



A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG PR  
PRACTITIONER DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN MALAYSIA

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Loo Xin Rong (18AAB02985)  
**REGISTRATION NUMBER**

A RESEARCH PROJECT  
SUBMITTED IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE AWARD OF  
BACHELOR OF COMMUNICATION (HONS) PUBLIC RELATIONS  
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE  
UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

JANUARY 2022

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Brianna Lee,  
Christine Tai Xin Jie,  
Joanne Tan Xin Yi,  
Liew Shir Ying,  
Loo Xin Rong.

## DECLARATION

I declare that the material contained in this paper is the end result of my own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic or personal.

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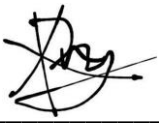
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## Approval Form

This research paper attached hereto, entitled “The usage of social media among PR practitioners during Covid-19 in Malaysia” prepared and submitted by” Brianna Lee, Christine Tai Xin Jie, Joanne Tan Xin Yi, Liew Shir Ying, Loo Xin Rong” in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Public Relations is hereby accepted.



Supervisor

Ms. Nor Ez-Zatul Hanani Mohamed Rosli

Date: 14 April 2022

## **ABSTRACT**

As Covid-19 pandemic happened, social media had been defined as one of the important communication tools that frequently used in the workplace, especially for public relations practitioners. People used social media to continue communicating and socializing with others even there are some consequences brought by social media. A qualitative research approach will be conducted to explore the impact of social media usage among public relations practitioners and investigate the social media usage among public relations practitioners so that they are able to provide public relations practitioners a better understanding about how they can use social media strategically to further the organization's goals and objectives. As such, 5 public relations practitioners from non-government PR agencies in Malaysia were sampled. In-depth interview method was chosen for this research study while thematic analysis methodology used to analyze the data collected by the samples. Through the thematic analysis, we found that there are seven usages and nine impacts of social media among the PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic. The discussion has been made by referring to the other journal studies and there are some similarities and differences compared to the other studies.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations

1 PR

Public Relations

**STUDENT DECLARATION FORM**  
Department of Public Relations  
Academic Honesty Regarding Final Year Projects

The following are examples of academic dishonesty extracted from “Student Handbook”

that are more applicable to final year projects.

- plagiarism, i.e., the failure to properly acknowledge the use of another person’s work;
- submission for assessment of material that is not the student’s own work;
- collusion, i.e., obtaining assistance in doing work which is meant to be solely the student’s own work;
- use of fabricated data claimed to be obtained by experimental work, or data copied or obtained by unfair means;

It is important that the student reads the Student Handbook and understands the seriousness of academic dishonesty. The student should pay particular attention on how to avoid plagiarism.

**Student Final Year Project Declaration**

I have read the student handbook and I understand the meaning of academic dishonesty, in particular plagiarism and collusion. I declare that the work submitted for the final year project does not involve academic dishonesty. I give permission for my final year project work to be electronically scanned and if found to involve academic dishonesty, I am aware of the consequences as stated in the Student Handbook.

**FYP Title:**

The usage of social media among PR practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia

---

Student Name:  
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Date:  
14 April 2022



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Liew Shir Ying

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Student ID:  
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Date:  
14 April 2022

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Research background**

The widespread of unidentified infection traumatized Wuhan City in Hubei Province China spread rapidly through Asia and the globe in December 2019. By the end of January 2020, this was announced by the WHO as a public health crisis of international significance. After that, an immeasurable challenge to public health has occurred. A deadly transmittable disease affected by life-threatening severe respiratory disorder coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), named coronavirus disease (Covid-19) 2019, is presently happening in Malaysia and across the globe. (WHO, 2020). Covid-19 is threatening to all people due to the disease that causes Covid-19 is mainly spread when a contaminated individual coughs, sneezes or breathes out through droplets that have been produced. These droplet particles are dropping on grounds or surfaces effortlessly due to the particles being too heavy to stay in the air, then infecting the respiratory system of other people (Ridzuan et al., 2021).

Covid-19 and the MCO (Movement Control Order) has affected every people and many sectors in Malaysia in which changes in their working environment, many stores or industry shut down, employers went bankrupt, there was a wide scale of reduction of expenditure and the unemployment rate are increasing until the economy the country receives a very huge impact. Hence, there are many who struggle to handle the new habitual during Covid-19 Pandemic (Ridzuan et al., 2021). One of the careers who was also affected by Covid-19 and MCO was PR practitioners. In accomplishing their daily duties associated to PR professions in any segment or company, it has turn out to be a routine for them but since the existence of the Covid-19 disease, PR practitioners have also been concerned and experienced culture shock due to new norms announced by the Malaysia government such as MCO to break this Covid-19 disease chain (Ridzuan et al., 2017). Therefore, most of the careers in Malaysia were affected and forced to change their working style from physical to work from home to stop the spread of Covid-19.

Work from home, also known as telework or telecommuting is the work activities with the deployment of information and communication technologies (ICT) that enables workers to access their work tasks wherever possible such as at home (Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012). Research done by Tumin (2020) explored the viable option of working from home for workers

in Malaysia and found that the PR profession becomes a vital aspect in every corporation and every institute in sustaining the image and maintaining public relations with the institute they work for. Furthermore, PR practitioners are accustomed to and prefer to accomplish jobs such as meeting clients, colleagues, meetings, and others in person because it is simple and enjoyable for them. This is because they like to interact and work in a public area, but they now have to work from home. Thus, for many PR practitioners, operating from home was the only alternative because it was considered dangerous to drive to our workplaces (O'Connor, 2020). As a result, the pandemic has caused various changes in all parts of social and economic life, changing interactions as well as communication techniques and practices (Tworzydło et al., 2020).

During work from home in Covid-19 pandemic, one of the technologies that are widely used by PR practitioners is social media. Similarly, PR practitioners use social media every day to get the information related to clients, easily to speak with clients and to reply to questions or issues. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media have rapidly become vital tools in PR practitioner's general toolkit (Kharvi & Bhusan, 2020). Social media has become the primary way of communicating and socialising with others (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). As a result, usage of social media platforms increased by 61% during the current crisis (Holmes, 2020). PR practitioners and scholars also agree that social media is transforming the PR industry especially during the pandemic period. Therefore, PR practitioners have to wisely use social media to play their roles amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Lastly, social media is not only familiar to the public but also public relations. Social media has become a platform that can help people to connect with the world when they stay at home. Furthermore, it can help to raise public's awareness and update the pandemic situation on time. This is because social media can help public relations to continue their work and help the organizations to maintain their relationship with the public and their customers even though the organizations faced Covid-19 pandemic. Social media has become the first choice for public relations to solve this crisis because it doesn't cost a lot of money and it's easy to operate. It can help to transmit direct and clear information to the public. Furthermore, PR practitioners used social media to help the organization to create two-way communication with their public so when they faced the problem, public relations can use the shortest time to solve the problem (Huang et al., 2021). Hence, this is the reason why it is important to study the usage of social

media among public relations practitioners during Covid-19 in Malaysia as social media is one of the most important used technology tools by PR practitioners.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly changed Malaysia's working activities. According to a survey conducted by JobStreet Malaysia, 67% of employees have worked from home during the restrictions. Workplace lockdowns caused employees to work from home. There is a major shift from the working sphere to the private sphere when employed men and women must work from home because of the restrictions (Boo, 2021). In addition, market research firm Ipsos, in its latest study on the pandemic's effect on the country's workforce, revealed that 65% of Malaysians are claiming to be working from home, compared with 52% of the global average (Sivanandam, 2021).

In addition, there is increasing use of technology and associated platforms as a way of continuing and maintaining social connectedness within each other (Marston et al., 2019). Industry reports revealed that when people spent more time at home owing to coronavirus lockdowns, their use of digital media grew dramatically (Kemp, 2020). These increases were especially widespread for social media and messaging apps, but the exceptional uptake in video conferencing apps and programmes was particularly noteworthy (Nguyen et al., 2020). Given that people rely extensively on information and communications technologies (ICTs) for social connection during such stay-at-home situations.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, more and more people turned to social media platforms to obtain information or deal with uncertainty (Azer et al., 2021). Social media has become the primary way of communicating and socialising with others (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). As a result, usage of social media platforms increased by 61% during the current crisis (Holmes, 2020). One of the reasons that social media is widely used by the public is because of the versatility of social media since it is available to the public to post, share and react to the post. Other than that, people were currently working at home during Covid-19 to ensure their safety. Therefore, the public rely on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Line and etc to raise awareness and support by spreading the information (Saud et al., 2020).

Social media usage is growing year by year, particularly in PR industries. Kharvi (2017) stated that social media is a transformative communications tool that has rapidly altered the way public relations is managed, becoming a vital part of the toolkit of PR practitioners.

Furthermore, the impact of social media usage on public relations is becoming progressively noticeable (Allagua & Breslow, 2016). PR practitioners in the workplace have gained a lot of benefit when using social media. Social media lets the workers exchange info and messages which aid them in the decision-making process, resulting in enhanced their working performance and working engagement (Wu et al, 2021; Murphy & Salomone, 2013). In addition, social media allows workers to be involved in interactive information management, resulting in helping workers' innovative performance (Sigala & Chalkiti, 2015). In addition, a researcher found that increased use of social media for work-related activities was linked with decreased work-life conflict (Wright et al., 2014).

However, this is not to say that social media doesn't have its detractors. Even though social media is a convincing platform for all of the people, it also brought some problems and many researches have focused on the negative consequences of social media usage during the global crisis (Choli & Kuss, 2021). These negative consequences include information overload, misinformation and abuse and misuse of social media. When people start to utilize social media to receive and transmit information they might receive or transmit the fake news or wrong information because they do not have time to authenticate the source of the information. This information might cause misunderstanding to others and it might need legal action to prevent the fake news problem when it becomes serious (Kaya, 2020). Additionally, several studies have also highlighted the importance of false and inaccurate statistics, misinformation, and rumours propagating on social media, which can lead to panic, fear mongering, conspiracy theories (Jalali & Mohammadi, 2020), as well as potentially affecting social media users' mental health (Gao et al., 2020).

As a conclusion, social media are becoming more predominant in people's daily routine, so more focused research on the impacts of social media usage in various aspects is needed (Bensona et al., 2019). As observed by Caers et al (2013) and Writes (2013), the number of articles and researches which emphasis on the value of social media in public relations have risen internationally but most studies were conducted in the Western country and there is no imitation and development in the context of Malaysia (El-kasim & Idid, 2016). In addition, former research has only revealed some descriptions on why the public use different social media platforms but did not examine the impact of social media usage and linked it to PR practitioners' work-related outcomes (Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014). Therefore, this research study reveals that it is necessary to understand the social media usage among PR



practitioners during Covid-19 in Malaysia. This is because most of the studies were conducted in Western countries and do not have the similar research or context related to Malaysia.

### **1.3 Research question**

RQ1: How are the usage of social media among PR practitioners during the covid 19 pandemic?

RQ2: How the usage of social media gave impact to PR practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic?

### **1.4 Research objective**

RO1: To investigate the social media usage among PR practitioners.

RO2: To explore the impact of social media usage among PR practitioners.

### **1.5 Research Significant**

This research will be able to provide PR practitioners a better understanding about how they can use social media strategically to further the organization's goals and objectives. Furthermore, the organizations are able to understand the effectiveness of social media to the employees from the perspective of work performance, innovation performance, work engagement and work-life conflict.

As social media become increasingly prominent in people's everyday lives, especially PR practitioners and organizations, this study can help them to improve job performance, trigger employee-driven innovation, help engender employee engagement in both their roles and their organization and solve the work-life conflict easily. In addition, the contribution of this study also can provide some recommendations to PR practitioners and organizations in order to make some improvements and changes.

Lastly, this research can be a preview for both PR students and PR practitioners, giving them an initial understanding of what social media brings to PR practice, thus inspiring their enthusiasm and assisting them to attain good results in their study or profession. Throughout this study, PR students and PR practitioners will be gaining new understanding which is by referring to this qualitative research study.

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Social media and its usage**

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) explained social media as “a community of Internet-based applications that allow users to generate, create, and share their own content”. By using social media, which is a web-based platform, individuals can use social media to share, post, edit, sort, and store various types of communications, information, and expertise. Social media is collaborative, fluid, agile, spontaneous, unstructured, and informal. The use of social media by businesses and individuals has become a major trend in both business and personal life.

Based on Men, O’Neil and Ewing (2020), enterprise social media and general social networking sites are two types of social media used in the workplace. According to Leonardi et al. (2013), social media allows employees to (1) specifically identify or insinuate some colleagues as communication partners; (2) communicate information/ messages with specific colleagues or broadcast information/ messages to everyone within the organisation; (3) at any time, view the content, text, links, files, and documents that others in the organisation have posted or edited; and (4) post, edit, and arrange texts and documents of oneself or others’. The second type of social media is the general social networking sites, for instance, Facebook, Twitter and others, which are widely used by organizations for internal communication.

The usage of social media allows people to form new relationships with other people and organisations, as well as reconnect with other groups, companies, and friends (Samsi et al, 2021). Twitter, Facebook, Google, and LinkedIn are a few examples of social networking applications. They have an impact on how we socialise on a regular basis. It’s critical that we learn more about their acceptance, level of use, and projections for their continued use in decision-making and policy formulation. Social media makes use of mobile and web-based technology to create highly interactive platforms that allow individuals and groups to share, co-create, discuss, and change user-generated content (Idemudia et al., 2016).

#### **2.1.1 Social media usage during covid-19 pandemic**

The pandemic of Covid-19 has resulted in a global health crisis which has had a tremendous impact on how we perceive our world and our daily lives. Amid the pandemic period, social and mass media have the power to portray a sense of unity by reaching a huge number of audiences (Hussain, 2020). Also, it mentioned that misinformation and

discrimination may thrive on social media as well as people can use the adaptability and pervasiveness of social media technology to promote public adherence to Covid-19 prevention strategies recommended by global health organisations. Additionally, Tsao et al. (2021) suggest that during a pandemic, social media may also be utilised efficiently to transmit health information to the general public. Furthermore, it stated that emerging infectious diseases like Covid-19, nearly usually increase the general public's use and consumption of media in all forms of information. As a result, social media plays an important influence in people's perceptions of disease exposure, decision-making and risk behaviours. According to Hussain (2020), various media sectors and mass communication platforms encourage adaptive reactions to create positive health attitudes and adherence to preventive measures. In addition, it mentioned that nowadays, social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and SnapChat are important sources for disseminating information and news to the general audience.

Additionally, public relations practitioners should employ social media and websites in terms of presentation, firm performance, and communication during Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of social media and websites is to showcase activities, communicate with the public, and receive direct feedback, as well as to establish a reputation for the company (Ridzuan et al, 2021). Moreover, a researcher Wang (2015) mentioned that many of them believe that social media serves as a platform for public relations initiatives and strategic communication. Social media can assist in disseminating a vast amount of information and increasing public participation in a corporation. People can use social media to form new ties with other people and organisations, as well as reconnect with other groups, companies, and friends during Covid-19 pandemic (Omar, 2016).

## **2.2 Social media and PR practitioner**

Public relations are a social phenomenon which has existed in every community since the dawn of time (Samsi et al., 2021). It begins with the formation of societies as a result of social interaction between individuals' organisations and bodies. Moreover, it also stated that public relations is regarded as one of the most ubiquitous and rapidly growing occupations in the world. While social media is defined as a term which refers to any number of technical platforms related to collaboration and community and become a medium for interacting with strategic publics as it allows for real-time, two-way contact where PR practitioners have

incorporated social and other developing media technologies into their practices since it has the ability to connect with people (Lee et al., 2020).

According to Nicoli and Komodromos (2013), PR professionals aim to engage with and hear from consumers, as well as share information with relevant audiences via social media. Researchers and PR professionals have a fresh and rich source of freely accessible data about individuals, society, and potentially the entire planet thanks to social media tools. A researcher (Key, 2005) also agrees that understanding how the audiences obtain and share information, and then influencing them at key points, is essential for public relations in the digital age (Komodromos, 2014).

Additionally, the growing usage of social networking sites, podcasts, video sharing services, vlogs and microblogging have revolutionised and shaped the profession of public relations by opening up channels of communication between organisations and their audiences (Lee et al., 2020). In addition, the emergence of social media has altered the dynamics of connections between PR practitioners, organisations and the general public. Due to its interactive capabilities and speed, social media offers countless options for these entities to establish reciprocal interactions (El-Kasim & Idid, 2017). As a result, many organisations developed social media sites, and PR practitioners used it at their practices.

According to Samsi et al. (2021), public relations are critical in every organisation since they help to create the company brand, convey the organization's message, and mitigate the impact of unfavourable news. With the use of social media, PR practitioners could help to build the company brand. As the Internet is no longer just used to get information, but also utilised to create online communities (Oncioiu et al., 2021). Social media networks are used by companies to create relationships with their audiences while also providing a variety of information and services to a varied population of direct and indirect audiences (Tang & Chan, 2016). PR practitioners can use these networks to help the companies to deepen their relationships with their target audiences and to increase brand loyalty. As a result, for businesses to remain competitive, social networks are a critical communication tool. In addition, PR practitioners have discovered that with the advent of social media, the message may be extensively disseminated to a large group, particularly to previously underserved audiences (Tang & Chan, 2016). Moreover, according to Oncioiu et al. (2021), when using social media communication, it is necessary for businesses to provide valuable, interesting material which engages the consumer, also having interaction with consumers is essential due to direct

interaction can lead to consumer loyalty if done correctly. Therefore, PR practitioners have to get used to social media in brand building and communication orientation towards continuous engagement with audiences which has lately been mandatory for organisations.

In the Malaysian context, the proliferation of social media, particularly social networking sites like Facebook with increased interactivity and connectivity has led numerous PR practitioners to recognise the importance of embracing these new media for having communication with internal and external audiences effectively (Lee, & Low, 2013). The widespread usage of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, in particular has enabled public relations practitioners to build new avenues of connection with their stakeholders (Lee et al., 2020). Furthermore, social media allows for constant contact, which leads to meaningful relationships between organisations and stakeholders (Ahmad, 2019). Also, it stated that unlike traditional media, social media allows organisations and stakeholders to generate, respond to, and share content 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, making it a perfect platform for debate and long-term relationships. According to Lee and Low's (2013) research, Facebook is a major external communication medium in Malaysia.

Moreover, modern public relations aspires to preserve a mutually beneficial and long-term connection between organisations and significant publics by balancing each party's interests (El-Kasim & Idid, 2017). According to Ismail and Ahmad (2015), public relations entails the development and maintenance of a positive image with the goal of maintaining constant and consistent communication with stakeholders. This is referred to as relationship management. With the rise of new media, particularly social media, has bolstered the concept of relationship management in PR practise. Social media platforms enable companies and key publics to communicate and gain meaning from their interactions in order to build long-term mutual relationships (El-Kasim & Idid, 2017). According to Edosomwan et al. (2011), the social media websites usage has expanded the channels of communication and their effectiveness within the organisation. Furthermore, most typically, crisis management falls within the purview of an organisation's PR practitioner (Wigley & Zhang, 2011). It also stated that controlling the information flow by generating and conveying crucial messages to the media and an organisation's publics is one of the most important aspects of successfully resolving a crisis. In addition, according to Valentini (2015), the prevalent rhetoric in modern public relations states that social media are the effective tools for crisis communication.

### **2.2.1 Social media challenges among Public Relations**

A strategic perspective of communication is required of the PR professional. At the same time, the profession has a difficulty in terms of appraisal. Organizations are now required to analyse their communication not just from a quantitative but also from a qualitative standpoint. Given the complexity of the supports in which communications are delivered to reach the audience (Almansa-Martnez, 2020), measuring the results of public relations actions has always been desirable, but it is now vital. According to Mustajab et al. (2020), people frequently lose attention at work as a result of the numerous interruptions created by secondary jobs that disrupt primary duties, particularly among senior employees. Working from home during the pandemic has reduced employee performance and motivation.

