Trust in a Tweet?

A Qualitative Study on Trusting Relationship Building between Public Relations Professionals and Journalists on Social Media

Lisa Marie Scholten – s2296055

Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences (BMS)

University of Twente

Bachelor Thesis in Communication Science (BSc)

Dr. Mirjam Galetzka

1st of July 2022

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

Acknowledgements

Time ran fast, and I cannot believe I am already handing in my bachelor thesis. I am deeply grateful for all the support I have experienced during the last three years of studying and especially while performing this research. I am extremely thankful for my supervisor Dr Mirjam Galetzka who took the time to answer all my questions and e-mails and whose feedback was enormously helpful. Furthermore, I also want to express my gratitude to Laika Communications and especially Michaela Krause and Can Kupfermann-Gezer. You did not only help me with finding participants but also always provided me feedback and mental support. Moreover, big thanks to all participants who made this study possible, my co-coder for taking the time to validate and discuss my research, and all teachers who gave helpful advice on this journey. Lastly, I would like to mention my friends and family who were included in endless feedback cycles and provided moral support.

Abstract

Objectives: Social media is important in professional life. Therefore, it also influences journalism and public relations (PR). The relationship between those professions has been found to be complex in prior studies. The objective of this study is to find out if and how PR professionals (PRP) can build trusting relationships with journalists over social media. Thereby, it is built upon studies dealing with the PR-journalism relationship and relationship building over social media. It is aimed to add to these studies and to offer PRPs guidance to utilize social media in media relations.

Methods: To achieve insightful results, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The sample consisted of six journalists, six PRPs, and three people with a background in both professions, all based in Germany. They were asked about their experiences with relationship building on social media and if they trust PRPs / feel trusted by journalists.

Results: Building trusting relationships over social media was found to be possible. Different forms of contact (e.g. following, commenting, direct messages) thereby enable having meaningful exchanges, building empathy, and seeing each other as equal partners. However, while personal interactions and insights were valued, more spamming with unhelpful messages and information influenced the process of relationship building negatively on social media. Regarding trust, integrity and authenticity were of special importance.

Conclusion and practical implications: In conclusion, trusting relationships between PRPs and journalists can be built over social media. Despite the importance of social media in professional life, there, however, still is potential for improvement. Social media require a strategic plan, determining one's motivation and goals. PR should not see those channels as pitching but as networking instruments that can be successful if one stays professional, respectful, authentic, and addresses journalists personally.

Keywords: Public relations, journalism, relationships, trust, social media

Table of contents

1. Introduction

Public relations (PR) are a complex field of work. PR professionals (PRPs) need to manage different stakeholders at the same time, juggle several tasks, and most importantly establish good relationships with all involved parties to be able to fulfil their jobs (Reed & Thomas, 2021). Relationship building can be seen as the core of the profession (Ledingham, 2003). For this, PRPs need to establish trust, which is a key concept of relationships (Ledingham, 2003; Welch, 2006). One stakeholder PRPs need to build relationships and trust with, are journalists. Without journalists publishing about PR's clients, tasks like awareness-raising or reputation management get difficult. Still, the relationship is highly complex because both parties follow different agendas (Cutlip et al., 2006). The relationship between PRPs and journalists might be compared to a complex customer relationship. Both want and need something from each other, but the relationship is not determined by an exchange of money or goods but by one of information, which requires mutual trust.

With the rise of social media, relations and collaboration got even more complex. Journalists face a change in their gatekeeping position because PRPs, and all other people, can publish stories, news, and comments on their own, and journalists moved some of their publishing to those platforms too (Broersma & Eldridge II, 2019; Roth-Cohen & Avidar, 2022). As journalists are still considered key stakeholders by PRPs (Macnamara, 2014), the way of building relationships between journalists and PRPs has also been influenced by social media. Through this dialogue-oriented medium, everyone got easier accessible (Chen et al., 2020) and more personal engagement over various topics has been enabled (Bajkiewicz et al., 2011; Supa, 2014). Social media offer the possibility of two-way communication and engagement, which can lead to meaningful relationships (Bedi, 2021; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Li & Kent, 2021). Nevertheless, establishing relationships between the two professions did not just get easier, but more complex. Many organisations still treat social media as a classical one-way channel, which can cause misunderstandings (Kent & Taylor, 2016). Also, questions of trust remain.

The establishment of trust, which was perceived as an important part of relationship building by journalists and PRPs, was found to be difficult over social media (Goldstraw, 2015).

Despite those difficulties, representatives from both parties acknowledge the potential social media hold for relationship building in all mentioned studies (Bajkiewicz et al., 2011; Bedi, 2021; Goldstraw, 2015; Supa, 2014) and claim that they can imagine making use of it in the future. Muck Rack, a PR software provider, holds yearly surveys among PRPs and journalists worldwide with a main focus on the US. The statistics show that both groups aim to use social media even more in the future and that they are already using it to build relationships (Muck Rack, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b). Looking at these numbers and other recent societal developments like the COVID-19 pandemic, that made face-to-face meetings – the preferred way of establishing trusting relationships (Goldstraw, 2015) – impossible, the concerns of journalists and the shortcomings of using social media might have changed.

This study aims to add to the literature about the potential social media hold for relationship building in the field of PR. Through this, a way of combining good media relations and social media skills, both judged as core skills by PRPs (Muck Rack, 2021b), shall be found. That would clarify the uncertain rules in the engagement with journalists (Macnamara, 2015) and thereby improve the collaboration. Based on this, the following research question gets raised:

How can public relations professionals use social media to build trusting relationships with journalists in Germany?

To be able to answer this question within the planned interviews, it was split up into four sub-questions. Those specify the important aspects of the research further to find the right channels, ways and motives for building trusting relationships as a PRP with journalists over social media. The four sub-questions are:

SQ 1: On which channels and how do journalists and PRPs engage and build relationships?

SQ 2: Do journalists trust the PRPs they engage with on social media?

SQ 3: What are the reasons journalists choose to build or not to build trust with PRPs on social media?

SQ 4: How do journalists imagine ideal relationship building to work on social media?

To answer these questions, first, a theoretical framework is presented. Afterwards, the method, namely semi-structured interviews, will be explained, before the results of the study are presented. The findings and the research will be reflected upon and lastly, conclusions are drawn.

2. Theoretical framework

For providing a theoretical background for the questions raised in the introduction and a basis for the following interviews, literature was reviewed first. In the chapter of this part, the importance of relationships and trust in PR will be discussed and both terms will be conceptualised. Then relationship building on social media will be explained before the specific relationship of PRPs with journalists will be discussed. These two aspects, then, will get combined when looking at how the PR-journalism relationship was found to be influenced by social media. Lastly, all findings of the theoretical framework will be summed up and conceptualised.

2.1 Conceptualising relationships and trust in public relations

The profession of a PRP is hard to define, as it not only combines several tasks, but PRPs also often work for a diverse set of clients. Reed & Thomas (2021) therefore characterise it as a liminal profession, always between all different kinds of duties. The authors define the core of public relations as forming and managing relationships and, therefore, refer to it as a "relational profession" (Reed & Thomas, 2021, p. 226). Ledingham (2003) agrees with this categorization, as he states that relationship building and management are the main tasks of PRPs, and communication is one of the tools they use for this.

Looking at PR as a relational profession, the term relationship needs to be conceptualised. Ledingham & Bruning (1998) defined five dimensions of the organisation-public relationship, namely trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment. Ledingham (2003) later refines these dimensions to trust, openness, credibility, emotion, intimacy, similarity, immediacy, agreement, accuracy, common interest, and relational history. Welch (2006) adds the twelfth dimension of distrust, not describing the pure absence of trust but the scenario of mistrusting the other party. These dimensions influence if and how relations between PRPs and their stakeholders can be built. As those relations are dynamic and transactional and they are driven by the perceived wants and needs of the involved, establishing them is complex but can lead to mutual benefit and understanding (Ledingham, 2003). Therefore, being able to successfully build relationships is crucial in PR.

All these theories add weight to the importance of trust as a key concept of successful relations. Welch (2006) even concludes that "[…] without trust there is no relationship [possible]" (p. 140). Just as relationship, trust is a concept similarly hard to conceptualise. Morgan & Hunt (1994) suggest having confidence in the other party's reliability and integrity as a definition for it. Blois (1999) complicates this by defining trust as a multidimensional concept including confidence, goodwill, faith, integrity, justice, veracity, competence, reliability, dependability, benevolence, risk and vulnerability. Hon and Grunig (1999) narrowed those down to three dimensions when aiming to measure trust as part of measuring relationships in public relations. They focused on integrity, dependability, and competence (Hon & Grunig, 1999). It can be argued that those still touch upon most aspects of Blois' (1999) dimensions through their definitions. For instance, integrity is measured with questions about perceived fairness, dependability covers aspects of reliance, and competence can be connected to aspects of confidence (Hon & Grunig, 1999). However, the dimension of benevolence (Blois, 1999) is not covered. Other scholars agree that it is an important one when it comes to trust (e.g., Colquitt

& Salam, 2009). Therefore, benevolence is added to the three dimensions of Hon and Grunig (1999). The conceptualisation of relationship and trust in this study can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptualisation of relationship and trust within this report
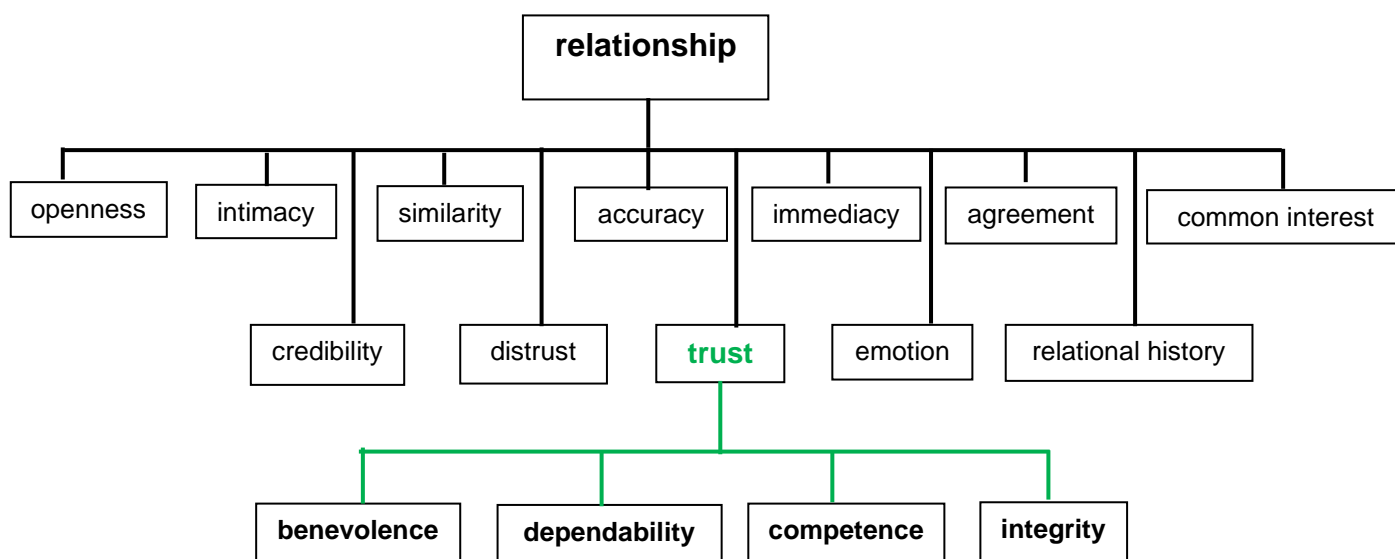
Note. **All boldly written concepts will be looked at in more detail during this study**

