-test results comparing STC and Saudi MCI means on overall two-way symmetrical usage of social media*

Organisation		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Significance
Overall two-way symmetrical model presence	STC	1.733	.432	.027	505.482	.000
	Saudi MCI	1.435	.377	.024		

Two sets of one-sample t-tests were performed to determine the extent to which the two organisations exhibited the two-way symmetrical model in their social media usage overall. As had been the expectations during the onset of this research, it was found that the means of both STC (t (261) = -28.746, p= .000) and Saudi MCI (t (248) = -44.541, p= .000) were statistically significantly lower than the test value of 2.5. This is an indication that both STC and Saudi MCI do not practice the two-way symmetrical model of PR in their social media engagement with the public overall. Despite the results reported in the previous section showing that STC and MCI exhibited some traits of the two-way symmetrical model, the overall view is that this is not enough to warrant the presence of the model. Table 6.5b below contains the combined results of the two one-sample t-tests.

Table 6.5b. *One sample t-test results on overall two-way symmetrical usage of social media by STC and Saudi MCI*

	Organisation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Significance
Overall two-way symmetrical model presence	STC	1.73	.432	.027	-28.746	.000
	Saudi MCI	1.43	.377	.024	-44.541	.000

6.5 Social media impact on organisation engagement with publics and stakeholders

Pursuant to the third research question and in accordance with the data operationalization as illustrated in Table 5.6.4a in the previous chapter, there were three questionnaire prompts that pointed towards how social media has affected the way STC and MCI PR practitioners and communicators engage their publics and stakeholders. These included prompts 20, 21 and 26. However, it is noteworthy that the quantitative data analysed in this respect only addressed the perspective of the public as the respondents. Yet, the practitioners and communicators' perspective, as depicted in the qualitative data analysis and results in the next section, offered the most practical insights to the results here. The qualitative data in this regard also helped in comparing the views of the public and those of the PR practitioners and communicators at STC and Saudi MCI.

An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the impact of social media in the two organisations based on data obtained from the three prompts. The group statistics showed that STC had higher means across all three prompts than Saudi MCI. The preliminary indication of these results was that social media had a greater impact on how STC PR practitioners and communicators engage their publics and stakeholders than Saudi MCI in terms of receiving criticism (M= 2.19, SD= .926), ease and speed of contact (M= 2.18, SD= .988), and access to important information about the organisation (M= 2.69, SD= .952). See Table 6.6a below.

Table 6.6a. *Group statistics for effect of social media on the way PR practitioners and communicators engage with the public and stakeholders*

Organisation		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Public mainly uses organisation's SM to criticise than to commend it	STC	2.19	.926	.057
	MCI	2.08	.763	.048
SM has made it easier and faster to contact organization	STC	2.18	.988	.061
	MCI	1.82	.745	.047
Organisation's SM allows access to important information about it	STC	2.69	.952	.059
	MCI	1.96	.731	.046

The results of the independent samples t-test indicated that the difference in the STC and Saudi MCI means on the public mainly using their social media platforms to criticise than commend the organisations were not significantly different (t (499.060) = 1.424, p= .000). However, STC received a significantly higher effect on social media easing and speeding the process of contacting the organisation than MCI (t (484.266) = 4.721, p= .000). Similarly, STC was significantly affected by social media in terms of allowing access to important information about it than Saudi MCI (t (487.812) = 9.769, p= .000). Notably, the Levene's test for equality of variances was violated in all three variables, as shown in Table 6.6b below.

Table 6.6b. *Independent samples t-test on effect of social media on the way PR practitioners and communicators engage with the public and stakeholders*

	Organisation	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**	**t**	**Significance**
Public mainly uses organisation's SM to criticise than to commend it	STC	2.19	.926	.057	1.424	.155
	Saudi MCI	2.08	.763	.048		
SM has made it easier and faster to contact organization	STC	2.18	.988	.061	4.721	.000
	Saudi MCI	1.82	.745	.047		
Organisation's SM allows access to important information about it	STC	2.69	.952	.059	9.769	.000
	Saudi MCI	1.96	.731	.046		

After computation of a new variable to test for the overall effect of social media on the way PR practitioners and communicators engage with the public and stakeholders, an independent samples t-test was performed to test for differences between STC and Saudi MCI. STC recorded a higher mean (M= 2.35) than Saudi MCI (M= 1.95) and the difference was statistically significant (t (501.158) = 6.833, p= 000). Table 5.6c below demonstrates the independent samples test results.

Table 6.6c. *Independent samples t-test for overall effect of social media on the way PR practitioners and communicators engage with the public and stakeholders*

	Organisation	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**	**t**	**Significance**
Effect of social media on the way PR practitioners and communicators engage with the public and stakeholders	STC	2.35	.720	.044	6.833	.000
	Saudi MCI	1.95	.603	.038		

A one-sample t-test was performed with the test value of 2.5 to determine whether the means of STC and Saudi MCI on the overall effect of social media on the way PR practitioners and communicators engage with the public and stakeholders was significant. The results showed that STC's mean (M= 2.35) was higher than that of Saudi MCI (M= 1.95). However, both means were significantly lower than the test value (see Table 6.6d below). The interpretation of this result is that social media has affected the way that both STC and Saudi MCI PR practitioners and communicators engage with the public and stakeholders. However, it is evident that the impact is greater on STC's PR practitioners and communicators than on those at Saudi MCI although not as significantly as expected during the onset of this research. It is notable that the results obtained in this regard are from the public and not PR practitioners. The researcher appreciates that although this test provides insightful information, the source of the data might not be the most reliable for this kind of findings.

Table 6.6d. *One-sample t-test results on effect of social media on the way PR practitioners and communicators engage with the public and stakeholders*

	Organisation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Significance
Effect of social media on the way PR practitioners and communicators engage with the public and stakeholders	STC	2.35	.720	.044	-3.347	.001
	Saudi MCI	1.95	.603	.038	-14.381	.000

6.6 Social media opportunities/affordances

The fourth research question entailed determination of the social media opportunities/affordances in relation to Facebook and Twitter that STC and Saudi MCI have yet to exploit in terms of public relations. As identified during literature review, visibility, persistence, editability and association are the four social media affordances. Data for each of the affordances were obtained through single corresponding prompts. To determine the presence or absence of each affordance, a one-sample t-test was performed with a test value of 2.5 for each organisation. The results demonstrated that of all four affordances were significantly lower than the test value for both organisations (all $t > -2.177$, all $p < .05$). This meant that neither STC nor Saudi MCI were exploiting the four social media affordances in their PR practice according to the respondents, as shown in the combined results in Table 6.7a in the next page.

Table 6.7a. *One sample test comparing STC and Saudi MCI on exploitation of social media affordances*

STC					
Test value = 2.5	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**	**t**	**Significance**
Visibility: SM has made organisation more popular to public	2.37	.965	.060	-2.177	.030
Persistence: I can access information sent through organisation's SM long after posting	2.31	.918	.057	-3.365	.001
Editability: Organisation uses SM to enhance info quality	2.34	.881	.054	-3.016	.003
Association: Organisation's SM has led to an online social connection with the public	2.27	.887	.055	-4.249	.000
Saudi MCI					
Test value = 2.5	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**	**t**	**Significance**
Visibility: SM has made organisation more popular to public	1.88	.772	.049	-12.608	.000
Persistence: I can access information sent through organisation's SM long after posting	1.90	.733	.046	-13.010	.000
Editability: Organisation uses SM to enhance info quality	1.92	.708	.045	-12.930	.000
Association: Organisation's SM has led to an online social connection with the public	1.88	.727	.046	-13.552	.000

Considering the trends in previous results where the social media platform seemed to affect the performance of an organisation in relation to certain aspects of the two-way symmetrical model, the one-sample t-test above was repeated with Facebook and Twitter distinctively per organisation on the social media affordances. However, the results did not reveal any significant differences attributable to the social media platform. Thus, this renders an inference that the affordances of social media are likely to apply equally to either organisation across different social media platform. This could mean that an organisation determines the extent to which it exploits the social media affordances regardless of the platform it uses to engage with its publics.

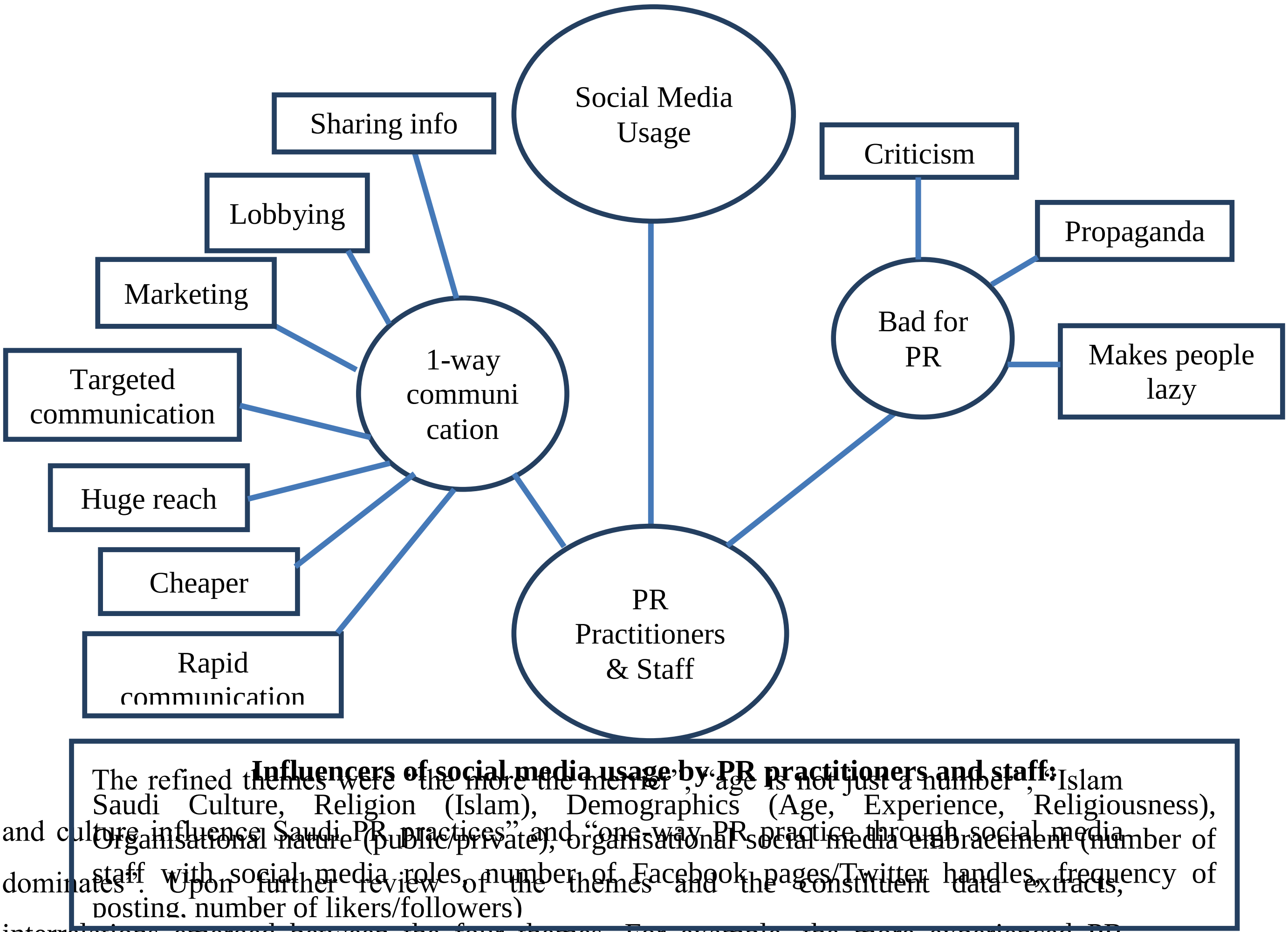
CHAPTER SEVEN: QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSES AND RESULTS

7.1 Interview analyses and results

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the six-step thematic coding procedure recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed in this research. Upon transcription and translation of the data, the data were entered into Microsoft Word 2013 under headings corresponding to the respective interview guide prompts. The headings were then shortened based on keywords and the keywords set as headings in MS Excel. Data for every interviewee were then entered in short codes under each respective heading corresponding to each interview prompt. The initial code generation entailed manual identification of issues mentioned by at least three interviewees. In other words, the themes were more data-driven than theory-driven at this stage.

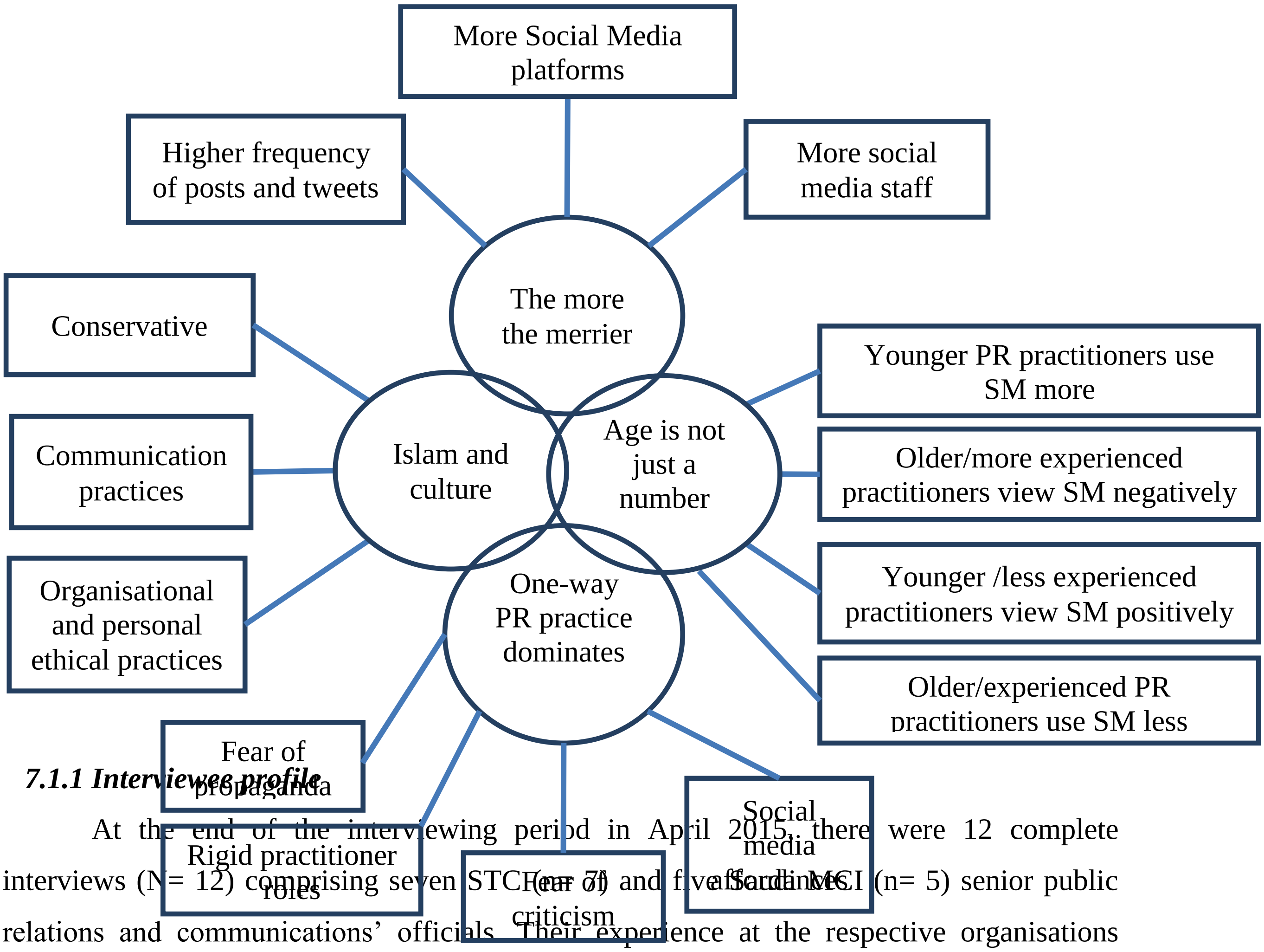
Upon coding and collation of the data, a long list comprising different codes drawn from the data emerged and a thematic map (Figure 6.1a below) was developed to help in the illustration. In the next phase, repeated data reviews alongside the themes were performed through reading all extracts coded under each theme to determine coherence and the themes were reworked. The reworking led to the creation of new themes and merging of other themes. For example: it was not clear before the reworking that the length of experience in PR practice (implying age) influenced the perceptions and usage of social media by the PR practitioners. The previous phase was also purely data driven. However, theoretical consultation led to the collapsing of social media benefits into social media affordances, as drivers of the predominant one-way communication practice among the PR practitioners. This led to the redefinition and refinement of themes by developing accompanying narratives based on coherence and internal consistency accounts of collated data extracts under the themes before the reporting.

Figure 7.1a. *Thematic map developed during the initial coding phase*



The refined themes were "the more the merrier", "age is not just a number", "Islam and culture influence Saudi PR practices" and "one-way PR practice through social media dominates". Upon further review of the themes and the constituent data extracts, interrelations emerged between the four themes. For example, the more experienced PR practitioners had deeper Islamic values, were more conservative, used social media less and upheld one-way PR practice and press agentry roles more than the younger ones. On the other hand, the conservative nature of Islam and the Saudi Arabian culture affected how different PR age groups used social media (in terms of work, familiarity and frequency of posting), supported the dominance of the one-way communication practices and the rationale behind Saudi MCI having only one social media account and lesser staff assigned to social media roles. This understanding led to the modification of the thematic map in Figure 6.1.1a to Figure 6.1b below.

Figure 7.1b. *Final thematic map*



7.1.1 Interviewee profile

At the end of the interviewing period in April 2015, there were 12 complete interviews (N= 12) comprising seven STC (n= 7) and five Saudi MCI (n= 5) senior public relations and communications' officials. Their experience at the respective organisations ranged between 10 months and 30 years. All interviewees were male and their years of joining PR practice ranged between 1984 and 2014, as illustrated in Table 7.1.1 below. Five themes that emerged from the interview analyses appear in the subsequent subsections after the table.

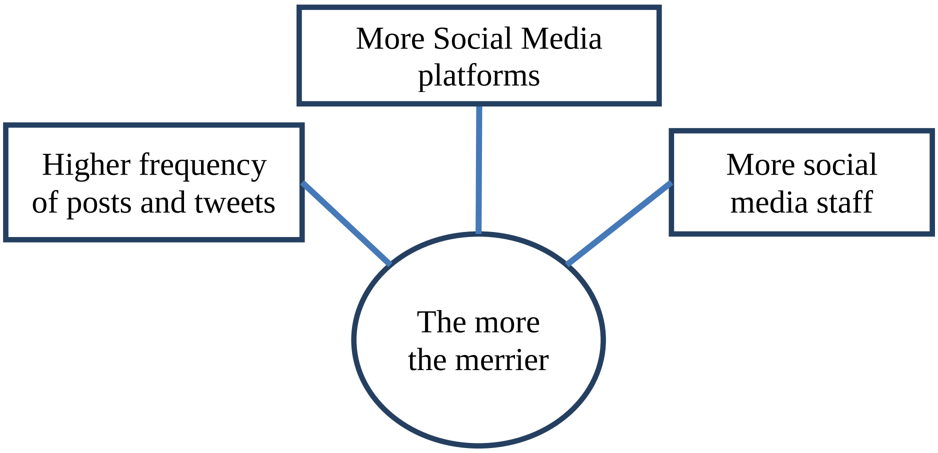
Table 7.1.1. *Interviewee demographic profile*

Interviewee	Experience	Joined PR
STC		
STC1	30 years	1986
STC2	10 months	2014
STC3	15 years	2007
STC4	4 years	2010
STC5	1.5 years	2013
STC6	4 years	2010
STC7	17 years	1999
MCI		
MCI1	3.5 years	
MCI2	3 years	2012
MCI3	3 years	2012
MCI4	2 years	2013
MCI5	30 years	1984

7.1.2 The more the merrier?

The results of the interview data analysis showed that STC was more actively engaged in PR activities through social media. STC had more human resources with roles connected to operations in digital media compared to Saudi MCI. While five (n= 5) of the STC interviewees (STC1, STC2, STC4, STC5 and STC6) worked in roles concerning digital communications or media affairs, only one interviewee from Saudi MCI (MCI1) was working in the department of new electronic digital media. It also emerged that STC had dedicated directorate and therefore personnel specifically with and through social networking tools and social media in their job descriptions. Moreover, the four STC personnel whose job descriptions entailed direct social media usage were more diversified with more officials on PR and communication across different directorates. This increased the chances of STC being more active on social media than Saudi MCI. Whereas to some this might be an opening for vulnerabilities, proper specialisation of roles allowed the organisation to advance from conventional communication to digital communication. The section of the thematic map corresponding to this theme is illustrated in Figure 6.1.2 below.