During the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, the way information is communicated and viewed on social media becomes especially more significant (Coman et al, 2021). A result of a study focused on the relationships between misinformation and media consumption, researchers discovered that social media exposure and Covid-19 misperceptions are strongly correlated, with researchers claiming that incorrect perceptions of the virus are partly due to false information spread on social media (Bridgman et al., 2020). Furthermore, a study of 225 news stories published online during the epidemic found that 59 percent were reconfigured news, implying that the majority of them featured misleading information, followed by information with inaccurate and modified material (Brennen et al., 2020).

Information may be transmitted simply and swiftly at any time thanks to advancements in information technology and internet capabilities, but what concerns everyone is the spread of fake news or incorrect information that leads to misunderstandings (Ridzuan et al., 2021). It includes the extensive dissemination of incorrect information or fake news about Covid-19 sickness, which has sparked public alarm. Issues of sharing unverified and incorrect information arise when irresponsible people share fake news or inaccurate facts about them. Unsuspecting residents will be exposed to such fraud as a result of this conduct. It has the ability to deceive an unknowing public into believing that the data is true (Yusof et al., 2020). This is unethical, especially when it comes to actively disseminating such information in order to deceive others, because false news is designed to deceive and affect people's opinions (Kanekar & Thombre, 2019). False information, on the other hand, it comprised of stories that are purposefully produced in order to promote certain agendas. Therefore, when PR practitioners faced these challenges, they need to be more conscious for these matters.

### **2.3 Impact of using social media**

Social media has always been considered as one of the powerful communication tools for the employees and the organization. According to the study, 82% of the employees agreed that social media can help them to improve their work relationship between the organization, colleagues and the public. Other than that, there are also 62% of the employees also agreed that the social media platform can allow them to do decision-making processes (Bizzi, 2021). According to research completed by Forsgren and Byström (2017), they agreed that social media platforms can help to maintain or improve the work relationship. However, they also point out that social media also brings some limitations and contradictions to the employee for the information or working environment. Nowadays, social media platforms are not only available for personal use and also for the organization to use in their business as it can help the organization to gain more public engagement (Brain, 2021).

There are 8 in 10 employees mentioned that they had used social media platforms in their work. Social media platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Wechat and etc had been frequently used by the organization. (V, 2020). According to Pathak (2021), social media platforms can bring several impacts in the workplace such as improve employee engagement, enhance employee learning, breed jealousy among employees, and increase technical risk.

#### **1. Improve employee engagement**

Employees will feel satisfied and confident when they are recognized by their organization through social media. It could help to create a comfortable working environment for the employees. It can also help to strengthen the workplace relationship at the same time.

#### **2. Enhance employee learning**

Social media also can be considered as a good platform for the employee to learn more skills and expand their knowledge. It allows the employees to know more about the information by referring to some research study, market statistics and so on.

#### **3. Breed Jealousy among employees**

Since social media is not only for work but also personal use. When employees improperly use social media, and cause jealousy in the workplace. This will cause the overall working environment to be inharmonious and prone to friction and problems.

#### **4. Increase technical risks**

Even though social media has become a common platform nowadays, there are also some latences that will bring some negative impact such as scams and viruses. If the organization or employees over-rely on social media, when they face the problem, there is a risk that might cause them to lose the important data.

According to a survey completed in 2020, 80.4% of the research participants agreed that social media allow them to have a good two-way communication for the work contribution in their workplace (Kolmar, 2021). One of the research studies completed by Briones et al. (2011) also agreed with this statement as social media allows two-way communication in the workplace. This is because the public can receive the latest information through social media so it allows the employees or organizations to provide faster services and receive feedback from the social media users. Besides that, public relations practitioners also adopt social media platforms as one of the tools because both of them are related with the communication based (Center for Social Impact Communication, n.d.).

### **2.3.1 Impact of using social media among PR practitioners**

Social media is a key component in the intense alteration of the communication structure, which has moved from the print era to the interactive digital era (Ahmed, Vveinhardt, & Streimikiene, 2017). During the global crisis, social media played a prominent role as a ubiquitous communication medium (Azer et al., 2021). People with Covid-19 are compelled to use social media for their daily activities (Verawardina et al., 2020). The emergence of social media has changed individuals' experience during a crisis, and it has thus become a vital communication channel to communicate with others (Jung, Song, & Park, 2018; Park, 2018). During a crisis, individuals rely on different social media platforms for seeking information and support in order to cope with unpredictability and uncertainty (De Meulenaer, De Pelsmacker, & Dens, 2015).

Social media has not only changed the way people communicate, but it has also altered the way public relations operate and communicate. Nowadays, the technique of public relations has shifted from pitching to participation (Cheng, 2019). It is a significant development and important for PR practitioners. According to the research study of Nchabeleng et al. (2018), he also stated that PR practitioners' practice has changed from traditional top-down communication to two-way communication. It also can be considered as one big opportunity to the PR practitioners because it can influence the public effectively (M, 2020a). This is



because social media allows the public to leave their reaction or feedback such as like, comment and share that can help the public relations to increase the engagement (Leibowitz, 2020).

As a result, social media has helped to break down numerous communication obstacles. Social media has dramatically changed the way people communicate with one another, especially on the aspect of information transmission. Information transmission is extremely important in personal and business communication. On an organisational level, social media allows organizations to reach out to a large number of people. Social media is a strong tool that allows people to collaborate. The quality of online communication has improved noticeably (Nchabeleng et al., 2018). Additionally, PR communication has grown more influential and practical as a result of the growth of social media (Cheng, 2019)

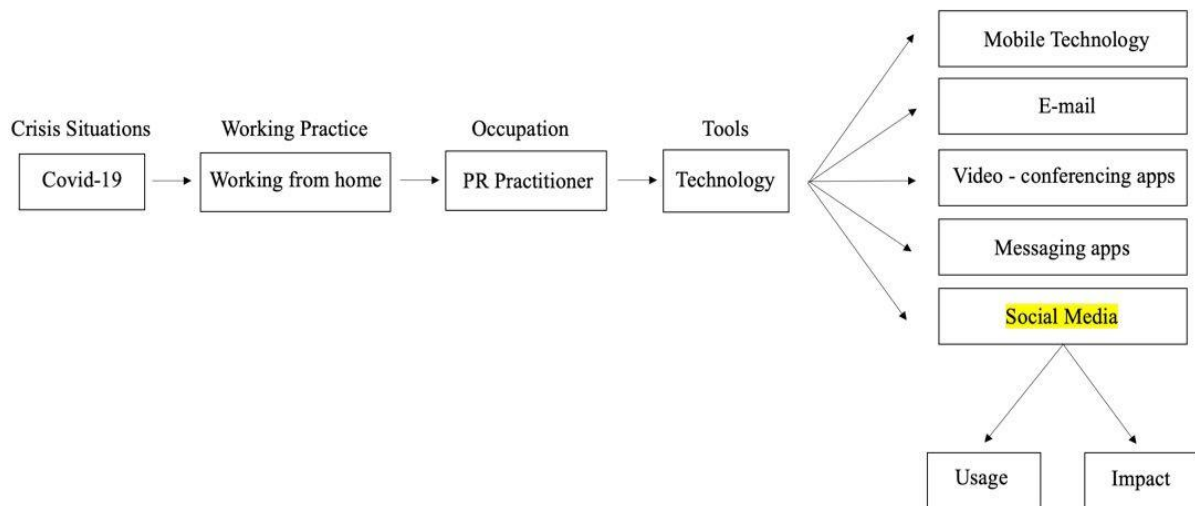
Moreover, public relations service is considered as a strategic communication service designed to cultivate and promote the relationship between the organization and its general public (Langett, 2013). PR professionals may develop solid relationships directly with a large number of people via social media — often considered as a one-to-one relationship. According to a research study done by Cheng (2019), they agreed that social media is able to provide PR practitioners with good communication between the publics so that they are able to generate good relationships and achieve their goals. Allagui and Breslow (2016) also agreed that social media can be the effective platforms to achieve their goals such as increase engagement and enhance brand reputations especially for PR practitioners. Social media can also help the PR practitioners to achieve their goals or protect their organizations' reputation (Boitnott, 2021).

In addition, technology is fundamentally altering how information is delivered and flows in new ways, and social media has altered the interaction between message providers and consumers (Nchabeleng et al., 2018). PR practitioners not only deliver information, but also collect information and monitor public opinion on certain issues (Rashid, 2014). PR practitioners can receive feedback and comments via social media content and then connect with audiences, thus facilitating two-way communication that is not possible with other media such as press releases, radio or television (Nchabeleng et al., 2018).

PR practitioners can get a lot of information from social media since it tracks what people are thinking and saying about their companies and brands (Cheng, 2019). Today's PR professionals not only serve as information distributors, but also play as participants. By

participating in the communication process, they obtain knowledge, gain understanding, and gather feedback from those who take part in the activities., and subsequently influence public opinion (Gqamane, 2010). Information is provided to PR practitioners through the collection of comments via social media platforms, thus allowing them to manage the information and make decisions based on different target audiences.

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework



## **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

In this research, the method that will be used is qualitative research approach. Qualitative research was deemed suitable for this research study as the purpose of this study is to explore the impact of social media usage among PR practitioners. This is because the qualitative research approach emphasizes an understanding and interpretation of meaning together with intentions causing people interaction. Qualitative research approach is a descriptive and subjective means of understanding in-depth meaning of phenomena from the participants perceptions, events and occurrences (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In addition, the objective of the qualitative research is descriptive and exploratory rather than explanatory.

The nature of descriptive in qualitative research allows readers to know the meaning enclosed to the experience, the impact of the issue and the distinct nature of the issue (Meyers, 2004). Moreover, conducting enquiries in a natural setting has the advantage of allowing researchers to study specific phenomena inside the context in which they appear, rather than under conditions in a laboratory (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The advantages of qualitative research are effective at managing and simplifying data without abolishing context and complexity (Atieno, 2009). This approach is greatly appropriate for questions where preventive reduction of the data will avoid discovery.

In this qualitative research study, in-depth interviews will be conducted, and the data will be collected via the informant. In-depth interviews are one of the most efficient methods of collecting primary data. In-depth interview is conducted with an intention of uncovering in-depth details of informant's experience and perspective on a subject unlike a basic questionnaire or scale in rating (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). The four phases included in conducting in-depth interviews are developing a sampling strategy, writing a guide for in-depth interview, running the interviews, analyzing the data (Wallace Foundation Website, 2009). When there are questions about how to specialize the research focus, or what questions need to be discovered through the research, these types of interviews are usually conducted at the beginning of a larger research project.

Moreover, in-depth interviews can reveal important insights, and allow the researchers to discover "The real story" from the informant that needs to be conducting the interview. Interview questions can be added or make some changes in real-time if necessary and skilled

interviewers are capable of responding to interview questions. The data can be collected faster than other research techniques, generally within a few weeks. In-depth interviews are also an outstanding selection for examining interviews with people who are expert about or involved with the research study (Wallace Foundation Website, 2009). Therefore, the target population of this research are the PR practitioners that are facing the impact of the usage of social media in Malaysia. Video record, online interviews will be conducted in this research due to the restriction of the Covid-19.

### **3.2 Sample and Sampling**

The sample of this study will be PR practitioners from non-government PR agencies in Malaysia. PR practitioners can work full-time or part-time, without gender or age restrictions. Interviewees of this study will be recruited through the researchers' existing network. The researcher will contact the potential participants from different PR agencies via email and ask for leads to PR practitioners who meet the criteria. In addition, the researchers will contact The Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM) by phone, asking for the help of the organization and asking permission to post the email on the organization's website or other suggested mechanisms to communicate with their association members. Today IPRM stands for Malaysia's national Public Relations body and it is the only organisation in Malaysia which is dedicated solely to the research and development of excellent PR practices.

Sampling is the process of selecting representative participants of the entire target population in order to obtain detailed information relevant to the particular research topic (Chivanga & Monya, 2021). The sampling technique of this study is purposive non-probability sampling as all selected interviewees are in-house public relations practitioners of different non-government PR agencies. Purposive sampling, also known as judgemental sampling that allows researchers to choose the samples based on their own judgement (Neuman, 2005). Non-probability purposive sampling includes identification and selections of peoples or groups of peoples that are well-informed and proficient with a phenomenon of interest (Etikan, 2016). When researchers utilise purposive sampling in their studies, they choose participants whom they believe will be the most capable of providing the information they need (Alston & Bowles, 2003; Van Wyk & Carbonatto, 2016). The benefit of using non-probability purposive sampling technique is it allows researchers to exclude potential participants who do not contribute relevant data, lower study costs, and focus on participants who will be assessed as particularly suitable for the study's aims (Chivanga & Monya, 2021).

Data saturation is significant to be achieved in qualitative study where the concept of it is firmly embedded among certain qualitative research logics (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Some studies stated that the lowest sample size for saturation was 5 interviews (Constantinou et al., 2017) and the highest sample sizes for saturation were 20–40 (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017). However, there are some studies stated that there are no guidelines for sample size in qualitative study (Patton, 1990). Thus, the researcher needed to use its own judgments which are object-level judgments and experience to determine the suitable number of the informants for this study. Therefore, in this research, following suggestions from Constantinou et al. (2017), the sample size is 5 practitioners.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

This study used in-depth interview as a research tool to undergo data collection where both the interviewers and interview questions were the instrumentation used. The interviews will be conducted online and each interviewee is conducted in a single interview session. No interview is undertaken without first obtaining verbal informed consent from all interviewees. In-depth interviews enable qualitative data to be acquired via intensive individual question and answer sessions with relatively small groups of participants through in-depth studies of their subjective perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and experiences in relation to events, occurrences, and phenomena relevant to certain research topics (Denscombe, 2003).

In this study, the in-depth interview with participants will be conducted through an online interview. Covid-19 has necessitated innovation in many aspects of our lives including qualitative research (Roberts et al, 2021). Also, it stated that during the Covid-19 situation, face-to-face interview is being prohibited due to the safety concern. Thus, this research will be conducted through online interviews and this research allows scholars to realistically analyse crisis circumstances while ensuring the safety of participants and researchers.

Additionally, an in-depth interview method is used in this research due to the intensive research with the interviewees which allowed them to express their thoughts on a specific topic, programme, or situation (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In this research, the researchers will ask PR practitioners about their experience related to the usage of social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a one-to-one communication between the researcher and the interviewees. Hence, the results which are analysed from the in-depth interview will be more standard and exact.

Moreover, all the data will be collected via the video-recording during every interview session with the full permission of all interviewees involved. As to adapt the settings of Covid-19, video-based online interviews are emerging as an alternative for traditional ‘in-person’ interviews among researchers and research participants in qualitative research (Foley, 2021). Also, it stated that even when the researcher is not physically close to the participants, videoconferencing platforms enable the researcher to keep the face-to-face element of interviews. Therefore, video-based online interviews are conducted in this study.

Many researchers are using videoconferencing systems including Zoom, Webex, GoToMeeting, Skype, and Microsoft Teams in the context of social distancing measures enforced by the Covid-19 pandemic (Foley, 2021). Zoom is a videoconferencing service that runs in the cloud and contains features including online meetings, group messaging, and secure session recording. Zoom, like similar services such as Skype, allows users to connect with others who are geographically distant in real time through computer, tablet, or mobile device. Furthermore, the ability of Zoom to securely record and maintain sessions without the usage of third-party software is a significant feature. This feature is critical in research where highly sensitive data must be safeguarded (Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016). Therefore, this research will be using Zoom as the online interview platform as it allows the researchers to record the interview session with the participants and it is securely recorded.

Besides, open-ended questions will be used in this study as it is most suitable to employ open-ended questions which generate depth of information, where we are able to interview the selected interviewees about their experiences in using social media as a PR practitioner especially amid the Covid-19 pandemic (Boyce & Neale, 2006). As a result, it allows our interviewees to openly clarify the questions that we posed in their own words, while also allowing us to thoroughly explore our research aims.

In fact, open-ended questions that are used in qualitative interviews defined as questions which a researcher asks without provide answer options for. In the qualitative interviews, researchers usually formulate a guide in advance which they can refer to and ensure that significant questions will not be missed out amid the interview (DeCarlo, 2018). Also, it mentioned that the interview guide is a list of topics or questions which the interviewers want to include amid the interview. Before start writing an in-depth interview guide which develops the interview questions, will need to determine the specific aim of the interview, information that interested to be explored and people who need the information as well as their purpose to

have them (Wallace Foundation Website, 2009). Therefore, the interview questions have to be prepared in the way that the interviewees will probably provide their answers that meet what are wished to obtain.

Furthermore, when asking open-ended questions should show what the thoughts of interviewees instead of what you think that they are thinking and they should encourage broad and detailed responses. It also mentioned that questions may include suggested explorations with follow-up questions that are designed to explore specific aspects of the problem. In addition, the guide should be kept fairly short and should focus on the research goals so that it can get as much in-depth input as possible from each interviewee (Wallace Foundation Website, 2009).

Therefore, in order to run an in-depth interview, there is a five-step process involved that begins with planning, then moves on to developing instruments, collecting data, analyzing data and disseminating findings (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In the planning process, we need to identify the participants who will be involved in this research and identify what information is needed from them. Next, in the developing instruments process, we will develop the same interview questions for every participant when we conduct the interviews to guarantee that the study outcomes are consistent and reliable. The interview questions will be open-ended rather than closed-ended. Thirdly, we will set up an online interview with the participants through Zoom and go through the data collection process after the interview. During the data collection process, we will summarize the key data and verify the information given in the interviews. Then, in the data analysis process, we will review and transcribe all interview data by interpreting and generating patterns and suitable themes for our study outcomes. Lastly, we will disseminate findings and conclude our study outcomes from the data analysis process.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

In this research, thematic analysis methodology will be conducted to analyse the data collected by the samples so that the usage of social media among PR practitioners during Covid-19 in Malaysia can be understood by others. In research from Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis methodology can be analyzed as one of the methods that is suitable for qualitative research. It can be a useful method to analyse subjective information such as the experiences and opinions (Jansen, 2021). For qualitative research, the thematic analysis method is not only a relatively common method, but also often used by the psychology field for them to conduct

their research (H, 2021). Overall, thematic analysis can be considered to study the patterns of the meaning by identifying the data set collected from the sample. Researchers need to start the analysis by studying the research questions (Jansen, 2021).

As there are several overarching approaches that can be used by the research through thematic analysis, researchers can make decisions on selecting the approach that is most suitable for their research study. Those overarching approaches in thematic analysis, include inductive approach, deductive approach, semantic approach, and latent approach. All of these overarching approaches are not necessary to use in the research, but depend on the type of data and target analysis (Jansen, 2021). According to research done by Chaudhari (2020), thematic analysis also can be separated into 6 different steps to conduct the method which is familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and writing.

- i. **Familiarization.** Researchers need to read all the data set and familiar with it before they start to do analysis. They are requested to play back to the recording and take note of the important things that they hear from the video recording. The note recorded by the researchers can be hard copy or soft copy. When the researchers are familiar with the data set, they can get an idea about the relationship and patterns of the data so that it can allow researchers to proceed to progress into coding.
- ii. **Coding.** Researchers can label the certain words or phrases inside the data that might be useful for the research study to proceed thematic analysis so that it can become a code that allow researchers to continue their analysis in an easier way. Coding can be done in two different ways which is manually or code by the software – Nvivo.
- iii. **Generating themes.** After the coding is completed, researchers were requested to come out with themes for those codes with the same expressions. They need to observe the pattern appear in the data set. Researchers can refer back to the coding to generate the theme and pattern through the data set from the research question.
- iv. **Reviewing themes.** Researchers need to compare the themes with their original research data set to ensure there is no mistake. This step also allows the researchers to complete with two different ways which is manually or seek help from the qualitative software application.