2.2 Relationship building on social media

Having established the dimensions and importance of relationships in PR, the process of building those needs to be looked at in more detail. With the rise of social media, much of the work of PR, including building relationships, moved online. According to Kent and Taylor (1998), the key to building relationships in PR is dialogue. Zhou and Xu (2022) transferred the five dialogic principles Kent and Taylor (1998) established for relationship building to modern social media. The basic principle of Zhou and Xu's (2022) model is favourable affordances. For example, Twitter has the affordance of being able to send out a message to a broad audience, which can then react to it, while Reddit is known for the communities that are built on the platform. The authors adopted four other principles from Kent and Taylor's (1998) model,

which they judge as feasible for social media. The first one is called *dialogic loop* and refers to the engagement of the different parties and their possibility to answer each other. The second principle states that provided information needs to be useful *(usefulness of information)*, and the third is concerned with the attractiveness and updates of profiles and sites to facilitate visitors to return *(generation of return visits)*. Lastly, visitors should not be led away from the page by, for instance, external links *(conservation of visitors)*. Next to this, one must also note that all principles are context-dependent because what one qualifies as useful and interesting information might be judged as unnecessary by someone else (Sundstrom & Levenshus, 2016).

Kent and Taylor (2002) themselves added to their original principles by additionally defining five features of successful relationship building. These are *mutuality* – which is based on collaboration and perceived equality of all parties –, *propinquity* – concerning the immediacy of presence, the engagement and the temporal flow –, *empathy, risk*, and *commitment*. Chen et al. (2020) found that these features can be met in a social media environment because affordances of the platforms like visibility, editability, persistence, association, portability, availability, locatability, and multimediality make engaging in this way not only possible but easy and attractive. If PRPs follow these principles and features of dialogic relationship building, establishing relationships shall be successful (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2022).

As established in the prior chapter, an important part of building successful relationship is building trust. Therefore, it is analysed here, if the discussed principles and features of relationship building on social media can also cause a trusting relationship. Yang et al. (2015) stress that social media create a good environment for building trust based on the principles and features introduced. Mutuality, which enables engagement and is one of the five features of dialogic relationship building (Kent & Taylor, 2002), is facilitated on social media and important for establishing trust. If this is applied, a climate of openness is created and useful content is shared trusting relations can be established on social media (Kim & Hammick, 2017;

Li & Kent, 2021; Yang et al., 2015). A visualisation of the principles and features in relationship building on social media can be found in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Building trusting relationships on social media in PR

dialogic principles	
dialogic loop	usefulness of information
generation of return visits	conservation of visitors
Favourable affordances	

+

dialogic features		
empathy	risk	mutuality
propinquity	commitment	

Building a trusting relationship

on social media in PR
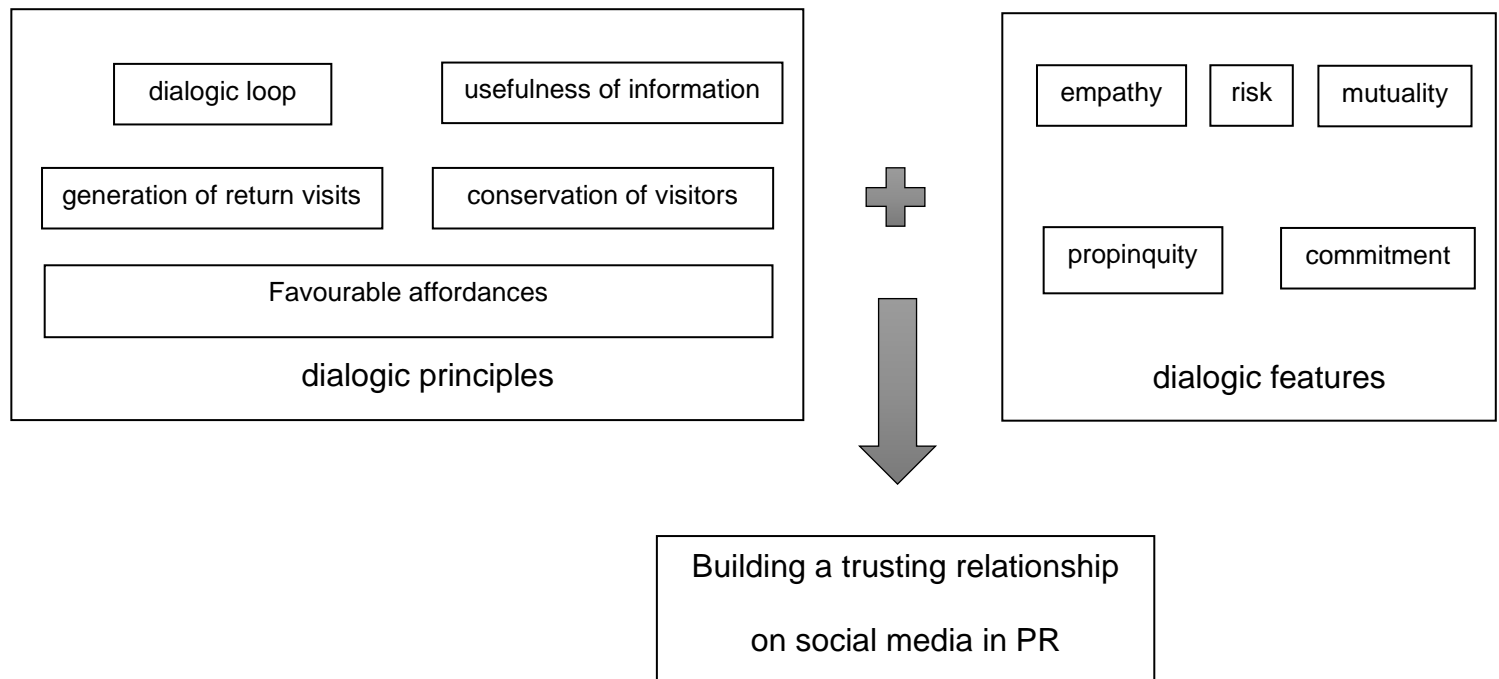
Nevertheless, ineffective dialogic communication can also cause distrust (Yang et al., 2015). Li and Kent (2021) add that it needs to be kept in mind that the quality of the interaction is more important than the pure quantity. To assure high quality, PRPs need to stick to ethical codes, while employing the new channels in the right way, by for instance, sending multimedia content or personalised messages at the right time (Li & Kent, 2021). Based on this, in this report, relationship building on social media will be studied according to the model displayed in Figure 2, but special attention will lie on whether the relationship built really can be considered trusting or not.

2.3 The relationship between PR and journalism

As mentioned, the specific relationship focused on in this study, is the one between PRPs and journalists. This specific relationship is interesting because journalists are key stakeholders of PR, their relationship is important for their daily work (Hoffjann, 2014; Muck Rack, 2022b), and it always has been a critical one (Hou, 2019; Macnamara, 2015). Currently, only 8 per cent of journalists, who participated in a survey by Muck Rack see this relationship as a partnership. 60 per cent see it as mutually beneficial but not as a partnership, 16 per cent even have an antagonistic view on PRPs and other 16 per cent judge this relation to be the necessary evil of their job (Muck Rack, 2022a).

This critical evaluation of the professions' relation by journalists has also been a topic of interest for scholars in the past. Macnamara (2014) found that marginalisation and even demonization of PRPs continue because of bad media relations practices. Senior PRPs that can develop a good relationship with journalists are valued and trusted sources, but professionals that lack good relationship management cause a bad image of PR in journalism, which hinders successful collaboration (Macnamara, 2014). Macnamara (2015) claims that some journalists see journalism as completely independent and not collaborating with PR at all. Others call PR a spin that is not worth any journalists' attention and some journalists even see themselves as victims of PRPs trying to influence them, taking away their independence. Especially with the rise of fake news and mistrust in times of social media, this way of thinking has gotten more popular (Hou, 2019), which shows the importance of trust and relationship building. PRPs mostly see themselves as honest brokers, trading and spreading interesting stories that journalists can or cannot publish. Lastly, there is the idea of a symbiosis between PRPs and journalists, which is mostly rejected by both parties because a certain tension is judged as a sign of a healthy media ecosystem (Macnamara, 2015). In line with this, Cutlip et al. (2006) state that PRPs and journalists can never work together symbiotically because they are following

different communication goals. Nevertheless, also they conclude that relationships need to be built as collaboration is important.

So, while there is tension, and especially many journalists see the relationship with PRPs critically, a good relationship is important for good collaboration. What complicates the relationship building further is the powerplay between the professions and, connected to this, the journalists' dedication to independence. At the beginning of the research on the PR-journalism relation, the determination thesis stating that PRPs determine what journalists cover (Baerns, 1979) was prevalent. As this does not fit the thought of journalists being objective and independent, one can understand the standpoints of denial, spin or victimhood in this regard. This thesis, however, was later nearly replaced by the dependence thesis turning the power balance around and adding power to the side of the journalists who are, in this view, in the position to decide which suggestions of PRPs they follow (Hoffjann, 2013; Wolf & Godulla, 2020). While this second thesis was popular in recent years and also appears to hold in practice, considering one of the biggest problems of PRPs is journalists ignoring their pitches (Muck Rack, 2022b), a third thesis gains more importance, especially with the rise of social media (Wolf & Godulla, 2020).

Within the interdependence thesis, a relation between journalists and PRPs that is based on mutual dependencies and collaboration is described (Godulla, 2017; Schantel, 2000). Godulla (2020) states that due to changes in the media environment and the rise of social media, the power position of journalists gets questioned. PRPs have the possibility to publish their news online without needing to ask the journalists as gatekeepers. As they, however, value journalists and the reach and credibility they can create, PRPs still aim to collaborate and build relationships with them (Hoffjann, 2014). Hou (2019) welcomes this as she states that both professions can, for example, fight fake news together and good collaboration depends on a personal relationship between both parties. To achieve better relationships just doing traditional media relations is not enough (Wolf & Godulla, 2020) but there needs to be engagement

between journalists and PRPs. Only this way stereotypes can be resolved, trust is built, and good collaboration, which is ultimately needed by and valuable for both parties, can be achieved (Macnamara, 2015).