Figure 7.1.2. *A section of the thematic map illustrating the "the more the merrier" theme*



On the other hand, only one interviewee was working as the director of PR at Saudi MCI and this could mean that the individual has more PR roles to play and might easily overlook social media. Altogether, it is noteworthy that the geographical scope of STC extends to the entire gulf region and beyond while that of Saudi MCI is national and confined to the geographical scope of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thus, STC might need more personnel to work on communication and PR than Saudi MCI. Yet, this should not hinder the diversification of the communication roles within the Ministry and the eventual inclusion of different personnel and directorates to handle different types of communication. The author of this research is aware that the Government of Saudi Arabia also operates in an increasingly centralised manner, which might warrant the existence of only one source of government communication to ensure accountability. Nevertheless, having one directorate that handles both communication and PR could mean that it focuses mainly on executing its mandate in a manner that does not welcome change of communication forms, channels, modes or content in general.

This could be interpreted as an indication of three different dimensions of the organisations in terms of digitisation and communication enhancement between stakeholders. The first dimension is the willingness and ease with which the organisation adopts, integrates and applies new knowledge. Without overlooking the diversity of the mandates that STC and Saudi MCI have to carry out and the responsibilities that come with such mandates, it is evident that STC adopts new technology and integrates it within the organisation quicker and more seamlessly that Saudi MCI. However, it is noteworthy that the adoption of new technology and establishment of new multiple departments to integrate the technology does not necessarily mean that the integration is of superior quality to that of Saudi MCI. Altogether, it is an overall indication that the organisation is likely to be more willing to adopt to new technologies and does so with greater ease. It is likely that public organisations like Saudi MCI have stringent operational structures and hierarchies defined by other powers than just those in the institution such as the Minister and the Government of Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, such stringent laws might make it more difficult for Saudi MCI to make shifts in the way they have been operating and engaging with the publics since inception. This is because Saudi MCI is accountable to both government and the public while STC is more accountable to its shareholders and stakeholders, who have little direct control over the management of organisational operations.

The second dimension is that such integration could be driven by organisational needs to fill a gap that such technological innovation aids are capable of filling. In the context of this research, it is possible that STC needs social media tools in their line of work more than Saudi MCI does. Some of the evidence about this view is evident in the creation of multiple Twitter handles and Facebook accounts while Saudi MCI only has one account for each. For example, STC has Twitter handles that target broadband Internet customers and mobile customers differently. This segmentation is a marketing strategy that suits the needs of STC than it does those of Saudi MCI in dealing with their public. Indeed, STC7 stated, "*As a service institution, the Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC) is primarily concerned with marketing its services. There are departments, which are created for classification of news and determination of their transmission times.*" For Saudi MCI, such segmentation might not be acceptable let alone relevant. This is because Saudi MCI as a public organisation is meant to serve all the people equally without favouritism or preferential treatment over others regardless of their engagement with the government.

On the other hand, Saudi MCI might have not identified organisational needs that social media helps meet. For example, rarely does Saudi MCI require marketing any of its products and services because they are public services to the people. This could hinder the urgency with which the Ministry might be willing to integrate social media into their operations. For a long time now, the Government of Saudi Arabia and its agencies have been operating secretively. Although there is an evident shift in the transparency of the government operations, they remain discreet and would rarely consider publicising their efforts. Perhaps the greatest fear of Saudi MCI (as government) in publicising their operations through social media is the fear of increased exposure or susceptibility to propaganda, as captured in the words of MCI4 while responding to the prompt concerning the potentially negative effects of social media:

> *"I think that negative aspects comprise the spread of rumours, alteration of messages and sending product to the public who are targeted with it, as such*

action will make the product lose its brightness, particularly if it was extensively circulated among people."

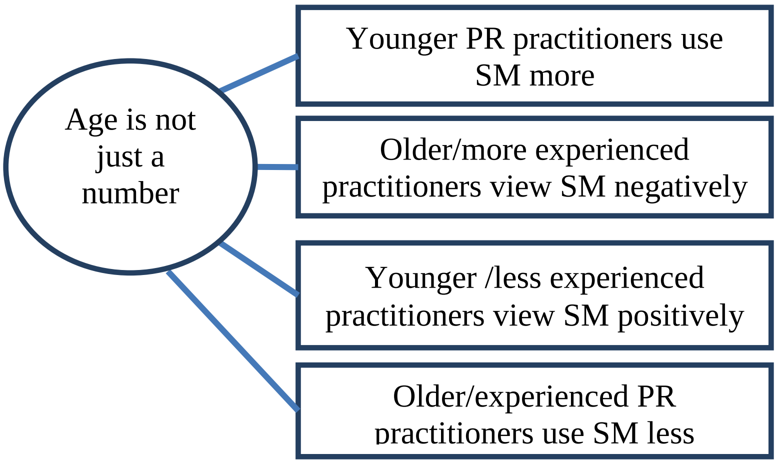
The third dimension is the profit versus non-profit dimension. STC's operations are driven by the motivation to increase organisational profitability. To increase such profit margins, STC needs to engage with their public more often in order to understand their needs and work towards fulfilling those needs. In addition, STC must consistently evolve in terms of operations to cut down on communication costs and other operational costs while increasing the business volume. Social media tools provide STC with the necessary tools for accomplishing this especially through reduction of costs associated with advertising and marketing. For example, four STC interviewees (n= 4) mentioned that STC uses social media for marketing purposes while only one Saudi MCI interviewee (n= 1) hinted at marketing being one of the uses of social media by the Ministry. When asked about the benefits of using social media in their organisations, STC5 stated:

"The usage of Facebook and Twitter has many benefits. It facilitated the passage of the information and secured its rapid publishing. I would like to remind you that in the past we advertise our products and services at zenith watching time at TV between 8 am -4 pm; that companies used to compete to secure time allotment. But, we used to pay huge sum for winning the approval for advertisement at such preferred slots of time at various programs. However, with the introduction of Facebook and Twitter and other social media, we have saved much money and commenced to advertise without specifying slots time as it was before and that we feel assured that our advertisement reaches the majority of people."

7.1.3 Age is not just a number

The theme emerged from cross-referencing the demographic characterisation of the interviewees, their experience in years, the period in which they joined PR practice and the positions or roles they play in their respective organisations. From the analysis, it emerged that PR practitioners with more years of experience hold high PR positions in both STC and Saudi MCI. For example, STC1, STC3 and STC7 had been working in the PR field for 15, 30 and 17 years respectively. As for MCI, MCI5 had 30 years of experience in PR. This means that the organisations still have PR professionals that joined PR in the 80s and 90s holding high positions of influence over the decisions made concerning PR practice within the organisation. While this might appear as an ageist argument, the results concerning the perceptions of these older respondents concerning social media usage and integration with PR indicated that age might influence negative perceptions towards such integration. The section of the thematic map illustrating this theme appears in Figure 6.1.3 below.

Figure 7.1.3. *A section of the thematic map illustrating the "age is not just a number" theme*



Indeed, among all the respondents from MCI, MCI5 was the only PR professional that did not use Twitter or Facebook for business purposes. However, MCI5 still claimed that he had good knowledge of social media and used it for personal purposes. As for STC, STC1 was the only PR practitioner that did not use social media in his work. In other words, both STC1 and MCI5 do not use social media for business and had the highest number of years in experience working in PR. When probed further, the two interviewees indicated that they did not find it necessary to integrate social media into their work because their organisations already had dedicated departments for handling social media communication.

Conversely, interviewees such as MCI2 and MCI4 who had four and three years of experience in PR respectively had both Twitter and Facebook accounts. In addition, the seemingly less experienced PR practitioners that joined PR practice after 2010 rated their knowledge of Facebook and Twitter as excellent. They also integrated social media usage in their roles at their respective organisations. The presence of dedicated social media departments in their respective organisations did not deter such proactive integration of social media in the work of the less experienced PR practitioners unlike the case with the interviewees with more years of experience in PR. For example, STC2 had only been in PR practice for 10 months at the time of the interviewing and was already using both Twitter and Facebook in his work to the extent that he described this as his work.

Whereas all the other interviewees indicated that social media usage had potential benefits in enhancing PR practice, STC7 and MCI5 argued that they did not find any benefits they could associate with social media usage in PR practice. This trend appears to replicate as an extension of the fact that the two interviewees did not use social media in their work.

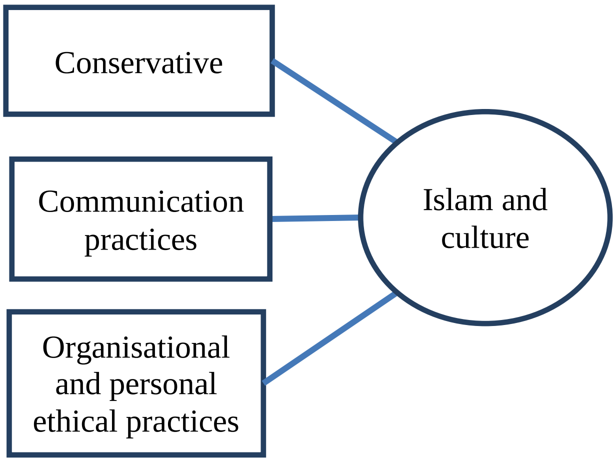
However, it is also true that these two interviewees were amongst the most experienced interviewees in PR practice. Their perception towards social media integration into PR is that it has greater negative than positive impact. The more experienced interviewees seemed to have a nostalgic review of PR practice and compared social media usage in PR against the times when it did not exist. Such an evaluation is manifest in the following sentiment by STC7:

> *"Social media platforms have negative impact on the practice of public relations. They encouraged people to be sluggish. In the past, many people used to come to the Company in person and attend its various social ceremonies, whereas majority of people depend on the images that are published on Twitter regarding such ceremonies and feel lazy to come by themselves."*

7.1.4 Islam and culture influence Saudi PR practices

All the interviewees unanimously concurred that the Saudi culture significantly influences PR practices and conduct in both STC and Saudi MCI. However, it is notable that Islam significantly influences the cultural orientation of Saudi Arabia in general and across all facets of life in the Kingdom. Thus, this theme intertwines the inseparable role of Islam and culture in influencing the Saudi PR practices in return. Islam and culture influence Saudi PR practices in two ways. These include influence on communication practices in general and effect on ethical practices especially in communication by PR practitioners. Figure 7.1.4 below illustrates a section of the thematic map that represents this theme.

Figure 7.1.4. *A section of the thematic map illustrating the "Islam and culture influence Saudi PR practices" theme*



Concerning the impact on communication practices, the religious orientation of Saudi Arabia requires that all Muslims live their Islam through daily practices and even in their work practices. The interview results showed that Islam and culture affect communication practices in two ways. On the one hand, Islam and Saudi culture influence the way PR practitioners conduct their practice and how they relate with the public and their colleagues at work. According to STC1, there is no doubt that culture influences his communication practices because he "*must abide by the principles of [his] religion and serve selflessly…*" On the other hand, Islam and culture also influence the way the public communicates with each other including communication with the organisations. This is because the behavioural norms and traditions expected of the people living in Saudi Arabia are consistently subject to interaction with the surroundings based on the responses of STC7, MCI1, MCI2 and MCI3. In other words, the cultural and social environment in Saudi Arabia shapes the way people behave. According to STC7, being part of the Saudi society implies that one is "naturally affected by its culture."

Altogether, the role of Islam had more overarching influence on communication practices than culture had on the same. Three interviewees (STC7, MCI1 and MCI2) indicated that Islam precedes the sociocultural influences when it comes to communication practices. The role of Islam in the communication practices also inhibits exploration beyond the boundaries that an individual PR practitioner considers to be outside Islamic teachings. For example, MCI1 indicated that he does not "*publish any segment or portion of a material whose publication is prohibited by Islam. I always put my religion interest first, then come the societal norms, values and traditions.*" The perceived impossibility of dissociating PR practice and communication from religion informs the second way through which the impact of Islam and culture on PR practice manifests.

The effect of Islam and culture on the organisational and personal ethical practices also emerged from the results. Concerning the organisational practices, the results showed that both Saudi MCI and STC derived their ethical practices from Islam. In fact, interviewees such as STC1 were not aware that STC had ethical guidelines for social media practice save for the adherence with Islamic principles. With both organisations emulating Islamic values and principles in their daily operations, they tend to reflect "*the values of society and… function within the general cultural framework of the society*" according to STC1. Some PR practices that are regarded as advanced in the Western world like official integration of social media in Saudi PR practice could take longer than it would in other countries that are not as conservative as Saudi Arabia.

This conservative nature of the Islamic values and norms also explains the disparity between outright adoption and implementation of social media usage by STC and the gradual, seemingly more careful application of social media tools at MCI. Although STC might seem to have progressed further in integrating social media in PR practice and communication than MCI, it is evident that its ethics in communication align to Islam considerably. For example, STC7 stated that the conservative Saudi culture compels STC as part of the society to consider "*this culture in communicating and drafting its various messages or products.*" STC2 echoed similar sentiments about the importance of determining "*the content in accordance to the targeted group and the prevailing culture.*"

The conservative Islamic ethics might also be responsible for slowing down the need for development of ethical guidelines on social media usage. This is because the organisations and PR practitioners might find no use for new guidelines on how to engage with the society when Islamic principles define ethics more explicitly and requires their application by Muslims in their work. Besides, the development of new ethical guidelines for communication would likely depend on the experience of the interviewees with more years of experience. If this were to be the case, such more experienced interviewees are unlikely to see the value in new guidelines considering that they have practiced PR for decades while relying on Islamic principles. Thus, compliance with Islamic ethics without additional ethical guidelines would seem adequate for such practitioners. For example, STC1 stated:

> *"There are no specific ethics- related general guidelines, but we have acquired them from the actual practice of work and normal dealing with customers. Moreover, since we are profit-seeking company that focuses on the service the country and its citizens, we have to do our level best to meet the demands of customers and comply with our Islamic ethics."*

The danger in relying on Islamic principles to serve as guides for ethical communication and PR practices - manifested more vividly when the interviewees were prompted to define ethical communication. For example, STC2, STC3, STC5 struggled to define ethical communication while MCI1 did not even attempt to define ethical communication practices. When such trends arise in PR practice one cannot overlook the possibility that PR practitioners working in the same organisation might have conflicting perceptions about what communication qualifies as ethical and which kind does not qualify as ethical. While STC4 described ethical communication as "*observation of certain general values such as honesty, impartiality, integrity, transparency and lucidness*", STC2 explained what he understood with ethical communication as follows:

> *"That the most significant thing in the ethics of communication is to respect the other opinion, and give, in the case of disagreement with others, a reasonable*

balanced and polite answer that considers ethics of communication and helps restrain matters to remain in the normal and acceptable course of action."

Assuming that these two PR practitioners were to work on developing the same message using the same platform, STC4 would most likely find STC2 to be taking ethical communication lightly than required. On the other hand, STC2 might find STC4 to be too complicated to work with and unnecessarily demanding because STC4 would most likely insist on incorporation of all the values mentioned while STC2 would just be interested in ensuring that the message and channel of communication strike every recipient as respectful. This would likely make it hard for the two members of the same organisation to work together productively due to lack of ethical communication standards.

This lack of standardised definition of ethical guidelines could also be attributable to the fact that most PR interviewees are not members of any PR professional body. This is because most professional PR bodies offer standardisation of PR practice and often include definitions and guidelines on common practices to ensure adherence by members. From the sample of the 12 interviewees that participated in this study, MCI2 was the only PR practitioner that had membership at the Saudi Association for Public Relations and Advertisement (SAPRA). According to him, "*ethical communication includes preciseness, authenticity, honesty and respect of the public.*" Although it was not within the scope of this research to find out why most PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia are not members of professional PR bodies, it would be interesting to find out the reasons behind this in subsequent research. It is possible that taking membership in the Saudi PR bodies is not seen as important to the PR practitioners. It might also be due to the underdeveloped nature of the PR bodies and their roles in Saudi Arabia, which implies that non-members do not perceive any benefits associated with joining the PR bodies. The mere fact that most PR practitioners, including those that have decades of experience, are not members of professional PR bodies could mean that PR practice in Saudi Arabia is a personal activity defined by a PR practitioner or an organisation according to their own needs. The implication is that PR practice in Saudi Arabia lacks standards and differs across individuals and organisations. This individualised approach is evident in MCI5's definition of ethical communication as, "*limits and general guidelines that an employee (official) should abide by*."

7.1.5 One-way PR practice through social media dominates

The results showed that most of the PR practitioners practice the one-way asymmetrical model of PR and the Press Agentry model than they do the two-way symmetrical model of PR. For the practitioners with longer years of experience, the preference for one-way communication might be attributable to their limited knowledge and value for the two-way symmetrical PR practice. For example, their long years of PR practice commenced before the advent of social media and the need for two-way symmetrical communication and PR practice. Instead, such interviewees that joined PR practice in the Eighties and Nineties began practising during times when PR models such as Press Agentry and one-way asymmetrical models of PR practice were more common and seemed to work best in favour of the organisation. The section of the thematic map demonstrating this theme appears in Figure 6.1.5 below.

Figure 7.1.5. *A section of the thematic map illustrating the "one-way PR practice through social media dominates" theme*

The one-way asymmetrical model and the Press Agentry model are manifest even in the description of the role that some of the interviewees that have been involved in the PR practice for decades play in the organisation. For example, MCI5 described his role as follows:

> *"I supervise these [PR] activities via communicating with the surrounding news, monitoring whatever is written about the Ministry, submitting it daily to those concerned, answering media queries, responding to internal and external clients, receiving delegations, participating with the Minister at the various occasions and supervising exhibitions, publishing news at both the traditional (paper- hard copies) newspapers and the site, managing media campaigns, managing conferences, printing publications, arranging programs of delegations visiting the Ministry, securing gifts and arranging Eid occasions ceremonies. We [MCI] have an internal communication department, which is concerned with the contact of officials (employees) inside the Ministry. Furthermore, the Minister has a new inclination for re-naming the department so*

that it comprises all activities and have the name of the general department for public relations and marketing and communication.

On the STC side, STC1's role was "*to prepare media content for the press, radio and television as well as expurgate media materials, coordinate with customers and solving their problems.*" Conversely, the role of STC2 who had the least experience in PR yet working specifically on social networking was "*to organize the process of managing digital channels of the Company (STC) on social networks (Twitter, Facebook, Linked, Google Plus, Instagram, Snapchat ...etc.*" This contrast demonstrates two main potential trends. The first trend is that the two organisations still practice the one-way symmetrical model, Press Agentry model and two-way symmetrical models across different departments and directorates within the organisation simultaneously.