- v. **Defining themes.** Researchers can rename the themes according to their understanding. This requested the researchers to come out with a specific and clear suggestion for the research study so that it can be useful and usable in the future study. It can allow the researchers to know about the problem or the improvement can be made in this study.
- vi. **Writing.** Researchers need to come to the conclusion by referring to the results. Researchers need to complete the report and provide a summary for the whole thematic analysis that can help public to understand the certain research topic in the future.

Therefore, thematic analysis is suitable for this research to explore the impact of social media usage among PR practitioners. As the latent approach under the thematic analysis could be used to assume the data collected through interview (Xiong et al., 2019). According to research completed by Davies & Hobbs (2020), the data collected from the interview will be generated into different code. The process can be conducted according to the six different steps come out by Chaudhari (2020) which is familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and writing. Those coded data can help this research to investigate the social media usage among PR practitioners (Davies & Hobbs, 2020). This is because thematic analysis can be considered as an excellent approach for the researcher to figure out the experience, values or opinions (Caulfield, 2021).

### **3.5 Instrument Development**

Interview protocol was created using the interview protocol refinement framework. According to Rubin & Rubin (2012), interviews provide researchers with rich and extensive qualitative data that can be used to better understand interviewees' experiences, how they characterize their experiences and the value which provides significance to their experiences. In addition, qualitative researchers are able to increase their interview protocols' reliability as instruments by refining them via the Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) framework (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). It is mentioned that researchers can improve the quality of data obtained from the research interviews by increasing the reliability of interview protocols. Moreover, according to Jones, Torres and Arminio (2014), the IPR framework can offer qualitative researchers with a common language for describing the meticulous processes necessary to create interview protocols and confirm their congruency with the subject at hand. Therefore, it is suitable to use the IPR framework for this research as it could not only improve

the structured or semi-structured interviews, but may also support the development of unstructured interview guides that have discussion topics or a limited number of broad questions to enhance the discourse (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

IPR Framework is divided into four phases which are ensuring that interview questions correspond with the research question of the study, arranging an interview protocol to generate an inquiry-based dialogue, receiving feedback on interview protocols and piloting the interview protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). It is stated that the first phase concentrates on the alignment of interview questions and research questions which this alignment can improve the utility of interview questions that validate the purpose of the study while also verifying the requirement for the study by removing extraneous ones. Followed by the second phase which is constructing an inquiry-based conversation. According to Patton (2015), a researcher's interview protocol is both an instrument of inquiry-asking questions for specific information relating to the goals of a study and an instrument for conversation about a certain topic. For the second phase is development of the protocol which includes initiating a conversation and writing interview questions which differ from how researchers typically write the research questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

After the development of the interview protocol through the first and second phases, the third phase is receiving feedback on the interview protocol that has been developed. The goal of getting feedback on the interview process is to improve its reliability and its credibility as a research tool (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Feedback can tell the researcher how well participants understand the interview questions and whether or not their interpretation matches what the researcher intends or anticipates (Patton, 2015). After aligning, examining and receiving feedback on each interview question, the fourth phase is piloting the interview protocol. The modified interview protocol is ready to be tested with participants who closely match the sample that will be interviewed for the actual study (Maxwell, 2013). Through piloting, the researcher can estimate the duration of the interview process and whether participants will be able to answer the interview questions.

To support the above statement, our interview questions were developed according to both of our study's research questions which are "How are the usage of social media among PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic?" and "How the usage of social media gave impact to PR practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic?" We classified two of the main research questions with regard to our study into two sections which Section A focused on the usage of social media among PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic while Section B focused on the impact of using social media to PR practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic.

### **3.5.1 In-depth Interview Schedule**

For this research, in-depth interview that counted as one of the semi structured interview will be schedule to develop the interview question to collect the responds and details from the respondents in order to have clear understanding on the usage of social media among PR practitioner during Covid-19 in Malaysia. According to research done by Scanlan (2020), in-depth interview that under semi-structured interview will be the best method for the qualitative research to complete the data collection. The content of the interview question will be developed by using the IPR framework according to the research question.

### **3.5.2 In-depth interview development**

According to the IPR Framework study completed by Castillo-Montoy (2016), there are 4 phase for develop the interview questions. Ensuring the interview question is always aligned with the research question will be the first phase for the interview questions development. In order to meet this requirement, we had separate the total of 10 question into two different section which is section A and B. All of the questions fall under section A will be aligned with the first research question which is “How are the usage of social media among PR practitioner s during the Covid-19 pandemic?” while for the question developed in section B will be aligned with the second research question which is “How the usage of social media gave impact to PR practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic?” Next, the second phase will be constructing an inquiry-based conversation. We designed the interview questions will “How” and “What” that can allow the respondents to have a smooth conversation when conducting the interview.

Thirdly, the third phase for IPR framework will be received the feedback on the interview protocols. While the respondents had done their interview, they also providing the feedback on the interview protocols that can allow the researchers to have a new understanding on the research topic. Last but not least, the fourth phase will be piloting the interview protocol. As the interview questions had developed that align with the research question, piloting can help the researcher have a draft idea on the whole interview. This is because, piloting can help to highlight the whole research as it was very useful. (Mohd Aliff Abdul Majid & Mohhidin Othman & Siti Fatimah Mohamad & Sarina Abdul Halim Lim & Aziz Yusof, 2017).

### **3.5.3 Guideline of develop In-depth interview question**

According to the research complete by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), the researchers agreed that 5 to 10 specific question should be enough for the research interview. There are also another researcher agreed that in-depth interview can be conduct with 10 questions (Showkat, N., & Parveen, H., 2017). Next, the in-depth interview question will be separate into two different sections according to two different research question. Each section had contained 5 question for the respondents to share their own opinion. According to the guideline of writing the interview questions, we develop the question start with “how” instead of “why” so that it allows the respondents to share their stories. (Strategies for qualitative Interview, n.d.) For example, there are few questions develop in section A and B had use “how” to begin with the question.

#### **Section A**

1. *How do you adapt to the sudden change of working environment during Covid-19 pandemic?*

#### **Section B**

2. *How do you think about the effectiveness of social media used? Explain the ways to measure the social media success.*
3. *How would you handle negative customer reviews or comments on social media?*

Secondly, the in-depth interview questions is develop according to the respondents expertise, working field, and experience (Strategies for qualitative Interview, n.d.). There is also contain few questions develop in section A and B use this step to develop questions.

#### **Section A**

1. *What do you think about social media as a working tool? Is that allowed for public relations practitioners to conduct their work during Covid-19 pandemic?*
2. *Briefly describe the usage of social media among public relations practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic.*
3. *Please tell me what you know about the usage of social media among public relations practitioner.*

## **Section B**

1. *What is the biggest challenge as a public relations practitioner while you are using social media to work during Covid-19 pandemic?*

Furthermore, there is also one in-depth interview question developed in section A that allow the respondents to answer the question easily that allow them have motivation to answer the question (Strategies for qualitative Interview, n.d.). For example:

## **Section A**

1. *What was your thought when you first try on using social media to conduct your work?*

Lastly, the interview question will be developed that allow the respondents to have brainstorming on some difficult questions. Those sticky question will be developed in the end of the interview (Strategies for qualitative Interview, n.d.). For example:

## **Section B**

1. *Are you aware of any problem with using social media as a working tool during Covid-19 pandemic?*
2. *Do you have any suggestion on how to minimize these problems?*

### **3.5.4 Pilot test**

A pilot test is carried out in any research and study in order to ensure that the validity is achieved (Gani et al., 2020). A pilot study is defined as a ‘small study to test research protocols, data collection tools, sample recruitment strategies, and other research methodologies in preparation for a larger study (Hassan & Mazza, 2006). It is also defined as a pre-test version of a research tool prior to the actual study being conducted (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002).

To begin, the researchers need to determine who would be participating in this pilot test interview session, as well as the interview framework that would be used. In this study, a pilot study will be conducted among the targeted UTAR PR students before the formal interview session. Before starting the pilot study, researchers should not only clarify the purpose and questions of the study, but also fully understand the experimental procedures and schedule (In, 2017). Then, based on the research objectives, appropriate interview questions are devised and

formulated (Gani et al., 2020). It comprises of a series of questions that reflect the research study's objectives. Finally, the researchers coordinated the pilot study details with the respondents, including the date, time, and location of the pilot study.

According to (Peat et al., 2002), there are ways for improving the internal validity of a questionnaire through pilot studies. One of the ways is to get feedback from the respondents to identify any ambiguity or tough questions. Besides that, record the time it takes to complete the questionnaire and determine whether it is reasonable is also a way for improving the pilot studies. Next is eliminate any unnecessary, difficult, or ambiguous questions. Determine whether each question provides an adequate range of responses. In addition, we can also ensure that the responses can be interpreted in accordance with the information required. Re-word or re-scale any questions that were not answered as expected. Lastly is shorten, modify, and, if possible, pilot again.

One of the importance of managing a pilot study is that it could offer advance warning regarding where the key research project could fail, where research protocols may not be monitored, or whether proposed techniques or tools are unsuitable or too complex. Pilot studies can also try to detect potential practical issues in following the research procedure. Moreover, pilot studies can also uncover local politics or problems that may affect the research process. This is specifically important because pilot studies can be “timewasting, challenging, and troubled with unanticipated issues, but it is better to deal with them before investing a great deal of time, money, and effort in the full study” (Mason and Zuercher, 1998). Well-made and well-conducted pilot studies can notify us about the finest research process and rarely about likely outcomes. The importance of pretesting can guide to identifying inaccuracies in multicultural language significance and word vagueness, as well as determining likely mistakes in survey measurement variables. Pretesting can also deliver advance cautionary about how or why a main research project can fail by signifying where research protocols are not followed or not reasonable.

Pretesting keeps a chance to revise study materials and data collection procedures to make sure that proper questions are being asked and that questions do not make respondents awkward or blurred because they merge two or more vital problems in one question. It is important that pre-tests be conducted analytically and include practice for all interviewers who will be participated in data collection procedures for the eventual main study (Hurst et al., 2015). A number of authors have emphasized the vital in conducting the pilot test, i.e. it aids

to notice any possible flaws at the early stage by identifying potential problems and areas which may require adjustments in the instrument (Dikko, 2016; Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001; Watson, et al, 2007) as well as in terms of added value and credibility into the research (Wijk & Harrison, 2013). The pilot test interview has offered the opportunity to help the researcher to clarify some questions to enhance the interview protocol. Besides that, the pilot test also aided to draw the researcher's consideration to the participants' voices especially during the interview session (Gani et al., 2020).

According to (Vaus, 1993), there are reasons for conducting pilot studies. The reason is improving and analyzing capability of research instruments. Next is evaluating the viability of a (full scale) study or survey. Furthermore, designing a research protocol and measuring whether the research protocol is accurate and effective is also the reasons for enhancing and interpret the capability of research instruments. Moreover, establishing whether the sampling frame and method are applicable, assessing the possible success of intended recruitment methods, identifying logistical issues which might happen using proposed approaches, approximating variability in outcomes to help determining sample size, collecting preliminary data, assessing the proposed data analysis techniques to uncover potential problems, developing a research question and research plan, convincing funding bodies that the research team is competent and knowledgeable, convincing funding bodies that the main study is feasible and worth funding, and lastly convincing other stakeholders that the main study is worth supporting are also the vital reasons for conducting the pilot studies.

Therefore, in this research, a pilot test has been run in order to ensure the reliability and validity of questions of the interview. Two PR students from UTAR has been interviewed to represent the PR practitioner. The reason why we purpose PR student act as a PR practitioner is because they have the knowledge for the questions that were ask and most importantly, they are also study in public relations course so that they will know how to applying their knowledge when during in-depth interview. The result of the pilot interview shows that for all the interview questions they're similar questions has emerges and it achieve the saturations point. Therefore, the questions are reliable and valid, and it will be used for the real in-depth interview.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Findings

This chapter will discuss on the findings of this research. The first part of this chapter is about the demographic of the 5 respondents including name, age, gender, job position, years of experience, organizations name, and their organization location. Next, this chapter will be continued with the usage of the social media which develop according to the first research objective. The third part of this chapter will be discussing in the impact of social media to PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic. All of the findings under this research was be run by thematic analysis in order to analyse the data collected to support the research questions.

### 4.2 Demographic of the Respondents

To run this research, there are 5 respondents has been interviewed. The five respondents are all around the age of 21 years old until 25 years old. All of the five respondents are only required one years of full time working experiences on the public relations fields. There are 60% of the respondents currently work in Penang and the other 40% of the respondents are from Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. We had invited these five respondents to participate in the in-depth interview of this research and conducted the in-depth interview in March 2022. We invite these five respondents to participate in this research study because they are public relations practitioners and their jobs was related to social media and use it as one of the main platform during their work. The demographic table shows below are the details of the five respondents.

| <i>Names</i>        | <i>Age</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Job Position</i>                      | <i>Years of experiences</i> | <i>Organizations name</i> | <i>Location</i> |
|---------------------|------------|---------------|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Alycia Wong</i>  | 25         | Female        | Executive<br>(Branding & Communications) | 1                           | Sunway<br>Property        | Selangor        |
| <i>Chan Yi Qing</i> | 24         | Female        | Junior Consultant                        | 1                           | Archetype                 | KL Eco<br>City  |
| <i>Chua Xue Cin</i> | 23         | Male          | Marketing Communication                  | 1                           | 8 Teen<br>Production      | Penang          |



|                    |    |        |                               |   |                         |        |
|--------------------|----|--------|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------|--------|
| <i>Khor Yi Kai</i> | 25 | Male   | Social Media Specialist       | 1 | Seventeen<br>Production | Penang |
| <i>Vangie Hung</i> | 21 | Female | Public Relations Practitioner | 1 | OAT Group<br>Sdn Bhd    | Penang |

The thematic analysis had been run in order to identify the usage of the social media among PR practitioners. Firstly, we conducted one-on-one interview with our five respondents so that we can collect the data and information by the respondents. There are 5 questions that has been developed for each research questions and research objective. Based on the analysis, we can know that there are total of seven themes that represent the usage of the social media among PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic and nine themes that represent the impact of using social media to PR practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic. Through the in-depth interview, we know that social media playing an important role for public relations practitioners especially during the Covid-19 pandemic as it can bring several benefits and useful for them to conduct their work even though there are still include some of the negative impact but the social media still bring positive impact to the PR practitioners.

#### **4.3 Thematic analysis of the usage of the social media**

In order to identify the usage of the social media, a thematic analysis has been run for this research for the five question that had develop for the usage of the social media to identify the usage of social media among PR practitioner. The thematic analysis has been run after we conducted the in-depth interview with five respondents through online. The transcript of the whole interview session for each respondent have done for the thematic analysis can be run smoothly. After the transcript, we code the important and useful information that provided by the five respondents and summary the coding to the respective themes that can represent the usage of social media among the public relations practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic. Based on the thematic analysis that we had run in March 2022, we can identify the result that there are 7 themes that represent seven different usage of the social media among PR practitioner during the Covid-19 pandemic. The seven usage that we can identify is new practice, working tools, PR tools, create two-ways communication, PR strategies, image management and also publicity tools.

Based on the thematic analysis, we can found that the first theme under the usage of social media is social media become a new practice for the public relations practitioners. This is because, not all of the public relations practitioners are familiar in using social media to conduct their work. However, they need to adapt this new practice due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This theme can represent social media is the new practice for the PR practitioners is because the respondents mentioned that they need to do back up plan and study a lot on common public relations on the social media presence so that they can conduct their work smoothly. By mentioning some words or sentence such as *study common PR* or *backup on social media* that can represent the one of the usage of social media is it can be a new practice for the PR practitioners. Even though some of the respondents had start to practice using social media to conduct their work but they still need to change everything from offline to online and they need to meet people frequently by using the social media. They are required to learn and complete their task through online.

The interview result on this question shows that the public relations practitioners need to make research on social media tools by experimenting to overcome the challenges posed by social media. There are two respondents which is respondent 1 and respondent 4 stated that they had the similar issue which is they was encountering a lot of tests and experimenting on the new platform which is social media. The code is generated through their interview questions which are research on social media tools as they are quite new in social media to conduct their work as a public relations practitioner. According to the respondents 3, she mentioned that one of the problem that faced as a public relations practitioner due to this pandemic is she can only reach their clients, colleagues, or management team through online so she need to adapt this new practice when she conducting her work.

There is also one respondent mentioned that she need to adapt the things when it all turn from offline to online and from online go back to offline. For example, when they need to turn their works from offline to online, there are 40% of respondents think that have an independent space can help them to conduct their work from home easily and effectively because the independent working space can allow them to avoid other attraction and allow them to focus in their work. This is what exactly different practice with the situation before the Covid-19 pandemic since they need to adapt the changing of the working environment from office to home and also home to office. So that the first usage of social media become the new practice of public relations practitioners.

Secondly, the second usage of social media that we can get through the thematic analysis is social media able to become a working tools for the public relations practitioners to conduct their work during Covid-19 pandemic. Based on the interview with the respondents, we can receive some information that they think social media is a beneficial for PR practitioners. All of the respondents emphasize the words such as *important*, *useful*, and *helpful* that can represent the importance of social media to be used when they want to practice any activities for public relations practitioners. This is because, the social media can help the practitioners to reach the organizations, clients and the publics. Their organization will separate the task for them through social media. Not only that, they also emphasize that social media can become a PR tools since it was very useful. The social media as a PR tools enable the public relations practitioners to fulfil the task and make innovations.

Referring to the data collected through in-depth interview, we have found that there are variety of code that are effective to engage with stakeholders through social media. The first code which is useful has shown that the public relations practitioners mainly use social media to connect with their potential stakeholders. Next is public relations practitioners are also thinks that social media is beneficial, which we generated through the code, to assist the organization to build more awareness and reach more audiences through social media. Besides that, respondent 3 also said that as a public relations practitioner, they also use social media to act as a monitoring tool and communication tool for the organization. Lastly, public relations practitioner using the social media to send live message and avoid unnecessary discrepancy between the public to prevent spreading false information. Hence, social media has act as an effective way to engage with stakeholders during Covid-19 pandemic.

Based on the data collected, there is one respondent mentioned that social media is actually a part of the public relations practitioners. He mentioned that social media is not only the working tools, it can be part of our life as most of the time they need to use social media to complete their task and work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Social media have fully entered into their daily life. For example, the third respondents had mentioned that she can use social media to reach the Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) through social media account to contribute with them for the brand collaboration with their organizations. This can allow the public relations practitioners reach their audience, clients, colleagues, and organizations when they need. The reason why is because all the respondents who had conducted the interview with us shows that social media is efficiency for conducting their work. This also shows that social media is an effective communication tool to conduct their work as a public relations practitioner especially during the pandemic. Public relations practitioners use social media to

have two-way communication with clients, updates vital information, searching information, make a public announcement and even carry out the publicity work during pandemic.

Other than that, the third usage for the social media among public relations practitioner is to create a two-ways communication for the public relations practitioners with the others. The respondents mentioned about the social media can allow them to communicate with anyone, in anytime, at anywhere no matter is for the official matter or personal communications. This can help the PR practitioners to easily conduct a two ways communications with others. As the respondents mentioned in the previous questions, the social media allow them to communicate with their colleagues and the publics. They can also get the feedback from the public through social media. In addition, 2 out of 5 respondents mention that PR practitioners need to use social media to reach out their client, target audiences and Key Opinion leaders (KOL) in order to create an effective two-ways communication. According to the data collected from in-depth interview, there are 60% of respondents agreed that social media can be the communication tools with the others by conducting two-ways communications.