2.4 The influence of social media on the PR-journalism relationship

Macnamara (2014, 2015) also states that social media offer opportunities to create such engagement. Surveys from Muck Rack (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b) show that social media are already used by PRPs and journalists to follow each other and maintain relationships. For example, 60 per cent of PRPs follow journalists on social media, which 75 per cent of journalists like. 39 per cent of PRPs and 25 per cent of journalists like to maintain relationships over Twitter, which is the same number of journalists who indicated to like meetings in person for this purpose. 34 per cent of PRPs and 23 per cent of journalists use LinkedIn to maintain relationships (all the percentages are not cumulative) (Muck Rack, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b).

These new possibilities shaped the work of PRPs and journalists as both are expected to master social media. Either they shall demonstrate that they are up to date with the latest media developments, or they need to create their brand and promote their work. Therefore, also the collaboration of journalists and PRPs was changed (Broersma & Eldridge II, 2019; Li & Kent, 2021). Jiang et al. (2016), for example, found that strategic and extensive use of social media in media relations improves the productivity, flexibility, and efficiency of professionals. Furthermore, professional relationships are strengthened. Despite these advantages, they also found downsides like the higher work- or stress load of professionals because of social media and their affordance of being available at all times and places. However, especially this availability can also add again to the relationship and trust building of journalists and PRPs because journalists can, for instance, get fast answers from PRPs (Atabek & Alikilic, 2020).

Therefore, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are characterised as important tools for online media relations by Atabek and Alikilic (2020).

Despite these advantages, the potential of social media is not fully used yet. Bedi (2021) states that social media open the opportunity for real-time two-way communication that leads to dialogue that can be the basis of a relationship. He focused on Twitter in his research and found that, despite this opportunity, both professions mainly use it for information spreading rather than direct engagement, showing more of a two-way asymmetric way of communicating (Grunig, 2009). Only initial connections are built on Twitter so far, but both, journalists as well as PRPs, recognize that there is potential for more interaction (Bedi, 2021).

Those further potentials are in line with reports from practice suggesting that both parties already engage and build relations over social media (Muck Rack, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b). Also, prior academic studies report on the advantages of the usage of social media in this regard. Bajkiewicz et al. (2011) found that PRPs value the possibility of communication in richer and easier dimensions and being able to send unfiltered messages. According to them, social media enable PRPs to also build relationships with journalists whom they were not in contact with before and it even changes the direction of traditional media relations. This change of direction was also reported by Waters et al. (2010) indicating that social media cause two-way interaction. Other advantages found, are more personal interactions and relations between journalists and PRPs and the humanization of journalists, which makes it easier for PRPs to reach out and connect (Supa, 2014). Moreover, journalists find it easier to establish more personal relationships, especially when PRPs add personal information to their profiles (Bedi, 2021).

Nevertheless, again, journalists are more critical of the relationship and its development. While PRPs are pleased by the new possibilities, journalists are afraid that social media are only another medium on which they will be spammed with messages and that the necessary professionalism and distance will disappear (Supa, 2014). Bedi (2021) also reports that the

opinion on this change among journalists is mixed, while PRPs are very positive. Goldstraw (2015) found that journalists are mostly interested in practical outcomes like getting the right information quickly when engaging with PRPs. In the interviews conducted by Supa (2014) 29 of 33 interviewed PRPs said that social media changed media relations, but only five of 36 journalists saw a substantial change in their relationships with PRPs because of social media. This finding is in line with Zbikowska (2016), who acknowledges that there are PRPs and journalists establishing relationships over social media and that social media can make this more attractive, but that this is not adopted by the majority yet.

Still, social media, as a tool for the collaboration and relationship building of PRPs and journalists, are on the rise (Atabek & Alikilic, 2020; Bedi, 2021; Goldstraw, 2015). Journalists see the potential it holds (Atabek & Alikilic, 2020; Bajkiewicz et al., 2011; Bedi, 2021; Supa, 2014), especially if PRPs stick to being professional, patient and polite (Supa, 2014). Above all, young journalists, who have a high usage level of new media platforms, trust organizations with successful online media relations more (Atabek & Alikilic, 2020) and practitioners of both fields stated that they plan to use social media more for their job in 2022 (Muck Rack, 2021a, 2021b). This leads to the assumption that, despite the concerns some journalists might have, social media and PR-journalism relationship management on these channels will gain even more importance in the future.

In the prior chapters, it was established that trust is a key concept of relationships and that it can be difficult to be built. Especially in the PR-journalism relationship, it has been critical. Goldstraw's (2015) findings add to this. She found trust to be especially important in the relationships between PRPs and journalists on social media. Both parties agreed that they want and need trust to be able to create a positive relationship. While it was found that creating friendliness and a personal connection is doable on social media, developing trust was perceived as harder due to the lack of rich personal interaction. Therefore, face-to-face meetings were preferred in this matter. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only very few to no face-

to-face meetings have been possible in the last years. Next to that, the usage of social media in PR and journalism and thereby also its adoption has increased rapidly (Muck Rack, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b). As already Goldstraw (2015) indicated that trust building on social media needs to be studied further, it was decided to follow her advice by studying the research question, that was raised in the introduction of this research.

2.5 Expectations and conceptualisation of the research model

Based on the reviewed theory (a search log showing how those were found is displayed in Appendix A), it can be concluded that the relationship between PRPs and journalists is complex but important and that social media influence the building process of those. How exactly social media is utilized and can add to relationship building has not been fully studied yet. Due to this research being a small-scale qualitative study no exact hypotheses on this can be formed. Nevertheless, some expectations are formulated.

While Bajkiewicz et al. (2011) and Supa (2014) provide good insights into how PRPs aim to utilize social media to establish relationships with journalists, as well as journalists' praise and concerns about this, they report about the limitation of a lack of adoption of the technology. Looking at the current and planned usage of social media in both professions, this limitation can be seen as eliminated in 2022 (Muck Rack, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b). While Bedi (2021) found that Twitter is usually only used for building initial connections, the majority of his participants from both professions acknowledged that there is potential for more engagement, which can lead to establishing meaningful relations (Yang et al., 2015). In addition, other channels like LinkedIn, Facebook or Instagram are used by both professions (Muck Rack, 2022a, 2022b), which have been characterised as useful and important channels for relationship building (Atabek & Alikilic, 2020; Chen et al., 2020). Therefore, this study is expected to add to the findings of Bajkiewicz et al. (2011) and Supa (2014) regarding the possibilities that arise in relationship building between PRPs and journalists by means of social
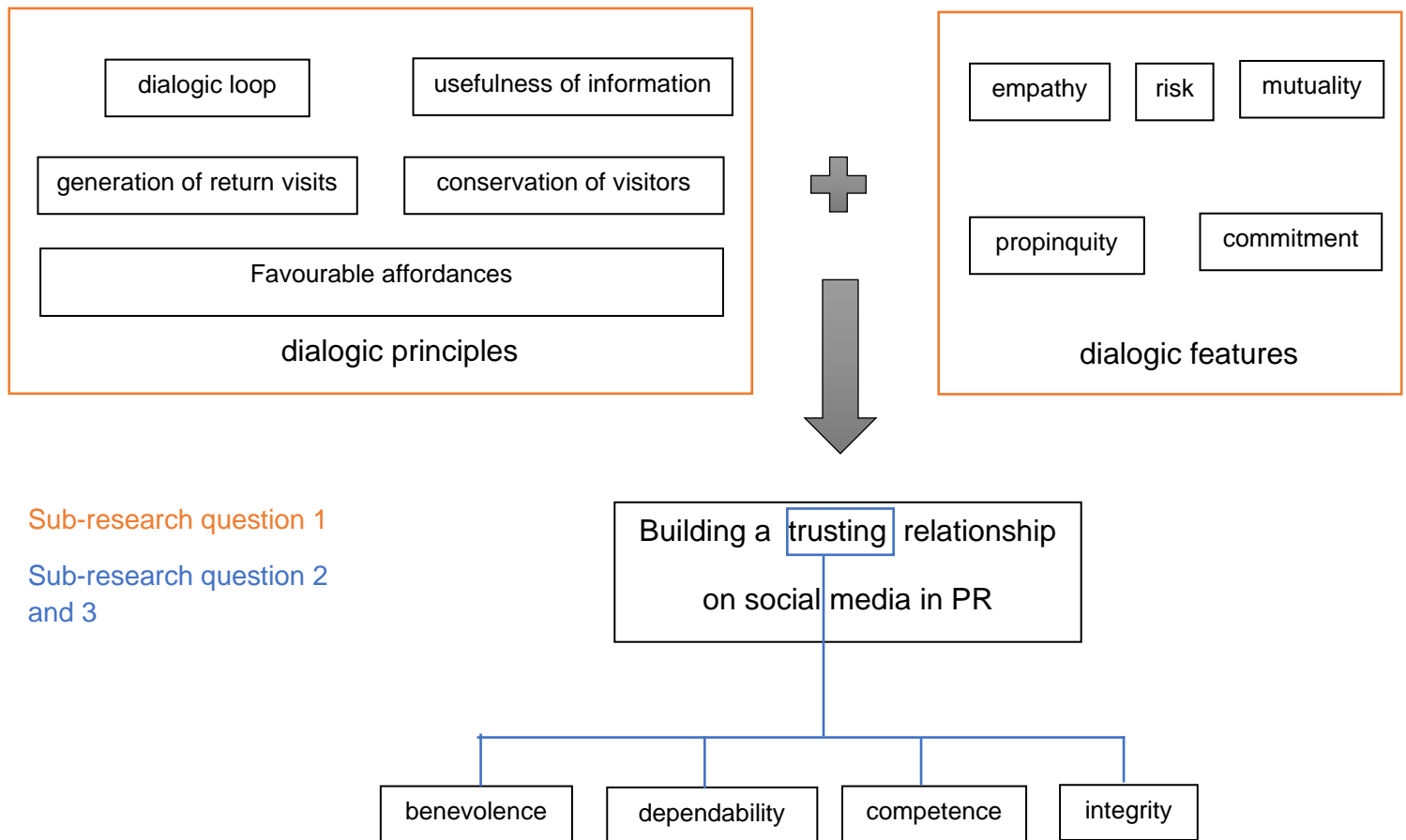
media, and even to report some effects. Thereby, the employment of dialogic principles in the relationship establishment process between PRPs and journalists shall be detected.

Moreover, it became clear that trust building over social media is specifically critical. Even if PRPs stick to the dialogic principles and features no trusting relationship might be built. Therefore, in this study, it is considered in more detail if journalists build trust toward PRPs. Due to changes in society, like the lack of face-to-face interaction because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the higher adoption rate of social media, also in the professional field of PR and journalism, the difficulties of trust building on social media could have been reduced. If trust building on social media is possible the question remains if journalists, then trust everything a PRP publishes on the platforms or if, for example, a direct message on LinkedIn is more credible than a public Tweet. All these expectations are closely linked to the sub-questions one, two, and three, which were raised in the introduction of this paper. How these questions are connected to the principles, features and concepts discussed in the theoretical framework can be seen in Figure 3.