In fact, MCI5 indicated that there are five departments within the organisational structure of the Ministry that work on different dimensions of PR including internal communication, media communication, marketing, PR and protocol. While this structuring is intended "*to increase the competency and effectiveness of performing the task of public relations*", it is evident that the directorates are semi-autonomous and rarely work together. According to MCI5, "*Media Communication Department covers the share of new media*", which is an indication of this isolated PR efforts across the five departments considering that MCI5 does not use social media for business. A similar sentiment denoting that social media usage is for other practitioners in the same organisation came from STC1 who indicated that he does not use social media in his field because STC has:

"…a specialized department for this [social media] field. Furthermore, my current task is focused on the services of traditional media, which comprise press, radio and television. Therefore, I don't use modern media in my work. However, we provide those in charge of modern media with the content of traditional media."

Even for STC, which had a specific directorate for digital communication and social media, the roles of the respective directorates included most activities that entail one-way communication. For example, STC2 explained that the STC mainly shared information pertaining to "*Marketing offers, important announcements, events coverage, community service and coverage of the various occasions at which STC participates.*" A closer interrogation of these information categories shows STC as the initiator of communication through social media. For instance, customers are unlikely to initiate information about marketing offers or make important announcements to STC. The explicit verbatim that STC uses social media to cover different occasions where it engages also implicates the use of social media tools for publicity purposes.

A similar trend replicated in the case of Saudi MCI with MCI2 indicating that the Ministry "*publishes news in one direction.*" However, MCI also makes effort to interact with the public based on the queries or comments they make subsequent to the publishing of news in one direction. This might be interpreted as a manifestation of the two-way symmetrical trait of mutual dialogue. However, the approach does not seem to feature balance in power relationships since the public only interacts with Saudi MCI in response to the one-direction news the Ministry posts on social media. MCI4 also indicated that Saudi MCI mainly uses Twitter for publishing news "*and comprises transmission of awareness messages and news pertaining to commercial fraud.*"

The results obtained from the interview prompt about the negative impact that social media has had on PR and communication practices can be interpreted to give insights concerning the reluctance to integrate social media into PR practice. Three interviewees (n= 3) mentioned issues pertaining to propaganda spreading and rumour mongering on social media against the organisation. This fear of having to deal with propaganda being spread by the public on media that the organisation had little or no control of at all, could be the driving force behind the one-directional and asymmetrical communication on social media. This premise stems from the understanding that the PR practitioners would rather not use social media symmetrically in their communication with the public. STC4 described Twitter and Facebook as "*a danger to certain companies.*" Such kind of perceptions from the PR practitioners could influence their view of social media negatively and subsequently hamper integration into practice.

From the responses of some of the interviewees, it was also clear that the practitioners are uncomfortable with receiving feedback they would classify as negative from the public. According to MCI1, "*Negative responses sometimes make us grumble and shake the confidence of those who practise public relations*…" This view from the PR practitioners appeared to be a risk that they would rather avert than have to deal with through using social media. Taking such positions to be representative of numerous other views from PR practitioners further supports the need for Saudi organisations to maintain status quo and continue disseminating information to the public without having to receive negative feedback. The previous section revealed results indicating that some PR practitioners leave social media usage for organisation PR to those charged with that responsibility in their job descriptions. Yet, they use social media in their personal lives. This behaviour might mean that a PR practitioner does not have to deal with public feedback about the organisation.

The impact that negative social media feedback from the public has on PR practitioners traversed across the various PR practitioner demographics including experience, organisation and position. Thus, the researcher interpreted that this was a prevalent view among PR practitioners. For example, STC2 was the interviewee with the least experience in PR with social networking as his main job description. Yet, STC2 stated:

> *"What really disturbs me is the outrage of customers which is published over the sites pages and, which is considered negative on the Public Relations practice, especially when such customers generalize problems and fail to diagnose them in a manner that helps solve or overcome them."*

If customer outrage, which could be as a result of negative brand perception or genuine poor service quality by the organisation, 'disturbs' a PR practitioner in charge of social networking, it is possible that such a view prevails across different practitioners. Instead of considering this as feedback from the client, the expression by STC2 seems to be wishful that customers do not have to publish their feedback on the social networks. This is an indication that even PR practitioners that are relatively new to the practice and that are more conversant with social networks are unprepared or unwilling to receive and handle negative feedback on the one hand. On the other hand, such a sentiment and others indicating rumour and propaganda as negative impacts of social media on the organisation mean that the PR practitioners are aware of the role that social media play on influencing customer perception about an organisation. Furthermore, it means that the PR practitioners in both STC and Saudi MCI appreciate the role that public feedback plays on the image of the organisation.

Five interviewees (n= 5) with four of these being STC officials indicated that STC uses Twitter when the intention is to reach as many Saudis as possible. On the other hand, the organisation targets non-Saudis through Facebook. The rationale for this trend is that "overwhelming majority of Saudis have left Facebook and joined Twitter as an alternative" according to STC3. This allusion featured predominantly when the interviewees were prompted to indicate the benefits of Facebook and Twitter. The said migration to Twitter by Saudis and the subsequent targeted tailoring of messages in response to this need is an indication that both STC and Saudi MCI try to meet the needs of their members. This response corresponds to the trait of the two-way symmetrical model of communication, which is about listening to stakeholder opinions and survival needs.

However, the results of this research cannot substantiate that the organisations shifted to using Twitter more because they listened to the opinions of their stakeholders and their survival needs or they did so in order to retain the audience that receives their communication. This argument stems from the results showing that the PR practitioners associated Twitter usage with increased visibility (STC3) and reputation building among the public (MCI3). In fact, MCI3 was not sure that Facebook accrued any benefits for Saudi MCI owing to the small following the organisation has on the social media platform despite identifying Twitter as beneficial in building the reputation of the Ministry. Similarly, STC7 described Twitter as a good feedback tool that enables effective communication. However, he indicated that he was not a Facebook expert despite the company using it.

7.2 Archived analysis and results

7.2.1 STC has more than MCI

Over the 30-day period of archiving daily tweets and Facebook posts by both organisations, 89 Facebook posts were collected in total (STC= 59; Saudi MCI= 30). On the other hand, there were more tweets than Facebook posts totalling to 217 tweets (STC= 122, Saudi MCI= 95). It was expected that STC would have more tweets than MCI although this was not the case for Facebook whereby the researcher expected that there would be a contention between the two organisations. Although the interviews were conducted later in 2015, the researcher already projected that STC would most likely have had more tweets than Saudi MCI because it is a profit-oriented business with numerous services and products than Saudi MCI. Altogether, the interview results demonstrating that STC had more directorates, departments and people assigned to social networking would be another factor. The rigid nature of government operations and tendency to retain status quo could also explain why Saudi MCI was not engaging with the public through social media as much as STC did.

One cannot overlook the fact that both organisations had more tweets than Facebook posts. This was not surprising for the researcher. Prior to even undertaking the interviews, the researcher already knew and expected that organisations within Saudi Arabia used Twitter more than they used Facebook and other social networks because Saudis are on Twitter than Facebook. This is because the researcher is a Saudi national. However, the researcher did not expect that even private organisations such as STC that are considered pioneers in technology had not linked up their Twitter handles with their Facebook pages to enable cross-posting. The response to this emerged in the interview results where it was found that the targeted audiences for Twitter are nearly Saudi nationals exclusively while the target audience for Facebook are non-Saudis.

It is also noteworthy that while Saudi MCI had only one Twitter handle and one Facebook page, STC had five twitter handles. However, to ensure fair comparison of the two organisations, the researcher archived tweets from @STC_KSA because it was the oldest Twitter handle and with the largest following. Despite using this approach, the researcher cannot overlook the possibility of STC having greater Twitter presence than Saudi MCI with the numerous handles. It is likely that there is cross following whereby one follower follows STC on all three Twitter handles thereby creating an impression of large following on all accounts. The multiple Twitter handles also denote the segmentation of social media audiences by STC, which is something that lacks in the case of Saudi MCI. On the other hand, this means that STC has invested more into Twitter than Saudi MCI has invested in terms of both human resources and content shared.

In terms of social media activity denoting public response to Saudi MCI Facebook posts, the Facebook posts by Saudi MCI received 398 comments. This means that the arithmetic mean of comments per post was 13. In total, the 30 Facebook posts received 2,605 likes by the end of the data collection period. This translated into a mean of 87 likes per post. The total number of shares for the 30 Facebook posts over the 30-day period was 2,038. This implied a mean of 68 shares per Facebook post. The 30 posts over 30 days can also be interpreted to mean that Saudi MCI posted once per day. The researcher initially expected that Saudi MCI did not post as much on Facebook especially considering that Saudi MCI's audience largely comprised of Saudi nationals who do not use Facebook as much as they use Twitter.

In STC's case, the 59 posts received 1,972 comments in total. This was an average of 33 comments per post or about 66 comments per day on average. The total number of likes was 40,467, which meant an average of 686 likes per Facebook post. This could also be interpreted as a mean 1,349 Facebook post likes per day. The 59 STC posts were also shared 2,038 times in total over the data collection period. Thus, the average number of shares per post was 35 while the mean shares per day were 70 for STC's Facebook posts.

It is important to note that the number of likes, comments and shares are all-inclusive and the collection did not single out comments, likes, and shares made by the two organisations. Altogether, it is evident that STC posted more on Facebook than Saudi MCI did. In return, STC had a higher number of comments, shares and posts. However, it would be erroneous and misguided to use the number or frequency of posts as the absolute determinant for higher number of comments, likes or shares. Other inherent factors like the number of Facebook fans, the content posted (e.g. promotions versus government news) and the time of posting are likely to influence the number of likes, shares and comments on Facebook. Considering that the STC Facebook page has more fans than Saudi MCI has, this might also explain the higher number of likes, shares and comments for their posts. In addition, STC operates beyond Saudi Arabia and the number of likes might include individuals from other countries. Moreover, STC deals in products and services that are household while Saudi MCI does not. For example, mobile phone penetration in Saudi Arabia is high and STC has the largest consumer base. People might feel like they need to follow STC more than they feel they need to follow Saudi MCI.

In terms of tweets, STC (@STC_KSA) also tweeted more than Saudi MCI did. The metrics for interaction with the tweets by the public included the counts of favourites (equivalent to Facebook post likes) and retweets (similar to shares in Facebook). In total, the 122 STC tweets were 'favourited' 11,213 times, which meant an average of 92 favourites per tweet and about 374 favourites per day. This also meant that STC tweeted 4 times on average per day. The total number of retweets for STC was 29,298. Thus, the mean retweets per tweet was 240 while the average retweets per day was 977. While these statistics are true as at 30th November 2014, the researcher is aware that the number of retweets and favourites have changed as more members of the public continued to engage with the tweets after the data collection period. It is also fundamental to note that STC has already deleted some of the tweets yet they still count in the case of this research because they were existent and valid as at the last day of the data collection period.

As for Saudi MCI (@MCI), the 95 tweets meant that the organisation tweeted three times per day on average. Over the thirty days, the 95 tweets had 13,335 favourites in total. This meant that the average number of favourites per tweet was 140 while the average favourites per day were 445. Based on the average of three tweets per day, it would mean that each tweet received an average of 148 favourites per day. The total retweets were 41,098, which translated into 433 retweets per tweet. In terms of retweets per day, the average was 1,370 over the data collection period. From the results, it is evident that STC tweets more and appeals to more favourites and retweets than Saudi MCI does. It is also notable that the number of Saudi MCI Twitter followers has risen since the data archival in 2014.

On the other hand, STC suffered a follower boycott in 2016 in protest against the blocking of free calling apps and services including WhatsApp, Snapchat and Face Time. The company lost an estimated more than 140,000 followers between September and October

2016. Altogether, STC still had more followers than Saudi MCI even after the boycott. Despite the time constraints encumbering this research, the researcher managed to archive tweets concerning the Twitter boycott for a one-week period starting 30th October to 6th November 2016. The English hashtag for the boycott, #boycottSTC, had 48 tweets whereas the Arabic one, #الطيران_وضع_stc, had 95 tweets. Although the tweets were archived for a short period, there were no indications that STC had responded to the boycott through any of the communication and social media platforms even as the popularity of the boycott went international. Some of the images demonstrating public anger against the organisation as posted in social media appear in Figure 7.2.1 below.

Figure 7.2.1. *Selected images posted by the public on social media during the STC boycott*

#boycott

"STC, we will bankrupt you"

7.2.2 Content and conversation initiator influence public engagement

The archival data showed that the content of a Facebook post and tweet determine the engagement level of the public with the post or tweet. In the case of Saudi MCI, it also emerged that the public replied, favourited and retweeted tweets more when the Minister was the original initiator. Concerning the appeal of the content to the public, a trend emerged for tweets and posts with the highest favourites and likes, replies and comments, and retweets and shares. For STC, the public tended to engage more with the tweets and posts when the organisation posted about promotions and giveaways. For example, the STC Facebook post with the highest number of likes (10,766), comments (394) and shares (372) was posted on 26 November 2014 at 1012 containing information about free internet service when customers topped up. Similarly, the tweet with the highest number of replies (250), favourites (501) and retweets (3,519) was about congratulating the winners of a competition posted on 29th November 2014 at 0915 hours.

In the case of Saudi MCI, the Facebook post with the highest number of shares (1,494), likes (790) and replies (211) was an announcement made by the Ministry concerning the closing down of Extra Stores owing to false discounts and malpractice. The post, which appeared on 21st November 2014 at 1347 hours, also contained photos to evidence the action. Similarly, the content of the tweet with the highest number of retweets (n= 10,766) was about the closure of “Gurnta Mall (Riyadh, Ihsa, Gubali)… due to continuous malpractice including false discounts.” The Ministry tweeted this on 21st November 2014 at 0155 hours. The tweets with the lowest number of favourites, retweets and shares were also about the Ministry closing down stores due to unlicensed and false discounts.

However, the tweet with the highest number of favourites (1,880) was a retweet of the Minister’s tweet which invited queries about starting business activities and reassured the public that their success counted on Saudi MCI. Saudi MCI retweeted the Minister on 10th November 2016 at 0757 hours. Following this result, the researcher further investigated the influence that the retweets of the Minister by Saudi MCI had on the public response. It emerged that the two Saudi MCI tweets with the highest number of favourites were retweets of the Minister. Moreover, six (n= 6) retweets of the Minister ranked in the top-20 tweets with the most favourites. The same six (n= 6) retweets ranked among the 20 most retweeted tweets by Saudi MCI.

In the case of STC, increased public interaction with the posts and tweets when the content was about promotions and competitions resonate is a revelation to the organisation about the importance of using social media in their marketing activities. It also underscores the interest that the Saudi public has when it comes to private for-profit companies. In the case of Saudi MCI, it appeared as though the public had more interest in seeing the government taking action with respect to safeguarding the public. However, it is evident that the public considers such information weightier (perhaps more plausible) when the Minister himself posts about it and not Saudi MCI. This could also be an indication that the public trusts government information more when they can put a face to the message on social media than when they have to receive the information from an institution in general. This could also be a learning point for both Saudi MCI and STC to assign reputable faces to the tweets and posts they share with the public.

7.2.3 Two-way symmetrical model traits

The Facebook posts and tweets of both organisations mainly featured one-way communication with the organisations being the initiators. In most cases, the organisations were sending out information that entailed the building of publicity and creating awareness about their activities. An example of a Facebook post illustrating publicity of Saudi MCI’s work was posted on 13^{th} November 2014 at 0951 hours Saudi time in Arabic, which and read as follows:

"“التجارة "تفوز بثلاث جوائز في حفل# جائزة_الإنجاز للتعاملات الإلكترونية الحكومية:
١ -خدمة العلامة التجارية الالكترونية
٢ -تطبيق "بلاغ تجاري"
٣ -انظمة خدمة المستفيدين”

(The Ministry of Commerce gets three awards at the "Achievement Ceremony For Government Internet Transactions 1- The electronic brand service 2- "Application" commercial statement 3- Customers' service systems)

As for STC, most of their Facebook posts were about promotions that they were undertaking and creating publicity around. For example, the company posted a lot about a bungee jumping promotional event that they were sponsoring. This promotion of the event featured in more than 10 posts over the 30-day period. Being the sponsors meant that they could lure as many Saudis and non-Saudis to attend the event where they would then promote their products and services. This argument applies to the case of promoting themselves as the sponsors of Saudi football. For example, STC posted the following message on Facebook on 19^{th} November 2014 at 2138 Saudi time:

"هذا الأخضر لا لعب
جهزوا كاس الذهب
مبروك للجمهور السعودي فوز منتخبنا وفالك البطولة يالأخضر
#السعودية_اليمن
STC
راعية الكرة السعودية"

("When the greens play, prepare the Golden Cup. Congratulations to the Saudi Fans on the occasion of the winning of our national team you deserve the championship Saudi Arabia vs. Yemen. STC, the sponsor of Saudi football")

During the review of the tweets and Facebook posts, it emerged that STC exhibited the traits of the two-way symmetrical models more than Saudi MCI did. This result emerged from the reviewing of both Twitter and Facebook posts. On Twitter where both organisations were more active, Saudi MCI concentrated on posting information concerning the actions the Ministry had taken on fraudulent businesses and information concerning their improved service delivery. On the other hand, STC tweeted different information sets that might denote relationship building and listening to the opinions of stakeholders and their survival needs. For example, STC tweeted religious information such as Quran quotes. This is an indication that STC understands their largely Muslim audience and keeps them engaged on other issues different from the work the organisation does. A tweet on 2nd November 2016 at 0910 translating into ""The prophet (PBUH) was asked about fasting Ashora he said ""I believe God will pardon the sins committed in the previous year"" Narrated by Muslim, Ashora """ read as follows:

"سُئل النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم عن صيام يوم عاشوراء، فقال: إني أحتسب على الله أن يكفّر السنة التي قبله. رواه مسلم
#عاشوراء"

Concerning the trait of mutual dialogue, STC tended to reply more to the tweets and posts of their publics than Saudi MCI did. In most cases, Saudi MCI seemingly ignored comments made by their fans on Facebook and Twitter especially when such comments seemed to challenge the effectiveness of the Ministry on an issue. For example, Saudi MCI did not respond to the comment of an aggrieved member of the public on 2nd November 2014 concerning a con that was operating within Saudi Arabia. However, STC tended to request the public to direct message them on Twitter to take up their grievances further. Although this appears to be an indication of dialogue, relationship building and possibly balance of power in relationships, the researcher acknowledges that he did not have access to the inboxes of the two organisations. Thus, he could not ascertain whether Saudi MCI did not indeed reply to the grievance. Similarly, there was no way to ascertain that STC engaged further with the clients they requested to direct message them about different issues. Altogether, it would appear that STC handles the comments in a manner that emulates the two-way symmetrical model traits of mutual dialogue and balance of power in relationships more than Saudi MCI does.

In addition to replying to comments and Twitter replies, STC also tended to retweet and share the posts initiated by the public more than Saudi MCI did. Reference to Twitter alone showed that STC retweeted their customers 14 times in November on different issues including STC products, services and corporate social responsibility activities like supporting the Saudi football team. On the other hand, Saudi MCI did not retweet any member of the public except for government institutions that had tweeted about Saudi MCI or other government business related to the organisation. Altogether, both organisations seemed keen on publicising their activities and sharing information about their activities and successes. This was not a surprise result considering the prevalent tendency of all organisations to demonstrate their prowess and minimise on opportunities that signal any form of weakness or demerit.

The results of the archival analysis on their own are inadequate to warrant substantiation of the presence of the traits of the two-way symmetrical model. For example, it would be difficult to offer an absolute position about the existence of mutual learning and mutual understanding by looking at Facebook posts and tweets alone. However, these archived tweets and Facebook posts provide an indication of the potential existence of opportunities for the two-way symmetrical model to manifest in the social media conversations between the two organisations and their publics. The archival analysis shows that STC and Saudi MCI are using Facebook and Twitter in their communication with stakeholders and their publics to inform and publicise their activities.