According to the data collected after conducted the thematic analysis, we know that public relations strategy also one of the usage of social media among PR practitioner during Covid-19. Respondents 4 had mentioned that social media as a new technology compared to the traditional media is allow the public relations practitioners to track on their work or audience reach. It can be effective for public relations practitioner to ensure they reach their organizations' s target and make innovation immediately. The other respondents also mentioned that social media always help the public relations practitioners to promote their organizations, increase the brand awareness, build brand presence, generate sales and etc. All of this advantages shows that social media is an excellent PR strategy as one of the usage of social media among public relations practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic.

Also, image management is considered as a usage of social media among PR practitioner during Covid-19. Respondents 4 had mentioned that he mainly use social media to manage the image of company. It is crucial for PR practitioners to manage and maintain a good image of an organisation by using social media. In order to manage an organisation's image, they use social media to communicate to with all the internal and external public and maintain a good relationship with them. According to data collected, there are 3 out of 5 respondents agreed that they use social media to increase their brand awareness. First respondent mentions that she uses social media to increase the product awareness among the public. The second respondent also mentions that they use social media to spread awareness about a program and build up their brand prominence through different social media platforms. Additionally, the

fifth respondent mentions that the social media usage to them is to build the awareness to the target audiences.

In addition, publicity tools is considered as a usage of social media among PR practitioner during Covid-19. Respondent 5 mentioned that they will use social media to do publicity work in his company. It is because social media can help them to reach out a large amount of audiences and it is very cost effective. Respondent 2 also agreed that when disseminating message to the public, social media can help to amplify the message, making PR practitioners more influential in their publicity work. Furthermore, public relations practitioners can use social media as the publicity tools to conduct their work or spreading the information during Covid-19 pandemic. Respondent 3 mentioned that he use different social media platforms to make public service announcement to the public during Covid-19 pandemic. Respondent 3 give an example about when the government announce that lockdown has been extended; they use social media to share about this announcement to remind the public to be mindful of what's going on. Also, respondent 3 mention that they use a lot of visual to spread the information and key messages to their audiences on social media.

#### **4.4 Thematic analysis of the impact of using social media**

A thematic analysis has been run for this research study for the five interview question that develop for the impact of using social media to PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic. After conducting the in-depth interview with the five respondents through online, the transcript has been done so that the thematic analysis can be done smoothly. All the information that provided by the respondents has been wrote down in the transcript. By summarize the important viewpoint and information in the transcript, we can come out different coding that can generate different themes that represent different impact of using social media. According to the thematic analysis, there are total nine themes that represent nine impact of social media usage among PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic. The nine impact has included organization's reputations, information overload, work efficiency, training and development, human behaviour, crisis communication engagement, self-discipline, relationship with stakeholders, and company resource allocation.

Based on the thematic analysis that we had run in March 2022, we can identify that the first theme under the impact of social media use by PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic is that social media may affect an organisation's reputation. This theme also can represent the first impact that social media usage brought to the PR practitioners during the

Covid-19 pandemic. Referring to the data collection, damage reputation is one of the problems with using social media as a working tool during Covid-19 pandemic. Respondent 1 mentions that this is because everyone can post any opinions and comments about an organisation through different social media platforms such as Facebook and others. Everyone can comment anything, no matter positive or negative comments, on others social media account. Respondent 5 agreed that a lot of bad news will come up in different social media platforms at this time. All negative news will spread in a very short time. It will have a big impact on the organisation as it may affect the organisation's image and reputation.

Secondly, the second impact of social media usage by PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic is information overload. Based on the data collected, respondent 2 mentions that there is too much information that exposes on social media during Covid-19 pandemic. This will result in the audience not being motivated to process and think about the information because they are dealing with so much information every single day. As a public relations practitioner, it is difficult to leave a deep impression in the audience' mind and the effectiveness of the message is weakened accordingly because of the information overload. When the audience felt tired to filter the information online and loss their interest, the public relations practitioners is not able to convey the organization's information and message to the public. It might also cause them not able to receive the feedback from the publics in order to make the innovations.

Other than that, the third impact of social media usage by PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic is that social media the work efficiency will be affected. As social media become the main tool of communicating during Covid-19 pandemic, everyone can just immediately text each other or call each other through different social media platforms, same goes to the public relations practitioners. Anyone can send any message to a PR practitioner anytime, anywhere. Respondent 2 mentions that when she is texting with this client, and then another client texts her at the same times. She needs to reply and response quickly to all the clients. At the same time, there are too many messages on their social media accounts, she finds it hard to actually reply to all of them. Therefore, it will increase PR practitioners' workload while using social media because they need to respond to many messages as soon as possible.

Referring to the data collection, 2 out of 5 respondents agreed that reduce work efficiency is one of the impacts while using social media during Covid-19 pandemic. Respondent 3 mentions that due to the overload messages on their social media accounts, she has to work for a while then respond to the messages then work for a while then respond to other messages. Therefore, it can be quite distracting which will directly reduce their work

efficiency. Also, Respondent 4 mentions that social media itself has no issue, but the skilling of people is a major issue. As social media is changing day by day, there is a gap in people ability and what the market wants. Some people don't really have a better understanding of how to use social media platforms and not familiar with different social media platforms. Therefore, it will directly reduce their work efficiency too. On the other hand, with the social media usage among PR practitioners amid Covid-19 pandemic, will increase the work efficiency.

As Respondent 1 and Respondent 2 have mentioned the convenience and benefits of social media which can engage with the audiences and allow to communicate with them like communicating them about the advantages of the product or service, also not only efficient in term of communication but also building relationship, thus will enhance the efficiency of work performance via the usage of social media. While for measuring the social media success, Respondent 4 has said through the way of quantitative that look at the engagements, numbers of views, page followers, average likes, average shares, average comments, number of viewed links articles and number of links clicked via social media. The more they have, the more successful the social media used for certain purpose and objective. Also, Respondent 4 has mentioned another way of qualitative which there is a table that shows the positiveness of the page and how well received the page from the audiences via social media in order to measure its success. These two ways show more work efficiency on measuring the success of the social media usage.

According to the data collected, 2 out of 5 respondents shows that they faced some impact of using social media to conduct in their work due to the sudden shifting on working environment in Covid-19 pandemic. Social media has a disadvantage on difficulty in observing body language when public relations practitioner is conducting their work. The reason why is during physical meet up with the clients can easily observing their human behaviour through their body languages or verbal communication. In social media, public relations practitioner could not interpret their human behaviour through the comments as they could not see their body languages. Besides that, using social media as a working tool might get a different outcome due to the public relations practitioner could not predict the outcome as they expected. Moreover, if the public relations practitioners posted something without advertised it using money, the code will be generated as lack of source as posting something organically might lead to less exposure to the target clients and eventually it will reduce work efficiency.

Therefore, this conclude that the impact of social media has greatly affected the PR practitioner when they encountered sudden shifting on working environment.

Based on the data collected, respondent 5 mentions that when he tries to announce something to the public through different social media platforms, the issue is he do not know is their message will be interpreted correctly by the audiences. It is difficult for public relations practitioners to spread the information in the most effective way and will affect correctness of the information. Furthermore, the sixth impact of the social media usage among PR practitioners amid the Covid-19 pandemic is leading to enhance brand recognition. Respondent 3 has said that using social media can help to enhance the client's presence online which led to higher recognition, also when managing the social media pages like Facebook, Instagram even LinkedIn will provide with a number of information analysis about the organisations. Besides, Respondent 5 has mentioned that social media can help many public relations practitioners to reach out the client or the target audiences easily.

While to measure the social media success, Respondent 1 and Respondent 3 have mentioned that can via comment feedback like counting the engagement via observing the audiences' reaction on social media, or also return of any investment after campaign done as well as look at the impression, reach and engagement of the contents on social media. Also, Respondent 3 has further mentioned that basically the higher the numbers, the more successful the social media used. Moreover, Respondent 2 has said that can measure the social media success via the amount of likes and shares, also by using audience growth on social media contents in order to measure the social media success. Moreover, PR practitioners need to help their companies to manage the social media well so as to build the companies' brand image and product image. The process of building brand recognition of a company is tough as the PR practitioner needs to take a long run to operate the social media platforms.

Follow by the next impact of social media usage among PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic is the training and development. According to Respondent 3, has said that social media can be very effective when being used in the right way. Respondent 3 did further elaborate with an example like for example Twitter which it is main for very short and suit sentences, which means like if with a super long paragraph in Twitter, no one is going to look at it which then it is not going to be effective. Therefore, in order for social media usage to be effective, it is significant to know how to use it wisely. Besides, Respondent 5 has said that using social media can require lesser time to reach out the things and it's simpler with its



functions provided, therefore it is significant to learn the ways of using social media effectively. While for measuring the social media success, Respondent 5 has mentioned that it can depend back to the purpose and objective that is being used. On the other hand, in the opinion of respondent 4, training and development about the social media platform and some skills should be provided so that to improve the information disseminate to be more accurately, timelier, and more transparently. PR practitioners could provide information for publics to increase their awareness about the way to interpret messages. This is important to minimize the problem of using social media as a working tool during the Covid-19 pandemic as many people would misunderstand messages being transmitted.

Moreover, the following impact of social media usage among PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic had affected the human behaviour which Respondent 4 has mentioned that although social media is good and effectiveness statistically but it cannot do what physical can do. The had the limitation on the social media since they can't conduct the physical human behaviour as people will do so. These is further elaborate by Respondent 4 which it is still necessary to have on ground activities due to these are the kind of things that social media cannot do effectively as physical such as human touch, human interactive. While the effectiveness really depends on the target that have set with the team and the management which being said that social media should not be the only area to promote the campaign but still have to do on physical activities, thus there will be limitation on social media. When there is lack of human behaviour such as physical contact with the other person, it might cause people couldn't put effort and their focus on the topic or the conversations because they can conduct their own things at the same time. For example, when the public relations practitioners start the conversations with the clients through social media, the clients can also reply the others message or conducting the other work at the same time since there is no physical contact between the conversations.

However, the social media usage among PR practitioners amid the Covid-19 pandemic also can help to lead to effective human behavior. It is really important for public relations practitioners in taking right action to handle the negative customer reviews or comments on social media in an effective way. Based on Respondent 1 and Respondent 2, they mentioned that as if is possible will need to have quick response on it, this could make those who comments or leave a message on social media feel valued and raise their favourable impression of the organisations. Also, showing the concern via the quick response on their matter. Besides, Respondent 1 and Respondent 5 have said to have honest response without lying to the

customers and can respond effectively instead of deleting the message or using another way to cover up the message. Furthermore, there are other effective ways of responding include attentive response and rational response.

As Respondent 3 has mentioned that it is important to first understand the situation, access the situation and then only proceed with the next steps in planning how should deal with the situation, also mentioned that it really can be case by case basis and can refer to manager for further guidance toward this kind of situation. As when it's really own fault, then should own up to the mistake and make up to the customers like either refund them back the payment for the product or offer a replacement and try to clarify the situation with them. While Respondent 4 has said to have patient response which firstly find the source of issue and then provide explanation to the customers without triggering them. Last but not least, as if there is issue brought from own side, then will need to have apologetic response which need to apologize to them and shows that there have the space to make improvement. In a nutshell, all these kinds of response actions by public relations practitioners are positive and much effective in handling the negative customer reviews and comments on social media.

Furthermore, the pandemic cause the PR practitioners need to be sensitive on the information in social media. As the information on social media is widely spread by netizens no matter it is real or fake, therefore, PR practitioners need to be very sensitive on social media in order to get the latest information and provide latest updates for the publics. They need to update the social media accounts of their companies often so that to keep connected with their publics and increase the exposure of their companies. While providing information to the publics, they must also be sensitive to ensure the information being transmitted is correct. PR practitioners also need to be sensitive on the information in social media to interact or respond with the publics instantly and to keep tracking on the trend. As mentioned above, all the actions or respond that need to be made by the PR practitioners had required them to become sensitive on the information in the social media.

Crisis communication engagement is also another impact of social media usage among PR practitioners amid the Covid-19 pandemic. It is significant for public relations practitioners in making the right decision when face the situation of receiving negative customer reviews or comments on social media. According to Respondent 4 has mentioned that when facing this kind of situation, will need to have proper and professional approach like as if is not under own department, then will need to direct it to the right department like customer services in order to handle it effectively, as well as ask manager for guidance. Besides, Respondent 4 also comes out with brainstorm solution which never handle it alone but seek help from manager or team

members and discuss as well as brainstorm on how to handle the situation properly. In addition, Respondent 5 also said to have proper approach when face this kind of situation which need to recall back and understand the 5W1H, then only will find the way to handle it more effectively. Therefore, when receive any negative customer reviews or comments on social media, must not be panic, think wisely to make a right decision and have appropriate approach. Overall, this will lead to engage with the effective crisis communication via social media.

Additionally, self-discipline is another impact of social media usage among PR practitioners amid the Covid-19 pandemic. PR practitioners need to be discipline to differentiate the important issue and the minor issue so that to prioritize the important task. As respondent 3 mentioned, she will hold on to the requirement of client for a while and deal with her important task first, she will prioritize the important task at the moment. This is the self-discipline of a PR practitioner to minimize the problem of using social media as a working tool during the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides, they need to do well on time management by scheduling a timeline so that they can complete their works within a period. In addition, PR practitioners need to show their concern to the comments of people on social media by providing immediate response to people. On the other hand, one of the biggest challenges as a PR practitioner while they are using social media to work during the Covid-19 pandemic is the self-discipline. As a PR practitioner, ones will receive a lot of messages on social media, and he still need to deliver task to manager at the same time. Thus, he must be disciplinary to distribute the task properly so that to reply all messages on time and doing the task given by manager at the same time. As respondent 3 stated, while PR practitioners are using social media to work, they will face a difficulty of separate between using social media for work and for their personal matters. Therefore, they must be disciplinary to draw a clear boundary between working and personal matters.

Besides that, the relationship with stakeholders is an impact of social media usage among PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic. The information transmitted rapidly on social media, thus the information about the PR practitioner's company might also being widely spread by people. Among the transmission of information, the message about the company might be transmitted inaccurate and lead to a crisis. As a result, relationship with stakeholders will be affected as they receive inaccurate information about the company. Moreover, the stakeholders might have miscommunication and misunderstanding towards the messages of the company, and they might reduce the trust towards the company. Thus, it is a

big challenge for PR practitioners to prevent these matters happened and maintain the relationship with stakeholders.

Last but not least, the impact of social media usage among PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic is the company resource allocation. As respondent 4 mentioned, many competitors are expanding their social media with high budget, therefore, PR practitioners need to try their best to convince the companies' management to provide higher budget for them to keep up with the competitors. Respondent 5 also stated that, he needs more budget to do something different with competitors so that to compete with them. However, the allocation of company resources is not controlled by PR practitioners, so it is a big challenge for PR practitioner to produce good content or information with lower budget than their competitors.

#### **4.5 Summary of Findings**

Based on the thematic analysis had been run for this research study, the result shows that there are seven themes that represent seven usage of social media among public relations practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic. Besides that, the results also shown that there are nine themes represent the impact of social media usage among public relations practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic. According to the five questions develop in the Section A, we can investigate the social media usage among the PR practitioners. There are seven usages that we can summary from the data collected such as new practice, working tools, PR tools, create two-ways communication, PR strategies, image management and also publicity tools. Overall results shown that social media is a useful tool for public relations to conduct their work during Covid-19 even the environment required them to make innovation or work from home. In order to meet with the first research questions which is to investigate the social media usage among PR practitioners. We found that the social media tools allow the public relations to conduct their work more efficient before the pandemic happen. This is because, public relations practitioners use various of social media platforms to conduct their work or receive more source of information during the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on the data collected, we know that social media can bring a lot of usage to the public relations practitioners. Most of the time, the public relations practitioners agreed that the social media is a useful and important tools for them.

At the same time, there are five question had developed for the second research questions which is to explore the impact of social media usage among PR practitioners. There are also nine positive or negative impacts that we analyse based on the data collected such as

organization's reputations, information overload, work efficiency, training and development, human behaviour, crisis communication engagement, self-discipline, relationship with stakeholders, and company resource allocation. We found that there a lot of uncertainty for the public relations practitioners who are new to the working mode which in work from home and utilise the social media platform to conduct their work. This is because, the social media platforms always open to everyone so that they can easily spread the message and information they want. This might cause their organizations or clients faced the same issue which is the spread of the negative news. Furthermore, social media allow the users used anytime and anywhere so this might let the public relations practitioners have information overload. As mentioned above, social media can be powerful and useful tool for public relations practitioners to conduct their work but also cause them faced difficulties.

Nevertheless, the impact of social media usage among the public relations practitioners also brought positive impact to them during the Covid-19 pandemic. The public relations practitioners able to provide quick respond to the clients and public when the crisis or problem happened. Social media also allow the public relations practitioner to track to the data, information, reactions, and public reach that they needed for their work. public relations practitioners can always make changes or innovation by referring to the data collected from social media. This can allow the public relations practitioner to improve their work performance by using the social media. The respondents also suggested to improve the education about social media for the university students to minimize the impacts of social media usage among the PR practitioners.

## **CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will be separate into four different sections to present about the overall summary and also the conclusions for the research. There are also implications and recommendations for this research topic in order to get better research in the future. The conclusion was based on the research questions, results, and also the purpose of study. The recommendations are based on the results of the study and provide the recommendations for the future research and also how to improve the social media familiarisation that will be explained in this chapter. There is also the limitation that we found in this research study after we completed the research. In this chapter, the first part will include the overview of study, summary of data, implications of study, recommendations, limitations and the conclusions.

### **5.2 The usage of Social Media**

From the data collection within the 5 respondents, the first usage of social media among PR practitioners amid the Covid-19 pandemic is identified as a new practice for the PR practitioners as not all of them are familiar in using social media to conduct their work. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they need to adapt this new practice especially when it turns from physical to work from home and everything turn from offline to online. According to the respondents, they mentioned that they need to have back up plan, have a lot of studies on social media presence among PR, have practice on reach out the audience via online and overcome the challenges posed by social media. From a study has stated that it will be an adaptation for PR practitioners on social media usage to perform their works during the Covid-19 pandemic. PR practitioners are familiar and like to conduct tasks such as meeting colleagues and clients, have meetings and others physically as it is simple and enjoyable for them (Ridzuan et al., 2021). Due to they like to socialize and work in a public setting, however they now have been forced to work from home. As for many PR practitioners, working from home was the only option as driving to the offices was deemed risky (O'Connor, 2020).

According to Tworzydło et al. (2020), the changes due to the pandemic has had an impact on interactions, as well as communication procedures and techniques. However, some PR practitioners struggle to make this adaptation and they try to do their best. While according to O' Connor (2020), she commented that people are dealing with and operating in uncertainty right now, it's difficult, but it's also an opportunity to grasp what people previously took for

granted and to learn how to adjust to practically everything. It is also stated that they are concerned about the way to live their life using the technique of work from home as they are concerned about the requirement to maintain the condition associated with the change in the work style of operating from home. They also anticipate a significant decline in the number of positions available for PR practitioners (Tworzydło et al., 2020). However, it can't deny that everything is changing because of the pandemic, which has caused significant changes in all spheres of social and economic life. Therefore, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, social media usage can be a new practice for PR practitioners and they need to make this adaptation, try their best to learn and perform their task through online in order to complete their work effectively even change to the mode of work from home.