Lastly, it was mentioned that it influences the collaboration of journalists and PRPs negatively if the latter do not stick to the rules of interacting with each other. Senior vice president of corporate affairs for McDonald's Restaurants (the United Kingdom and Northern Europe) Nick Hindle said (as cited in Macnamara, 2015) "I think the rules of engagement are rarely made clear on both sides. The rules of engagement are too often left unsaid" (pp. 135-136). For building trusting relationships between PRPs and journalists on social media, this means, that those rules of engagement need to be made clear first, which is my last expectation and goal for the outcomes of this research.

Figure 3

How the sub-research questions refer to the established principles, features and concepts

dialogic loop

usefulness of information

generation of return visits

conservation of visitors

Favourable affordances

dialogic principles

empathy

risk

mutuality

propinquity

commitment

dialogic features

Sub-research question 1

Sub-research question 2 and 3

Building a trusting relationship on social media in PR

benevolence

dependability

competence

integrity

Based on the overall research question and the complementing sub-questions, the aim is to add to the theories on the PR-journalism relationship as well as the theory on the building of (trusting) relationships on social media. Furthermore, some practical tips for PRPs might be retrieved from the findings. To do this, journalists and PRPs will be interviewed alike. While the focus lies on whether journalists can trust PRPs hearing both sides is important to prevent collecting one-sided data. The reflection of both parties involved in the relationship and trust building processes can help with the understanding. The sample and the method, in general, will be discussed further in the following section.

3. Methods

3.1 Research design

For this study, a qualitative research design was chosen to get in-depth insights into relationship and trust building and the logic and emotions of the involved parties. More precisely, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This method enables a good mix of an open conversation between the participant and the researcher and still ensures comparability of the different interviews, which adds to the analysis of the data (Boeije, 2010). Boeije (2010) adds weight to the advantages of such structured conversations as they allow insights into the social world of participants that are harder to achieve with a quantitative approach but needed for complex topics like relationships and trust. The predefined questions, that created the structure, are based on the dimensions, features and concepts established in the theoretical framework. This way, applying constant comparison during data analysis and producing theory and practical advice, in the end, was possible (Birks et al., 2008). Moreover, the studies of Bajkiewicz et al. (2011), Bedi (2021), Goldstraw (2015), and Supa (2014) already demonstrated that interviews can create valuable output regarding this topic.

Additionally, this study is based on the grounded theory approach, meaning that concepts emerging during the data collection were taken as input for the following interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Grounded theory is a common method for building new theory as the collected data is constantly compared, data collection is improved based on the findings, and new concepts and themes can be established (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). However, the original approach is quite open and therefore not applicable considering the time frame of this research. It was therefore decided to go for a light version of it. This means that the general structure of the interviews was kept, but the data analysis overlapped with the data collection, which is an important part of grounded theory (Suddaby, 2006). This still enabled taking insights from prior

interviews to the following ones, leading to improvements in the questions and slight changes in the focus of the interviews.

As with qualitative interviews also personal data, like the name of the participant, are collected by default, securing the participants' privacy and taking ethical concerns into account is important (Boeije, 2010). For this reason, the participants received a consent form (Appendix B) informing them that they could withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and that the interview will be recorded, but the recordings will be deleted as soon as an anonymised transcription was created. No one, except for the researcher, had access to the recordings. All collected data is stored safely and at the time of publication, no participant is identifiable from the report. Therefore, this study was also approved by the Ethical Committee of the University of Twente.

3.2 Participants

In this study, different sampling methods were combined to assure a sample that is big and diverse enough and to reduce sampling bias. Precisely, convenient sampling was employed and combined with intensity sampling (Patton, 1990). The sample is convenient, as either the researcher or the colleagues of the researcher from Laika Communications – the supporting external organization – know the asked PRPs and journalists. More specifically, three of the PRPs are colleagues and one was a former colleague of the researcher. The other four were PRPs of companies working with Laika Communications. The seven journalists have either collaborated with one of the colleagues of the researcher or with the researcher beforehand[1].

---

[1] Participants that had a background in both professions were in this case counted as a professional in the field they are currently active in

This implies that there already was a trusting connection between the researcher and the participants. While this can be helpful for the willingness to open up from the participant (Boeije, 2010), in the context of the study this can be seen critical. The sampled journalists already had a relationship either with the researcher or with her colleagues, which could bias the results, as they might be more open-minded towards relationships with PRPs. However, journalists having a negative attitude towards PRPs are less likely to participate in such a study in general. Furthermore, none of these relations was built over social media, so the bias was judged to be justifiable considering that it is hard to convince an unknown journalist to participate in a bachelor thesis. Still, as conclusions will be drawn in light of this sampling procedure, these potential shortcomings will be discussed in more detail in the limitations section.

Intensity sampling means, in this study, that it was checked whether the participants contacted have used social media. It was not controlled if potential participants build relationships on social media as this was a question to be answered during the interviews. However, if someone does not use social media at all, no insightful data could be expected and therefore the person was not considered an interesting participant.

While this way of sampling is not random, this mix of these sampling procedures is beneficial for a grounded theory approach, which was applied in this study. For grounded theory, it is important to sample information-rich cases and stay flexible in the sampling procedure (Coyne, 1997). Furthermore, by sticking to the predefined structure of the interviews and stating that there are no right or wrong answers, measures were taken to reduce possible bias that can be caused due to familiarity between the researcher and the participants (Boeije, 2010).

In the end, the sample consisted of 15 participants of which six were journalists, six PRPs, and three had a background in both professions. The professional experience ranged from 3 to 30 years. There was no age limit, except for people needing to be 18 or older. Participants' age

ranged from 25 to 57. Seven participants were male and eight female. More detailed descriptives of the participants can be found in Table 1.

All participants are currently working in Germany and are fluent in German. It was chosen to focus on one country only, as prior studies found differences in the adoption and usage of social media between different countries (Zbikowska, 2016). Germany was chosen due to the pre-existing network of journalists and PRPs. Conducting the research in German additionally enabled a natural conversational flow, as the researcher and all participants are fluent in it. The exclusion criterium of social media usage was explained before.

Table 1

Descriptives of the participants (n = 15)

Current jobs				
PRPs in an agency /freelancer	5			
PRPs in organizations	3			
Lifestyle journalists	1			
Science journalists	1			
Technology journalists	3			
Economic journalists	2			
	M	*SD*	Min.	Max.
Age	38.67	9.15	25	57
Professional Experience PR	9.13	4.08	3.5	16
Professional Experience journalism	15.07	10.22	3	30
	male	female		
Gender PRP	0	6		
Gender journalists	4	2		
Gender of participants with a background in both fields	3	0		

3.3 Interview topics

The main part of the semi-structured interviews was built on the features, concepts and dimensions established in the theoretical framework and on the sub-questions raised in the introduction of the paper. First, the researcher asked questions about the usage of social media for building PR-journalism relationships (example questions: "Have you had contact over social media with a PRP/journalist?" / "Did you feel like you were seen as equal in the interaction?"). By talking about these questions with the participants, it should be determined what channels are used, if there are preferences for different channels in different contexts, which channels are important in the professional context, and if channels next to social media, like e-mail or face-to-face meetings, are (more) important. Furthermore, topics like which profession is more likely to contact the other one and in which ways, if the participants saw the other party as equal, if they liked the interactions, and if a relationship was built were discussed.

Afterwards, the development of trust was looked at in more detail (example questions: "Can you rely on the PRPs with whom you interact over social media?" / "Do you have the feeling journalists rely on you (more) when/after you interacted on social media?" / "Why do you think you can/cannot trust PRPs you have contact with on social media?" / "Why do you think journalists do/don't trust you on social media?"). Topics discussed in this part were, for example, if the channel the interactions take place on influences the perception of competence or dependability or if PRPs keep the integrity on social media. Another aspect was whether benevolent actions, like reposting a journalist's post to help them boost their reach, are more common on these channels and if yes, what the motives behind these actions might be.

It shall be noted that the questions were about whether journalists can build trust towards PRPs because it was found in the theoretical framework that journalists are more critical of the relationship. Therefore, also PRPs reflected on whether they think they are trusted in these interactions on social media and not whether they trust the journalists.

Lastly, the ideal process of trusting relationship building was discussed (example questions: "Can you give three do's and don'ts for trusting relationship building on social media?" / "What are your preferred channels for trusting relationship building?"). There, most participants gave their own lists of ideas on how they think it would be optimal to behave on social media if one aims to build trusting relationships. The full outline of the interviews can be found in Appendix C.

3.4 Procedure

The research was started by contacting the participants over e-mail, Slack, LinkedIn, Instagram, or WhatsApp. Depending on whether the researcher knew the participants, or they already worked with a colleague of hers, the initial contact person varied. Being contacted by a person the participants know, can increase the trust, which is important during interviews (Boeije, 2010). However, to assure that no one except for the researcher knows who took part in the study, all participants were told to only communicate about their study participation with the researcher. This means, that when participants were contacted by colleagues, they explained that they should only answer the researcher, who was in CC in the first e-mail, and not her colleagues so that they do not know if someone accepted or declined to take part. After someone agreed to be part of the study, they were sent the main topics of the interviews so that they knew what to expect. Boeije (2010) states that it is beneficial to give participants an idea of the content of the research to reassure them. Still, it was decided to only give them the four sub-questions and not all follow-up questions to enable a flexible and natural conversational flow during the interviews. An example of this second e-mail can be found in Appendix D.

If the participant was not contacted by the researcher in the beginning, the second e-mail was also used for the introduction of the researcher explaining her position as a working student at Laika Communications next to the study. It was explained that Laika Communications is interested in the results but will not see any personal data nor know who

the participants of this study were. Thereby, it was made clear that the data will be protected and this way trust between the researcher and the participants should be established. People who were directly contacted by the researcher already knew her, but an explanation about the connection of this study to the organization was still included for transparency.

The interviews were performed online. It was advised to turn on the cameras to create the atmosphere of a real-life conversation. This way, gestures and facial expressions could also be noted. Nevertheless, no one was forced to turn on the camera. The risk of missing non-verbal expressions was judged less significant than the privacy concerns of participants. In the end, 14 participants enabled their cameras. Online interviews were more convenient than in-person meetings because of the COVID-19 infection rate as well as the fact that participants lived in different cities in Germany.

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher introduced herself and the aim of the study again and it was asked again if the participants were fine with recording the session. Then a technology check was performed, to see if the recording, the microphones, and cameras functioned properly. Afterwards, the informed consent was addressed again to check if there were any misunderstandings or questions and to remind the participants of their rights. It was also mentioned that there are no right or wrong answers and that participants shall raise any ideas or concerns they may have. Next, the predefined questions were asked, and upcoming other topics and questions were discussed. The interviews took on average around 30 minutes each. In the end, the participants were thanked and asked if they wanted to receive the finished report.