The archival data did not contain information to demonstrate the extent to which STC and Saudi MCI adhere to, or violate ethical communication and PR practices. As a Saudi national, the researcher can attest to the increased access to Saudi MCI as a government agency facilitated by Twitter and Facebook. Common knowledge of the previous Saudi government featured high-level secrecy even in the activities the ministries were undertaking regardless of their significance to the public. The only evident social media opportunity/affordance that manifested clearly in the tweets and Facebook posts was that of persistence. This is because both Facebook and Twitter stored the posts and tweets long after they were published. Indeed, a search of random tweets archived for this study using the advanced Twitter search function revealed that they still existed. In fact, the researcher found that the public continued to interact with the tweets even after the end of the archival period.

This is because there were notable increases in the number of favourites, replies and retweets for most of the tweets tweeted in November 2014 upon their review in October 2016.

Since the public could continue to ‘edit’ the replies, favourites and retweets long after they were published, this is an indication of editability as a social media affordance/opportunity on the one hand. The researcher found that some tweets that had been archived during the data collection period were missing in October 2016. Since Twitter does not delete tweets and neither does Facebook, the researcher assumed that STC and MCI deleted some of the tweets for reasons unknown to the researcher. Regardless of the party responsible for deleting the tweets and posts, the researcher argues that this is a manifestation of editability to the two organisations.

Concerning visibility, the use of Twitter and Facebook continually increased the visibility of STC and Saudi MCI to the public. This was especially evident in the increase in number of followers and likes on the Twitter handles and Facebook pages of the two organisations. This visibility was particularly more profound for Saudi MCI being a government entity that was seemingly reaching out to the public through new media, which was not the case before. It also emerged that the visibility of the Saudi MCI Minister was increasing whenever Saudi MCI retweeted his tweets. The fact that both organisations have more than one million followers and likes on Facebook and Twitter respectively is an indication of this visibility. However, one can argue that the two organisations have yet to reach optimal visibility and there did not appear to be specific efforts to improve the situation outside the norm of posting. For example, neither STC nor Saudi MCI was running promotions for their social media platforms in any way. For instance, some telecommunication companies run promotions where they reward new followers on Twitter and this was not found in the case of both organisations.

Association as a social media affordance/opportunity also emerged in the archival analysis. The public seemed to have associations with both the organisations that posted and the posts and tweets themselves. The association between the organisations and the publics was evident in the following and liking of the Twitter handles and Facebook and the subsequent interaction between the organisations and their publics. Since both organisations had Facebook pages that do not allow pages to connect with other pages through liking back or being friends, it was not possible to verify whether the organisations reciprocate the association between them and their publics. However, Twitter allows one to view the people/organisations that the organisation was following and its followers as well. Since, for example, STC and Saudi MCI do not have over one million people on Twitter, it is evidence that the organisations do not follow their publics back. Although an organisation following all its followers might sound impractical, it is difficult for the followers of an organisation to direct message the organisations when they did not follow each other back.

About association with the content, the retweets, favourites and replies to the tweets posted by the organisations evidenced this. This was nearly a guarantee that some members of the public would interact with the posts and tweets of the organisations almost immediately they were posted and regularly. This means that the two organisations had ‘blocks’ of followers or Facebook fans that associated with their tweets or posts because they associated with the organisation and not necessarily because they had a strong association with the content of the tweets or posts. However, the results of the archival analysis presented previously demonstrated that the public exhibited different levels of association with different forms of content tweeted or posted by the organisation. In addition, the archival analyses showed that the association with content tended to increase with the role and benefits the public expects to get frorm the specific organisation. For example, they expected Saudi MCI to protect them against fraudulent business dealings. Thus, they associated with the content that the Ministry posted about action against fraudulent business people. As for STC, the public tended to associate more with content that allowed them access to giveaways and other promotions such as free Internet.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter contains deliberations about the findings obtained and presented in the previous chapter. The researcher draws on previous literature to help compare and contextualise the findings of the current study based on previous findings and theoretical suppositions. The structure of this chapter mirrors the research questions outlined at section 1.4 of the first chapter of this thesis. This chapter also outlines the conclusion, practical recommendations, research implications, research limitations, and recommendations for further research. Consequently, this last chapter has ten sections.

8.1 Facebook and Twitter usage by Saudi organisations in their communication with stakeholders and their publics

Evidence concerning the usage of the two social media platforms in the communication between the two organisations and their stakeholders featured in all three datasets collected and whose findings have been presented in the previous chapter. It was expected that the usage of Facebook and Twitter in the two organisations would differ based on the operational differences and the distinct nature of the two organisations. The results manifested a trend that is typical of most organisations despite their operational variations. Altogether, an interesting discovery from the quantitative results was that STC used Twitter and Facebook more than MCI in both seemingly positive and negative (two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical manners). Upon revisiting related evidence from the archived tweets and posts together with the interview results, it emerged that the differences were not an indication that STC uses social media more asymmetrically while Saudi MCI uses the two social media platforms more symmetrically. Instead, it emerged that both organisations have similar, asymmetrical usage tendencies. However, STC is seemingly more active than Saudi MCI on both platforms and this explains the emergence of STC’s usage as more asymmetrical than the usage by Saudi MCI.

The qualitative findings demonstrated that most of the messages sent by the two organisations to their publics on social media were not followed with evidence of high interaction or response. This substantiated the quantitative findings that demonstrated that the respondents felt that the organisations (especially STC) were keen on changing public opinion and lobbying support for their position. The qualitative interview findings helped in providing potential rationalisation for this tendency. Apart from the conservative culture discussed at length later, the fear of propaganda emerged as a hindrance to other usage. Although this research was conducted nearly two decades after the work of Alanazi (1996), the findings concerning social media usage complement those reported in his works. For example, Alanazi (1996) found that the PR perception in Saudi Arabia assumes a propaganda function, as opposed to contributing to processes of making decisions. Whereas this is not reflected in the findings of the current research on social media usage for PR, it is noteworthy that the PR practitioners have that fear of propaganda and it hinders usage especially among the older practitioners interviewed. The absence of established democratic structures in the Arab World including Saudi Arabia is a major hindrance to free PR practice. This is because the nature of the political system in a country influences the nature of PR practice (Kirat 2005). Mainly, progressive democracy creates a sense of freedom of expression and allows PR practitioners to work more freely without fear of contradicting existing political structures. Al-Enad (1990) asserted that democratic societies allow adequate space and mechanisms for explaining and defending the need for PR. This is because PR values are in most cases democratic. Yet, Saudi Arabia is more of an authoritarian country than it is democratic (Al-Enad 1990). Al-Khayat (2015) gave an example of how authorities in Saudi Arabia often interrogate and interfere with PR practice. The Saudi Food and Drug Authority banished a PR message circulating in the digital media about children suffering contamination from a Saudi market as incorrect. Interestingly, the public accepted the position issued by the Authority. This is an indication that the public in Saudi Arabia will take sides with the Government in most cases at the expense of PR practice being plausible. It is also arguable that the older PR practitioners might have been the young practitioners at the time Alanazi (1996) reported these findings.

The findings of this research show that private organisations in Saudi Arabia use social media more to their own gains while overlooking the needs of their publics. However, it is also worth giving credit to the private organisations for the usage of social media to enhance information quality and to offer a question and answer platform for their public. While the private sector seemed to apply this more than the public organisation, one could question whether this is also what the public expects of the organisations. In other words, could it be that the Saudi public is content with government not sharing as much information through its ministries like Saudi MCI? In fact, the archival results showed that the public reacted more to the tweets by the Saudi MCI Minister than they did to tweets from Saudi MCI directly. This implies that the public in Saudi Arabia could be more inclined to engaging in conversations with real people as opposed to organisations. However, it is important to consider that the public in Saudi Arabia highly reveres people in high positions especially in government. Therefore, the public might want to be associated with people with positions of power hence the response. This begs the question of what role the PR professionals are employed to do at the Saudi MCI if the Minister commands more attention than they do. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the Saudi MCI publics ranked the Ministry lower in all usage dimensions prompted for in this research than STC's publics ranked STC. These findings seemingly coincide with Jo and Jung's (2005) findings, which faulted PR practitioners for not optimising Internet usage to favour organisation interaction with the publics. However, the findings of this research define Internet usage as reported by Jo and Jung (2005) more precisely as social media usage by public and private organisations in Saudi Arabia.

While it emerged that the two organisations use social media in most cases to change public opinion than to seek it, the researcher takes note of the expression by Gordon (2011) that PR partly entails influencing discussion about an individual, idea or institution. If such expressions are feasible in the scholarly arena, it is easy to establish why PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia might be more interested in influencing public opinion than to seek the opinion of their respective publics. In the case of STC, the results of the archival analysis, and the interview results revealed two major ways in which the organisation might strike its public as to change their opinion than accepting it.

First, it was evident that STC used the platform to market its products and inform the public about the superiority of the firm and its products. Second, the findings showed that STC rarely responded to the queries and complaints by the public. While this second reason also manifested in the case of Saudi MCI it is worth noting that the researcher did not investigate whether the organisations responded to individual queries through direct messaging and not on the public platform where it was posted. If this is the case, then the two organisations need to be aware that queries and prompts posted in public are best responded to in public to avoid perceptions that indicate that the organisations do not respond to the publics and only seek to influence their opinions or lobby support.

The issue of selective usage of social media by organisations emerged more profoundly during the protest dubbed the "STC Boycott". Through archiving of tweets and Facebook posts, the researcher established that STC did not respond to any of the issues that the public raised. At instances, it emerged that STC had deleted some of the tweets posted by the public criticising it after the researcher conducted a search in 2016 for tweets posted between November 1 and 30, 2014. It is not clear what the net effect of the boycott was. However, the loss of over 140,000 followers on Twitter during the boycott might have been a reflection of actual customer loss and subsequent declines in revenue. During the boycott, STC did not attempt to defend its position on social media. Instead, the organisation continued to market their products and publicise their CSR activities as before the boycott. The findings led to the confirmation of the first hypothesis:

H_1: There is a significant difference in terms of how Saudi private and public organisations engage their publics

On the other hand, increased public participation against STC on social media during the boycott introduced another unforeseen dimension about when the public uses social media most to address the organisation. The initial findings collected in November 2014 leaned more towards indicating that the public used social media most when STC had an offer for their services. However, the boycott revealed that the public used social media even more to target the organisation while faulting it or expressing their dissatisfaction with a certain position that the organisation has taken. In the case of Saudi MCI, the archival analysis helped in demonstrating that the public addressed the Ministry more through social media when the government took action to protect the public from unethical business practices. The findings showed that Saudi MCI was keen on publicising their achievements through social media. In addition, the Ministry also uses social media to share information with the public. These two sets of findings match the reports by Al-Enad (1990) that the objective of PR practice by government institutions involves publicizing accomplishments of the entire society and/or of a client with the aim of making the public satisfied. In other words, the findings of this research showed that social media usage by both private and public organisations strikes the public as more appealing when the public is gaining from the actions of the two organisations.

8.2 Ethical/Two-way symmetrical usage

Both quantitative and qualitative findings revealed that STC and Saudi MCI use social media ethically. Notably, both the organisations and their publics drew or anchored their definitions of the different dimensions of ethical usage of social media on Islamic practices and teachings concerning ethics. Islam is not just a religion, but also a lifestyle that affects the practices of most Muslims even in their social media and business engagements. Indeed, it emerged that most of the PR practitioners could not establish whether their organisations had ethical codes of conduct associated with PR practice and social media usage. Instead, there were citations in the interview results indicating that the PR practitioners relied on Islamic teaching and the expected Islamic practice to guide their usage of social media. Although this is out of the scope of the current research, it might be important to investigate the extent to which Islam influenced social media usage and PR practice in organisations. Such investigations would be useful in considering the adequacy of Islamic teaching in ensuring ethical PR practice and social media usage. However, such investigations of would also question the extent to which ethical PR practice and social media usage can be considered standardised. This is especially critical considering those religious interpretations and their applications thereof are likely to differ due to subjective, individual understandings of Islam.

The results obtained showed that STC appeared to be more ethical than Saudi MCI when interacting with its public on social media. Notably, ethics in this research were tested for based on the dimensions of truthfulness, fairness, respect (in relation to Islamic and Saudi cultural views), and taking responsibility for information sent on social media (Coopman and Lull 2012; Kushal 2010). Although the public rated both organisations as truthful and fair in their PR practice on social media, STC had better rankings than Saudi MCI overall. The contentious nature of what constitutes the truth even in the context of this research implies subjective interpretation by the individual respondents. Indeed, this was quite evident in the sense that the differences in publics (Facebook or Twitter users) yielded different results concerning truthfulness and fairness in the case of STC. Considering the findings indicating that Facebook users are mainly non-Saudis (potentially non-Muslim), the consistency in rating the fairness of the two organisations with respect to social media usage based on Islamic interpretation of ethics might qualify as somewhat similar by all Muslims

The findings of this research also showed disconnect between the publics and the PR practitioners with respect to the understanding of integrity, which was defined as moral uprightness in this research. This is because the PR practitioners in both organisations cited that the integrity levels required of them by Islam guided their practice on social media and off social media. However, the public in both cases found this to be different and ranked both organisations as disrespectful and not morally upright in their engagement with them via social media based on the responses obtained from questionnaire prompts 17 and 18 respectively. This could have various implications. For instance, it could be that the PR practitioners do not meet the expectations of the public in terms of integrity due to different expectations of the two groups. Furthermore, the PR practitioners might actually adhere to high integrity levels, but limitations associated with social media usage hinder their ability to show this to the public. It is also possible that the definitions and understanding of moral uprightness by the public and the PR practitioners differs significantly hence the divergent views. In other words, whatever actions strike one PR practitioner as morally upright might not qualify as such with another PR practitioner.

It emerged in this research that the public found Saudi MCI to be less ethical across all dimensions overall compared to STC. However, it is notable that the public could be biased against the government and its institutions. This speculation hinges on the findings of Alanazi (1996) and those of Freitang and Stokes (2009). Alanazi (1996) found that PR in Saudi Arabia has considerable ties to government institutions and that Saudis perceive it as a publicity, a protocol and a manipulation tool. On the other hand, Freitang and Stokes (2009) realized that transparency when it comes to government activities is almost non-existent when discussing PR in Saudi government institutions. Marrying these two positions reported over a decade apart could explain the rating of Saudi MCI as unethical in terms of truthfulness, fairness, respect for the public, and taking full responsibility of information they send through social media. In other words, the respondents might have had a predetermined position/perception that is general to all government institutions. Thus, it would be misleading to overlook the potential respondent bias in the rating of Saudi MCI as unethical being a government Ministry.

Altogether, the interview results provided little evidence implying attempts by the different PR practitioners from Saudi MCI to rectify this perception. The retention of older PR practitioners with views that are more averse to social media than pro-social media at Saudi MCI is unlikely to help in making the position of the public on the manipulative and unethical nature of social media usage for PR by Saudi MCI. Altogether, it is still possible to ensure ethical social media adoption and usage in efforts to alter public opinion towards Saudi MCI. The findings of this research established that the Saudi MCI Minister was actively engaging the public on social media to the extent of receiving more attention than the Ministry itself. The potential tragedy with this trend is that it renders one individual more plausible than the entire government ministry in the eyes of the public. The initial unfavourable public perceptions towards government and its ministries will remain unchanged should the current Minister be reshuffled to another Ministry or even ceases to be in government. Altogether, the findings of this research show that both STC and Saudi MCI use social media ethically according to Islamic and cultural standards of Saudi Arabia and not necessarily in accordance to any professional PR ethics' code. Thus, the second hypothesis was confirmed:

H_2: Ethical usage of Facebook and Twitter between private and public organisations differs significantly

Concerning the two-way symmetrical usage of social media, contentious findings emerged demonstrating an incorporation of some aspects of the two-way symmetrical model and other models. This overarching finding complements the criticism by L'Etang (2008) towards the two-way symmetrical model, which indicated that communication remains asymmetrical and that it is highly likely that organisations combine press agentry, public information, and two-way asymmetrical models in their PR practice. The information asymmetry is traceable in both the quantitative and qualitative findings of this research. For example, the archival results showed that the two organisations were responsible for initiating most of the conversations and rarely responded to, shared or retweeted to posts by the public. Altogether, instances in which the organisations sought for public feedback concerning a product like in the STC case negate the postulation by Habens (2011) that the two-way symmetrical model is more likely to happen in the future for PR practitioners.

Speedy condemnation of the seemingly skewed usage in both organisations is subjective and might be highly dependent on the interpreter, which then implicates the possibility of interpretation bias. This is because Western interpretation in a more democratic and less conservative society like Saudi Arabia would most likely find this ancient and possibly unacceptable. Interpreters from more conservative Islamic societies would perhaps find such practice less perturbing. The main point in the findings concerning usage is that the practice of PR in Saudi Arabia combines multiple traits of different PR models. For example, the findings showing that STC uses social media to publicise their activities embodies the traits of one-way communication as associated with the press agentry/publicity model (Grunig and Hunt 1984).

However, the other findings demonstrating that STC uses two social media platforms in an ethical manner and in a way that respects the public (particularly based on Islamic ethics) defies the true embodiment of the press agentry/publicity model. This is because the press agentry model involves 'schemed' communication through mass media with the intention of persuading, dissuading, or manipulating the target audience into acting in a manner the organisation intends without prioritising on honesty, truth or transparency, which overlooks PR ethics (Mathee 2011). The two organisations exhibited levels of accuracy, fairness, honesty, and transparency that were acceptable to the publics and this emerged even in the interview results. These sets of results, therefore, nullified the complete practise of social media usage that resembles the press agentry model. The findings denoting that the organisations use Facebook and Twitter to send information to the public emulates the traits of the public information model (Gürel and Kavak 2008).

This demonstrates that PR practice in both public and private organisations in Saudi Arabia features various elements of the two-way symmetrical model. In other words, PR practice in Saudi Arabia in the advent of social media is not restricted to one model of PR communication. This approach to PR practice that defies confinement into a single PR model complements and extends the claim by Beckerman (2007), who argued that Middle Eastern blogging is characterised by “a hidden trove of multiple perspectives in a world that the West often imagines as having only one perspective” (p. 18). In the wake of substantiating such claims by Beckerman (2007) through the usage of Facebook and Twitter for PR practice, the findings of this research thence challenge the applicability of Western models of PR in the Saudi context. The tendency by Western literature to portray issues related to PR practice and new media within a single, potentially ideal perspective such as the two-way symmetrical model falls short of explaining PR practice in Saudi Arabia. This calls for further investigation to understand the new trends of Saudi PR practices in the advent of new media.

In terms of the traits of the two-way symmetrical model of communication, the results obtained in this research imply that it is not a perfect model of PR communication. It emerged that the power in relationships between both STC and Saudi MCI was skewed towards their advantage.

This was in the sense that the public seemed to be more responsive to the tweets and posts by the two organisations than the organisations were towards them. This negated the earlier description of balance in power relationships, which depicted this trait as both the organisation and its public sending messages to each other and their messages receiving equal attention as to warrant responsiveness by the recipient. Several explanations might apply for this finding. However, the characterisation of the Saudi culture as having a large power distance (implies lower chances of consultation between people in higher positions of power and those in lower ones) could suggest that the organisations generally assume a superior and more authoritative hand in the communication with the publics.

It is notable that this research was performed with the understanding that the communication considered placed STC and Saudi MCI at the epicentre of the social media relations and their publics at the periphery. This is because the unifying social media communication factor in this research was the social media activities of the organisations towards the publics. The role of the power distance might also explain the similarities in the scoring of the balance of power in relationships between both STC and Saudi MCI. In other words, it can be argued that the culture cuts across both organisations. This makes the Saudi public to perceive the organisations as their superiors in the power hierarchies than the members of the public.

The findings showed that the mutual understanding trait of the two-way symmetrical model of communication was only present in the case of STC. Tracing the advent and eventual inclusion of mutual understanding in PR practise shows that it entailed development of communication to aid practitioners in delivering targeted and accurate messages to their publics (Wilcox and Cameron 2006). The findings of this research showed that STC was keener on using Twitter to target Saudis and Facebook to target non-Saudis with their messages. In fact, the communication in the Saudi context skewed towards frequent tweeting than posting in Facebook. The interview results also showed that the Saudi PR practitioners were using the two platforms to target certain promotion and marketing messages at their publics based on the regions they come from or their nationalities.