Secondly, during the Covid-19 pandemic, social media become a working tool for PR practitioners to perform their work. Through the data collected from the respondents, they mentioned social media can help PR practitioners to reach the organizations, clients and the publics. Not only that, they also emphasize that social media can become a PR tools as it was really useful for PR practitioners to complete their work and make innovations. From a study, has stated that the social media usage by PR practitioners is significant in terms of firm presentation, performance and communication (Ridzuan et al., 2021). It also mentioned that the necessity for social media is for them to showcase events, communicate with the public and immediately receive feedback and improve the reputation of the company. Moreover, the respondents have interpreted that using social media can be effective in engaging with stakeholders which PR practitioners can use social media to connect with potential stakeholders, help organization to build awareness and reach out more audiences.

According to Wang (2015), many people believe that social media acts as the platform and carrier of public communication campaigns and strategic communication. Social media may assist in disseminating a huge amount of information and increasing company participation to the public. The social media connectedness allows people to form new links between people and organizations as well as reconnect with other organizations, businesses and friends (Omar Shaikh, 2016). Additionally, in this modern era, social media has increased the engagement of building brand awareness and every time an entrepreneur engages with media, brand awareness grows (Azhan et al., 2021). According to Smith (2019), PR practitioners of every organization nowadays need to maximise sufficient social media platforms in the best way possible with such enormous growth due to prominent social media platforms hang out with the target audience. As a result, this will assist their business in connecting with their favourite brands and communicating with them on many levels. Also

supported by an article by Mike (2021), who highlighted that social networking is about engaging with other people as much as it is about sharing content.

Additionally, respondents did mention that PR practitioners can use social media to transmit live messages and minimise unnecessary discrepancies among the public in order to avoid false information spread. However, there is a study opposed this saying which according to Ridzuan et al. (2021), with the advancement of information technology and internet capabilities, particularly social media, information can be transmitted simply easily and swiftly at any time, nevertheless what make everyone concern is the spread of fake news or false information which leads to misunderstandings. Also, it stated that it involves the extensive dissemination of fake news or false information on the Covid-19 disease that has sparked public alarm. Further, when irresponsible people share fake news or false information about them, the problem of sharing unverified and false information arises and as a result of this action, unsuspecting residents would be exposed to such scam.

Furthermore, there is respondent who mentioned that social media is not only the working tools, but it can be part of our daily life especially for PR practitioners who use social media to complete their work amid the pandemic. According to Maharashtra (2020), it is undeniable that social media has a significant impact on our lifestyle, economy, thoughts and general worldview. A study has stated that it's an online community where people may share information and thoughts and it has become an integral component of everyone's daily lives (Ismail et al., 2021). It is also stated that amid the ongoing pandemic, the social media usage has grown as people were looking for more information, awareness and guidance about the unique Corona virus disease.

As a result, many social media awareness campaigns were launched, educating people around the country about the essentials as well as the preventative steps that should be done during the pandemic. Besides, respondent did say that social media can be used to reach the Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) to contribute with them for brand collaboration with the organization to achieve massive audience reach. Based on a study by Azhan et al. (2021), having influencers and dropship can help to raise awareness of the product due to they have many followers. Therefore, PR practitioners can reach the influencers through their social media accounts for brand collaboration in order to build awareness of the organization, the brand and its products.

In addition, social media can be used for two-ways communication among PR practitioners with the others which according to the respondents, social media allow PR practitioners to communicate with anyone, in anytime, at anywhere either for the official matter



or personal matter, also allow them to receive feedback from the public via social media. Based on Robson & Karen (2020), there is also a rising emphasis on social media as an efficient means of two-way symmetrical communication between PR practitioners and the general publics. The social media was discovered to promote the acquisition of up-to-date available information, hence increasing the knowledge, awareness and practices of both PR practitioners and the general public (Ismail et al., 2021).

Also, it stated that media plays an important role in communication for an effective and speedy worldwide reaction. In spite of the existence of Covid-19 does not prevent PR practitioners from disseminating information to the public by using social media platforms which the medium that the society normally uses (Ridzuan et al., 2021). Not only spreading information, but also using social media to receive customers' feedback which enable the organizations to maintain good relationships with the clients (Azhan et al., 2021). Based on the article, Consumers Have Humanlike Relationships with Brands (2020), relationships foster loyalty and a good relationship with clients can lead to a brand they know and trust. Also, it mentioned that relationships foster positive word of mouth, which means customers will disseminate positive feedback to their family and friends. Receiving their feedback and responding to their inquiries is also a significant part of having a successful relationship with customers. Overall, social media allows PR practitioners to have two-ways communication with the public which able to disseminate information to them and at the same time able to receive feedback from them.

Moreover, public relations strategy is one of the social media usages among PR practitioners amid the Covid-19 pandemic as it has been mentioned by the respondents that social media acts as a new technology compared to the traditional media in assisting PR practitioners to perform their tasks like promote the organizations, build brand presence, achieve the organizations' goal and make innovation. According to Mukhtar & Arabi (2017), the rise of new media, particularly social media, has heightened how organizations build and maintain relationships with their strategic publics. Also, it stated that people tend to utilise or not use an application to the extent that they believe it will assist them execute their work better. Based on Schwartzman et al. (2009), discovered that PR practitioners are driving the social media revolution among organizations of all sizes and types.

Besides, social media can also help in image management by PR practitioners during the pandemic. Respondents have mentioned that it is important for PR practitioners to manage and maintain a good image of an organization by communicate with the public, raise brand awareness and build brand presence via social media. With the existence of Covid-19 does not

prevent PR practitioners from spreading information (Ridzuan et al., 2021). It is further being interpreted that people are using social media platforms to gather information amid the lockdown, thus it is one of the alternative ways for PR practitioners to disseminate information in this pandemic is through the medium which the society normally uses. Also, the way that allow them to communicate with the public and build brand awareness as well as brand presence among the public. Obviously, accuracy is vital in the eyes of the general public and PR practitioners play important role in providing accurate information in order to manage and maintain a positive image of the organization (Ridzuan et al., 2021).

Last but not least, social media can enhance the publicity which respondents did say that PR practitioners can use social media to carry out publicity work as can achieve massive audience reach and it is very cost effective. Also, social media can be used to spread information that to remind the public to be mindful of something. Based on a study by Dawi et al. (2021), with over 3 billion users globally, social media could be the ideal medium for raising awareness and adherence to prescribed preventative measures. Also, it mentioned that social media features like pop-ups and banners are useful for alerting users to new updates and reminding them of protective behaviors like as social distance and handwashing. Additionally, it also stated that the ability of social media to transmit real-time information will aid in the detection and combat of contagious diseases. Overall, it demonstrates the critical role that social media had in spreading information publicly amid the health pandemic as it enables to reach huge number of audiences and being effective to provide updates and reminders to the public.

Besides the social media usages that have been discussed above, there is other usage of social media among PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic which is applying marketing strategy using social media in order to improve the business. According to Adrian (2020), claimed that the Covid-19 pandemic has generated an ongoing human and health situation in Malaysia since the economic state is unstable due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, some entrepreneurs have created incentives such as free shipping in order to draw consumers' attention as paying less but receiving more is one of the best words for shopaholics (Azhan et al., 2021). Also, it mentioned that PR practitioners can publicise the promotion with the advertisements via social media so that viewers and followers are aware of the updates, for example, sharing advertisements on Shopee will increase viewers due to Shopee was the popular online shopping platform in Malaysia with 38.3 million clicks. Shopee (2019) has demonstrated that advertising with Shopee Ads will assist in achieving the company goals, whether it's attracting purchasers interested in the products, increasing sales, or developing the

brand. Additionally, as business may not be running smoothly, PR practitioners may use the opportunity to think about the future product and conduct research to get back on track and meet their corporate requirements with the usage of social media (Azhan et al., 2021).

### **5.3 The impact of using social media**

From the data collection within the 5 respondents, we discovered that using social media has an impact on an organisation's reputation. This is because everyone can share their own opinions, feedbacks and comments about the social media, no matter positive or negative comments. Therefore, all negative news on social media will go viral in a very short time which may affect and damage the organisation's image and reputation. This outcome is different with a study done by Allagui and Breslow (2016), in which they found that social media is an effective platform for PR practitioners to enhance brand reputations. Boitnott (2021) also agree that social media can help the PR practitioners to protect their organizations' reputation, which is also different with the outcome of our study.

Secondly, the results of the thematic analysis in order to analyse the data collected in the in-depth interview with 5 respondents in this study had indicated that one of the impacts of using social media is information overload. It is because there is too much information that exposes on social media during Covid-19 pandemic. This is consistent with the study of Choli & Kuss (2021), in which they also found that the consequences of using social media include information overload. This research also included misinformation and abuse and misuse of social media as the impacts of using social media that didn't mention in our study. Based on our study, we found that information overload will affect an audience's ability to process and think about information because they have so much information to process every day. Similarly, Choli & Kuss (2021) also mention that due to information overload, people may receive or spread fake news or misinformation because they don't have time to verify the source of the information.

Thirdly, according to the findings of our study, the work efficiency of PR practitioners will be affected by using social media. As PR practitioners shift their working environment and approach to clients from physical to online, all their conversations and communications are moving from physical to social media. PR practitioners need to respond to their clients' messages as quickly as possible, even when they are busy on doing something else. Thus, it can be quite distracting which will directly reduce their work efficiency. Likewise, a study

done by Forsgren and Byström (2017) agree that using social media imposes some limitations and contradictions to the users for the working efficiency and working environment.

Furthermore, based on the results of the thematic analysis that had been run for this research it revealed that training and development is considered as an impact of social media usage among PR practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic. It is because social media can be very effective when being used in the right way and it is significant to learn the ways of using social media effectively. Therefore, the training and development of PR practitioners within an organisation will be affected. Training and development about the social media platform and some skills must be provided for PR practitioners in order to improve the information disseminate to be more accurately, timelier, and more transparently.

One of the studies of Pathak (2021) also agreed that social media will affect PR practitioners' training and development. Pathank (2021) point out that social media is considered as a good platform for them to learn more skills and expand their knowledge. In fact, some people lack of the knowledge on how to use social media platforms effectively and not familiar with different social media platforms. Therefore, the widespread of social media among PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic will force them to learn more about the information of social media which will affect their training and development. This study also mentioned that PR practitioners can know more about the information of social media by referring to some research study, market statistics and so on.

In addition, based on the results of the thematic analysis that had been done by this study, we found that using social media has an impact on the relationship between public relations practitioners and the stakeholders. Social media is not only effective for communication, but also for building relationships. PR practitioners use social media to communicate with all the internal and external public in order to maintain a good relationship with them. Likewise, according to the study by Bizzi (2021), 82% of the respondents agreed that social media can help them to improve the relationship between the organization, colleagues and the public. This is also consistent with the study of Cheng (2019), in which they also found that PR practitioners may develop solid relationships with a wide number of people by using social media. They agreed that social media allows PR practitioners to communicate effectively with the public; therefore they are able to build strong relationships with them and achieve their objectives.

Moreover, we found that one of the impact of using social media is social media will affect the human behaviour after we conducted the thematic analysis to analyse the data collected from the in-depth interview. While social media is statistically good and effective for

public relations practitioners, but it lacks of human behaviour and cannot do what physics can. They have limitations on social media because they can't engage in physical human behaviour that people do, like human touch, human interaction and so on. This outcome is supported with a study done by Fitch (2009), in which they also found that using social media would result in a loss of interpersonal, human touch and human connection, unlike what PR practitioners do in physical contact.

Also, this study had revealed that it is difficult for PR practitioners to observe people's body language when conducting their work through social media. In social media, public relations practitioner could not interpret their human behaviour through the messages and comments as they could not see their body languages. On the other hand, PR practitioners can easily observing their human behaviour through their body languages, body gesture or verbal communication during the physical meeting with people. A study done by Walther & Burgoon (1992) agreed that PR practitioners are not able to observe people's voice tone, facial expressions, body gestures and many more by using social media. It makes them harder to deal with people as it lacks of human behaviour and no physical contact.

According to the results shown by the thematic analysis, crisis communication engagement is considered as an impact of social media usage among PR practitioners. It is significant for PR practitioners to use social media in making the right decision when facing crisis. When a crisis happened, PR practitioners must not be panic and need to think wisely in order to make a right decision. Therefore, this will lead to engage with the effective crisis communication via social media and overcome the crisis successfully. This outcome is different with a study done by Coombs (2015), in which they found that the emergence of social media is posing a challenge to PR practitioners. A study from Kim and Park (2016) also agree that it is difficult for PR practitioners to overcome the crisis through social media because social media make the crisis communication process from traditional one-to-many channels to a many-to-many channel of communication. The study from Kim and Park (2016) also indicated that Public Relations sources are more likely to be perceived as less trustworthy than unnamed sources during a crisis.

Besides the social media impacts that have been discussed above, there are other impacts of using social media among PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic that mentioned in several past studies. According to the research study of Nchabeleng et al. (2018), two-way communication is considered as an impact of using social media among PR practitioners. This study revealed that PR practitioners' practice has changed from traditional top-down communication to two-way communication due to the emergence of social media.

These is because PR practitioners can obtain feedback and comments through social media and connect with the audience, thus facilitating two-way communication that is not possible with other traditional media such as press releases, radio or television. According to a survey completed by Colma (2021), 80.4% of study participants agreed that social media enabled good two-way communication for work contributions in the workplace. A study done by Briones et al. (2011) also agreed that social media can carry out two-way communication in the workplace. Nowadays, PR practitioners not only transmit information, but also collect information and monitor public opinion on certain issues (Rashid, 2014).

#### **5.4 Implications of study**

Considering that the Covid-19 pandemic had resulted in the widely used of social media by the PR practitioners, this study contributes to the literature by exploring the usage of social media among PR practitioners during Covid-19 in Malaysia and how the usage of social media gave impact to PR practitioners during Covid-19 pandemic. In order to collect more information about the perceptions of interviewees, this study was conducted in in-depth interview method which can get a better understanding about the usage of social media among PR practitioners. The findings of in-depth interview are detail, and it benefits the PR practitioners and current PR students to get the information and they can avoid the same issues in their future work. This study provides a basic understanding of what social media brings to PR practice for PR students, thereby encouraging their enthusiasm and helping them in obtaining good results in their studies or professions.

Through the findings on how the usage of social media gave impact to PR practitioners, it helps the PR practitioners to improve their job performance, trigger employee-driven innovation, help engender employee engagement in both their roles and their organization and solve the work-life conflict easily. In addition, the study focused on the Covid-19 pandemic period, which is a new discussion of study, and it is a new topic for the future students to explore and have more in-depth research on it. It shows the investigation of PR practitioners' usage of social media during Covid-19 pandemic and explore the impact of social media usage among PR practitioners. Not only that, to analyse the data collected in the in-depth interview, a thematic analysis has been run. This thematic analysis can help to analyse the data collected in the in-depth interview so that it can be easier for the other researchers to refer.

As mentioned above, the discussion had shown that there are also several similarities on the usage and impact of social media among public relations practitioners. This can show

that is important to conduct this research so that the public relations practitioners can have clear understanding on the social media. This research can help the organizations and also public relations practitioners to have deeper understanding on the topic of social media. They enable to conduct the prevention or ways to solve the problem that occur by using social media and emphasize the important of the social media. They can refer this study and make amendment on using the social media as one of the tools for public relations practitioners to conduct their work not only during Covid-19 pandemic but also after the pandemic.

There are some of the differences on the usage and impact of social media among public relations practitioners after refer to the other research studies. We found that there is no respondents mentioned about social media can help them to apply the marketing strategy in order to help them to improve their organization's reputations and business. As mentioned above, social media can be one of the marketing strategy that allow the public relations practitioners to publish their advertisement on it so that they can appear more opportunity to their organizations and transmit the information to the public. Not only that, we also found that there are research studies mentioned that the social media allow the changes from traditional top-down communication into two ways communications. This is because the social media can provide a good communication for the public relations practitioners to contribute their work with the publics, clients and organizations as they not only use the social media to convey message but also collect information and monitor the public's opinion.

### **5.5 Limitation of the study**

Although our research provides useful information regarding the usage and impact of social media among PR practitioners, we acknowledge that it has some limitations like other research. The current research focusing on the usage and impact of social media usage among PR practitioners in Malaysia, it has not developed or proposed the way to solve the negative impact of social media usage among PR practitioners or minimize the problem appearance of the Covid-19 situation. Other than that, the in-depth interview in this study is just invite 5 respondents to participate in the interview. The sample size of the research is small and not available to represent most of the public relations practitioners in Malaysia due to the small sample size. The insufficient sample size can affect the statistic of the result of the thematic analysis so that the opinion and data shared by the 5 respondents might not be sufficient enough for the references in Malaysia.

Not only that, there are also limitation in this study because this study is mainly focus on the period of Covid-19 pandemic. Since this pandemic was occurred in Malaysia in the year 2022 January so that there are lack of previous research study on this particular topic. There is lack of the previous study on this topic that not allowed us to conduct more comparison on the data collected from the respondents. We are not able to ensure the data collected is 100% sufficient and useful to others. Next, the thematic analysis had been conducted in this research study so that it will need a lot of time to conduct the thematic analysis by completing the transcript and also analyse the data. Due to the time constrain, we had only have the limited time to conducted the in-depth interview and analyse the data collected by using the thematic analysis.

### **5.6 Recommendations of the study**

The recommendations for this research study is the further study can help to identify and discuss some useful methods for the PR practitioners to cope with when they faced negative impact while using social media. The discussed point of view is important and helpful to improve the job performance and solve the work-conflict of PR practitioners. Some of these limitations are emphasized by the fact that our research did not focus on a specific social media platform. In this regard, future research could focus on exploring the analysis and discussion on specific social media platform such as Facebook or Instagram, and in the context of Malaysia in order to conduct a more detailed analysis. This can help to increase the validity and reliability of this particular topic. It can help the organization, public relations practitioners, and also the other researchers to have a reliable result on this particular topic. Moreover, the sample size of the study also can be increase to invite at least 12 respondents to participate in the research study to ensure the accuracy of the study.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic become more familiar to the people nowadays, the recommendations for this study is to encourage the other researchers to conduct more topic that related to the social media among the public relations during the Covid-19 pandemic. As the pandemic become more normal and accept by the public, they need more research that appear in this pandemic period so that they can get the data by referring to the latest research instead of refer back to the oldest research that might include the message that might mislead them to the wrong information. Furthermore, the next recommendations for the future research study is to avoid time constraints because the more time can ensure the whole study not rushed,



and more time can spend on analysing the data collected and conducting the thematic analysis to provide more accurate theme.

## **5.7 Conclusions**

Given the widespread usage of social media by PR practitioners during the Covid19 pandemic, this study had effectively examined the usage of social media by PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia, as well as how the use of social media impacted PR practitioners during the pandemic. Majority of the respondents need to adapt the new practices in using social media, using social media as a PR tools and has become part of their life as well. Next, social media can be also used for two-ways communication among PR practitioners, effective communication, public relation strategies, help in image management, carry out publicity work. Meanwhile, all of these positive usage for social media were similar to the past studies. In addition, there are only one usage of social media that is oppose with the past study. In our research, we found that social media can use to transmit live message and minimise the unnecessary discrepancies among the public. On the opposite hand, the past study stated that social media can easily spread fake news or false information to the public.

Moreover, the impact of using social media to PR practitioner in Covid-19 pandemic has also greatly affected in their work efficiency, their training and development, effective communication and building relationships. From our study, one of the impacts of using the social media which is affect and damage the organisation's image and reputation has found a difference in the past study. The past study shows that it can enhance the brand reputation through social media. Besides that, our study shows that using social media can cause information overload and it will lead to bad impact. On the similar side, the past studies also agreed that due to information overload, people may receive or spread fake news or misinformation because they don't have time to verify the source of the information. Furthermore, there is a similar impact in our study and past study which is social media will affect PR practitioner' training and development is a positive way. Other than that, there are some similarities between our study and past study which is both agreed that social media can help them to enhance their relationship between the stakeholder, lack of human behavior such as physical contact and human interaction. From our study, the last impact of using the social media is it can lead to engage with the effective crisis communication via social media and overcome the crisis successfully. But on the opposite hand, the past studies found that social media make the crisis communication process from traditional one-to-many channels to a

many-to-many channel of communication which will makes the process of crisis management more complicated.