3.5 Data analysis

The first step of the analysis was data familiarization. Therefore, all interview recordings were transcribed (Bailey, 2008). While doing this, the interviews were anonymized. Each interview was assigned a label to make them differentiable. The label revealed the profession

of the participant with P standing for PRP, J for journalist, and B for having a background in both professions. It was decided to go for a word-by-word transcription rather than a deep content analysis, which would include all breaks, filler words and similar. Because the participants knew the outline of the interviews and could prepare themselves, the additional work was not expected to add to the findings and therefore it was decided against it to work efficiently. Nevertheless, memos were taken to note if, for example, irony was used. Memos are important during the data analysis, especially when applying grounded theory to keep track of emerging topics and concepts as well (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

These notes also gave input during the first coding phase. The three coding stages by Boeije (2010) were applied, which are open, axial, and selective coding. During the open coding phase abductive coding was utilized, meaning that the initial codes were built on the predetermined dimensions, features and concepts from the theoretical framework as well as on emerging concepts noted in the memos (Alrajeh et al., 2013). To specify the codes further, constant comparison was applied during the axial coding phase. Thereby, concepts were compared to find if they hold true for more than one participant, and similarities and differences were noted (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Then main- and sub-codes were defined.

The first two coding phases overlapped with the data collection so that insights from the interviews could be taken to later ones (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This way, already after the first interviews a new concept for trust, namely authenticity, was established as it was mentioned in every interview without being included in the questions. Consequently, it was added to the later interviews and the codebook. The first version of the codebook was established after the first four interviews (Appendix E). Then an independent co-coder also coded parts of those interviews to check for intercoder reliability. According to Nili et al. (2017), Krippendorf's alpha has the advantage that it produces very accurate results for reliability tests, which of why it was utilized in this study to check for intercoder reliability.

The Krippendorf's alpha for the main codes were sufficient taking a value of 0.667 as a threshold (Nili et al., 2017). They can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Krippendorf's alpha for the main codes

	Krippendorf's Alpha
Channel	1
Relationship	0.748
Trust	0.737
Advice	0.849

After the calculation of Krippendorf's alpha, the codebook, the current concepts and questions were discussed with the co-coder to further improve the questions and codes. Thereby it was noticed that the codes of "contact" and "content" were too broad. Therefore, those were relabelled. The concept of "contact" goes further than just the pure question of whether there has been contact between journalists and PRPs on social media as it deals with questions like who initiated the contact and if the parties saw each other as equal. After review, it became clear that this fits the already established dialogic feature mutuality, which became the new code. Similarly, "content" was relabelled to "usefulness of information" as this sums up the comments of the participants better than the broad term content and was already established in the theoretical framework as well.

Generally, the concepts, dimensions and features established in the theoretical framework were useful during the analysis. As those already were the basis for the interview questions, it became easier to detect structure and patterns during the analysis. Only two dimensions and one feature have not been applied in the codebook. Those were generation of return visits, conservation of visitors, and propinquity because in none of the interviews, for

instance, the regularity of updates or the navigation on the profiles or the immediacy of presence (Kent & Taylor, 2002) were of concern. Already early in the coding process, it appeared that sentiment codes were useful for the analysis. Therefore, they were included in form of "Relationship positive", "Relationship negative", "Trust positive", and "Trust negative". In summary, four content-related main codes were established, which subcodes specify them further and should lead to the insights searched for. The final version of the codebook can be found in Appendix F.

Once all interviews were coded, the selective coding process started, looking for connections between the codes and establishing categories and themes (Boeije, 2010). To do this systematically, the query tool and the Co-Oc table of Atlas.ti were employed, and constant comparison was continued (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Lastly, all findings needed to be connected to a coherent story.

4. Results

The three main themes established were the channels and habits for building trusting relationships, relationship building between PRPs and journalists on social media, and trust building between PRPs and journalists on social media. While the first theme gives a general impression of what happens on social media in the context of trusting relationship building between the two professions, the other two go into more detail regarding how relationships and trust are built. The underlying codes and categories will be discussed. Key findings within those codes and categories are highlighted.

4.1 Channels and habits for building trusting relationships

The most straightforward results are the social media *platforms* used by the participants. The ones mentioned most were Twitter and LinkedIn for journalists and PRPs alike. Especially journalists used Twitter for staying up to date with news and trends. LinkedIn was used for building networks and interacting with each other on a professional basis, which sometimes led

to relationship building. This difference can be linked back to the affordances of the different channels. While Twitter was judged as fast-moving and sometimes confusing for participants of all groups, they appreciated LinkedIn ("[With LinkedIn] you have this index character, so you find people belonging to an organization [easily]", J4). How trusting relationship building on LinkedIn was described, will be discussed in the next parts.

Other social media channels mentioned by the participants were Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Xing, Reddit, Pinterest, YouTube, TikTok, and Snapchat. Especially the latter ones were, however, only mentioned seldomly and no relationships seemed to be built on those. Instagram was used for private purposes. On Facebook and Xing many participants reported still having accounts but relativised this by stating that they judge those channels as dead. Some still like Facebook due to the control one has over their posts (P4) or for checking for updates (P2), but especially for journalists, the channel seems to have lost its relevance ("On Facebook, it may well be that [someone contacted us] at one time. But that should be quite some time ago", J6). WhatsApp was only used with PRPs/journalists with whom a relationship has already been built before. J5 stated that they "[…] do not accept messages on WhatsApp from external [and unknown] PR people. [They] block them".

Next to social media, some other channels were mentioned. Telephone, e-mail, and personal meetings at events or in a more private setting are important in the work of PRPs and journalists. The preference of especially the journalists for communication over e-mail can be traced back to *habits* causing convenience and efficiency as many journalists reported building their to-do lists based on their e-mails and get overwhelmed having to check the inboxes of several channels. B2 even claimed: "[…] I am not a big friend of social media anymore. It all takes a long time and then I always think, better send me an email, everything is in there". Despite that, no one claimed that they see e-mail as clearly better to build relationships or trust than social media ("So there is no reason for me to think that e-mail is somehow more trustworthy or anything.", J2). This is different for telephone and personal meetings as those

are channels not depending purely on written messages, which makes it easier to build relationships and trust according to the participants ("[…] [social media is, on the interactional level and style, not that] different from a personal conversation […], except that you do not have the body language […], and […] the tone. And we know that the tone [is important to get the meaning] […], P2").

Concluding, the affordances of social media are recognised for building trusting relationships. It seems that some channels are preferred over others due to their affordances. Nevertheless, more traditional channels are still highly relevant for the daily work of journalists and PRPs causing social media to be a useful additional channel for relationship building but not the prevalent one. A visualisation summarising the categories, codes and key findings within this theme can be found in Figure 4. This way a good overview of the most important findings of this part shall be given. How relationships are built on social media will be discussed in the following sections.

Figure 4

Visualisation of the theme "channel and habits for building trusting relationships"
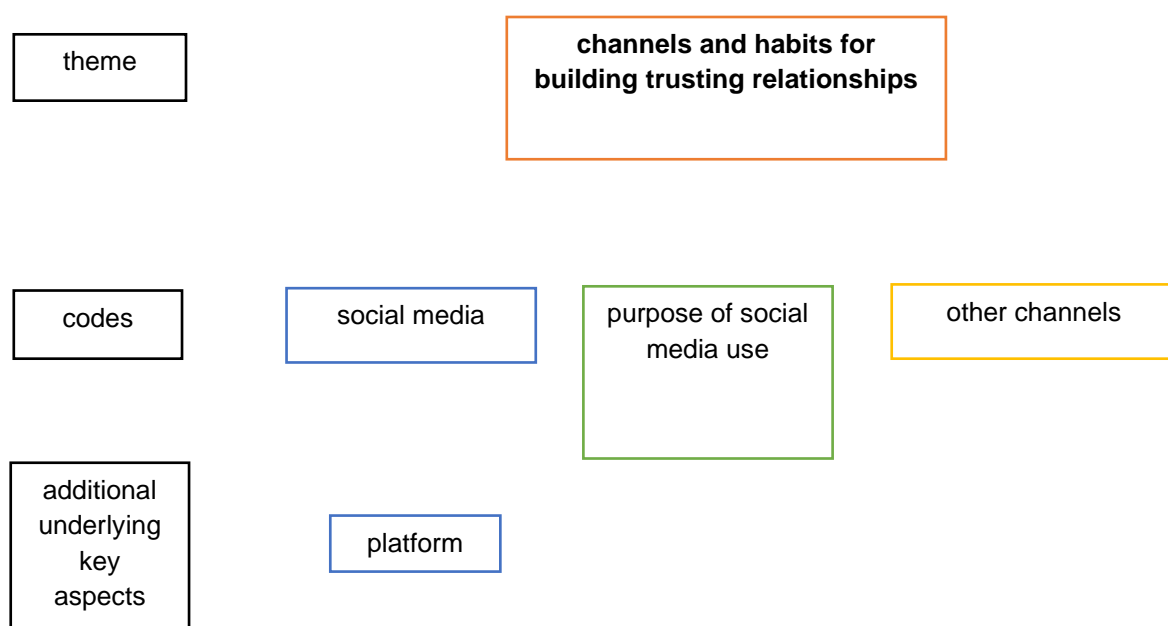
4.2 Relationship building between PRPs and journalists on social media

It was established that building relationships between PRPs and journalists is complex. To enable an analysis relationship building was broken down to the dialogic principles and features that also were utilized as codes. Some of these codes were combined in overarching categories as they were found to be connected in the analysis. Those codes and categories will be described and explained now.

However, before those are discussed in more detail it should be mentioned that in general only one journalist stated that they do not believe that building relationships over social media is possible because they change directly to e-mail or a personal meeting before a relationship could be built (J6). Two other journalists and two PRPs have never built relationships with the other group over social media themselves, but they mostly blame this on themselves being not popular on social media, not having enough time or not taking the initiative because they are afraid to do something wrong which could leave a bad impression. Nevertheless, all four of them believed that it is possible.

4.2.1   Initiating and establishing relationships

There are different ways to get in contact on social media. The most common channel appeared to be LinkedIn, as already mentioned. Many PRPs reported that they contact journalists over direct messages if they, for instance, saw posts of them suiting the topic their client covers. However, whether PRPs contact journalists over LinkedIn is an individual decision. B2, for example, stated that they use "[…] LinkedIn […] rarely [to] write journalists – probably […] almost never". One of the reasons they gave for this was that the reply pace was slow. This reason was also given by a journalist, however, they relativised it, saying that in PR and journalism people look at their profiles often and that this problem appears if they need external experts (J3).

Next to direct messages, other possibilities for interacting and thereby building a basis for a relationship are, for instance, commenting and tagging. Just as with the direct messages, if those approaches are successful depends on the content shared, the *tone of voice* and the *individual preferences* of all involved parties. While tagging can sometimes be perceived as "[…] just [being dragged] in [a] post" (P1), P1 also reported about an incident where another user tagged them and a journalist under a post and said that they need to get to know each other. Based on this a good relationship was built over social media.