The archival analysis showed that STC was even sharing religious messages such as verses from the Quran with their publics across both Facebook and Twitter. In addition to underscoring the central role Islam plays in influencing PR practice in Saudi Arabia, this is also an indication that the organisation understands the importance of Islam to their publics. A similar level of understanding did not feature in the case of Saudi MCI, which could explain why the respondents did not score mutual understanding in the case of MCI highly.

The perception by respondents that neither of the two organisations struck them as listening to stakeholder opinions and survival needs explains the achievement of similar findings on mutual communication and mutual learning. This is because the listening to stakeholder opinions and survival needs informs the accomplishment of mutual understanding, which in turn leads to mutual communication through facilitated mutual dialogue. The public and the organisations then learn from each other through the facilitated mutual dialogue (Grunig 2009). To this extent, the findings of this research reiterate that an organisation's failure to listen to stakeholder opinions and survival needs hinders mutual communication, mutual learning and mutual dialogue. However, the findings of this research negate speculation by Grunig (2009) that the achievement of these traits entails the PR practitioners using both interpersonal and mediated communication. With mediated communication involving social media, which was the focus of this research, arguing from Grunig's (2009) point of view does not explain the results depicting inadequate listening to stakeholder opinions and survival needs. In other words, this research does not find evidence to support that use of mediated communication guarantees listening to stakeholder opinions and survival needs.

Relationship building as captured in the elucidation of the two-way symmetrical model entails the organisation and its stakeholders working together in pursuit of a relationship that enables the flourishing of all the other traits (Grunig 2009). Consequently, the imperfect presence of some of the traits in the communication between the two organisations and their publics explains the low manifestation of the relationship building in the results. Unlike the results concerning websites lacking interactive features to enhance dialogic relationships as reported by McAllister and Taylor (2007), both Facebook and Twitter have interactive features. Thus, this implies that the presence of interactive features does not imply that mediated communication will translate into relationship building. Instead, the findings of this research signal that the interactive features are aids or enhancers of relationship building while PR practitioners are the primary determinants.

The findings show an attempt at mimicking some of the traits of the two-way symmetrical model. Within the scope of the findings of this research, it remains unclear whether such mimicking is deliberate, incidental or coincidental in the Saudi context. However, communication still appears overbearingly one-sided with the organisations communicating more to the public than the converse. In addition, there are few indications that the organisations respond to the publics with as much attention as they receive from the public. For the two-way symmetrical model to be considered present in PR communication practice, the traits must feature in their entirety and not partially as found in this research (Habens 2011; Theaker 2001; Windahl et al 1992; Grunig and Grunig 1992). Altogether, the findings show that STC performed significantly better than Saudi MCI. Bearing this in mind, the findings of this research informed the confirmation of the third hypothesis:

H_3: There is a significant difference in the extent to which private and public organisations use Facebook and Twitter in two-way symmetric manners

8.3 Effect of Facebook and Twitter usage on the way Saudi organisations communicate

Facebook and Twitter usage affected the way organisations communicate by easing contact, allowing access to important information and allowing the public opportunities to criticise the organisation. While on the surface these changes are tangible, the underlying revolution and evolution in communication by organisations in Saudi Arabia is the most significant finding attributable to the effect of social media. For instance, the ease of contacting especially Saudi MCI represents a significant reduction in the norm of the large power distance effect characterising Saudi culture (Hofstede 1991). This reduction in the power distance between the organisations and the public also manifests in the access that the public now gains to important information following the adoption of social media for communication by the organisations. For example, the STC now uses social media to inform the public about issues they would otherwise not disclose such as signal interruptions in selected areas. This transition from closed to more open organisations elevates the PR departments of organisations to rank among the most significant information sources especially in the case of targeted audiences like Saudis via Twitter (Alanazi 1996).

The ease of contact and the social media capacity to enable the public to criticise their organisations also denotes a change in the power equilibrium between organisations and the publics. Initially, PR practice was restricted to one-way asymmetrical communication and two-way asymmetrical occasionally with the public being the recipients. With social media providing a communication interface that is less malleable by the organisations, the power dynamics appear to shift in favour of the public. This enables the organisation to converse with the publics in a way that is similar to ordinary conversations between humans. This finding matches the submission by Kelleher (2009), which indicated that social media platforms provide novel potentials for PR through their authentic communication style and the conversational human voice.

Notably, this does not mean that the public messages receive equal attention as they give the organisation. The implication is that the change in balance of power in relationships, as captured in the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig and Grunig 1992), does not automatically mean that the public and the organisations have equal influence in the communication processes. Thus, it cannot be said that the power the public now has of criticising and reaching their organisations more easily through social media eliminates the roles of the sender and the receiver in the communication process (Theaker 2001). These findings confirm the perception by L'Etang (2008) that communication remains asymmetrical. However, it is notable that the findings of this research did not show that the organisations practised the two-way symmetrical model of communication. While this might render the model idealistic as L'Etang (2008) argues, there is no evidence to support the perception that the model is entirely impossible to apply in PR practice. In fact, this research provides evidence indicating that some of the traits of the two-way symmetrical model of communication are present in the PR practice in Saudi Arabia. Ruling out the possibility of achieving the ideal two-way symmetrical model might be extreme criticism that could easily appear biased.

The findings of this research showed that the social media impact on public/stakeholder engagement affected STC the most. Notably, there are various possible explanations for social media affecting STC more than Saudi MCI. First, STC was more exposed to social media than Saudi MCI, in the sense that it had more accounts, tweeted and posted more, had a bigger following, and more staff handling their social media accounts and affairs. Saudi MCI used social media less and at one point relied more on the tweets by the

Minister than by the Ministry. While this signals the flexible nature of STC to adapt new technologies and apply them in PR communication and stakeholder engagement practices, it also cautions organisations intending to adopt social media for stakeholder engagement. It implies that adoption of social media creates an avenue that an organisation has to prepare for, which is visible to the public and demands more resources (human, capital and time) to handle the repercussions that come with the gateway of communication provided by social media.

This research also found that PR practitioners from both Saudi MCI and STC were aware that their audiences on Facebook and Twitter differed. Subsequently, it emerged that they had altered their stakeholder engagement approaches on social media to encourage increasingly targeted messages. For example, the realisation that Saudi nationals use Twitter more than they use Facebook changed the engagement behaviours of the organisations on either platform. First, it was difficult to find a tweet in English for both organisation and one could find an English post on Facebook occasionally. This is an apparent response to the needs of the audiences on social media since most foreigners speak English or try to speak English as the main communication language while in Saudi Arabia even as they learn Arabic. The organisations also sent messages targeting the Saudi population on Twitter and not on Facebook in most cases. This finding confirms the observation by Hazelton, Harrison-Rexrode and Kennan (2008) that new media impacts PR practice by contributing to the fragmentation of mass audiences.

The STC boycott also signals another significant impact of social media on stakeholder engagement. Notably, the boycott was a reaction to changes STC caused in the stakeholder engagement by charging for products that they used to offer for free. However, the initiative to boycott social media following of the organisations was an active as opposed to passive reaction by the public. This matches the suggestion by Hazelton, Harrison-Rexrode and Kennan (2008) that new media users are increasingly more active than passive. Before the advent of new media, conventional PR did not allow adequate and affordable opportunities for stakeholders to express their views about an organisational change. This could mainly be attributed to the lack of networking for common goals that new media provides. Preference for the conventional mode of PR practice was found in the interview findings, which showed that older PR practitioners viewed social media more negatively and used it less fearing criticism and propaganda.

The issue of older PR practitioners seeming more averse towards social media use in PR practice also married with the lack of adequate skills to use social media as noted in some older practitioners. Although there were attempts by some older practitioners to learn how to use social media in their PR practice, it emerged that younger PR practitioners especially from STC used social media more. Despite the aversion towards integration of social media in stakeholder engagement by the older PR practitioners, both organisations still proceeded to incorporate and run social media considering the benefits such as low cost and bigger reach. Thus, this implies the inevitable need for PR practitioners in the two organisations to acquire social media skills considering that the stakeholders expect such high-level skills and might be more advanced users than they are.

The findings showing that STC had more social media impact and gained more benefits by using Facebook and Twitter to engage with their publics could be attributed to the presence of younger PR practitioners that were more pro-social media. This finding supports the works of Fitch (2009a) who acknowledged that the lack of new media knowledge and especially the inadequacy of social media understanding with its emphasis on engagement, interactivity and participation among seasoned practitioners have repercussions for PR. The findings of this research extend the findings of Fitch (2009a) by demonstrating the kind of repercussions on PR due to inadequate social media understanding by PR practitioners. These repercussions include negative public perceptions towards the organisation, outdated PR practices that the stakeholders are averse to, and negative organisational image/reputation. Altogether, social media usage has led to improved communication between the organisations and their respective publics. However, the impact is stronger on STC than it is on Saudi MCI. Thus:

H_4: Private and public organisations differ significantly in how the use of social media has enhanced the communication practices within these organisations

8.4 Social media opportunities that Saudi organisations have yet to exploit in PR terms

In this research, social media opportunities that Saudi organisations have yet to exploit in terms of PR practice were approached from the perspective of benefits that can be gained from using social media. The views of the publics as captured in the quantitative findings were that neither STC nor Saudi MCI exploited the four social media affordances tested for, which included persistence, visibility, association and editability (Treem and Leonardi 2012). However, inquiry into the interview and archival analyses findings showed that the organisations were reaping some of the social media affordances to an extent that could improve in future. Since social media affordances are consequences of processes causing organisational change (Treem and Leonardi 2012), such reluctance in exploiting them might be attributable to the change averse nature of PR practitioners especially the seasoned ones that are directors of major departments of PR in STC and Saudi MCI.

Although the findings of this research from the perspective of the public indicated that the organisations were not capitalising on the visibility affordance, it emerged that the PR practitioners appreciated the increased popularity and reach of the organisation. Considering that both STC and Saudi MCI's Facebook posts and tweets often appealed to numerous comments and reactions through likes, shares and retweets, as established in the archival results, it is evident that both organisations enjoyed increased visibility following social media usage for communication. However, such visibility could still be enhanced considering the publics' views that the organisations had not exploited this affordance fully. Considering that visibility entails methods, opportunities and means used in presenting the organisation and the messages (Bregman and Haythorthwaite 2001), both STC and Saudi MCI might need to review the potential opportunities and ways of engaging through social media.

For example, social media posts and tweets that had videos or pictures appended seemed to appeal more to the public. This implies that the means of sharing the information by incorporating such media will be useful in increasing organisational visibility. In the case of opportunities, it emerged that messages originating from the Minister and concerning action by the Ministry to protect the public as consumers caused a spike in visibility and public reaction. Thus, Saudi MCI could capitalise on these opportunities by taking advantage of the large power distance nature where the title Minister appealed more to the people than the Ministry itself. The Saudi MCI Minister might also use the opportunity he has of being more visible than the organisation to increase the Ministry's visibility. This might be achievable through tagging the Ministry in his messages as opposed to waiting for the Ministry to retweet or share his posts.

In the case of STC, the organisation's visibility could be enhanced by focusing more on promotions and giveaways than on general messages like CSR. Perhaps, the incorporation of dual content in the posts and tweets could also promote STC's visibility. Since messages containing promotions and offers were more visible, STC could also append general information messages to accompany the promotion information. Overall, this increased visibility when the public is gaining implies that the Saudi public expects more from both organisations than it gives to them in return. This now changes the initial view that the organisation has an upper hand in communication. While considering social media affordances, then the publics have more power in communication and the organisations need to appreciate this phenomenon in order to exploit the visibility affordance.

The findings of this research that show that the public did not consider persistence as a fully exploited social media affordance by STC and Saudi MCI might appear controversial. This is because persistence is almost guaranteed when one shares a message through social media. This is because, for instance, the researcher archived tweets and posts sent by STC and Saudi MCI in 2014 and still viewed them two years later in 2016. However, it emerged that STC deleted some tweets especially concerning the boycott since they were no longer accessible after some time. This outcome supports Whitaker's (2003) argument that persistence is the same as permanence.

The reason behind the questionnaire respondents describing STC and Saudi MCI as not having exploited social media's affordance on persistence is unclear. However, it is possible that the public misunderstood the prompt about accessing information posted by STC and Saudi MCI long after it was posted. For example, they might have interpreted this to mean that they take long before reading the posts and tweets of the two organisations. It is also possible that the public did not have interest in posts and tweets posted long ago by the organisations. In other words, it is possible that the public did not utilise the advantage of accessing information on social media long after the organisations posted it thereby having little value for persistence as a social media affordance. Furthermore, even the interview and archival analyses provided no evidence as to how the two organisations utilise persistence, as a social media affordance. The evidence found was the growing of content shared by the two organisations, which STC used to undertake, segmented marketing and advertising. This is consistent with the notion that keeping records of previous conversations can foster proper contextualisation and allow people ample time to understand conversations better (Gergle et al 2004).

Although the quantitative findings presented evidence indicating the need for the two organisations to exploit the editability social media affordance further, the traits of editability were more evident in archival data. Compelling evidence was found in the tweets and posts denoting that the public and the organisations were expending significant time and effort in the creation and recreation of different communicative actions that they availed to others in social media (Walther 1993). Besides, the archived tweets and Facebook posts presented with strong evidence about rehearsibility (ability to countercheck and edit messages before posting) because both the public and the two organisations posted messages that had precise, deliberate meanings (Dennis, Fuller and Valacich 2008) especially in the case of Twitter due to the 140-character limit. In the case of Facebook, the researcher found instances of posts labelled "edited", which implied that the initiators of the posts had changed the posts to ensure precision of their messages. This applied for both the public and the organisations. Editability was also evident in the contextualisation of the messages through customisation with respect to the different segmentation of the Saudi MCI and STC audiences on Facebook and Twitter (Treem and Leonardi 2012). It seemed to the researcher that both organisations and their publics understood the capacity of editability, as a social media affordance to regulate personal expressions, enhance information quality and promote targeted sharing of content.

For association, the quantitative findings differed with the qualitative findings to the extent that the former insinuated under-exploitation of this social media while the latter showed growing evidence of the two forms of association described by Treem and Leonardi (2012). Concerning the association between the publics and the organisations, which denotes social ties, the huge public following in millions of followers is adequate evidence of the social ties. However, it is notable that the social ties in this case are skewed in favour of the organisation. This is because the public follows the two organisations in huge numbers, but the organisations do not follow their publics in return. Since the public often support and endorse the organisations they follow and the messages sent by such organisations, this is consistent with the concept of social capital (see page 65) on social media as cited by numerous previous authors (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe 2007; Taylor 2010).

Concerning the association between the people and content, it emerged that the public and the organisations used the interactive features to retweet/share and comment/reply to posts by the organisations. Perhaps the rationale behind the public expressing the need for the organisations to exploit the association affordance further is due to the skewed relationship the organisations seem to show towards the public and the content initiated by the public. For example, a member of the public might tag STC or Saudi MCI in their posts and receive no reaction from the organisation. Moreover, there was little evidence that the organisations ever tagged members of the public or actively responded or shared content originating from a member of the public.

The researcher appreciates that the efforts and time resources that the organisations would require to balance their contribution towards the association affordance might not be commensurate with the gains. There is need to interrogate the contribution made by social capital gained through association as a social media affordance to an organisation. This would help in understanding the importance of organisations investing efforts and time towards exploiting association through social media. Such understanding would most likely substantiate the view that information is the most important aspect of The Information Age trilogy (Castells 2001). It is also important to question whether the Saudi public even expects or wants the organisations that the public follow on social media to follow them back and so on.

The discussions concerning the results about the social media affordances show significant disparities between the qualitative and quantitative phases of this research. Notably, the findings of the quantitative phase originated from data obtained from the perceptions of publics toward social media usage and behaviour by the organisations. On the other hand, the qualitative interview findings reflected the views of PR practitioners in the two organisations. The results obtained from the archival data were a reflection of the actual social media practice by the public and the organisations. Thus, archival analysis offered a more researcher-based view into the social media usage and behaviour by both the organisations and their publics. Considering this, it appears that the understanding of social media affordances from the perspective of the public differs significantly from that of the PR practitioners. This disconnect is significant especially considering the growing need for appreciation of PR practice in Saudi Arabia. This disparity also implies that the organisations will most likely continue encountering difficulties in meeting the expectations of their stakeholders on social media. Therefore, the public does not feel that the two organisations are making efforts towards optimising engagement with them through social media. Ironically, the findings showed that the two organisations enhanced stakeholder engagement. However, such engagement was not enhanced to the optimum. Considering these two findings, the researcher rejected the fifth hypothesis due to the use of the word “optimise”:

H_5: Both STC and Saudi MCI are using Twitter and Facebook to maximaze stakeholder engagement

8.5 Applicability of the two-way symmetrical model in the Saudi Context

One of the most significant contributions of this research is that the applicability of the two-way symmetrical model in the Saudi context is subject to Islam and the cultural influence of Saudi Arabia. The findings of this research established that the connection between Islam as a religion and the lifestyles of the publics and the PR practitioners in both organisations is almost inseparable. In other words, no social media usage or PR practice is devoid of Islamic practice in Saudi Arabia. In fact, the qualitative findings presented explicit evidence of this inseparability in two ways. First, the PR practitioners responded to the question of ethics in their PR practice in reference to Islamic teaching indicating that religion took precedence even in their works. They responded to the question of whether their organisations had a code of ethics as though the prompt was about whether they adhered to

Islamic ethics in the PR practice. Being a Muslim, the researcher understands that even Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) taught that religion is ethics. In several instances, PR practitioners from both Saudi MCI and STC indicated that their organisations adhered to Islamic codes of ethics and did not have a code of PR ethics that was specific to their organisations. This means that the two-way symmetrical model stands little chance of full integration into the PR practice in Saudi Arabia considering its Western descent, which did not consider Islam and the associated cultural and professional practices by Muslims. It is imperative to note that Islam is so central to PR communication practices to the extent that PR history in Saudi Arabia was at one point used to convert new followers and spread Islamic teachings (Freitang and Stokes 2009).

Second, the archival data yielded evidence showing that even profit-oriented organisations like STC will at times send religious messages. In the Western world where the two-way symmetrical model has its roots, religion, culture and professional practice tend to be isolated and rarely mix. With Islam requiring respect for authorities as a religious teaching passed on to Saudis as a culture, it is easy to understand the imperfect balance of power in relationships, for example. This is because Islamic teachings might substantiate the respect for organisations and a government minister, as authority figures. However, the STC boycott signals the growing flexibility by the publics to interpret some of the cultural and religious values differently. The boycott might strike conservative Saudi Muslims, as disloyalty and a contravention of Islamic values where loyalty and allegiance are highly valued, encouraged and even rewarded. However, such change only amplifies the existence of cultural lag. For example, the slow integration and acceptance of PR practice through social media does not match the rapid adoption and usage of social media (Al-Enad 1990).