In conclusion, there are some importance of using the social media. The PR practitioners wisely use the social media as their PR working tools, two-ways communication, public relations strategy, aids in image management, achieve massive audiences reach and cost effective. Both PR practitioners and social media are built on communication, but social media amplifies message with real-time messaging, allowing PR practitioner to be more powerful and impactful. This shows that most of the social media usage for PR practitioners to conduct their work during Covid-19 is a positive impact for them.

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## **Appendix**

### **7.1 Pattern of interview answer**

The first question in Section A will be “How do you adapt to the sudden change of working environment during Covid-19 pandemic?”. Even though one of the interviewees did not have actual working experience but as a student, his working environment can be considered as his learning environment. There were two answers that we receive from our interviewees. One was that they believed that sudden change would be very acceptable due to the use of social media as a communication tool in their daily life. The other explained that it would be difficult and unacceptable to suddenly switch from offline work to online. So, in general, everyone has a different perspective on the sudden shift in the work environment due to the familiarity with the social media.

The second question for Section A is “What do you think about social media as a working tool? Is that allowed for pr practitioners to conduct their work during covid-19 pandemic?” Both interviewees strongly agree with social media can be used as working tools. This is because social media is a very convenient communication tool that helps to connect others while ensure they will not to be affected by Covid-19. Besides, they also believe that social media can be a good help for public relations practitioners to conduct their work because social media can also help to hone their skills or conduct online activities.

The third question of Section A is “What was your thought when you first try on using social media to conduct your work?” Both interviewee had replied to a similar answer which is both of them had encountered new challenges, many new things they need to adapt through online world. On the other side, each interviewee has different opinion on their usage in social media. The first interviewee has a positive attitude and thinks that social media is a great tool to conduct his work. The second interview thinks that it is quite challenging for her as she never used social media to work before. Therefore, this shows that everyone has a different adaptability in trying new area and everyone has different social media skills.

The fourth question of Section A is “Briefly describe the usage of social media among pr practitioners during covid-19 pandemic?” According to what each interviewee had said, the first interviewee is mainly explaining about the general of PR practitioner using social media to conduct their work from physically shift to online. He mentioned that PR practitioner is using social media to conduct online event, and to communicate with clients. Another interviewee is mainly talking about PR practitioner in a specific department is utilizing the

social media and thinks that social media is very useful to everyone. This can conclude that although they are explaining different things, but they are mainly talking about social media can conduct everything that they want on physical to online and utilize the social media well.

The last question of Section A is “Please tell me what you know about the usage of social media among pr practitioners”. There were two answers that we receive from our interviewees. First interviewee said that PR practitioner mainly utilizes social media during these Covid -19 pandemic such as Instagram and Microsoft team. In addition, Microsoft team can be considered as a tool that gather them remotely together as one or conduct discussion, this is actually made them come together as one and work together even in this COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, second interviewee explained that she uses social media as a communication tool to check, inform and update the information with the public. Second interviewee also considered social media as a tool for customer relationship maintenance. Although is a small company, they will share their information in social media in order to connect with their customers. This can conclude that although they are explaining different things, but they are mainly talking about the usage of social media, such as working tool, communication tool and customer relationship maintenance tool.

The first question of Section B is “Are you aware of any problem with using social media as a working tool during covid-19 pandemic?”. According to the first interview, he stated the problem with using social media as a working tool are mainly internet disconnectivity and the technical error, which are pretty much burdensome. Another interviewee mentioned that people can easily criticize our government or any organization through social media nowadays. Therefore, we can conclude that the problem with using social media as a working tool during covid-19 pandemic include internet disconnectivity, technical error and uncontrolled information and comments.

The second question in Section B is “Do you have any suggestions on how to minimize these problems?”. Both interviewees were giving suggestions about different problems. For the first interviewee, he suggested to make early submission to avoid any uncertainties due to technical issues and do early preparation to prevent the internet connection problem. The second interviewee suggested that people have the responsibility to take care of themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic, but not just put the blame on the government. To conclude, people should take their own responsibilities on the issues they faced and do early preparation to avoid any uncertainties.

The third question in Section B is “What is the biggest challenge as a PR practitioner while you are using social media to work during Covid-19 pandemic?”. The first interviewee mentioned that the biggest challenge that he faced was not being able to communicate physically with people. The second interviewee stated that the biggest challenge while using social media is needed to think wisely for the use of word and the content of information being shared on social media. To conclude, social media become the essential platform for people to communicate during the pandemic, hence there are many problems faced and people need to be more careful while spreading words or information on social media.

The fourth question of Section B is ‘How do you think about the effectiveness of social media used? Explain the ways to measure the social media success.’. Based on the first interviewee, he did mention that with the safe social media usage can lead to stay positive as it can affect people properly. Besides, both first and second interviewees do have same view of the effectiveness of social media use which is its ability for dissemination of information in a quick time to everyone. Furthermore, both of them also have same thought about the way to measure the social media success which is via the awareness and engagements from others toward any social media post. Also, both of them provide positive feedbacks on social media usage which one of them mentioned it is so much convenient like can just create a room and have a virtual discussion via Microsoft Team whereas another interviewee mentioned social media is a good platform for online communication tool.

The fifth question of Section B is ‘How would you handle negative customer reviews or comments on social media?’. Even though both interviewees currently are university students, but they did imagine themselves with a situation like this and think that it’s best to reply, but in a polite manner and with good responses even when being criticized by others. Additionally, first interviewee did mention not only reply it politely but also make choice whether to improve or not as some customer reviews may contribute to own improvement but some may not due to just play negative comments that trying to tackle the business reputation. Besides, from the opinion of second interviewee, off the criticize comments and block the individual will be the way to overcome this issue by avoiding the information which will spoil the company’s reputation to spread in the company’s platform.

## 7.2 Thematic analysis

### 7.2.1 The usage of the social media

#### Question 1:

**How do you adapt to the sudden change of working environment during Covid-19 pandemic?**

| <b>Quotation</b>  | <b>Code</b>            | <b>Themes</b>      |
|---|------------------------|--------------------|
| <p><b>Respondent 1:</b><br/>we need to do backup on the social media plan because they need to like turn every things online</p>                                    | New practice           | New practice in PR |
| <p><b>Respondent 1:</b><br/>we need to study a lot on common pr on the social media presence for our company</p>  |                        |                    |
| <p><b>Respondent 3:</b><br/>We had been doing a lot of things digitally</p>   | Familiar               |                    |
| <p><b>Respondent 5:</b><br/>you are working through all the laptop and all the electronic device to get things done</p>   |                        |                    |
| <p><b>Respondent 3:</b><br/>work with your colleagues to develop a plan on what works best on the team</p>  | Ability to communicate |                    |
| <p><b>Respondent 4:</b><br/>meeting people digitally become more frequent</p>   | Adaptive capacity      |                    |
| <p><b>Respondent 3:</b><br/>I had to adapt at that time was to go back to office and actually work in an environment where I can see my colleagues face to face</p> |                        |                    |
| <p><b>Respondent 2:</b><br/>I arranged a special room in my home as my office... help me quickly get into the working mode seriously</p>                            | Independent space      | Self-discipline    |
| <p><b>Respondent 3:</b><br/>you have to set up a good working environment for yourself.... try do not mix the space where you relax and you work</p>                |                        |                    |

**Question 2:**

**What do you think about social media as a working tool?**

| <b>Quotation</b>  | <b>Code</b> | <b>Themes</b> |
|---|-------------|---------------|
| <b>Respondent 1:</b><br>social media is very important as a working tool  | Important   | PR tools      |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b><br>social media is a very useful working tool in PR practices to conduct their work normally | Useful      |               |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>a very useful and helpful working tool  |             |               |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b><br>Yes, for multiple reasons.  | Beneficial  |               |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>Social media is actually a part of PR practitioner,                                       | A part      |               |

**Is that allowed for pr practitioners to conduct their work online during Covid-19 pandemic?**

| <b>Quotation</b>   | <b>Code</b>         | <b>Theme</b>              |
|--|---------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Respondent 1:</b><br>a main platform for us to communicate no matter with our company, clients, audiences or co-workers           | Communication tools | Two ways communication    |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b><br>social media allows PR practitioner to communicate anytime and anywhere.                                     |                     |                           |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>for us to communicate for official matters but we always use social media as a platform to expand our reach. |                     |                           |
| <b>Respondent 1:</b><br>help the public relations to generate sales  | Community relations | Public Relations strategy |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>help a brand to promote themselves, build their presence, spread an awareness                                |                     |                           |

|   |                 |  |
|---|-----------------|--|
| <b>Respondent 4:</b><br>for social media, they have live data... I can see a percentage of people                       |                 |  |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>Think on the creativity/ social media management that can help my client to improve             | Media Relations |  |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>are preferable that you can work using the right wise social media to work as a PR practitioner |                 |  |

### Question 3.

What was your thought when you first try on using social media to conduct your work?

| Quotation   | Code                   | Themes                   |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Respondent 1:</b> impact is there is a lot of experiment and the effort  | Experiment             | Adapt new practice in PR |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b> There are a lot of tests and a lot of experimenting.   |                        |                          |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b> social media makes my work more convenient and help me to complete my work in shorter time compared to previous time | Beneficial             | PR tools                 |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b> work efficiency has been increased greatly   |                        |                          |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b> I become much more productive.   |                        |                          |
| <b>Respondent 1:</b> I just feel like I was managing our own account (personal account)   | Personal experience    |                          |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b> social media is something that I was very comfortable with already   |                        |                          |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b> we use social media for our personal matters but this time I actually using it for work purposes.                    |                        |                          |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b> these are source of your hard called very niche followers.   | Impact of social media | Reduced work efficiency  |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Respondent 4:</b> The analytic behind social media is very complex.   |  |  |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b> It is a very complex understanding on human behaviour   |  |  |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b> But when you use it as work, it's actually a different perspective, you will think it's another thing and saw its difference. |  |  |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b> why the outcome was not same as the thing I had planned.  |  |  |

#### Question 4.

**Briefly describe the usage of social media among pr practitioners during covid-19 pandemic?**

| Quotation  | Code               | Themes                |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Respondent 1:</b> social media for us to communicate with our potential customer  | Communication tool | Two way communication |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b> PRPs can communicate messages with the public, hold online events and carry out their publicity work during the pandemic.             |                    |                       |
| <b>Respondent 1:</b> social media to update the company message like when we are coming back after pandemic or any updates on our products and information |                    |                       |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b> As the usage of social media help maintain the normal operation of PR practices during Covid 19 pandemic                              |                    |                       |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b> social media is a very useful tool for PRPs   |                    |                       |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b> we will develop post and then we help them to post it to their respective social media accounts                                       |                    |                       |

|   |                    |  |
|---|--------------------|--|
| <p>to help them to reach out more audiences and to build their brand awareness.</p> <p><b>Respondent 4:</b> they can send live messages to the public and avoid any unnecessary discrepancy between the public.</p>   |                    |  |
| <p><b>Respondent 5:</b> you help your client to say sorry and how you can manage to help them to make a Public Announce</p> <p><b>Respondent 5:</b> there is a platform for you and your colleagues, boss, superior and anyone in company to contact.</p> <p><b>Respondent 5:</b> use it as a platform as a connection and draft out the message at a short time or very wide reach out the target audience in very short time.</p> |                    |  |
| <p><b>Respondent 3:</b> it can be a crisis or a big news, so it serves well as a form of a source of information</p>  | Beneficial         |  |
| <p><b>Respondent 4:</b> it's about timeliness and information accuracy for PR practitioners using social media during the pandemic period.</p>  |                    |  |
| <p><b>Respondent 5:</b> pandemic will cause the usage of social media increase directly very higher</p>   |                    |  |
| <p><b>Respondent 3:</b> we mainly use social media to connect with influencer</p>   | Communication tool |  |
| <p><b>Respondent 3:</b> We also use social media as a form of media monitoring tool</p>   | Monitoring tool    |  |

**Question 5:**

**Please tell me what you know about the usage of social media among pr practitioners.**

| Quotation | Code | Themes |
|-----------|------|--------|
|-----------|------|--------|



|   |                           |                           |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Respondent 1:</b><br>mainly is use to manage the image of company  | Image                     | Image management          |
| <b>Respondent 1:</b><br>marketing tools to increase the product awareness.  | Awareness                 | Public Relations Strategy |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>we also use social media to spread an awareness about a program   |                           |                           |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>build up their brand prominence   |                           |                           |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>the social media usage to us is to build the awareness to the target audiences                                  |                           |                           |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b><br>communicate with their audiences faster   | Communication tools       | Two ways communication    |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b><br>allows two-way communication in PR practices which is necessary to receive feedback and opinion from the public |                           |                           |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b><br>maintain a good relationship  | Relationship-building     |                           |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b><br>strengthening the connection  |                           |                           |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>we use social media first are to reach out to Key Opinion leaders (KOL)   | Reaching target audiences |                           |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>to reach out client or target audience  |                           |                           |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b><br>social media helps amplify the message, making PRPs more influential in their publicity work                    | Disseminate message       | Publicity tools           |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>We will use it to do the publicity  |                           |                           |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b>  | Information               |                           |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| make public service announcement               |  |  |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>spread the key message |  |  |

### 7.2.2 The impact of using social media

#### Question 1:

**Are you aware of any problem with using social media as a working tool during covid-19 pandemic?**

| Quotation   | Code                                      | Themes               |
|---|---|----------------------|
| <b>Respondent 1:</b><br>everyone can post any opinion in our Facebook page comment section. So some comment may affect our company's image.                             | Spread of negative news                   | Reputation           |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>a lot of bad news will come up in social media  |   |                      |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b><br>Exposure to too much information on social media during covid-19 pandemic causes the audience to not be motivated to process                    | Too much information                      | Information overload |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>too many messages on our social media accounts, we find it hard to actually reply to them,  | Too many messages                         | Work efficiency      |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>I have to like work a bit then respond to the messages then work a bit then respond to the messages. So, it can be quite distracting sometimes. | Distraction from work                     |                      |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b><br>skilling of people is an issue. There is a gap in people ability and what the market wants.   | Lack of social media knowledge and skills |                      |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b><br>don't have a better understanding of how to use social media platforms  |   |                      |

|  |                                |  |
|--|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>When you try to announce something, the issue is: is it your message or something you tried to inform and the objective will be interpreted correctly by your audiences. | Correctness of the information |  |
|--|--------------------------------|--|

## Question 2

**Do you have any suggestions on how to minimize these problems?**

| Quotation   | Code                    | Themes                    |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Respondent 1:</b><br>we need to respond immediately to the comment           | Media responsiveness    | Effective human behaviour |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b><br>update company's social media accounts instantly        |                         |                           |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>ensure the information from our side is correct         | Information accuracy    |                           |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>prioritize your task                                    | Priority                | Self-discipline           |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>time management   | Time management         |                           |
| <b>Respondent 1:</b><br>we need to show our concern about the issue             | Sincerity               |                           |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b><br>university starts to teach students the major platforms | Education in university | Training and Development  |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>do a small education for awareness to target audience   | Self-learning           |                           |

## Question 3

**What is the biggest challenge as a PR practitioner while you are using social media to work during Covid-19 pandemic?**

| Quotation  | Code              | Themes            |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Respondent 1:</b><br>building the company's brand image and product image | Image recognition | Brand recognition |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b>   | Attentiveness     | Self-discipline   |

|  |                                    |                                |
|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| swipe through many messages at the same time and ensure to respond to all of them without missing any of it and still able to deliver my tasks to my managers. |                                    |                                |
| <b>Respondents 3:</b><br>separate between using social media for work and for my personal matters.   | Work boundary                      |                                |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b><br>reply to many people's messages on social media, thus delaying some people's messages  | Responsiveness                     |                                |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>spreading fake news about my client on social media  | Protection of client reputation    | Relationship with stakeholders |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>prevent the miscommunication and misunderstanding from target audiences towards your message   | Communication with target audience |                                |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b><br>convince your management directing a huge budget to social media   | Management support                 | Company resource allocation    |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>need more budget to use the platform to compete with competitors   |                                    |                                |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b><br>competitors are also putting in big bug to improve and expand their social media   |                                    |                                |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>try to do something different with others PR practitioners   | Competition                        |                                |

**Question 4:**

**How do you think about the effectiveness of social media used?**

| Quotation            | Code                        | Themes          |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Respondent 1:</b> | Convenience of social media | Work efficiency |

|   |                             |                          |
|---|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Engage with the audience and allow to communicate with them.  |                             |                          |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b><br>In terms of communication and building relationship.  | Benefits of social media    |                          |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>Helping to enhance our client's presence online.  | Increase recognition        | Brand recognition        |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>When managing the social media pages like Facebook, Instagram even LinkedIn will provide with a number of information analysis. | Information access          |                          |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>It can help many PR practitioner to reach out the client or the target audiences easily.  | Convenience of social media |                          |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>It can be very effective when being used in the right way.  | Proper usage                | Training and Development |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>Require lesser time to reach out the things and it's simpler with its functions provided.                                       | Higher efficiency           |                          |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b><br>Social media is good and effectiveness statistically but it cannot do what physical can do.                                     | Physical limitation         | Human behaviour          |

**Explain the ways to measure the social media success.**

|  |                      |                   |
|--|----------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Respondent 1:</b><br>Counting the engagement via observing the audiences' reaction, or also return of any investment after campaign done. | Comment feedback     | Brand recognition |
| <b>Respondent 3:</b><br>Look at the impression, reach and engagement.  |                      |                   |
| <b>Respondent 2:</b><br>Through the amount of likes and shares, also by using audience growth.   | Audience interaction |                   |

|   |                               |                          |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <p><b>Respondent 4:</b></p> <p>Another way is qualitative which there is a table that shows the positiveness of the page and how well received the page from the audiences.</p>   | Quality value                 | Work efficiency          |
| <p><b>Respondent 4:</b></p> <p>One of the ways is quantitative which look at the engagements, numbers of views, page followers, average likes, average shares, average comments, number of viewed links articles and number of links clicked.</p> | Quantity value                |                          |
| <p><b>Respondent 5:</b></p> <p>It depends back to the purpose and objective that is being used.</p>   | Effectiveness of social media | Training and Development |

**Question 5:**

**How would you handle negative customer reviews or comments on social media?**

| Quotation  | Code                 | Themes                   |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------|
| <p><b>Respondent 1:</b></p> <p>Respond immediately and showing the concern.</p>  | Appropriate response | Effective human behavior |
| <p><b>Respondent 1:</b></p> <p>Respond without lying to the customer.</p>  | Honest response      |                          |
| <p><b>Respondent 5:</b></p> <p>Can respond in an effective way instead of deleting the message or covering up the message.</p>   |                      |                          |
| <p><b>Respondent 2:</b></p> <p>Respond as quickly as possible.</p>   | Quick response       |                          |
| <p><b>Respondent 3:</b></p> <p>First understand the situation, assess the situation, then only proceed with the next steps in planning how should deal with the situation.</p> | Attentive response   |                          |
| <p><b>Respondent 3:</b></p> <p>Case by case basis and refer to the manager for further guidance.</p>   | Rational response    |                          |

|  |                       |                                 |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Respondent 4:</b><br>Find the source of this issue and explain to the customers without triggering them.  | Patient response      |                                 |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>Basically, need to apologize and show that there is place to make improvement.   | Apologetic response   |                                 |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b><br>Direct it to customer services.  | Professional approach | Crisis communication engagement |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b><br>Direct it to right department and ask manager for guidance.  | Proper approach       |                                 |
| <b>Respondent 5:</b><br>Need to understand back to the 5W1H, then only will know the way to handle it.   |                       |                                 |
| <b>Respondent 4:</b><br>Never do it alone but seek help from manager or team members and discuss and brainstorm on how to handle the situation properly. | Brainstorm solution   |                                 |

### **7.3 Transcript of the in-depth interview**

#### **7.3.1 Section A: The usage of social media**

##### **1. How do you adapt to the sudden change of working environment during Covid-19 pandemic?**

###### **Chua Xue Cin:**

When the pandemic happened, we need to do backup on the social media plan because they need to like turn every things online since my industry had focusing more on besides offline publicity and promotion then before the pandemic happened, we only need to help the company to prepare the publicity material like the brochure or flyers and do just a little posting on social media but then when the pandemic happened, then we need to study a lot on common pr on the social media presence for our company.