Despite these positive experiences, some participants voiced concerns about contacting someone they have never talked to or mailed with before over social media ("So I am not going to write to anyone [over LinkedIn] I do not know […]", B2). Others, especially journalists, stated that for them the channel of contact does not make a difference regarding the relationship building ("I would not have any problem contacting an expert via LinkedIn or Twitter or something like that, so that would not really make a big difference to me.", J2). This positive judgement seemed to be partially caused because during the interactions on LinkedIn both parties see each other as *equal*. All PRPs who have experienced such an interaction before agreed that if the first message is written respectfully, the answers are respectful and friendly as well. Journalists supported this.

Once a topic was addressed that might lead to a collaboration like an article, the channel usually was quickly switched to either e-mail, telephone or a personal meeting to agree on the details. However, the connection on social media remained, which was described as the basis for a good relationship. PRPs and journalists generally often tend to be silent followers of one another who only interact if they have a suitable topic for the other party. Which might sound like no relationship at all was highly appreciated by all parties because this way one can build a network that is easy to keep up with and that can be activated when one has something suitable for someone else. This shows the importance of networking over just trying to score articles for

a client ("[…] really have the idea of networking behind it [and not just wanting to sell something]", P6).

To summarize this, it shall be noted that there is no one right way of contacting a journalist on social media, but there are many possibilities and all of them can be a good starting point for building a relationship, but they can also fail. It often depends on the personal preferences of all involved parties. Overall, it is important that, whatever way of imitating and establishing relationships is chosen, treating the other person as equal – meaning, for example, being respectful, friendly and thoughtful – was said to be crucial.

4.2.2 Commitment to the relationships and social media

While networking was established to be important it does not seem to be easy as it demands high commitment. If one is committed, social media holds advantages over other channels for networking. One of which is the possibility to pick up a conversation even after a long time of only silently following one another. This was described as a *"latent relationship"* that can be (re-) activated at any time by P1 "[…] because there is a chat and you can pick […] up […], so you do not always have to start at zero". B3 mentioned a similar experience when they, as a journalist, needed to contact a PRP again after they switched jobs: "[I did not text] bluntly, but like: Hey, do you still remember me? Cool that you switched [positions] and so on and […] that can work". Using the advantage of "latent relationships" (P3), that social media creates, to its full potential, demands, as stated before, commitment to social media. P3 described this as the importance of having social media as a "constant background noise". The participant explained that "it is not done with one action, one interaction, but it is a lot. […] [You, for example, need to] post yourself, […] offer added value somehow […]" (P3).

Looking at all the interviews, it seems like PRPs are more committed than journalists. As stated, most of the conversations are started by PRPs, and most journalists never or seldomly checked the profiles of PRPs or agencies ("Maybe I should do it more often. I do not do that",

J1) and even if journalists appreciate that PRPs follow them on social media, they do not always follow back ("[…] if I do not know them privately [, I do not follow back]", J5). Only one journalist reported that they follow many PRPs and interesting organizations, because "[the journalist has] very specific […] topics. So, of course, that is put together relatively quickly when you follow [the organizations]" (J6).

PRPs showed understanding of this ("[…] at the end of the day it is always a question of resources", P5). Still, while most of the time the PRPs want to request something from the journalist, B4 summed up the relationship between the professions nicely: "The relationship between PR and journalism is exciting. No one can get along without the other party […]". In conclusion, it is, therefore, important that people that make good attempts to build relationships on social media and are committed to it, then also get a positive reaction and not be ignored because the other party is not committed.

4.2.3   Accessibility and spamming

Another aspect praised by many PRPs was the *accessibility*: "[…] [Phone and mail had] […] much higher thresholds, and now it is much easier, so […] I would say it is positive that we now have these [social] channels. For the work of PR people and journalists." (P3). This accessibility, however, was the point criticised the strongest by journalists. They reported that they get many messages that do not help them in their jobs at all. Examples were coaching and course offers they were not interested in, PR offers that were not relevant for the topics they cover or even badly translated requests from companies out of Germany that did not make sense to them. While this *spamming* also happens on other channels, the mass due to the accessibility on social media seems to be overwhelming ("[On social media it] is about doing stuff quickly. I quickly link up with xx […]. That is just a click away and then I offer them something [like] vacation trips to Austria or […] such consulting stories.", J1).

This spamming can overshadow the good PRP-journalist relationships that have been built on social media. J2 even claimed, "when contacts arise to PR departments […] then it usually happens when [the journalist] stumbles upon [them in their] own research and contacts them, but rarely the other way around, because their proposals are usually [spam]". This means while all interviewed PRPs stated that they mostly initiate the contact and most journalists confirmed this, the mass of spam creates the image in some journalists' minds that PRP requests on social media are most of the time not good enough to build relationships.

Furthermore, the mass of postings that are displayed on social media, of which not all have the best quality, and the algorithm that picks which posts one sees also influences what journalists are exposed to and consequently how they perceive the channel, people active on it and incoming requests ("So my guess is that maybe 98% of all content published on LinkedIn is junk and only a very […] small part remains that is really worth reading […]"; "That actually means it is pure coincidence, or coincidence by the LinkedIn algorithm, what I see in my timeline", B1). So, while none of the participating PRPs stated to spam journalists with unfitting requests, they are still affected by the spam happening on social media due to the stress that is created for the journalists and that might influence their responses from time to time.

In short, spamming has always been a problem for journalists but due to the high accessibility on social media, this problem increased. Hence, PRPs trying to establish a relationship with journalists need to make sure to only contact them with suitable information or post valuable posts to not become a part of the spam next to using the right tone in their message and staying committed to social media and relationship building.

4.2.4 *Possibilities and affordances to build empathy*

While the results discussed above are relevant to making the first steps for building a relationship, a relationship is much more than the pure contact and content shared. One important aspect of a relationship, that was also already established in the theoretical

framework, is empathy. Concluding from the interviews, it can be said, that it is possible to build empathy on social media between PRPs and journalists, which supports relationship building. One reason for the emergence of empathy is direct messages that make the journalists feel noticed and valued as an individual. In an exchange of two individuals, empathy can arise. While P4 argued that "[…] this sympathy must take place […] in [an] e-mail exchange [before], so that […] [they] connect […] via social media", J5 claimed that if the tone and the content of the message are fine, it does not make a difference whether someone contacts them over LinkedIn or e-mail. This journalist, however, found that to be harder on Twitter as the tone of voice seems to be harsher on this *platform* (J5). Regarding trust building, these differences between channels could also be observed for other participants.

Within these *personal exchanges*, *emotions*, which are important for an empathetic conversation, can be transported ("You are asking about empathy, so the emotional quality of social media? Yes, without any problems. I think working in the communications industry […] you can read the tone of a message even without directly speaking to each other […]", J4). In such conversations PRPs perceive themselves also as being able to advise journalists (P1). This is appreciated if "the PR representative has done their homework in the sense that they […] considered who they are communicating with" (J2).

An advantage social media has in this regard, especially compared to e-mail, is that it enables a more *personal impression* of the other party. P3 described this as follows:

> It is not just the profile and pictures, it is also the fact that if you look at the profile, […] you can infer much more about positions, similarities, differences, etc. to this person [from the previous posts, reactions, etc.] and therefore also have greater points of contact […]. (P3)

This is highly appreciated because PR is a "people's business" (P2), and those insights give the interaction "[…] a bit of a human touch" (P4). P2 reflected upon this stating that PRPs could use personal information, not for empathetic exchange but manipulation. However, none of the

journalists reported such a concern. J5 stated that "[they do not believe that] interaction with PR people is critical as a rule. They do not come to LinkedIn to mess around". Hence, this shows that social media enables interactions not only regarding what is explicitly said but also on a more implicit level covering emotions and personal information leading to empathy.

4.2.5   Risks

Despite the journalists' conviction that PRPs do not aim to misuse their data, all parties are thoughtful about what to post on which channels. Having *private and professional channels separately* was advised several times by PRPs and journalists. The risk of mixing private and professional matters inappropriately was mentioned several times and even the concern was raised that a too close interaction of a PRP and a journalist could seem like nepotism and scare away other journalists from the specific PRP ("[…] [close contact] can become intrusive and the journalist must assure that his credibility remains. […] You just have to be careful that it does not come across as nepotism when you are mumbling around […]."; "[…] if you specifically target one journalist, you may, in turn, repel other journalists with it", P5). However, this was relativised by stating that such interactions are, of course, part of the job and also happen on other less public channels.

The already addressed aspect of *spamming* is a risk as well in connection to the separation of the professional and the private life. Spamming journalists on private accounts is seen as even more intrusive than the general problem of spam discussed above and perceived as a risk ("[everyone has] a private sphere, and this must be respected […]", B3). "[However], that is part of the occupational risk [that one takes as a journalist]" according to J4 and therefore was not seen as too severe by them.

Despite all possible risks, the participants do not think that risks on social media influence negatively how they build relationships. Of course, everything posted might be shared and be online forever, but "[i]t does not matter where the information comes from, whether it

is from an e-mail, the web, or whether [the interaction] actually took place directly in the social media channel" (B2). P4 summed the general attitude towards the relationship risks on social media up quite nicely: "So I am not afraid or anything like that. I think the thing is […] you can always say no".

Overall, it can be summarized that it is indeed possible to build relationships over social media between PRPs and journalists. P1 summed it up nicely:

It is a very sensitive relationship that you are working with, and it can take a beating later on, but it is very sensitive at the beginning. But if you – and I am convinced of this – if you stand behind it with your person and make yourself personally, but also professionally, vulnerable by saying that you stand behind it, then it is a good precondition for a good relationship. (P1)

Again, a visualisation summarising the categories, codes and other key findings within this theme was created. This indicates which aspects need to be thought of when aiming to build a relationship over social media according to this study. It can be found in Figure 5. All these findings, however, do not yet mean that a trusting relationship was established. Building trust on social media between PRPs and journalists will be discussed in the next section.