The results showing that Saudi MCI performed more poorly than STC in terms of applying the different traits of the two-way symmetrical model are also traceable to the PR history in Saudi Arabia. Since Saudi MCI is a government ministry, it is more subject to the strictness of the efforts of the Saudi government to champion and reinforce Islamic practices and social morals that have distinguished Saudi Arabia as among the most traditional and strictest societies globally (Clarke 2007). This adds another complex dimension and hindrance towards the full applicability of the two-way symmetrical model in Saudi Arabia. Beyond the said Islamic teachings and cultural constraints, the political dimension becomes inevitable when considering the applicability of the two-way symmetrical model in PR practice especially in Saudi public organisations like MCI. Considering the authoritarian nature of the Saudi culture that infiltrates organisational practice in Saudi Arabia (Kirat

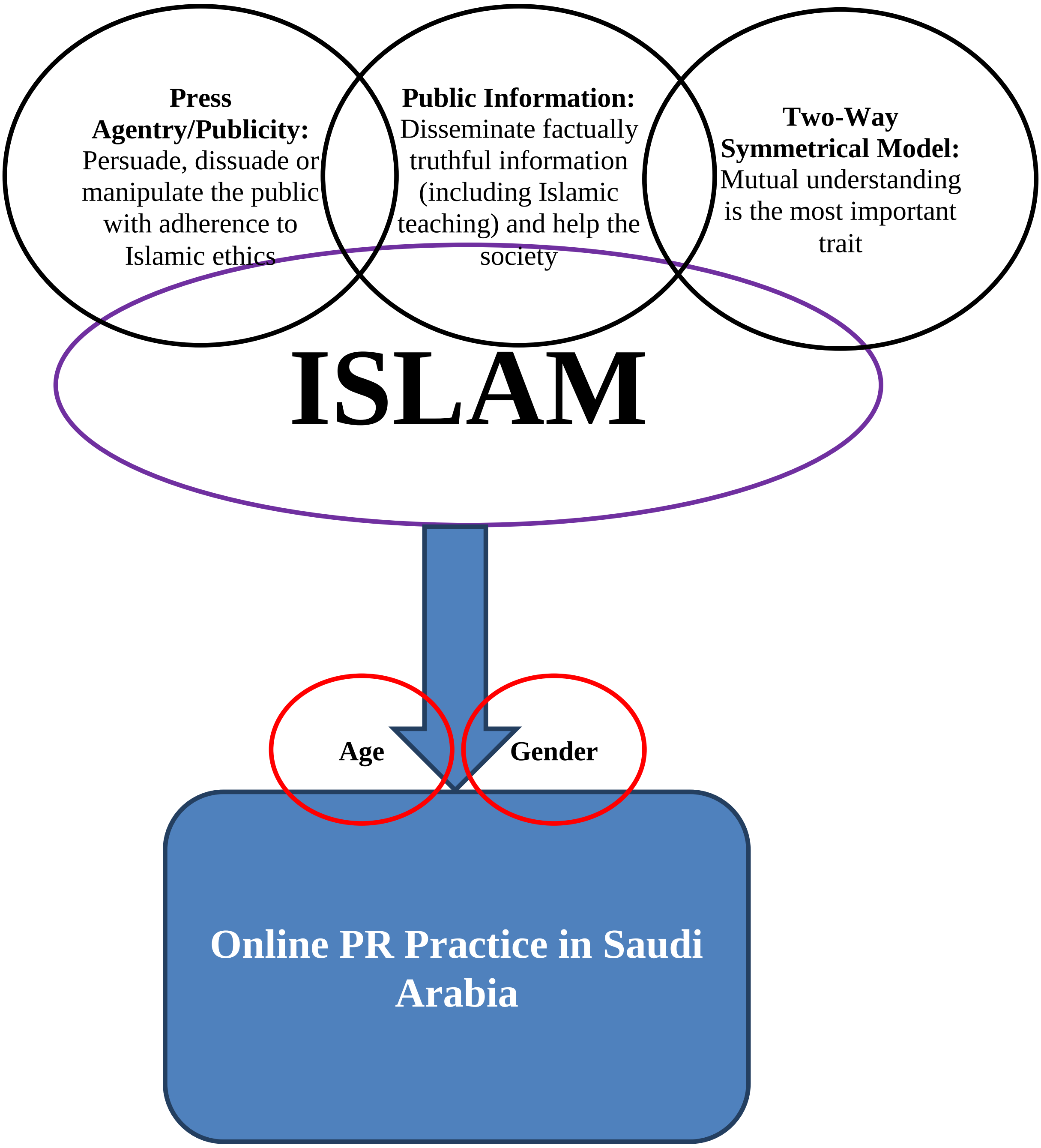
2016), the likelihood that PR practice in public institutions will progress towards the adoption of the two-way symmetrical model is weak. The dominance of the press agentry and one-way asymmetrical communication with the organisations assuming the upper hand in the communication matrix influences the PR practices, tools, philosophies, and goals in the Saudi context is consistent with previous findings (Alanazi 2013).

The findings of this research support the position stated by Alanazi (2013), which showed that PR tries to adjust to the expectations and needs of the nonmaterial and material aspects of a culture with the likelihood of failing to satisfy the PR standards presented in theoretical literature. The adoption of social media and its integration in the PR practice in Saudi Arabia borrows heavily from the Western PR practice having been introduced from the US and continually mimicking such practice. However, PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia find it impossible to dissociate their professionalism from Islamic religious practice. This renders adjustment of the PR practices they borrow from the Western world inevitable. Combined with the fact that most of the PR practitioners did not find it necessary to take up membership with PR practice bodies, it is likely that different professionalism levels exist in both public and private sectors in Saudi Arabia. This is consistent with the findings of Alanazi (2013) and Badran, Turk and Walters (2003). The findings of this research find that the key driver of the differences in PR professional practice is the potentially different cultural and religious interpretations.

Although it was not within the scope of this research, the number of PR professionals holding high positions in both STC and Saudi MCI were male. Considering the place of the woman as defined by Saudi culture under the heavy influence of Islamic teaching, it is possible that the two organisations are aware that female PR professionals might not be received with adequate respect to warrant their being listened to in the Saudi context. However, it was surprising to find not even a single woman in the high PR practitioner levels at either organisation. This outcome underscores the relevance of the place of an individual within the society as explained by Alanazi (2013). Alanazi (2013) established that the place of an individual within the society is a significant factor because it determines their freedom, strategies for communication and the magnitude of his or her opinion matters significantly within the society. From the findings of this research, it is possible to deduce that the place of the woman in the Saudi PR practice appears constrained and possibly second-place at best when comparing this to the place of the male PR practitioner. The placing of the woman in the PR practice appears congruent to her placing in the Islamic and cultural orientation of Saudi Arabia. Notably, Saudi Arabia is considered the cradle of Islam. This means that the values long held in Islam are rigid and preserved by both women and men with equal devotion.

Overall, PR practitioners are unlikely to adopt and apply the two-way symmetrical model and the public neither seek nor expect equal reciprocation from their organisations. This is majorly attributable to religion where Islam assumes centre stage in the professional and nonprofessional lifestyles of Saudis. Thus, the PR practice in Saudi Arabia continues to harbour tenets of press agentry/publicity, public information and mutual understanding and two way assymmetrical model under the strong influence of Islam. However, age was also found to be an influential factor in determining adoption of social media for PR practice in Saudi Arabia across both private and public organisations. Based on this understanding and the evidence available in the findings of this research, the researcher captured the new model of online PR in Saudi Arabia as illustrated in Figure 8.5 below.

Figure 8.5. *New model of online PR in Saudi Arabia*



The model above demonstrates that online PR practice in Saudi Arabia is not containable in one single model of PR practice and communication, as Grunig and Grunig (1992) proposed. Instead, evidence presented in this research and used to inform the development of the model above coincides with the suggestion by L'Etang (2008) that organisations are likely to blend various PR models in their PR practice. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the press agentry/publicity model is considerably alive in PR practice. However, the PR practitioners are cautious in their application of this model not to violate Islamic teaching concerning ethics and respect of the other. In this case, "the other" refers to the public. The practitioners also integrate the public information model and this includes the teachings of Islam and the observation of key periods in the Islamic calendar such as the Ramadan. Concerning the application of the two-way symmetrical model, the most prominent trait is mutual understanding between the organisations and their publics. However, this does not imply that PR practice in Saudi Arabia is devoid of the other traits of the two-way symmetrical model. Instead, the model above depicts that the other traits feature in PR practice sparingly or at negligible levels. This trend is also traceable to Islam as a religion and a lifestyle where, for example, the public does not find it necessary or plausible to achieve a balance of power in relationships.

Notably, Islam also influences the place of women in the online PR practice in Saudi Arabia considering the apparent dominance of male PR practitioners in senior positions in both organisations. The role of age in online PR practice in Saudi Arabia features in two ways. First, it influences the adoption of online PR itself because age affects the inclination towards adopting online tools for PR such as social media. Moreover, age also shapes/defines the perceptions towards the use of online PR. Second; age is also a significant influencer of the attempts at transitioning from conventional PR practice to online PR practice. This includes both the ease with which PR practitioners adopt new technologies and integrate them into practice. It also includes the ease with which PR practitioners in Saudi Arabia incline towards conventional or contemporary models of PR. From the findings of this research, older PR practitioners were more experienced, had more negative views towards social media and were supportive of PR practices that related to press agentry/publicity and public information models than younger, less experienced PR practitioners.

8.6 Conclusions and suggestions

The aim of this research was to study and compare the use of social media by companies in the Private and Public sectors in Saudi Arabia in order to understand the magnitude of ethical implementation of two-way symmetrical communications by the companies with their publics through social media. The objectives were as follows:

1) To investigate how private and public organisations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are using Facebook and Twitter in their communication with stakeholders and their publics
2) To examine whether Saudi private and public organisations, are using Facebook and Twitter in ethical and two-way symmetric manners
3) To establish how the usage of Facebook and Twitter has changed the way organisations in the Saudi private and public sectors communicate

4) To uncover social media opportunities in relation to Facebook and Twitter that Saudi private and public organisations have yet to exploit in terms of public relations
5) To test the applicability of the two-way symmetrical model in the Saudi context and extend its theoretical suppositions in this regard

In line with the research objectives outlined above, the following research questions were adopted to serve as guides in this study:

1) How are STC and Saudi MCI using Facebook and Twitter in their communication with stakeholders and their publics?
2) To what extent are STC and Saudi MCI, as reflections of Saudi private and public organisations, using Facebook and Twitter in ethical and two-way symmetric manners?
3) How has the usage of Facebook and Twitter changed the way STC and MCI PR practitioners and communicators engage their publics and stakeholders?
4) What social media opportunities/affordances in relation to Facebook and Twitter have STC and Saudi MCI yet to exploit in terms of public relations?
5) To what extent is the two-way symmetrical model applied in the Saudi context?

Using Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC) and The Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Saudi MCI) as the case companies, a research process combining concepts of parallel and sequential mixed methods research strategy in an exploratory and explanatory approach were implemented. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected independently of each other through an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with PR practitioners. Additionally, tweets and Facebook posts collected manually in November 2014 for 30 days were analysed using inductive content analysis. Inductive thematic analysis was performed to analyse interview data and the development of thematic maps enabled the development of thematic maps to illustrate the themes obtained from the interview data. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 21 after arrangement in Microsoft Excel 2013.

Concerning social media usage, both STC and Saudi MCI use Facebook and Twitter asymmetrically and to mainly publicise their activities or achievements and to share important information. It emerged that STC used Facebook and Twitter more frequently than Saudi MCI and this was traceable to the nature of their for-profit operations and the number of staff employed to deal with communication on social media. While the organisations were found to be ethical in their communication with the public via social media, a disparity emerged between the perceptions of the publics and the PR practitioners on ethical usage.

Altogether, both the publics and the PR practitioners acknowledged the supremacy of Islamic ethics, which applied even in their social media usage and PR practice. The two-way symmetrical model was found to be largely inapplicable in its entirety in the PR practice in Saudi Arabia although mutual understanding stood out as an important trait. Easier contact between organisations and their publics, combined with the sharing and access to important information about the organisations were the main effects of social media usage on the way Saudi organisations communicate. Largely, the public did not find the two organisations to be exploiting the social media affordances. However, consideration of the qualitative findings and further discussions aided in demonstrating that the organisations were making significant attempts in this regard. However, it emerged that the public might not have significant connection with the four social media affordances as to notice their exploitation or not by the two organisations. In the end, the findings of this research led to the confirmation of four out of the five hypotheses, as shown in Table 8.6 below.

Table 8.6. *Summary of hypotheses and confirmations/rejections*

Hypothesis	Confirmed/Rejected
H_1: There is a significant difference in terms of how Saudi private and public organisations engage their publics	Confirmed
H_2: Ethical usage of Facebook and Twitter between private and public organisations differs significantly	Confirmed
H_3: A significant difference exists in the extent to which private and public organisations use Facebook and Twitter in two-way symmetric manners	Confirmed
H_4: Social media has enhanced the communication practices within private and public organisations differently	Confirmed
H_5: Both STC and Saudi MCI are using Twitter and Facebook to optimise stakeholder engagement	Rejected

The quantitative findings showed that both STC and Saudi MCI use social media to publicise their activities, send public information, lobby public support for their position, change public opinion than to seek their input, enhance information quality and provide a question and answer platform for public. However, STC performed better across all these usages than Saudi MCI did. Concerning ethical usage, the STC public found it to be more ethical than the Saudi MCI public found the Ministry to be ethical. The STC public questioned the level of the organisation’s moral uprightness and the issue of taking full responsibility for all the information sent through social media. Differences emerged between the perceptions of the Facebook and Twitter audiences concerning the social media usage of the two organisations. The interview results revealed that the audiences on Facebook and Twitter were mainly non-Saudis and Saudis respectively, which explained the difference in perceptions. The inference deduced from these findings was that both STC and Saudi MCI were ethical in their PR practice in accordance with Islamic ethical requirements as opposed to professional PR ethics.

Evidence was found indicating that the usage of Facebook and Twitter changed the way STC and MCI PR practitioners and communicators engage their publics and stakeholders. The change was more prominent in easing the contact between the organisation and the public, allowing the public access to important information and enabling the public a voice in the engagement especially through criticising the organisation. Considering the largely one-sided PR practice whereby the organisations have the upper hand in conventional PR practice in Saudi Arabia, social media usage has reduced the receiver-sender gap between the public and the organisations respectively.

Upon testing for the application of the two-way symmetrical model in social media usage for PR practice and engagement with stakeholders, the findings showed that mutual understanding was the only prominent trait while the other traits featured less prominently. Consideration of all findings led to the conclusion that the online PR practice in Saudi Arabia is not containable in one PR model. Instead, PR practice features different traits of the PR models although the press agentry/publicity and public information models are more prominent. However, the findings showed strong evidence indicating that Islam influences PR practice significantly. Age and gender of PR practitioners also emerged as influential moderators of online PR practice in Saudi Arabia. The conclusion in this respect is 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.

About the social media opportunities/affordances that STC and Saudi MCI have yet to exploit in terms of public relations in relation to Facebook and Twitter, four social media affordances deduced from literature reviewed in the third chapter were tested for in this research. The findings revealed that the publics of both organisations were not convinced of the exploitation of visibility, editability, persistence, and association by the two organisations. However, the qualitative findings showed that the organisations were making significant efforts at exploiting the four social media affordances.

The conclusion was that the private and public organisations in Saudi Arabia exploit the social media affordances comprising visibility, editability, persistence, and association, but the public does not notice such exploitations.

Five other related conclusions were obtained based on the tests performed on the hypotheses. The first one is that both private and public organisations do not engage their publics in online debates about them regularly. Secondly, both private and public organisations use Facebook and Twitter in ethical manners. Thirdly, both private and public organisations do not use Facebook and Twitter in two-way symmetrical manners. Fourthly, using social media has led to enhanced communication practices in both private and public organisations. Finally, both STC and Saudi MCI use Twitter and Facebook to maximaze stakeholder engagement.

8.7 Practical Suggestions

The practical recommendations based on the findings of this research are as follows:

1) 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. This will likely elevate the trust the public have in the organisations with respect to the content shared via social media. While it is impractical to respond to all the comments and concerns of the public raised through social media, the employment of various PR practitioners to attend to the social media accounts of the organisations can improve the attention organisations accord their stakeholders.
2) The 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. However, the continued lack of strong professional PR bodies is a hindrance to the achievement of standardised PR practice even in terms of ethical PR practice. Whereas there are PR bodies that exist in Saudi Arabia, organisations and PR practitioners could enhance their value by promoting their relevance. Different approaches would be useful in ensuring that PR bodies are strengthened to pursue standardisation of PR practice in Saudi Arabia and the Arab World. For example, the PR bodies need to sensitise all PR practitioners on the importance of having one body that stewards the recognition of PR as a professional practice. This can commence at both organisational and university levels to encourage

PR students to take up membership. Incentives such as employment placements with reputable firms will likely appeal to fresh PR graduates and continuing students.

3) Seeing the inevitable impact that social media adoption and usage is having on PR practice in Saudi Arabia, PR practitioners need to learn ways of adapting to the change and transforming their practice consistently. This is achievable through regular seminars and workshops within organisations where PR practitioners learn about new developments from a unified code of PR practice defined by a professional PR body. Inclusion of social media use tactics in such training would also work towards promoting the integration of these tools in PR practice. Moreover, practitioners would have a platform where they can identify common problems presented by online PR and brainstorm on potential solutions to such problems.

8.8 Research implications

The most outstanding implication of this research is that PR practice in Saudi Arabia cannot continue to be defined or its advancement measured based on the models borrowed from the Western contexts. In other words, there is need to consider different PR models to define PR practice in Saudi Arabia. None of the existing PR models provides for the overarching influential role of religion as a way of life that infiltrates PR practice and influences its progress or stagnation at all instances. This implies that the PR practice in Saudi Arabia needs reinvention from the Western PR practice. Otherwise, PR practice in Saudi Arabia will always be considered conservative and rigid based on Western PR models for as long as Islam continues to define the lifestyles of the Saudi people. However, the development of a PR model to suit the Saudi context would mean borrowing from different models in the Western World that are considered out-dated or primitive. The PR model developed in this research challenges the school of thought that considers the applicability of one PR model to define PR practice as progressive or primitive. It also questions the presentation of one PR model as superior to, and more applicable, than the other is from a global view. This research demonstrates that different models apply differently across different cultural contexts.

The findings of this research reaffirm the significance of Islam to all aspects of Saudi professional and nonprofessional lifestyles. This research blurs the suitability of any theoretical or practical innovations in Saudi Arabia provided they overlook the role of Islam or consider it secondary. Overlooking the role of Islam in the development of professional solutions is likely to result in modification through contextualisation in Saudi Arabia or total rejection. In the case of Saudi Arabia, Islam shapes the culture and not the other way round, as is normally the case in other countries like Christian ones. For a Muslim, religion is central and everything else revolves around it including their work and relationships. In the case of the two-way symmetrical model for PR practice, it is likely that its perfect application may never be achieved in the Saudi context due to its likely contravention of the Saudi culture particularly on the balance of power in relationships, mutual learning, mutual dialogue, and mutual communication traits. This is because these traits tend to place the organisations and their publics at the same level, which defies the cultural orientation of the Saudi people especially in consideration of the large power distance. However, there is significant change in communication between the organisations and their publics occasioned by social media and this might indicate the narrowing of this power distance in this respect.

The findings of this research also demonstrate that the two-way symmetrical model might not apply in equal magnitude for both public and for-profit organisations in the Arab World. The differences in the operations, goals and organisational cultures of the two types of organisations might hinder or allow for accelerated adoption of the two-way symmetrical model. For example, it emerged that public organisations are less likely to advance speedily to adopt and implement new media and adjust their operations and structures to suit the demands thereof. The rigid nature of Saudi public organisations will likely continue to impede the advancement to two-way symmetrical practice. This is despite the individual embracement of influential people in the public organisations, as is the case with the Saudi MCI minister. Considering this reality, the future of innovative PR practice in Saudi Arabia is brighter with private organisations than it is with public organisations. Altogether, progress in transforming PR practice in private, for-profit organisations would result in skewed, selective PR practice and increase the difference in the practice across the two sectors leaving behind PR practice in public organisations.

8.9 Research limitations

Although this research accomplished its objectives, several limitations encumbered its completion. First, the implementation of parallel mixed methods research meant that some of the findings obtained in the quantitative analyses could not be explained while those obtained through the qualitative phase could not be measured. For example, it was difficult to explain the rationale behind the public finding the organisations to be underexploiting the social media affordances yet the analyses of tweets and Facebook posts indicated otherwise. It was difficult to measure the extent to which age influenced the adoption and integration of social media in PR practice. Second, the research design was taxing in the sense that the researcher had to acquire new skills during the research period. For example, the researcher had to work extra hard to study and understand the processes of recruiting interviewees, interviewing and analysing interview data using thematic analysis and incorporating thematic maps. Most of the skills gained meant time and financial implications yet the research was constrained on both. In the end, the expected completion time was delayed and the data collected in 2014 was presented in the final research report in 2017.