###### **Vangie Hung:**

So, during this pandemic, I work from home two days a week. So I arranged a special room in my home as my office, and close the door when I am working, so as to help me quickly get into the working mode seriously, and after my working hours, I also can cast off in time.

###### **Chan Yi Qing:**

Ok, so first up for my scenario, I actually started work with my very first job, working from home so I didn't exactly have to go through the face like other people where they transition from the usual working style where you work in the office and then suddenly it goes to work from home. So I started up working from home and I was quite comfortable with it because I had everything I needed, my company provide me with all the necessity like my laptop and that really was all I needed but later on when things started to get better and things started to opened up, I when back to office and I think all I had to adapt at that time was to go back to office and actually work in an environment where I can see my colleagues face to face and to be honest, it was, at that time I felt a little weird because I was so youth to doing everything virtually with my colleagues but then again. I would say it wasn't a heavy transition because in a way our society, how should I say it? We had been doing a lot of things digitally and many organizations have been undergoing something on report digital transformation so honestly speaking, I feel like what the pandemic did was speed up the entire process because to be very



honest some jobs do not require us to be in the office. So honestly, I guess is something that, so called something good that we got from the pandemic but after that I came as MCO, where you know suddenly our cases went up again and I had to immediately get back to working from home. At that point in time, I felt like most of us are already ready to face this situation because we have already experienced it before. So honestly at that time, it wasn't very hard anymore, is more like, maybe during the first one or two weeks, it was just a little like not very used to it because you know how you usually? We can just walk straight to our calls and then we talk to them, chat with them, face to face. Like when I have a question, I just walk to you, Vivien and I say "Ei Vivien, I want to ask you, how do I do this?" but now I have to like, maybe type you a message "Oh, Vivien, I don't know how to do this." or I have to like ask you "Oh Vivien can I get on a call with you ah?" so I think it was the biggest difference, is a little more time consuming in this sense because you cannot physically reach up with the person anymore. And then of course there got other things like, for example, you know? is quite common when we get on Zoom. First things we will ask each other "Ei can you hear me ah? Can you hear me?" because you know? some of us internet connection is not good so sometimes you have destruction, cannot hear each other clearly or you know? sometimes we just get disconnected. So, these are some of the challenges that I faced when I worked from home during the pandemic. It wasn't a really huge challenge but nevertheless it did distract my work in some sort of way.

So how do I adapt to this sudden change? I think first things first, you have to embrace what has already happened and work with your colleagues to develop a plan on what works best on the team. Let's say for example back then I use report to my manager everyday. Ok, today I have to do this, these few task - ABC but now meanwhile I do is we do in a excel sheet. We make use of the internet and we do our to-do list there. So that our manager can just go in and then they can see clearly. Oh ok, that's what Yi Qing need to do today and these are my feedback to her. So, this is how we make things a lot more in-line and standardize so that things won't become very messy. So that's one way and number two is you have to have the good working. Erm, you have to set up a good working environment for yourself. For example, you need to have a space that actually dedicated to work and try do not mix the space where you relax and you work because otherwise, I notice that it will be distract. (Line broken) Ok so the another ways I adapted to this is I separated my working space and the place where I relax. that means that I had a corner in a room which is really just dedicated for work and nothing else. And when I go to my bed, it really just to relax myself like try not to mix both these spaces because when you do that your body will not be able to adapt to it. In a sense where, ok, I am

working but then I work on my bed, so my body will feel like “Ok now I am on the bed but I am not supposed to sleep, I am supposed to work. So, at night when you want to sleep, it will actually affect your sleep pattern and affect, you know? when you cannot sleep well obviously it is going to be affect your mood as well. So, what’s important is be able to create a clear boundary between your work space and the space for you to relax. One more thing is you see ya, when we work from home, you have the tendency to work overtime because compared to the office, “Ok, 6pm already is time to go home but now that you at home, you tend to find yourself to continuously work non-stop. So, it is important to give yourself a count of time, like I still have to work but it can be continuing with tomorrow so no want to give yourself a count of time from work. So that’s the another way to adapt yourself to this.

**Alycia Wong Lye Min:**

I actually enter the workforce during the pandemic but I had previously asked my colleagues how they adapted. Firstly, before the pandemic happened, Microsoft Teams wasn’t a thing. Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Zoom wasn’t a thing because we meet physically. So, we still use Facebook and Instagram as our primary platforms to communicate with our public. But in term of coordinating or planning any marketing materials, those were done physically. So, that is one of the biggest differences. Meeting people become less frequent. However, when the pandemic started, meeting people digitally become more frequent. Last time physically meeting was probably like once or twice every week, now almost every day for one to three/ four hours will have meeting.

**Mr. Khor Yi Kai:**

Just because of in before pandemic recall in 2019, we mostly are doing all the PR practitioner in physically instead of social media. We can say that mostly is around 60-70% will be physical, 20-30% will be using social media or can said that we are working in field, because what we have in PR is like media conference, press conference, new product launching or other related. So, when it goes to pandemic time, actually it is a very sudden change because we are always going out from home. For example, you are going out 8/9am for work, you will reach your home by 10/11pm, then you just take a bath and rest and you can sleep, and next morning you are going out with the same schedule. Until the sudden change, you need to stay at home, you are coming up at 8am, but you no need to going out, just need to sit in front of your computer or open up your electronic device, and open up the Zoom and said hi to boss and everyone, you

are working through all the laptop and all the electronic device to get things done, and all the things will change from face to face to physically for discussion, interview or planning, you all need to go for online. And the thing is, you can't get the message or information be transmitted immediately because of you are not only one to one but you are one to many, because in the office you are also get the one to one or one to many, but then the time you are using wifi, for example I get the phone to send message and if let's say the person you are trying to contact or anyone who is busy, so you need to wait for their time. In office, you can direct work, go to the station or just go in front of them and ask: how are the things updated. So, this is the change and how I adapt with this, actually I can't say adapt, but then can said as forcing because of pandemic and because you need to learn how the change of the environment.

**2. What do you think about social media as a working tool? Is that allowed for pr practitioners to conduct their work online during covid-19 pandemic?**

**Chua Xue Cin:**

In my opinion, social media is very important as a working tool because the social media is a main platform for us to communicate no matter with our company, clients, audiences or co-workers and social media is very important for pr, for me. Because it also help the public relations to generate sales for now.

**Vangie Hung:**

Yes, in my opinion, I think social media is a very useful working tool in PR practices to conduct their work normally. As the nature of social media allows PR practitioner to communicate anytime and anywhere. No matter when and where, PR practitioner are able to communicate important messages of their organization to the targeted audience. Therefore, during covid-19 pandemic, I will say it is an indispensable working tool in PR practices.

**Chan Yi Qing:**

Social media is, no doubt, a very useful and helpful working tool because like honestly, it's not just something that we use personally anymore. It really been used to, for example help an organization, help a brand to promote themselves, build their presence, spread an awareness so we do use a lot of social media to do our work but even during Covid-19. You know how bad that work is all about emails. We do everything through email, black and white. But now it

really isn't, erm... I mean email is still primarily use for us to communicate for official matters but we always use social media as a platform to expand our reach. For example, I work with some KOLs, (Key Opinion Leaders) or also known as influencers and they are so mainly their presences are on social media so in order to reach up to them for brand collaboration, we often use social media to reach up with them and said through Instagram. So, to answer your question, definitely we are allowed to conduct our work online, using social media during the pandemic. Even before the pandemic we had already started to doing that, but I will say it came more prominent over time and it will continue to remain prominent and slowly maybe we even become the main business tool for us in the future.

Yes, it definitely allows me to conduct my work online during the pandemic and we are allowed to do that.

**Alycia Wong Lye Min:**

Yes for multiple reasons. If talking about traditional media like billboards, the way you measure how many people see the billboards depends on for example the traffic, the amount of car passed by, and those are almost not calculable and it's not live data. But as for social media, they have live data. Let's say u post something up and want it to be seen by more people. You just pumped in money and boost the post and you get the live data every second to second. You can see the users' demographic, their interests, etc. For instance, let's say LinkedIn. When you post something or when you update your page, you can see day by day what kinds of people are interested in your page. So, for PR practitioners based in the human resources department. Let's say I am targeting business development people this year and I want to expand my BD department. So I want to target my ads to these business developers. Then, when I retarget those ads, I will look at my page visitors. I can see a percentage of people so whether they are marketers or whatever background they from. We can see that growth and data but if you use traditional data, it is hard to see. So yes, social media is a very good platform even during the pandemic.

**Mr. Khor Yi Kai:**

Social media is actually a part of PR practitioner, even from a student who come out as a new practitioner or even you are a senior. So as for now, we will call the society or we call the industry world, they are preferable that you can work using the right wise social media to work as a PR practitioner. Even from Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok or XiaoHongShu, for now, they

are actually a working tool depends on how you think about that. Let's say you think it's a working tool, you will do it hardly or you will think is tiring to think a lot of creativity. If let's say, you do it as you think you are the owner or you are using another perspective to think, you will be: Oh, I am the owner of the business / I am the client, what kind of creativity/ social media management that can help my client to improve or why the client is come to you and why you need social media as your working tool.

**3. What was your thought when you first try on using social media to conduct your work?**

**Chua Xue Cin:**

I think for the first time I use social media to manage my company's account, I just feel like I was managing our own account (personal account) but impact is there is a lot of experiment and the effort behind then only we can get the effective results for our company.

**Vangie Hung:**

So, when I first try using this in my PR practice, I think social media makes my work more convenient and help me to complete my work in shorter time compared to previous time. And also my work efficiency has been increased greatly compared to those time when there is no social media. I think I become much more productive.

**Chan Yi Qing:**

To be very honest with you, it happened quite naturally because it is something that my colleagues are doing, and social media is something that I was very comfortable with already, so it felt quite of natural but maybe what felt a little different is just was that usually we use social media for our personal matters but this time I actually using it for work purposes.

**Alycia Wong Lye Min:**

It was very difficult reason being social media is not just about posting. It is a very complex understanding on human behavior and how money plays a role on that. If we post something organically on Instagram or Facebook, chances are you will only get about 20 – 30 likes. And these are source of your hard called very niche followers. If you want your posts to go up and be interacted with, you will be definitely to pump money. The analytic behind social media is

very complex. You are not looking at the users' behavior; you are looking at what platforms they are using. For instance, are they viewing your page through mobile phone, desktop? Are they using Apple or Google? What are their interests outside of your area? For me, I am in the property industry. So the way we target ads is not just on the building. For example, let's say I wanted to target building A and I am promoting building A to other people. But I also want to see if they are people surrounding building A within the 5km to 10km radius might be interested to invest in the building. So, targeting this kind of people and doing something we don't very often called A/B testing. So, we test which post works better. For instance, they are five visuals. And we put these five visuals into five individual posts. Which will gain more engagements and how much money we will use to boost in order to achieve the target that we want? There are a lot of tests and a lot of experimenting. There is no one size fits all industry and it really depends on what is your budget size and your management directions.

**Mr. Khor Yi Kai:**

To be honest, it is very suck because you are actually using the social media where you use it as normal, where we use as personal things, and it is just a platform for us to entertain ourselves. But when you use it as work, it's actually a different perspective, you will think it's another thing and saw its difference. (What you think is a thing, but the result will be another thing). For example, you plan in A which will be 100% perfect, but when you conducted it into social media, you will think: why the outcome was not same as the thing I had planned.

**4. Briefly describe the usage of social media among pr practitioners during covid-19 pandemic?**

**Chua Xue Cin:**

First I think social media for us to communicate with our potential customer like they use social media to update the company message like when we coming back after pandemic or any updates on our products and information, something like that. Then is also for us to execute the marketing campaign on social media.

**Vangie Hung:**

I think is great for them to use social media during the pandemic. As the usage of social media help maintain the normal operation of PR practices during covid 19 pandemic. With the help

of social media, PRPs can communicate messages with the public, hold online events and carry out their publicity work during the pandemic. As I mentioned earlier, social media is a very useful tool for PRPs, and this is even more obvious as you can see during the pandemic.

**Chan Yi Qing:**

So, during the pandemic, we mainly use social media to connect with influences so meaning to said, we will go to their Facebook pages or their Instagram profile. We will go there and then will ask them “Hi, this is Yi Qing from this PR agency, would you be reaching out to you on behalf on this brand? Would you be open for the brand collaboration?” So often times that we use it as the primary platform to reach out to the influencers. and number two we also have some of our clients to manage their social media account like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn. What we do is, we will develop post and then we help them to post it to their respective social media accounts to help them to reach out more audiences and to build their brand awareness. We also use social media as a form of media monitoring tool because let’s say for example The Star, the English newspaper. They have their website online also so what many publications do these days is they will share their article on their Facebook page so what we will do is. We will sometimes when we are monitoring the news, we want to see is The Star cover this particular news about this brand. We even go to Facebook and to do a research. You know how social media is always the first thing that people turn to when something happens. You know? it can be a crisis or a big news so it serves really well as a form of a source of information. So we use social media quite a lot la, I would said. Ya, definitely during Covid-19.

**Alycia Wong Lye Min:**

If we are looking at government alone, whenever we turn social media, it means that it is being access by the masses and in a form of media platforms. So, MySejatera is also actually a form of media output although it is not interactive where in I could send you a chat message for instance. But it is used by the government to send out information. So, whatever data that we have on MySejatera, if we pulled it over to other social media, for example Twitter. A lot of politicians always use Twitter because it is live data and it is very instance and everybody can access and it is very timely. So, when the government use Twitter for instance, they are able to send live messages to the public and avoid any unnecessary discrepancy between the public. For instance, let’s say there is a new virus coming out and the public panic. The government

can immediately say “Oh no, that’s false news”. So, it’s about timeliness and information accuracy for PR practitioners using social media during the pandemic period.

**Mr. Khor Yi Kai:**

Actually during the pandemic, social media is such of a

If let’s say you can search back or you can look back to the study, actually pandemic will cause the usage of social media increase directly very higher, because there is compares back to few years. Back to years like 2017/2018, even the usage is quite high, but because of pandemic, it caused a year or half of a year that we are work from home, so definitely we are using that with internal, external, supplier, client or audience, there is actually different usage and how you used it. First, internal, there is a platform for you and your colleagues, boss, superior and anyone in company to contact. For external (your client), is how you contact to your client. For example, you are in wedding industry, how you help your client to say sorry and how you can manage to help them to make a Public Announce that: Due to the MCO, now we need to drop your plan and your all wedding planning after the MCO and so on. So, it’s a platform for you to announce it. So, go for your external, for example you are at a company, you want to book for an oversea travel, so use it as a platform as a connection and draft out the message at a short time or very wide reach out the target audience in very short time and also you can do it independent or alone at home, you don’t need to face to face with your colleague.

**5. Please tell me what you know about the usage of social media among pr practitioners.**

**Chua Xue Cin:**

It just like, something like I just mentioned just now. Mainly is use to manage the image of company and also as a marketing tools to increase the product awareness.

**Vangie Hung:**

I will say the usage of social media is very important among the PRPs. Everyone who work in the PR field they will need to use the social media. As the usage of social media helps PRPs to communicate with their audiences faster and easier compared to previous times. It also allows two-way communication in PR practices which is necessary to receive feedback and opinion from the public. Also, social media helps PRPs to maintain a good relationship with the public.



Social media help PRPs in strengthening the connection between the organizations with the public and make the distance between them closer by providing chat rooms and feedback spaces and so on. In addition, the publicity work of PRPs becomes faster and more convenient as social media helps amplify the message, making PRPs more influential in their publicity work.

**Chan Yi Qing:**

Sorry, I mean can you elaborate a bit on this question? When you said what you know about the usage in what sense? Did you have any examples for me? (Xin Rong explain) Ok, in that case, it is quite similar to my previous answer so to sum it out, we use social media first are to reach out to Key Opinion leaders (KOL) or influencers or we also use social media to help our clients which are some brands to spread an awareness about a program, it can be to build up their brand prominence to let more people to know about them. It can even be use to carry out campaigns like online campaigns. Let's said for example what was previously very popular was wear your mask, sanitize your hand and you know some brand they are really creative in a sense as we came out a very out of the ordinary ideas to encourage the public to take care of themselves. I was sort involved in any of campaigns but this are some of the things that social media was used to execute. We also use social media to make public service announcement like for example the government announce that lockdown has been extended or you know some important announcement, we use our client social media pages to share about this announcement to remind the public to be mindful of what's going on. And most importantly we use social media to spread the key message of our clients. Key messages in a sense that you know how every organizations have their mission and vision and their objective, goals. So key messages are something like what do you want the brand to tell the audiences. What you want people to think of you when they first see your brand? So, to do that, we use a lot of visual to poetry our key messages to the audiences on social media. To do that your visual must be very capability and is able to catch the netizens attention very easily because there are so many things and contents on social media. and one person's attention on one post is just around 3 seconds so there is really a lot to explore when it comes to social media.

**Alycia Wong Lye Min:**

That's really depends on the industry. Let's say I am an agency and a specialist in recruitment or career opportunities. The platform that I will be more willing to put money to is LinkedIn.

For my company, the primary social media platforms is Facebook and Instagram but we are looking to expand LinkedIn because for Last year we are being the grade of recertnigton and this year is being the grade of restructuring. Therefore, we are looking to hire more people because during the grade of recertnigton, many people have left. It is not just our company, there are many company are affected by this. So this year is about restructuring and reorganizing the workforce and resources. So that's why we are looking to expand and improve our current LinkedIn page.

**Mr. Khor Yi Kai:**

As a PR practitioner, we mostly use social media to preshock to target audience, even if you are a student, as you conducted an event, you will use it to do the publicity. Second, need to see how the platform that let you as a PR to publicity your company: what we have and what we do. It's not even as a business, but it shows there is difference perspectives of company. For now, actually the same things happen is digital marketing, it's a bit similar like what we did as a PR practitioner for our social media management, so from my understanding, digital marketing is happening because their objectives is sales. For us PR practitioner, the social media usage to us is to build the awareness to the target audiences with what we have, instead of what we sales. We try to make the awareness, for example, diabetes campaign awareness and stay home stay safe awareness are what we used for our social media. Thirdly, it's a good way to reach out client or target audience in very safe and quick ways with limited budget because can reach out a large number of client or target audience.

**7.3.2 Section B: The impact of using social media**

**1. Are you aware of any problem with using social media as a working tool during covid-19 pandemic?**

**Chua Xue Cin:**

I think the main problem is everyone can post any opinion in our Facebook page comment section. So some comment may affect our company's image.

**Vangie Hung:**

Yes, as social media is something keep changing, social media need to always update their functions to continuously meet up the users. I would say information overload poses a

challenge to PR practices during this pandemic. Exposure to too much information on social media during covid-19 pandemic causes the audience to not be motivated to process and think about information as they are too much information in every single day. As a result, the visible time of information on social media is shortened, and it is difficult to leave a deep impression on the mind of the audience, and the effectiveness of information is weakened accordingly. Therefore, this makes it difficult for PRPs to influence the decision-making process of their audiences through social media or to make people remember their organizations.