Figure 5

Visualisation of the theme "relationship building between PRPs and journalists on social media"
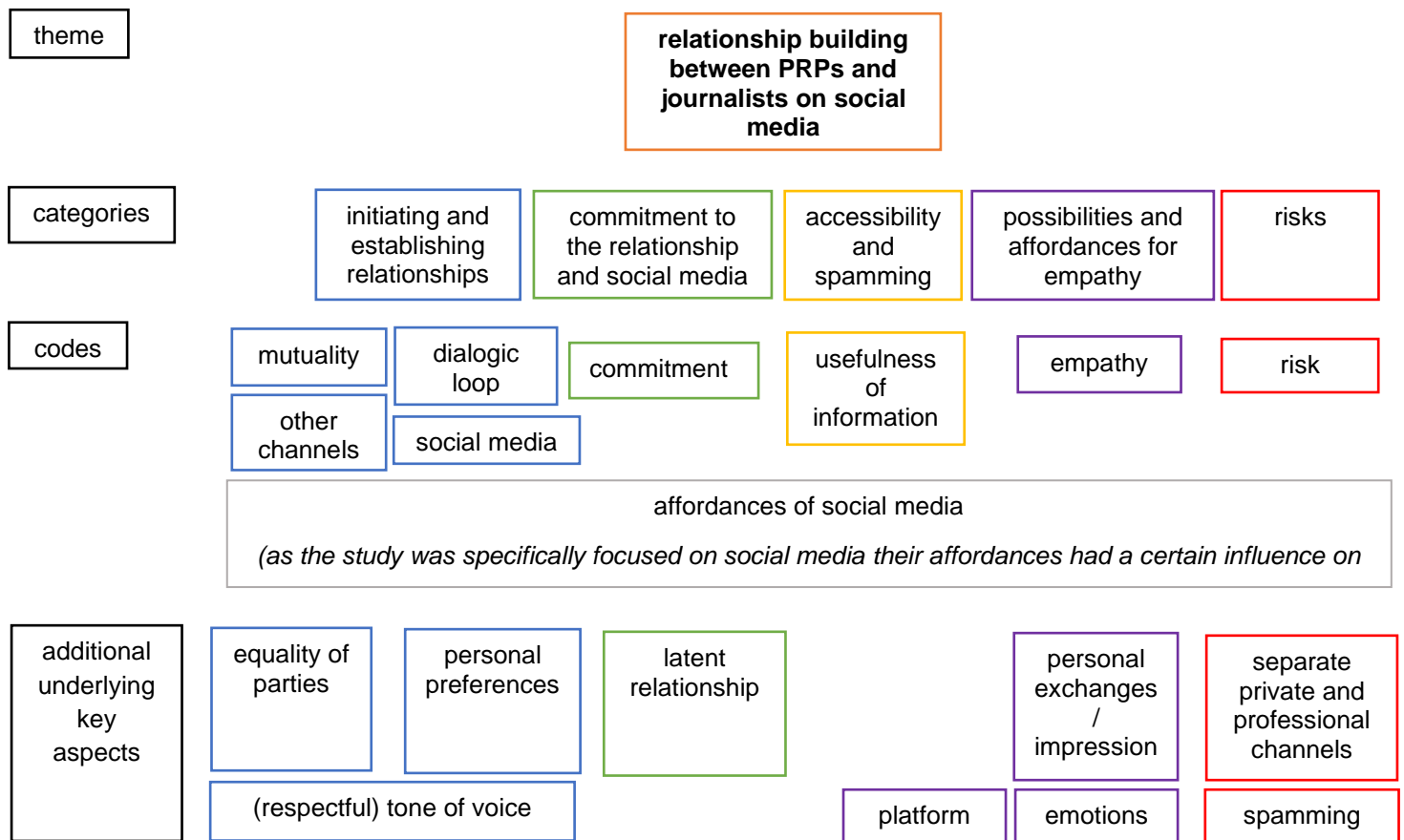
4.3 Trust building between PRPs and journalists on social media

All participants agreed that building trust is possible over social media. This is interesting, as even the one participant thinking that relationship building is not doable on these channels stated that they believe that trust building is possible (J5). This can be explained by looking at the dimensions of trust and how they were perceived on social media by the participants. This section starts with the most straightforward results, covering dependability and competence, and then complicates this by looking at integrity, benevolence, and the newly found dimension of authenticity.

4.3.1   Perception of reliability

Two of the dimensions of trust are dependability and competence, which were summed up under the category of reliability. For both, all participants generally agree that journalists can consider PRPs as dependable and competent on social media. Only one journalist stated that they would check the content they receive over social media twice, but they relativised that by stating that they work in science journalism and that they tend to be more critical of PR content anyway (J6). This shows that there might be differences between the journalistic fields.

Of course, also other journalists reported incidents where a PRP was not dependable ("Some of the contacts are not dependable. They say, I will send you something and [it is unfinished and unthought-out] stuff", J1). Nevertheless, many journalists and PRPs alike think that social media can even add to trustingly depend on PRPs because it makes the interaction more personal ("I think social media also brings us a bit closer, because maybe there is a photo [...] from the other side that you would not get via mail [and that maybe makes it easier to depend]", J2; "My gut says [...] [they rely even more] because it is a personal relationship", P1). The only exception P4 makes is Twitter, as there, people might be more anonymous. Generally, however, all participants agree that social media does not minder the journalists' willingness to depend on PRPs. However, it might be that an individual PRP seems unreliable and then it is decided to not trust this PRP in this regard ("So, of course, there are people who are enormously reliable [and] just because they use social media [it] does not mean they are not. On the other hand, they are not [more reliable] because of that [...]", J4).

Also, regarding competence, it seems to depend on the people rather than on whether the interaction takes place on social media or via another channel: "You just have professional stuff and [...] a lot of people who just yell [...] and have dangerous half-knowledge and they think just because they are loud that they are [...] right" (B2). Nevertheless, the participants made some differences between the social media *platforms*. Especially Twitter and Instagram were mentioned as less professional channels, while LinkedIn was praised. This was, however,

relativised, as depending on the context of the interaction, Instagram or Twitter could be suitable environments and there are also trolls on LinkedIn. It seems that one can be perceived as competent on social media as long as one "[…] knows how to operate these channels […]" (J5) and contacts journalists professionally. While some PRPs are still afraid that journalists judge them as less competent when they try to build a relationship over social media because they think journalists do not like it (P5, P6), P3 even raises the question of "[…] if you are not represented on social media as a journalist or PRP, doesn't this seem strange?".

Therefore, it can be concluded that being perceived as competent and dependable is possible on social media which adds to the possibility of building trust on these channels. However, it needs to be kept in mind again that these judgements highly depend on *personal presentation and preferences*.

4.3.2 Integrity

It becomes more complex looking at the results regarding the dimension of integrity. P2 summarised it as "[social media] may destroy integrity, but it may also build integrity […]". Actions destroying integrity are, for instance, *spamming* and pressuring journalists to achieve coverage ("[…] if you then start to bombard them with messages […], so that you finally get your answer, […] that does not make a good relationship […]", B2; "But I actually believe that there can also be very aggressive behaviour, where journalists are deliberately used as a vehicle, also to put pressure on them", P1; "I think we know the clipping pressure […] and that sometimes someone thinks, then I'll just write to them [on social media] or […] tag them […]", P5). Journalists also sometimes feel treated unfairly if they do not get feedback ("If I have written the fifth [message] at some point and then I get feedback two days before publication, I don't feel like it anymore either", B3).

Moreover, overpromising has a negative influence on the perception of a PRP's integrity ("So, there are agencies that say we give one hundred per cent full steam for our products. But

we spend 89% of the steam on touting", J1), as well as pretending to be closer to a journalist than one is ("So there are certainly also PRPs, who probably use this and […] want to convey the feeling that they are better friends with the journalist than they actually are, just because they are friends on social media", P4; "[…] but please do not [pretend we are friends] on social media [when we are not]", J5). Lastly, the lack of personal interaction, eye contact, and non-verbal cues can make the feeling of mutual integrity harder.

Nevertheless, participants of all groups believe that integrity is possible on social media ("I do believe that integrity can be created", P2; "[…] the interaction is just as *respectful* [as on other channels]", J2; "[…] for the most part, people treat each other very well [in these interactions]", B3). Journalists and PRPs both see integrity as crucial for their relations and trust ("[…] I think [integrity is] even essential", P3; "[…] that is what I actually expect, that they have integrity", J5) and all interviewed PRPs assured their efforts to act as fair, respectful, honest and ethical as possible. Regarding the channels, it can be concluded that integrity on social media is possible but "[…] integrity is always a mix of everything. [It cannot be done] only through one channel" (P2).

4.3.3   *Honesty and good intentions*

The category honesty and good intentions consists of the codes benevolence and authenticity. This category was created because participants of all groups framed it as important, to be *honest* on social media and have *good intentions* or at least not aim to deceive or use others.

Acting benevolent seemed to be better achievable on social media as it is sometimes said to be easier to get to know journalists and their interests on social media and therefore also to take them into account. However, answers to the question if PRPs are more benevolent towards journalists on social media were often complaints of journalists about *spamming* and unsuitable requests, which is in line with prior findings. J4 claims that "[f]irst and foremost,

[PRPs] have to look at what [their] target group wants [and] that is the journalist" and demands benevolence towards busy journalists. The interviewed PRPs all agreed, reflecting that "[…] if something unsuitable comes up for the fifth time, the journalist just rolls their eyes […]. I can understand that journalists find that annoying" (P6). Sometimes there is not enough time to get informed well-enough about a journalist (B2) but in general, all interviewed participants stated that they try to avoid such incidents and that it is not only possible to find out what is of interest to the journalist over social media, but easier than ever before.

Another aspect of the dimension of benevolence is helping each other. On social media, this can be done, for instance, by liking or reposting posts and thereby boosting the reach. In the PRP-journalism relationship, PRPs can do this with the posts of journalists to do them a favour and J5 states that "[they are], of course, happy when [their posts are] shared". B1 goes even further and says that the current liking and reposting is only the first step of everything that could be done. It would be even more beneficial if, for example, deep discussions get started under a LinkedIn post with value for everyone, creating a "win-win situation" (B1). However, many journalists are concerned that this is not done to help them but rather PRPs hope to get an advantage from this: "[…] the PR person does something good for me to get more attention from me the next time" (J5). While the participants believe that sharing and liking is "[…] okay to a healthy degree" (B3) and there are some success stories from this approach ("I shared the article then and promoted it, whereupon a good contact has now been established" P1) honesty and authenticity are important keywords here.

Authenticity also arose as an extra dimension of trust during the data collection and analysis. Being able to "[…] write everything about themselves" and only showing "the best side" (B2) was described as a downside of social media. Especially LinkedIn was criticised ("[…] most LinkedIn profiles are terribly inflated […]", B1; "Especially when it comes to marketing, PR and the whole industry, LinkedIn is also a platform where I have the feeling that there are quite a few airheads on the go", J2; "[…] in the last few months I increasingly saw

self-congratulatory posts [on LinkedIn] […]", P3). According to B1, this could even lead to people "starting to hate each other on LinkedIn".

Journalists are, however, sure that they can tell when somebody is not authentic, which has a negative influence on their decision to trust this person. Especially if PRPs "[…] write to every customer that they have reinvented the wheel" (J5) journalists are critical. PRPs can get trust worthier if "[…] a PRP is self-critical" (J2). The possibility to get more *personal impressions* of a journalist/PRP on social media was praised again in all interviews and if the profile is honest, reflected and shows "the human side" (P4), then authenticity is an aspect that enables trust building and is a strong point for it on social media.

In conclusion, it seems like authenticity builds the basis for benevolence and both together are important for the trust building process on social media. The interrelations of the dimensions of trust will be looked at in the discussion section.