Second, the online survey data collection and the collection of tweets and Facebook posts presented with some challenges. Collecting quantitative data using a survey meant potential participation by under qualified and unqualified participants based on the criteria set for preferred participants. This is because the researcher did not have control over who could access the survey since the link was available publicly online. Although the researcher included prompts in the questionnaire to help in filtering out unqualified respondents, there is no guarantee that only questionnaires from the respondents that met the entire criteria were included in the final analyses. In line with the use of the online survey, the researcher could not compute the questionnaire response rate. This is because it was difficult to tell how many potential respondents had accessed the survey. With respect to archiving of tweets and Facebook posts, it is possible that the information reported as findings of this research was not a full representation of the actual interaction on social media between the organisations and their publics. For instance, the researcher did not have access to the inboxes of the organisations to determine whether they were interacting with their publics beyond the interaction available to the public. This limits the findings of this research in this respect to the conversations available publicly and not those held privately between the organisations and their publics.

8.10 Suggestions for further research

The completion of this research presents numerous opportunities for future research. For instance, it is important for future researchers to replicate the research design implemented in this research to validate its suitability and reliability in accomplishing consistent results concerning social media and PR practice in Saudi Arabia. Such replication would also create avenues for criticising and advancing the operationalization of the traits of the two-way symmetrical model. While simple arithmetic was used effectively in testing for the application and applicability of the two-way symmetrical model in PR practice in Saudi Arabia, alternative methods would help in developing knowledge about how to capture these traits during research. The goal of such future research should be to advance debate concerning the two-way symmetrical model in PR practice and to progress research in this respect towards a unified formula for testing for the presence of the traits of this model.

Accordingly, future research in the Saudi context should aim at testing the model for online PR practice in Saudi Arabia that was developed in this research. Future research should test the model across different industry sectors and using different organisations including not-for-profits, which were not considered in this research. Besides adding value to understanding online PR practice in Saudi Arabia, such research will be useful in confirming the position of Saudi PR practice vis-à-vis the global PR developments. In addition, such research will be crucial to answering some of the questions that were beyond the scope of this research. For example, there is still need to understand the extent to which the various components in the proposed model of online PR practice in Saudi Arabia apply in real practice. The roles of gender and age in PR practice in Saudi Arabia also require further investigation to determine their relevance or otherwise in understanding PR practice in Saudi Arabia.

Most importantly, there is need for further research concerning the extent to which Islam is implicated in the Saudi PR practice. This research already showed that ethics in professional PR practice draw heavily from Islamic ethics. It is important to determine whether other cultural and religious aspects affect the way PR practitioners perceive of and perform PR. Equally, the role of culture and religion in determining how these two factors influence the public perception and reception of PR practice as a profession in Saudi Arabia. The findings of such studies will be useful in differientiating research about Saudi PR practice from the ongoing trends towards using PR models developed in the West to study and explain PR practice in Saudi Arabia. The unique nature of Saudi Arabian lifestyle and the seemingly inseparability between religion as a lifestyle and professional practice renders such other models deficient in terms of capturing the true picture of PR practice in Saudi Arabia.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Invitation Letter

PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

{Researcher's Name}
University of Salford
Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Invitation to Participate in a Doctorate Research

My name is **Abdulhadi Almfleah**, currently undertaking a doctorate research at the University of Salford in the United Kingdom. This letter is an invitation for you to participate in my doctorate research and is based on the understanding that you are most suited to offer valuable input in the study due to your experience in the field of research. The details of my research are as indicated below:

Research Title: SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Purpose of research: To investigate the use of social media by companies in the Saudi Private and Public sectors with specific attention to Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC) and The Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Saudi MCI) in order to understand the magnitude of implementation of ethical two-way communications by the companies with their publics through social media in addition to offering guidelines on the increasingly famed public relations' area.

Your Role: If you agree to participate in this research, you will be issued with a participant information sheet and requested to sign an ethical consent form. You will be required to take part in an interview where you will be asked questions relating to the use of Facebook and Twitter in the KSA PR practice today. The interview session will take place at a venue and time that you and I will agree on. Each session will be audio recorded to ensure that I accurately document the deliberations for further analysis.

Thank you for considering my request. Please indicate your willingness or otherwise to participate in this study by checking only one of the boxes below:

☐ **I would like to participate in this research**

☐ **I do not want to participate in this research**

Please return or mail back this letter through the person or address you received it.
Sincerely,

Abdulhadi Almfleah

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Research

SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to do so, it is important that you understand the research that is being done and what your involvement will include. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask the researcher for clarification about anything that is not clear or for any further information you would like to help you make your decision. Please do take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of this study?

To investigate the use of social media by companies in the Saudi Private and Public sectors with specific attention to Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC) and The Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Saudi MCI) in order to understand the magnitude of implementation of ethical two-way communications by the companies with their publics through social media in addition to offering guidelines on the increasingly famed public relations' area.

Do I have to take part?

It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. Agreeing to join the study does not mean that you have to complete it. You are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason and without any repercussions whatsoever. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part at all, will not affect the rest of the treatment/care that you receive.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be involved in it by *completing an online questionnaire or participation in an interview designed by the researcher.*

The first thing to happen will be *to append your signature to this form before proceeding to complete the questionnaire or participate in an interview session*

What are the possible disadvantages, risks or side effects of taking part?

There are no possible risks or side effects associated with participation in this research.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Participation in this study is absolutely voluntary and carries no incentives or benefits whatsoever.

How will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Participation in this study will not require disclosure of personal information traceable to you. In addition, all information obtained through the questionnaires and interviews that are traceable to you will not feature in the presentation of findings unless you give written consent authorising such disclosure or legal requirements demand such disclosure. In case you will participate in the interview sessions, you will be referred to using a pseudonym (e.g. Interviewee 1 or Participant1) during the presentation of your responses.

Data protection measures have also been put in place to ensure that the researcher is the only person with access to raw data. Where applicable, electronic data files will be password protected and the password will not be disclosed to anyone by the researcher. Prior to, and upon completion of data transcription and analyses, all media containing raw data will be password protected.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be presented in form of a report and submitted for assessment as per university regulations/policies.

Who has reviewed this study?

This research has been reviewed by *Dr. Carole O'Reilly* and *Dr. Cristina Archetti*

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

If you would like further information or would like to discuss any details personally, please get in touch with me, in writing, by phone or by email: a.m.a.almfleah@edu.salford.ac.uk.

Although I hope it is not the case, if you have any complaints or concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please write to the University Secretary and Registrar.

Thank you very much for reading this information and giving consideration to taking part in this study.

Sincerely,

Abdulhadi Almfleah

Appendix 3: Participant Informed Consent Form

University of Salford

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDIES INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

I, the undersigned *[please give your name here*, *in BLOCK CAPITALS]*

……….
of [*please give contact details here, sufficient to enable the investigator to get in touch with you, such as a postal or email address]*

…..…… ..
hereby freely agree to take part in the study entitled *[insert name of study here]*

SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY PUBLIC RELATIONS

DEPARTMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

1 I confirm that I have been given a Participant Information Sheet (a copy of which is attached to this form) giving particulars of the study, including its aim(s), methods and design, the names and contact details of key people and, as appropriate, the risks and potential benefits, and any plans for follow-up studies that might involve further approaches to participants. I have been given details of my involvement in the study. I have been told that in the event of any significant change to the aim(s) or design of the study I will be informed, and asked to renew my consent to participate in it.

2 I have been assured that I may withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage or having to give a reason.

3 I have been told how information relating to me (data obtained in the course of the study, and data provided by me about myself) will be handled: how it will be kept secure, who will have access to it, and how it will or may be used.

4 I have been told that I may at some time in the future be contacted again in connection with this or another study.

Signature of participant……………………………………………………………………………Date…………………………

Signature of (principal) investigator…………………………………………………… Date…………………………

Name of (principal) investigator *[in BLOCK CAPITALS please]*
ABDULHADI ALMFLEAH
…….....

Appendix 4: Interview Guide

SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Interview Guide

Thank you very much for accepting the call to participate in this interview. The interview is set to take between 30 and 75 minutes and will be recorded pursuant to the stipulations set forth in the participant information sheet that you signed. If there is something you would like to say prior to the starting of the interview, you are welcome to say it now.

1) Kindly share about what your role is at STC/MCI
2) If at all, please explain how your role is involved with public relations or communication with the public.
3) For how long in terms of years and/or months have you been in this position at STC/MCI?
4) In which year did you join PR practice?
5) Are you a member of any PR professional body? If yes, what’s the name of the professional body?

Facebook and Twitter Use for PR practice

6) Do you have a Facebook and/or Twitter account?
7) How would you rate your knowledge in Facebook and Twitter?
8) Do you use Facebook and/or Twitter in your work? If yes, how? If no, why not?
9) Does your organisation have a Twitter handle and/or Facebook page?
10) In what ways does your organisation use Twitter or Facebook to communicate with its publics, if at all?
11) Kindly state the types of information that are disseminated by your organisation to its publics over the Twitter and/or Facebook platforms?
12) Kindly explain whether you are/are not convinced that the public in Saudi Arabia is ready to embrace PR practice through Facebook and Twitter.
13) Please give your opinion on the potential benefits that social media and especially Twitter and Facebook can have on PR practice.
14) Kindly explain any potentially negative impacts that social media and especially Twitter and Facebook can have on PR practice.

15) Please give your opinion on how social media and especially Twitter and Facebook have both positively and negatively affected how your organisation communicates with its publics and PR practice in your organisation.

Ethics and use of Facebook and Twitter

16) As a PR practitioner, kindly explain what you understand by ethical communication. In other words, what does ethical communication entail in your opinion?

17) Are there any organisational ethical guidelines specific to how your organisation's PR practitioners use Facebook and/or Twitter? Kindly explain your response.

18) Kindly highlight any benefits of ethical communication that you have seen apply to your organisation.

19) In your opinion, does your ethical communication practice as an individual have anything to do with the KSA culture? Explain your response.

20) In your opinion, does the KSA culture influence the manner in which your organisation's ethical communication practices? Explain your response.

21) What more should be done to promote ethical PR communication in your organisation through Facebook and Twitter?

22) Is there anything more you would like to share in relation to this research or the interview session?

Thank you very much for your honest insights and responses during the interview. Your responses are invaluable and crucial to the findings and conclusions of this study.

Appendix 5a: Facebook Questionnaire

SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Facebook Questionnaire

Thank you very much for accepting to contribute to this research. Your participation and responses to this questionnaire will only be employed in my Doctorate dissertation, which seeks to identify the use of social media by companies in the Saudi Private and Public sectors with specific attention to Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC) and The Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Saudi MCI). Moreover, your responses to the questions below will contribute significantly to the body of knowledge that this study promises to offer. Any response, suggestion, or opinion will be treated with utmost anonymity, integrity and confidentiality and only for the intended research purposes of this study. All questionnaires will be password protected before and after data analysis is completed. Completion of this questionnaire serves as your informed consent to participate voluntarily in this research.

Note – <u>"The Organisation" refers to either STC or MCI depending on where you found the link to this survey e.g. if you found the link from STC's Twitter page, then STC is "the organisation" in that case.</u>

Demographic Data

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age (Years): ☐ Below 20 ☐ 20-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ Above 50
3. Are you a Saudi national? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Participant Facebook Use

4. Have you liked the organisation's Facebook page? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Have you ever posted on the organisation's page or commented on their post or liked their status/post/link at least once? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

6. **The organisation engages in dialogue with the public about their activities as the main aim of their Facebook use**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
7. **The organisation only uses Facebook to publicise their activities**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
8. **The organisation only uses Facebook to send the public information and does not respond to the views of the public**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
9. **It is likely that feedback from the public can make the organisation change a position they have taken**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
10. **The organisation uses Facebook to help the public see and support the view/position of the organisation in different matters**
    ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
11. **The information posted on Facebook by the organisation is always truthful**

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

12. The organisation uses Facebook to spread government/ministerial propaganda

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

13. I trust that the information sent by the organisation on Facebook is true

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

14. The organisation shares information via Facebook in a fair manner

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

15. The organisation takes responsibility for all information sent through its Facebook page

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

16. The organisation shows respect for the public through their conversations on Facebook

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

17. The organisation shows a high level of integrity in their Facebook posts

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

18. The public gets responses from the organisation when they challenge the ministry's position.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

19. Saudi MCI seeks to change the opinion of the public more than they seek to have the opinion of the public

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

20. The public mainly uses the organisation's Facebook page to criticise than to commend it

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

21. The organisation ignores some of the posts sent to them by the public and do not respond

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

22. Facebook has made it easier and faster to contact the organisation

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

23. Facebook comments, status updates, friending, photos, and posts have made the organisation become known to more individuals in the public

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

24. I can access information sent through the organisation's Facebook page long after it was posted

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

25. The organisation uses Facebook to regulate personal expressions, enhance quality of information and create target-oriented content

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

26. The organisation's Facebook page has led to the development of an online social connection between the members of the public

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

27. The organisation's Facebook page allows access to pertinent information about the ministry

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

28. The organisation encourages the Saudi public on Facebook to participate in conversations about the ministry

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

29. The organisation often sends informative links via its Facebook page to all its 'likers'

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

30. The organisation's Facebook page is also a Question and Answer (Q&A) platform for the publics

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

Thank you very much for your honest insights and responses. Your responses are invaluable and crucial to the findings and conclusions of this study.

Appendix 5b: Twitter Questionnaire

SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Twitter Questionnaire

Thank you very much for accepting to contribute to this research. Your participation and responses to this questionnaire will only be employed in my Doctorate dissertation, which seeks to identify the use of social media by companies in the Saudi Private and Public sectors with specific attention to Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC) and The Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Saudi MCI). Moreover, your responses to the questions below will contribute significantly to the body of knowledge that this study promises to offer. Any response, suggestion, or opinion will be treated with utmost anonymity, integrity and confidentiality and only for the intended research purposes of this study. All questionnaires will be password protected before and after data analysis is completed. Completion of this questionnaire serves as your informed consent to participate voluntarily in this research.

Note – “The Organisation” refers to either STC or MCI depending on where you found the link to this survey e.g. if you found the link from STC’s Twitter page, then STC is “the organisation” in that case.

Demographic Data

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age (Years): ☐ Below 20 ☐ 20-30 ☐ 31-40
   ☐ 41-50 ☐ Above 50
3. Are you a Saudi national? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Participant Twitter Use

4. Do you follow the organisation on Twitter? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Have you ever tweeted to the organisation or sent the organisation direct message or commented on their tweet, retweeted or favourited their tweet at least once?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

6. **The organisation engages in dialogue with the public about their activities as the main aim of their Twitter handle**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
7. **The organisation only uses Twitter to publicise their activities**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
8. **The organisation only uses Twitter to send the public information and does not respond to the views of the public**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
9. **It is likely that feedback from the public sent through the organisation’s Twitter handle can make the organisation change a position they have taken**
   ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree
10. **The organisation uses Twitter to help the public see and support its view/position in different matters**

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

11. The information posted on Twitter by the organisation is always truthful

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

12. The organisation uses Twitter to spread government/ministerial propaganda

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

13. I trust that the information sent by the organisation on Twitter is true

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

14. The organisation shares information via Twitter in a fair manner

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

15. The organisation takes responsibility for all information sent through its Twitter handle

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

16. The organisation shows respect for the public through their conversations on Twitter

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

17. The organisation shows a high level of integrity in their tweets

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

18. The public gets responses from the organisation when they challenge the organisation's position.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

19. The organisation seeks to change the opinion of the public more than they seek to have the opinion of the public via Twitter

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

20. The public mainly uses the organisation's Twitter handle to criticise it than to commend it

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

21. The organisation ignores some of the tweets and direct messages sent to them by the public and do not respond

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

22. Twitter has made it easier and faster to contact the organisation

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

23. The organisation's tweets and conversations have made it become known to more individuals in the public

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

24. I can access information sent through the organisation's Twitter handle long after it was posted

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

25. The organisation uses Twitter to regulate personal expressions, enhance quality of information and create target-oriented content

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

26. The organisation's Twitter handle has led to the development of an online social connection with the members of the public

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

27. The organisation’s Twitter handle allows access to pertinent information about the organisation

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

28. The organisation encourages the Saudi public on Twitter to participate in conversations about the organisation

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

29. The organisation often sends informative links via its Twitter handle to all its followers

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

30. The organisation’s Twitter handle is also a Question and Answer (Q&A) platform for the publics

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

Thank you very much for your honest insights and responses. Your responses are invaluable and crucial to the findings and conclusions of this study.

Appendix 6: Ethical Approval Form

College Ethics Panel
Ethical Approval Form for Post-Graduates

Ethical approval must be obtained by all postgraduate research students (PGR) prior to starting research with human subjects, animals or human tissue.

A PGR is defined as anyone undertaking a Research rather than a Taught masters degree, and includes for example MSc by Research, MRes by Research, MPhil and PhD. The student must discuss the content of the form with their dissertation supervisor who will advise them about revisions. A final copy of the summary will then be agreed and the student and supervisor will 'sign it off'.

The signed Ethical Approval Form and application checklist must be forwarded to your College Support Office and also an electronic copy MUST be e-mailed to the College Support Office;

The forms are processed online therefore without the electronic version, the application cannot progress. Please note that the form must be signed by **both the student and supervisor**.

Please ensure that the electronic version of this form only contains your name and your supervisor's name on this page, where it has been requested.

All other references to you or anyone else involved in the project must be removed from the electronic version as the form has to be anonymised before the panel considers it.

Where you have removed your name, you can replace with a suitable marker such as [.....] Or [Xyz], [Yyz] and so on for other names you have removed too.

You should retain names and contact details on the hardcopies as these will be kept in a separate file for potential audit purposes.

Please refer to the 'Notes for Guidance' if there is doubt whether ethical approval is required

The form can be completed electronically; the sections can be expanded to the size required.

Name of Student: Abdulhadi Almfleah

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Carole O'Reilly

School: University of Salford

Course of study: PhD in Media and Arts

Name of Research Council or other funding organisation (if applicable):

1a. Title of proposed research project

SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

1b. Is this Project Purely literature based?

NO (delete as appropriate)

2. Project focus

To investigate the use of social media by companies in the Saudi Private and Public sectors with specific attention to Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC) and The Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Saudi MCI) in order to understand the magnitude of implementation of ethical two-way communications by the companies with their publics through social media in addition to offering guidelines on the increasingly famed public relations' area.

3. Project objectives

6) To investigate how private and public organisations are using Facebook and Twitter in their communication with stakeholders and their publics
1) To examine whether Saudi private and public organisations, are using Facebook and Twitter in ethical and two-way symmetric manners
2) To establish how the usage of Facebook and Twitter has changed the way organisations in the Saudi private and public sectors communicate
3) To uncover social media opportunities in relation to Facebook and Twitter that Saudi private and public organisations have yet to exploit in terms of public relations
4) To test the applicability of the two-way symmetrical model in the Saudi context and extend its theoretical suppositions in this regard

4. Research strategy

(For example, outline of research methodology, what information/data collection strategies will you use, where will you recruit participants and what approach you intend to take to the analysis of information / data generated)

Mixed research methods with primary data being collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with PR practitioners working with STC and Saudi MCI, online survey for the publics designed using Google Forms whose link will be posted on the STC and Saudi MCI Twitter handles and Facebook pages, archival of tweets and Facebook posts. Ground theory for interview data analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS for survey data and content analysis of tweets and Facebook posts by the organisations. All interview, questionnaire and archival data will be collected in Arabic and later translated to English for presentation of findings. Interview quotes will be provided in the presentation of findings.