**Chan Yi Qing:**

To be honest, I would say, you know how social media is use as a tool to connect all of us together right? So, meaning to say, you know? because once we had connected to Wi-Fi, we can just immediately text each other or call each other. So, the things is, I feel like what is sometimes overuse is the sense when we are so connected in a sense that this only became disconnected. Like for example, we sent each others messages, usually we will reply very fast to one and another back then but now because there are too many messages on our social media accounts, we find it hard to actually reply to them, to all of them at once. Maybe we are in texting this friend, and then another friend text you. You have been texting this client, and then another client texts us. So is like you have to respond to many things at the same times, unlike back then when is not so, I feel is not so bad. And sometimes maybe, you know like, for example, we maybe focus in a task, let's say for example I need to write a press release or official article. So, oh we writing, but then my Facebook, my Instagram, my notification will keep ringing "Ding, Ding, Ding" You know maybe this influencer has the question for me or maybe my client has something to ask me then I cannot totally focus already. I have to like work a bit then respond to the messages then work a bit then respond to the messages. So, it can be quite distracting sometimes.

I just want to conclude. So, I won't deny that social media is really useful and is a very powerful tool but it definitely comes with its own set of problems.

**Alycia Wong Lye Min:**

I don't think there are any issue in term of the platforms itself, like social media itself is not an issue. It is the up skilling of people, that's an issue. There is a gap in people ability and what the market wants. For instance, during my last few semesters only did I learn Social Media in Public Relations (SMPR). This subject has been taught at very least 10 years ago and expounds

a pond because the demand for your ability to understand the social media space is really needed in the market. Like I say, It is not about having a pretty picture and posting it. It is about understand the complexity of your audiences and using live data and analytics to create your post. So, the issue we have right now is that we don't have a better understanding of how to use social media platforms, especially the younger generation. You ask digital marketers who are have 10 years experiences those want to really know and these are kind of people that we need to attract the university to teach the younger generation. If not they come out a really loss.

**Mr. Khor Yi Kai:**

Definitely, using social media during the pandemic is harder compared to the previous time because of the tools thing. We are not only as a PR practitioner but then we also as the user of social media, so actually we are aware that a lot of bad news will come up in social media. For example, a company has a staff who detected positive of COVID-19 virus, but that is true or fake one no one will know, so the message will be double check or even simply use by others to said that it is a fake news. When you try to announce something, the issue is: is it your message or something you tried to inform and the objective will be interpreted correctly by your audiences. This is the issue which is the most important or we called it the correctability of the information.

**2. Do you have any suggestions on how to minimize these problems?**

**Chua Xue Cin:**

For me I think we need to respond immediately to the comment and we need to show our concern about the issue for them. For the program deficient.

**Vangie Hung:**

Yes, but is just for minimize the problem. We cannot say we really can overcome the problem completely. PRPs should update their companies' social media accounts regularly. Only instantly updating the social media accounts to interact with the public, PRPs can compete with others for public attention in order to ensure that the public can always remember their organization.

**Chan Yi Qing:**

To be honest I feel that social media is only going to grow and not it has become, I am sure you will agree that social media itself is one part of our daily life. And it's not going to go away anytime soon, so is about how we want to work around this challenge that we are facing on or more like I am facing I. So, what I always try to do is I try to prioritize what is important, said for example, I had really need time to concentrate on this article I am writing. So, you know if I can, I tried to really just leave my phone aside, I know I cannot turn off my phone because when I turn off my phone of Wi-Fi then if something, if an emergency happened and I am not online, that's really going to be a huge issue. So, what I do is maybe I will put my phone in silent mode or turn off my notification for one hour. So, I can be probably work on my task on hand. That's on way to do it, and you know, the second thing is like I learn to prioritize which is more important like for example, if client has this request for me, maybe they want us to research on some information. So, what I will tell client is that "Ok, I am so sorry, please give me some time. I will get back to you by what time" and then just leave the conversations as this, focus on what I need to do right now and then work on what client wants. So, is about the time management and knowing how to prioritize your task, knowing how to plan and strategize your day.

**Alycia Wong Lye Min:**

Number 1 is the university starts to teach their students as soon as possible, at least the major platforms and then expand to other platforms. The major platforms will be Facebook and Instagram, and Youtube as well. Students will know the basics of photography and videography will do very well in the future. Graphic designers will do very well in the future and those who study specifically digital marketing will do very well too. This is one of the ways we can improve the information disseminate in the future. We are not just talking about the growth of this generation; we are talking about how this generation is going to help the future generation spread better information more accurately, more timely and more transparently.

**Mr. Khor Yi Kai:**

For my opinion, I will say that, as a PR practitioner, we can do few things. First, you can do a small education for awareness to your target audience, how that they can do when you are receiving something for the decode of message. Second, educated that they receive something and try to double confirm something that is happening because we are using social media as

easily we can reach out a large number. If I am not mistaken, Facebook is a huge platform that we can easily reach out to people in short time, we have simple hashtag or some page will spread out faster. So, first was education, second was ensuring that information from our side, we are posting out of anything we sharing out to be correctly, even for us to decode, to transmit the message or even how they receive the message. So, education, ensure ourselves the information is correctly, ensure your target audience is receiving correctly, and there is no other ways. If let's say, you are trying to get something Law or anything, when you try to make it happens, you try to do something before you just use the final way to get the things go to right.

### **3. What is the biggest challenge as a PR practitioner while you are using social media to work during Covid-19 pandemic?**

#### **Chua Xue Cin:**

I think the biggest challenge in building the company's brand image and product image because building a brand is need to take a long time so that we could see the result.

#### **Vangie Hung:**

I think the biggest challenge is that as a PRP, I am required to give very immediate feedback on social media as social media allows anyone to use it anytime and anywhere. However, the job of PRPs is not only to reply to messages on social media, so it is impossible to use social media to reply at any time. PRPs may also need to reply to many people's messages on social media, thus delaying some people's messages. The audiences become unsatisfied when I am not able to give immediate feedback.

#### **Chan Yi Qing:**

I would say, biggest challenge ah. I would say when there are, you know, ok. I don't exactly use Facebook to communicate with my colleagues but we do use this social platform is call Slack to communicate. I think the biggest challenges, it can still consider as social media la just that is similar to WhatsApp but is not, somethings like Microsoft Teams la actually. Ok so right I think the biggest challenge was when, for example I was servicing six clients, so that's mean I will be in six group chats but besides these six group chats, we still have like office group chat, another group chat for maybe foe media announcement only. Like basically we got many group chats, I am in like more than 10 group chats. I think close to 20 group chats so the

biggest challenge is when so many messages are come in at the same time and you don't know which one to respond first. Like for example, my account A, my manager said "Yi Qing have you work on this?" and when I going to reply suddenly account B, my manager said "Yi Qing what is the progress on this" and then after that, you know things just coming in non-stop and I think it was the biggest challenge that you have to look through all the messages and sometimes is very easy to miss out on them because is just so many things is going on at the same time, where as you know when you are in office, if it is one thing at the time, like for example, if we don't using social media, people see that there is someone talking to me. They won't come and talk to me but when using social media, we do not know who is talking to who so we just go ahead and send the message and that when we send the message, the person can be very busy. So, I think it was the biggest challenge I faced, having to look through, to swipe through many messages at the same time and ensuring that I able to respond to all of them without missing any of it out and still able to deliver my tasks to my managers.

**(Further elaboration)**

I think my biggest challenges was when mainly I have to communicate with my colleagues but that one is for our social, not media but social chatting platform. It's not exactly a media I would say, but if we want to really directly look at social media itself. To be very honest, it wasn't any huge challenge in using them but I think is important to able to separate the between using social media for work and for my personal matters.

Honestly speaking, I don't think it was any really big challenge. I mean like what I said just now, I think one of the challenges is when, you know, knowing when to use social media for work and for personal matters. Meaning able to separate both because you've been using the same account, sometimes like you using the same account to reach out to influencers and you using the same account to chat with your friends. So sometimes everything's get mix out and next when you have to know how to strike the balance.

Because when we are working and your friends will be texting you, at the same time maybe your client or any influencers will be texting you so things can get really mix out be like, what should I do, reply who first. Or my friend can see I am online now or but then I am very busy with my wok right now, I just appear to be online only, you know? and then there is another thing in using social media, I am not sure it is relevant or not but do you know about the fake news on social media? Ya, so this is a challenge as well, for example right, you have to be

careful of fake news being spread when, in a sense where people. Ok, for example the most recent crisis that I was managing was that, you know, people started spreading fake news about my client on social media. I mean I won't said is fake news but is an inaccurate news on social media and when it spreads. It spread like wildfire, people don't really care about whether or not is a real thing happened, they immediately share so I really said this was a really big challenge in a sense where it became a crisis, you know the client had to issue out a statement to clarify that, ok so you know this thing didn't happened, what happened was this instead and we are looking to rectify it.

**Alycia Wong Lye Min:**

One of the biggest issues using social media as PR practitioners during the Covid-19 pandemic is that all of our competitors are also putting in big bug to improve and expand their social media. So if you want to keep up with the industry, you have to convince your management directing a huge budget to social media while will definitely affect your sales, your product development positivity. We are trying to keep up with the competitors and trying to save a float that the biggest challenges.

**Mr. Khor Yi Kai:**

From internal, there will be the how the client thinks when you try to get something to used or even you are using the PR, you are not saying to client, to internal company your works are still bad, why you try to use this platform or how is the result. Because when all the thing goes online, you will get a lot of information even difficult, doubled, right or wrong, true or false, so it will be the issue that how you try to do something different with others PR practitioners or agencies. Secondly, for client, they definitely need more budget to use the platform because they can't use the thing physically, so online definitely need the money there (E.g. Facebook advertisement) because you need to do something to compete with competitors, or similar industry will also go for online. Thirdly, how to handle or to prevent the miscommunication and misunderstanding from target audiences towards your message that you try to transmit.

**4. How do you think about the effectiveness of social media used? Explain the ways to measure the social media success.**



**Chua Xue Cin:**

Social media is effective to engage with our audience and allow us to communicate with, like coming the audience about the benefits of our product, something like that. So it can measure by counting the engagement, see the reaction of the audience or also the most importantly is the return of investment after any campaign done.

**Vangie Hung:**

More effective than expected in terms of communication and building relationship. **In term of ways, I think the amount of Likes and Shares is the easiest way to track social media success.** Besides, I also use **audience growth to measure social media success.**

**Chan Yi Qing:**

So, to measure the effectiveness right, we always look at insights so for example, for Facebook and Instagram even LinkedIn actually, particularly when you managing the social media pages, they will provide you with a number of information analysis for you to look at so it will depend on what our clients actually prefers or to measure social media success but we typically look at impression, reach and engagement. These three key things, so basically the higher the numbers then that means the more successful you are but you know? we not just look at that number in that the particular month. we also look at like for example, why is it that the reach is so high on that particular day, is it because we posted some things that the audience really like or this is what the audience like, maybe we should post more of this kind of content in the future or maybe ok for example, in this particular day, we posted a Q&A post, but then the engagement is very low, no one, very little people comment, like and share. So, from that we will try to analyse, ok what is wrong here because this post is supposed to get people to engage. Is it because the visual is not nice so that people do not like it or people not understand the content. So basically, these are the ways that used to measure the social media success.

Social media is definitely very effective in helping to enhance our client's presence online and you have to know, in order for it to be effective right, you need to know how to use it. Like for example Twitter. Twitter is main for use to put in very short sentences. If put in a very long paragraph, no one will be going to look at it. Do you get what I am trying to say?

(Xin Rong repeat because of offline)

So, I think that the effectiveness of social media is definitely very high and working like using social media to work, I mean especially to, you know, my clients. You can see that it really helps to build their online presence. But in order for it to be effective, you have to know how to use it. Let's said for example Twitter. Twitter right is main for very short and suit sentences, you get what I mean? So, if you type a super long paragraph in Twitter, no one is going to look at it, then it's not going to be effective already. Same goes to Instagram, Instagram is very, like image and video based, very visual based. You know every time when you scroll, you don't really look at the caption you just look at the picture and if you like the picture you just straight give it a like, right? So, if you put a very ugly visual, but then the caption along then no one is going to like it. So, what I am trying to say is social media can be very effective when you use it the right way.

**Alycia Wong Lye Min:**

There are a few ways you can measure it. For example, when you are looking at Facebook, you have a few ads objectives. Most of the time, when we talking about the success of the social media page, we are looking at the numbers and we are not even looking at the quality. That's a whole different segment and for that you actually need an agency to help you package how you are being perceived in the market. So, there are two ways which are quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative we are looking at things that engagements, numbers of views, page followers, your average likes, average shares, average comments, how many links articles were viewed, how many links clicked you have. For instance, let's say I am selling tower A and I want Facebook people be directed to my microsite where I want they to register for my tower A. So I will boost up a post about tower A and linked my microsite with a code, it's called SID code. For example, Tower A/SID123, so the code behind will help you determine how many people from Facebook click that link. You are able to see the user journey flow and it is applicable for any other platforms that you wish to promote your registration. For example, your mobile app, then you has a different code let's say "123" is for Facebook, then "45678" will be for your mobile app. So you can track all of these movements. It is not invasion of privacy if the person voluntary click on this. Now we talk about the qualitative. How is your post perceived? For instance, let's say somebody didn't like your post. It commented negative things on your posts. How do you measure the percentage so normally the way we work is there is a table that show us the positiveness of the page and how well received the page from our audiences? So generally we want our audiences to find that our page is positive and then

they like our page. If people don't like our page and they use a lot of negative words, such as "I hate this products" or "I did not like this products" these negative words will push your statistic down. So that how we perceived social media and how we determine the effectiveness based on quantitative and qualitative. Effectiveness to us is always determined by our target. Let's say our CNY campaign for instance. Our target for social media is to reach at least half a million views for our CNY video. In order to achieve that, we actually have to boost quite a bit around 5 to 6 thousands, and the campaign is about quarter million. So, really 5 thousands is not really much but we also see other competitors reaching 2 million, 8 million something because they have bigger budget up to 80k just for boosting. So the effectiveness really depends on the target we have set with your team and your management. That being said that social media shouldn't be the sole area to promote your campaign. You still have to do on ground activities because these are the kinds of things that social media cannot do as effectively as physical is human touch, the interactive of human. Starbucks do this very well as they use your name on your cup. It is very personal when they call you. This is something that social media cannot do. Social media is all number and data. So, if you can pull human touch and draw emotion through social media, then you make a bank for your buck. This is Petronas do very well with their advertisements year after year. But do keep remind that they have a very large branding team. Their branding team is about 60 over people something like that so they can brainstorm on all of these ideas on how to achieve the high human senses. Social is good and effectiveness statistically but it cannot do what physical can do.

**Mr. Khor Yi Kai:**

For me, I would rate the effectiveness of social media for 8 or 9 marks over 10 marks. Because it can help a lot of PR practitioner to reach out the client or the target audiences easily. Secondly, we can use lesser time to reach out the things and it's simpler, just use the phone to type out messages and post/ publish it easily. Next, the way to measure the social media successful depends on the reason you use this objective. For example, you try to get this post to reach out your customer in awareness/education/sharing/publicity/PSA, how you think that is happen have to depends back to your objective and the purpose why you are using it. For example, you go for PSA, then definitely you will see how is the engagement, how much of people, or what is the amount of number you had reach out to the client or target audience. Let's say you are adapting your objective, successful in level 1: reach out my target audience at 500,000; level

2: reach out 700,000. So, there is not a “must” way to determine for different way or objective, it needs to depend back to your purpose and objective you are using it.

**5. How would you handle negative customer reviews or comments on social media?**

**Chua Xue Cin:**

As I said, is possible we need to respond immediately and showing our concern and do not lie the customer.

**Vangie Hung:**

I respond as quickly as possible to the **negative customer reviews or comments** on social media to make those who comment or leave a message on social media feel valued and increase their favorable impression of the organisations. It is also to prevent more people from reading negative comments about the organisations.

**Chan Yi Qing:**

Ok to be very honest with you, I personally have not met this kind of situation before but generally when we have like, when we receive this kind of negative reviews, what we typically do is, we will try to understand what the situation like why did we receive this kind of review, is it really because the product of service is not good or just simply the customer is just trying to find fault with us just for fun. You know how some customer they, maybe they bought the product, they not satisfy with it so they want to return and then they give you a bad review just because of that, when there is nothing wrong with your product. So, I think is important to first understand the situation, access the situation, then you only proceed with the next steps in planning how you should deal with the situation. If it's really your fault, then honestly, I will say, own it up, owned up to the mistake and make up to the customers, like either offer a replacement or refund them back the payment for the product or service and try to clarify the situation with them. I think it's very important and it comes to customers, you know, who give you a lot of trouble, is another thing to think about already how you want to handle them because this will be slightly more tricky and usually when it comes to the situation like this, it really case by case basis and I have to refer to my manager for further guidance. That's it.

**Alycia Wong Lye Min:**

It depends on your departments. So for my department, we sell unit which is a product based company. We sell building and apartment. We do not directly reply to the clients. So, there are a few things with this. When we have negative comments, we direct it to customer services. My department is branding and communication. Normally, our comments come from live chat or from the comment box. We will screenshot all these complaints and we will send it to customer services. For our side, we are branding related stuff like “I enjoy your campaign but I have not received the prize that you promise to me six months ago”. With these sources of comments, we need to read very carefully. There must be a reason why it is happening. So, find the sources of this issue and explain to the customers in a way that does not trigger them. For example, let’s say when our customers participate in our campaign in January, and their prize is supposed to be sent to them by the end of January. But now already in March and they will come after to you day by day. There must be a reason and you can explain to them like It’s being process but at the same time there might be some other issues, like budgeting issue and financial department saying that “Oh no, you can’t purchase them because blablabla”. So you need to explain in a very weak manner but in a way that keeps them assure. Ultimately you don’t want to accelerate the situation because once it come to a worst situation that “Oh, I want to report the owner of the company for instance. So, this is the things that the owner doesn’t want to see reason being there are many other things to think about. So you want to maintain your integrity that you keep your promises. So all of these negative comments just find the root of the problem and try to direct it to the right department and ask the manager whenever you are not certain about what to do. Always ask your manager or your team members and discuss and brainstorm on how to handle the situation probably. Never do it alone because if you do, you will be uncountable of whatever happens.

**Mr. Khor Yi Kai:**

Definitely, we will face this kind of issue no matter during pandemic period or before pandemic period, even for the real or fake comments, or any competitors hired someone to give bad comments. Back to normal, as a PR practitioner, we are handling crisis management, we can assume that this is a crisis management because we did not handle it carefully, or purposely in correct way, it will become the crisis. For example, in recently, an issue of Mc Donald’s which is towards the OKU staff, and also the post hiring and something about the requirement or enquiry to ask that: do you hiring someone. If let’s say go for Facebook or other social media,

there will be negative comments or reviews to you because you are representing your company or some branded. So, you need to understand back to the 5W1H, then only you will know how to handle. Let's say the customer give bad comments on a very small matter, for me, I would not recommend to hide or delete the customer's review. Even if the thing is fake and not the real one, but in their way they will decode that it's the fake one, so we try to hide something. Instead of deleted, we can try to write some explanation to let the customers know that how the things are going on. Secondly, we need to understand if there is anything brought from our side (e.g. from clients or internal side), basically we need to apologize because apologize is not means that we are doing things wrong but it means we are not good enough. It shows that we are not good enough, we have the space to make improvement, and we can use the reason: thank you for the review and the comments can make us to improve (Instead of deleting the message or using another way to cover up the message).