5. What is the rationale which led to this project?

(For example, previous work – give references where appropriate. Any seminal works must be cited)

Multitude of research (e.g. Gandia 2011; Hallahan 2010; Curtis et al 2010) focused on the opportunities for two-way communication, via social media for business organisations. However, there is negligible evidence that such organisations presently use social media for this aim. Researchers like Hallahan (2010) contend that public relations lack emphasis on online ethical conduct since they do not consider online platforms as formal PR channels. Others like Gandia (2011) argue that many organisations are yet to utilise social media to its fullest. This research will uncover social media opportunities that organisations are yet to exploit in terms of public relations. Besides, most research in this area focused on American contexts (for example, Curtis et al 2010) and Mainland European settings (Ingenhoff and Koelling 2009) ignoring public relations in the Middle East.

Transparency and trust are increasingly vital for organisations in their quests to forge relationships and develop support (Coombs and Holladay 2010). In the public relations' context, various authors (including Kim, Hong and Cameron 2011; Sweetser 2010; Rawlins 2009) concur that transparency is synonymous with open communication that has a higher likelihood of being strategic. On the other hand, trust refers mainly to public trust in public relations in organisations (Poppo and Schepker 2010). Consequently, Poppo and Schepker (2010) argue that public trust is "readily defined as the degree to which external stakeholders, such as the public, hold a collective trust orientation toward an organisation, is a relatively understudied area" (p.124). This implies that public trust is the magnitude to which parties outside the organisation who have interest in the organisation appear to collectively trust the organisation. Therefore, public trust appears to be the extent of collective public inclination towards an organisation.

On the other hand, Bowen (2004) contends that the ethical facets of public relations, which "typically include ethical advocacy, honesty, integrity, expertise, and loyalty" (Harrison and Galloway 2005, p.2), are critical in relation to the credibility of discipline in an organisation. Grunig (2009) recommends two-way communication, which involves communication from the organisation to the public and vice versa. In addition, he points to the importance social media could have for this type of dialogic communication. Both social media and public relations gravitate around exchange of information, which supports contentions from public relations practitioners claiming positive results through social media use (Phillips and Young 2009).

The first research objective will be critical as the foundation for establishing the possibility of social media usage in communication with stakeholders. According to Hird (2011), the trend towards social media usage for communication in business arenas is expanding as the users of social media concurrently continue to rise. The various kinds of social media give organisations a chance to participate in conversations through the internet and debates about organisations occur online consistently (Brown 2009). However, there is still an unexplored research area of how organisations actually use social media when communicating with stakeholders especially in the Saudi Arabian context. Therefore, it would be important to find out how private and public organisations use Facebook and Twitter when communicating with stakeholders

As for the second research objective, Bowen (2004) notes that academics contend that ethics ought to be a generic excellence principle in public relations. Coombs and Holladay (2010) reiterate this significance and mention the poor reputation that public relations have with respect to ethics. Through the demonstration of authenticity, organisations are likely to obtain vital trust from their publics according to L'Etang (2008). In fact, Coombs and Holladay (2010) contend that open conversations stand out as essential facets of modern public relations for the purposes of pursuing interactivity, ethical behaviour and transparency. By examining whether STC and Saudi MCI, as reflections of Saudi private and public organisations, are using Facebook and Twitter in ethical and two-way symmetric manners, the researcher will be in a better position to make proper recommendations for enhancement or sustenance of ethical and two-way symmetrical social media usage.

In the past, many commentators have stated the opinion that social media technologies have the capacity to enhance communication practices within organisations that are distinct from those using classical computer-mediated communication technologies such as teleconferencing, email and intranets (Smolnik and Hoppe 2011; McAfee 2006; Grudin 2006). Interestingly, Raeth et al (2009) contend that the adoption of social media in organisations consistently surpasses empirical understanding on their usage and our theoretical suggestions concerning why they could change a variety of organisational processes. These inconsistencies and raging debates inform the need for the researcher in the current study to investigate how the usage of social media has changed the way organisations in the Saudi private and public sectors communicate as addressed through the third research objective.

Various literatures in the context of optimal social media usage in organisations inform the need for the fourth research objective, which entails uncovering social media opportunities that organisations are yet to exploit in terms of public relations. For example, Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012) conducted a research investigating how 73 US not-for-profit organisations used Twitter in engaging stakeholders through tweets and other various methods. They analysed 4,655 tweets and the findings showed that the largest not-for-profit organisations were not making use of Twitter to optimise stakeholder engagement. They instead utilise social media as a one-way channel of communication. Although the study by Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012) was on US non-profit organisations, it would be interesting to investigate the matter on for-profit private and public organisations within a Saudi Arabian context. This is because findings on this objective are likely to contribute significantly to extant literature on social media usage, public relations and stakeholder involvement from a non-western context.

6. **If you are going to work within a particular organisation do they have their own procedures for gaining ethical approval**

   (For example, within a hospital or health centre?)

   YES (delete as appropriate)

If YES – what are these and how will you ensure you meet their requirements?

Written authorisation must be sought from the PR managers of both STC and Saudi MCI to allow the researcher to conduct research focusing on the organisations. I have already applied for and received written authorisation from the relevant authorities at STC and Saudi MCI to continue with the research and involve their publics by posting links on their Facebook pages and Twitter handles.

7. Are you going to approach individuals to be involved in your research?

YES (delete as appropriate)

If YES – please think about key issues – for example, how you will recruit people? How you will deal with issues of confidentiality / anonymity? Then make notes that cover the key issues linked to your study

Interviewees will be approached personally through their organisations' contact lists. For example, the researcher will seek from the PR managers to provide contacts with the PR practitioners working under them in each organisations To ensure confidentiality/anonymity, Names of the questionnaire respondents and interviewees will not be asked for in the questionnaires or interview guides and they will not be included in the presentation of findings. Instead, pseudonyms will be used for identifying the interviewees.

8. More specifically, how will you ensure you gain informed consent from anyone involved in the study?

I will issue informed consent forms to every interviewee prior to starting the interview sessions whereby interviewees will be required to read, ask any questions and append their signatures. The questionnaires will start with an informed consent section indicating to the potential respondents that by completing the online questionnaire they were giving their informed consent for participation.

9. How are you going to address any Data Protection issues?

See notes for guidance which outline minimum standards for meeting Data Protection issues

Data will only be used for research purposes only. Additionally, all interview transcripts, questionnaires and raw electronic data will be password protected. The Association on International Researchers ethics code will be used to guide the research ethics in the current study.

10. Are there any other ethical issues that need to be considered? For example - research on animals or research involving people under the age of 18.

No

11. **(a) Does the project involve the use of ionising or other type of "radiation"**

NO

(b) Is the use of radiation in this project over and above what would <u>normally</u> be expected (for example) in diagnostic imaging?

NO

(c) Does the project require the use of hazardous substances?

NO

(d) Does the project carry any risk of injury to the participants?

NO

(e) Does the project require participants to answer questions that may cause disquiet / or upset to them?

NO

If the answer to any of the questions 11(a)-(e) is YES, a risk assessment of the project is required and must be submitted with your application.

12. **How many subjects will be recruited/involved in the study/research? What is the rationale behind this number?**

Between 8 and 20 interviewees will be recruited as it is deemed saturation will have been reached and no further interviews will be necessary in line with the recommendations by Creswell (2014) and Moustakas (1994) At least 100 questionnaire responses

13. **Please state which code of ethics has guided your approach (e.g. from Research Council, Professional Body etc).**

Please note that in submitting this form you are confirming that you will comply with the requirements of this code. If not applicable please explain why.

Association of International Researchers ethics code

Remember that informed consent from research participants is crucial, therefore all documentation must use language that is readily understood by the target audience.

Projects that involve NHS patients, patients' records or NHS staff, will require ethical approval by the appropriate NHS Research Ethics Committee. The University College Ethics Panel will require written confirmation that such approval has been granted. Where a project forms part of a larger, already *approved, project, the approving REC should be informed about, and approve, the use of an additional co-researcher.*

I certify that the above information is, to the best of my knowledge, accurate and correct. I understand the need to ensure I undertake my research in a manner that reflects good principles of ethical research practice.

Signed by Student ____

Print Name ____

Date ____

In signing this form I confirm that I have read this form and associated documentation.

I have discussed and agreed the contents with the student on ____________________
(Please insert date of meeting with student)

Signed by Supervisor ____

Print Name ____

Date ____

College Ethics Panel:
Application Checklist

Ref No:	*Office Use Only*

Name of Applicant: Abdulhadi Almfleah

SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

The checklist below helps you to ensure that you have all the supporting documentation submitted with your ethics application form. This information is necessary for the Panel to be able to review and approve your application. Please complete the relevant boxes to indicate whether a document is enclosed and where appropriate identifying the date and version number allocated to the specific document (*in the header / footer*), Extra boxes can be added to the list if necessary.

Document	**Enclosed?** (indicate appropriate response)				**Date**	**Version No**
Application Form	Mandatory			If not required please give a reason		
Risk Assessment Form	Yes	No	Not required for this project ✓	The project does not carry any potential exposure to risk of injury or harm to the participants		
Participant Invitation Letter	Yes ✓	No	Not required for this project			
Participant Information Sheet	Yes ✓	No	Not required for this project			
Participant Consent Form	Yes ✓	No	Not required for this project			
Participant Recruitment Material – e.g. copies of posters, newspaper adverts, website, emails	Yes	No	Not required for this project ✓	Interview participants will be approached in person while questionnaire respondents will follow the link posted on the STC and MCI Facebook pages and Twitter Handles		
Organisation Management Consent / Agreement Letter	Yes ✓	No	Not required for this project			
Research Instrument – e.g. questionnaire	Yes ✓	No	Not required for this project			
Draft Interview Guide	Yes ✓	No	Not required for this project			
National Research Ethics Committee	Yes	No	Not required for this project	University and organisational approval		

consent			✓	will be adequate		
Note: If the appropriate documents are not submitted with the application form then the application will be returned directly to the applicant and will need to be resubmitted at a later date thus delaying the approval process						

Appendix 7: GANNT chart showing work done, milestones, time plan and future work.

	Time (Months)									
Activity	1-5	6-12	13- 16	17-25	26-30	31-34	35-40	41-45	46-47	48
Proposal development and presentation										
Seeking research and ethical consent										
Literature compilation, review and methodology writing										
Interview guide preparation										
Establishing contact with STC and Saudi MCI, scheduling and conducting of interviews										
Data Analyses										
Final Dissertation compilation and submission										
Final revisions and Final Touches										

Key:

Done	**Partially Done**	**Pending**

Appendix 7: Interview coding manual

Interviewee	STC1	STC2	STC3
Date	Sunday, April 5, 2015	Sunday, April 5, 2015	Monday April 6, 2015
Gender			
Organisation	STC	STC	STC
Position	Director of Media Affairs and Content	Director of Social Networking	Director of Social Responsibility Department
Role	Media Editor: prepare media content for the press, radio, TV, and expurgate media materials, coordinate with customers and solving their problems	of process Organize the managing digital channels of the Company (STC) on social Twitter, Facebook,) networks Linked, Google Plus Instagram, Snapchat	. International principles' automation to preserve human rights, ensure job security, preserve work environment, serve clients to ensure loyalty . Social integration of staff . Social initiatives e.g. 22 health centres, charity
Experience	30 years	10 months	15 years
Joined PR	1986	2014	2007
PR Association Membership	No	No	**No,** but member of social responsibility clubs
Facebook or Twitter Account?	Twitter (limited usage)	Yes	**Yes**; Twitter very active Facebook inactive
SM knowledge	Limited	Excellent	Good
SM for Business?	No	Yes; managing company SM platforms	**Yes;** . Review public views to identify trends and tendency
Organisational SM Usage	. Marketing . Communicating with public	. Marketing . Conveying new orders . Technical support	. Official FB and Twitter accounts grouped into client categories
Information Published	. Economic news . Financial news . Social news	. Marketing offers . Important announcements . Events coverage . Community service	. General information (services, new offers) . Private information (shareholders, projects, shares)
Public ready for PR thru SM?	Yes; customers mainly youthful	Yes; remarkable increase noticed	**Yes;** Especially Twitter
Potential SM benefits on PR practice in General	. Easy customer access . Less effort and time in service delivery	. Increased reach esp. to those unreachable thru TV, Radio, Newspaper	. Communication with public . Visibility
Negative SM impact on PR practice	. Propaganda	. Customers publish outrage especially due to general problems	. Eliminates personal contact . Productivity reduction . Time wastage
Defining Ethical Communication	. Honesty . Transparency . Conspicuousness . Information accuracy	Could not define clearly . Respect for others' opinion	**Somehow correct** good conduct and treating others as self
Are there Company SM ethics' guidelines?	**No,** but there are acquired from actual practice and Islamic ethics	Yes; . Have general policy in work practice ethics	Yes; . Personal values too . Company values e.g. client
Facebook Benefits to Company	. Active Interaction . Contact with customers . Gathering competitor intelligence . Access to many customer categories	. Personal communication esp. with non-Saudis	Not much; many Saudis left for Twitter
Twitter Benefits to Company	. Huge Saudi audience . Marketing . Gathering customer intelligence . Competitor intelligence	. Huge Saudi audience . Rapid communication with customers . More interactive	. Huge audience . Popularity/visibility . Free expression of opinion . Rapid communication with public
Communication practices and relationship with culture	**Certainly** Abide by religious principles Serve country selflessly	Certainly Religious orientation of homeland	**Yes**; especially Islamic teachings
Culture and effect on ethical communication practices	Ethics are erived from societal and Islamic culture	Certainly Because content must be tailored to target group	**Yes**; STC runs activities based on Islamic teachings (honesty, integrity,
Promotion and development of	. Intensify communication with customers . Redirect course of action appropriately	Instructions to accept other people's opinion	Responsibility and accountability for behaviour on SM
Additional Comments	. We encourage new media usage in PR . New media is the future for conveying information fast, successfully, most	STC to retain pioneering role	This study takes a new and significant trend in media

STC7	STC6	STC5	STC4
	Monday 6 April 2015	Sunday April 5, 2015	Monday 6 April 2015
STC	STC	STC	STC
Director of Section of Planning & Public Relations	Director of Department of Digital Communications – Organizational Affairs Sector	Executive Contact Person of the relationships in the digital communications company	Director of Department of Digital Communications – Organizational Affairs Sector (director of the Internal & External Digital Channels)
Planning & Public Relations at Public Relations Department	Director of the Internal & External Digital Channels	Digital PR and electronic news' distribution	Create and administer content
17	4 years	1.5 years	4 years
1999	2010	2013	2010
No, but member of Dubai Press Club	**No**	**No**	**No**
Yes, both	Yes, both	Yes, both	Yes
Good	Excellent	Good	Excellent
Yes, pass messages of different occasions in informal ways	**Yes:** Manage LinkedIn, Google Plus, Instagram and Snapchat	**Yes**	**Yes;** Manage with alongside LinkedIn, Google+,
.Have dept. with message passing, offering services, marketing	FB to Interact with non-Saudis Twitter to interact with Saudis LinkedIn: use simple, non-classical Arabic	Through 2 sections: . Publication of services and offers	FB to Interact with non-Saudis Twitter to interact with
. Marketing . News	. Marketing of services . Products . General information -<=6 tweets, 4 FB Messages, 2 Instagram	. Marketing . Sharing Islamic information . Public education e.g. security info	. Marketing . Sharing general information
Youth are active		**Yes**; Youth are more convinced	**Yes**
Customer closeness Easy customer access Enable measuring public		. Rapid communication . Cheaper than traditional methods of advertising	. Become very close with clients . Access clients easily
Make people lazy and sluggish		. Reduced personal contact	. One-directional communication for some companies
Did not define		**Somewhat correct;** Honesty, clarity and transparency	**Correct;** observation of certain general values such as honesty, impartiality,
Yes, only one official spokesperson		**Yes**	**Not really**
No idea		. Rapid access to target segments . Access to non-Saudis	. Huge audience . Targeted communication
. Enhanced communication . Feedback tool		. Customer location identification . Customer feedback	. Huge audience . Learning customer preference . Data mining
Yes; As we are part of the society		**Yes;** esp. Islamic principles	**Certainly**
Yes; Saudi culture is conservative		**Yes;** STC reflects Saudi society values and functions within	**Not really** STC abides by conditions and
		Dialogue + Respect for other people's opinions	No
Exchange with international companies to develop communication ethics		No	No

MCI5	MCI4	MCI3	MCI2	MCI1
Thursday 16 April 2017	Thursday 16	Thursday 16 April	Thursday 16 April 2015	Thursday 2 April 2015
MCI	MCI	MCI	MCI	MCI
Director general for Public Relations	Director of Department of Public Relations & Marketing - Real Estate Contribution Committee	Public Relations Specialist- Real Estate Committee	Consultant of Public Relations Department- Real Estate Contributions Section	Director of the Department of New Electronic Digital Media, News Publishing and social networks management
. Communicate news . Monitoring writings about MCI . Daily info submissions . Answering media queries . Responding to internal and external clients Receiving delegations	Marketing and PR	To communicate with internal and external public	Implementing all PR assignments connecting to public, event organisation support	
30	2 years	3 years	3 years	3.5 years
1984	2013	2012	2012	
No; I work with Saudi Society for Public Relations and Advertisements	No	No	Yes; Saudi Association for Public Relations and Advertisement	No, but chief editor of NASHIR Magazine (MCI trademarks' publisher)
No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Good	Excellent	Good	Excellent, but I am not	Excellent
No; We have specialised departments	Yes . Publishing media news	Yes Passing important info	Yes assess tweets and forward them to	Yes, pass my own messages mainly on Twitter
. News conveyance . Public awareness	News' publishing	Public communication	. News (one-way) . Respond to public queries or amendment	. Answers public queries . Address complaints on fraud, extortion
. News . Public awareness messages . Answering queries . Garnering public opinion	.Consumer awareness News on commercial fraud	.General information . Guidance and directives	. News . Customer precautions . Real estate contributions and	. Answers to customer queries
Convinced they are ready	Not sure Public is ready	Convinced they are ready	Convinced they are ready	Convinced they are ready
. Reduced need for manpower . More organised work . Rapid information dissemination	Easy access of people	. Information reaches target individuals rapidly	. Increased rapid communication . Reduced expenditure	. Decreases time and financial wastage (low budget) . 180-second issuance of
Negative reception due to negative PR perception	. Rumour spreading . Message	Unclear	Rumour spreading	Negative responses
Limits and general guidelines that an employee (official) should abide by	Clarity, transparency, respect client, open dialogue,	authenticity, transparency, clarity, impartiality and justice in	Preciseness, authenticity , honesty and respect of the public	Making promises we can keep, observing due honesty, sincerity, creation and transparency
Yes; Guidance brochure, but PR department is restructuring	Yes (guidelines); Mainly from journalistic view	Yes; Procedural guide	Yes; major media determinants	Recently released a Code of Ethics' brochure
None MCI now using YAMOR for internal communication	. Easy public access . Rapid message	I am not sure (has small following)	Huge following (access to public)	Access to the public
. Greater reach than press news and newspapers	. Effective public access/reach	. Reputation building among the public	Rapid in response and discussion	. Rapid updating . Public feedback (complains, reports)
Yes; Society respects religious and social aspects like age	**Yes;** Through interaction with	**Yes;** I am part of society	**Yes;** culture affects conduct, norms and traditions	**Yes;** Islam first then societal norms, values and traditions
Yes	**Yes;** World is now small universal	No; Ministry controls its own practice	Yes	**Yes;** MCI is part of society deriving the KSA culture and
. Train PR practitioners in using new media	Intensify training in marketing	Activate internal communication	Essential to increase public awareness in	Must consider societal values and violators be punished
. Future PR challenges are material, human and support ones . PR in third world is not understood by	We now understand and appreciate PR	Hope PR practitioners will learn new media	Hope PR practitioners will learn purpose of using technology is	Proud doctoral research is about MCI, which implies success