4.3.4   Other influences on trust building

As stated before, the social media *platform* can influence the trust building process. All participants agreed that they would rather build trust on LinkedIn than on Twitter as Twitter is known for its rough tone of voice ("I think Twitter is stupid, so that may be because of the harsh tone, but you do not manage to establish a proper conversational culture on Twitter at all, and that is why I am quitting very quickly", J5). However, these results need to be considered carefully as social media is constantly changing ("There are clear differences [between the channels], but this is always in flux" P3). As mentioned, for example, LinkedIn already got criticised for the emerging self-promotion posts. This might lead to another channel becoming more popular in the future.

Another interesting theory regarding trust building was raised by one participant. They built on the theory of Kahnemann (2012) stating that:

Repetition creates familiarity, creates trust. And that is why just the fact that when you open Twitter [or] when you open LinkedIn, that you see certain people again and again through the algorithms, etc. … [That] creates trust because you see them again and again. (P3)

This would mean that the pure affordances of social media already create trust or at least make trust building easier.

Looking at this and the results regarding the dimensions of trust, building trusting relationships seems to be possible on social media. All mentioned categories, codes, and other key findings within this theme were again visualised (Figure 6) to create an overview and show the complete picture of the trust building process. Still, these findings need to be set into a theoretical context again.

Figure 6

Visualisation of the theme "trust building between PRPs and journalists on social media"

theme		**trust building between PRPs and journalists on social media**		
categories	perception of reliability	integrity	honesty and good intentions	other influences on trust building
codes	dependability / competence	integrity	authenticity / benevolence	
additional underlying key aspects	platform / personal preferences / personal exchanges / impressions	(respectful) tone of voice / spamming	personal exchanges / impressions / spamming	platform / replication creates familiarity creates trust (Kahnemann)

5. Discussion

This research aimed to find out whether it is possible to build trusting relationships on social media between PRPs and journalists, posing the research question: How can public relations professionals use social media to build trusting relationships with journalists in Germany? Prior research showed that social media holds opportunities for relationship building between these two groups, but also illustrated some weak points, especially regarding the establishment of trust. This study investigated the processes and effects further by interviewing German PRPs, journalists, and people with a background in both professions based on four sub-questions that will now be looked at in more detail. Furthermore, an overview of the main findings will be provided, the strengths and limitations of this research will be presented, and a final conclusion will be drawn.

5.1 Main Findings

The most important finding is that all expectations for this research raised in the introduction and the theoretical framework have been (partially) met. Most of the dialogical principles and features, that have been discussed in the theoretical framework, came up during the interviews. The affordances of social media, mutuality, empathy, commitment and the usefulness of information were, were the most prominent aspects of relationship building on social media. Also, the expectations regarding the preconditions for trust building – namely integrity, competence, dependability, and benevolence – hold. However, authenticity was additionally found to be important.

The main take-aways for PRPs are that they should try to implement social media as a networking channel in their worklife to build trusting relationships with journalists. Thereby, everything from just following to a direct message is allowed, except for pure pitching and spamming with unhelpful information. Authenticity and integrity are crucial in each of these activities. The success, however, also depends on the personal preferences of all involved

parties. The channel recommended based on this study is LinkedIn. Though it needs to be kept in mind that this study was limited to Germany. A summary of the main findings is visualised in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Summary of the main findings
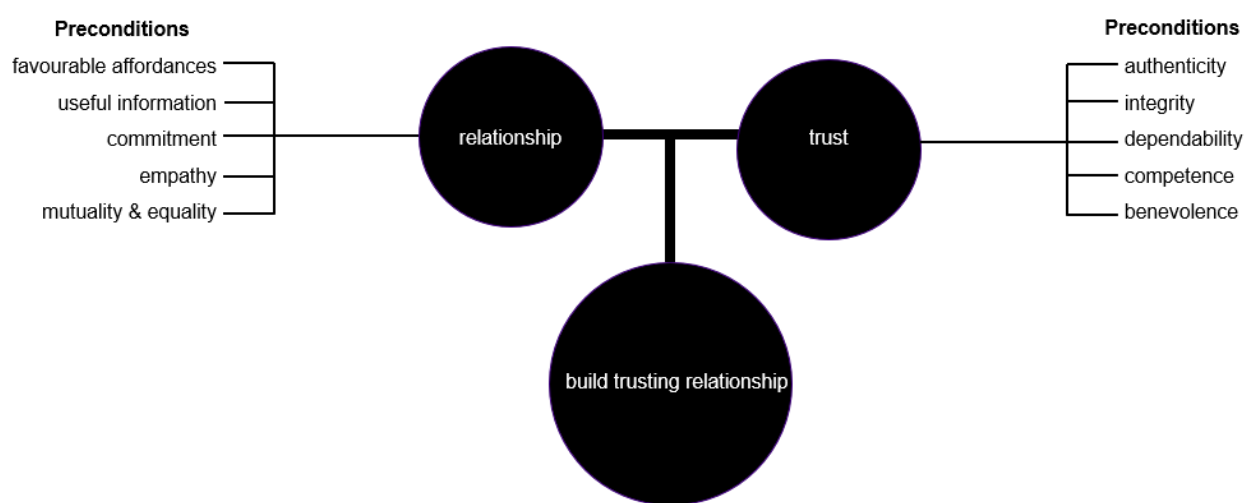
5.2 Theoretical implications

5.2.1   *Relationship building between PRPs and journalists on social media*

The first sub-question posed was: On which channels and how do journalists and PRPs engage and build relationships? The established dialogic features and principles also hold in this study. A good dialogic loop, useful information, favourable affordances of social media, low relational risks, empathy towards each other, mutuality in the interaction, and commitment to it (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Zhou & Xu, 2022) were seen to enable relationship building on social media also between German PRPs and journalists. However, the affordances of social media are not always favourable as the enhanced accessibility, for instance, also caused

spamming, which affected especially journalists negatively. This is in line with Supa (2014) stating that it is indeed easier to reach out and connect over social media and that this is valued by PRPs, but that journalists are afraid to be flooded by messages.

The two dimensions, generation of return visits and conservation of visitors (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Zhou & Xu, 2022), and the dialogic feature propinquity (Kent & Taylor, 2002) turned out to be not important for the relationship building of German journalists and PRPs over social media. This could be due to journalists not checking the profiles of the PRPs and the agencies so that a generation of returning visits or conservation of visitors does not come into play. The focus lies on what currently happens in the feed or the direct messages, which also takes away some of the importance of propinquity. Regarding the used channels Atabek and Alikilic (2020) found WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram to be the most important in Turkey. While those were also relevant in Germany, LinkedIn was seen to be the most important channel.

Looking at Twitter, the findings of this study are in line with Bedi's (2021) findings, showing that symmetric two-way communication is seldomly found on Twitter. Nevertheless, it was found that this type of interaction does happen on LinkedIn in Germany. This way, sending more unfiltered and personal messages, as described by Bajkiewicz et al. (2011), is possible. While they and Supa (2014) reported that especially journalists have mixed feelings about this, this study showed that PRPs are insecure as well. Both groups value personal insights but are afraid to overdo this. An explanation for the struggle to find the right balance between a personal exchange and a pure professional collaboration might be found by looking at the relationship norms by Fiske (1992). Even though there is no money exchange involved in the relationship between PRPs and journalists, these exchanges best fit the relational model of market pricing. Decision-making, for example, is often connected with a cost-benefit analysis. Whether an interaction or relationship is pursued can, for instance, depend on whether both

parties – but especially the journalists – think that the time investment is worth the offered information. Another example is PRPs offering exclusives to enhance their social influence.

Based on this theory, relationship trade-off theory (McGraw & Tetlock, 2005) can also be employed to the case. The decision of a journalist to collaborate with a PRP can seem to them like giving up parts of their independence, which has always been a taboo trade-off for journalists. In establishing a more personal relationship, a non-routine trade-off regarding personal data is added, which makes the decision to engage in relationship building on social media even more complex. This also explains the concerns from both sides and the individual preferences regarding the decision to engage in relationship building over social media or not (McGraw & Tetlock, 2005). This trade-off gets even more complicated by the decision of how much (personal) information is beneficial and when, for instance, spamming starts. While both parties do not consciously aim to spam each other, the personal perception of which trade-off is still acceptable might differ between individuals and between professions (McGraw & Tetlock, 2005; Supa, 2014). Even though the theories on relationship norms and trade-offs stem from marketing research, they add to the understanding of the findings of this study.

In conclusion, the first sub-question can be answered by stating that German PRPs and journalists build relationships over social media, more specifically mostly over LinkedIn. As already established in prior literature (Atabek & Alikilic, 2020; Bajkiewicz et al., 2011; Bedi, 2021; Supa, 2014), the new channels are valued, and all participants see potential for the future. Especially important for relationship building on those channels are interactions, where everyone sees each other as equal, and which content is useful for both parties. More personal insights are valued but a professional standard should be kept. As there are no clear guidelines and everyone has individual preferences about how the perfect approach to relationship building on social media looks, there are still many uncertainties about how to utilize these channels.

5.2.2 Trust building between PRPs and journalists on social media

The second and third sub-questions posed were "Do journalists trust the PRPs they engage with on social media?" and "What are the reasons journalists choose to build or not to build trust with PRPs on social media?" and discuss the issue of trust building between PRPs and journalists on social media. The main research question of this study was based on one of the further research suggestions by Goldstraw (2015), who found that while it is possible to build positive relationships over social media between the two groups, building trust is critical. In this study, it was hypothesised that COVID-19 changed that because no face-to-face meetings were possible – which was the preferred way of building trust in Goldstraw's (2015) study – and the adoption of social media increased. This cannot be seen as confirmed after looking at the interviews. As mentioned, face-to-face meetings are still valued a lot.

Nevertheless, the outcomes of this research contradict Goldstraw's (2015) findings that building trust is not doable or at least extremely hard over social media. All interview participants in this study stated that they do believe that building trust on social media between PRPs and journalists works and some of them even described incidents where they have developed trust through these channels. The explanation of one participant based on Kahneman's (2012) theory that replication creates familiarity, which creates trust might be one reason for this that subconsciously supports the trust building process facilitated by the affordances of social media. Still, there is more to it than pure exposure to specific profiles. The established dimensions of trust, namely competence, dependability, integrity (Blois, 1999), and benevolence (Colquitt & Salam, 2015) hold. All participants agreed that fulfilling these criteria is possible over social media and sometimes even easier than over other channels, which stimulates trust building. Nevertheless, there always are people not complying with these dimensions. However, this was mostly judged as a problem with the individual and not with the channel as such.

Still, the affordances of social media sometimes make such misbehaviour easier. One example mentioned a lot was unauthentic people. Authenticity was not established as a dimension of trust in the theoretical framework but found during the data analysis. Prior literature has already established authenticity as important for trustworthy PR (e.g., Sisson, 2017). That unauthentic online behaviour is problematic was also reported in several studies (Jacobs, 2012; Marwick & Boyd, 2010; Sisson, 2017). However, it was argued that it is hard to stay authentic on social media considering that, for instance, on Twitter different audiences are merged and one tries to satisfy all of them with every post (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Still, it is possible to stay authentic on social media. For example, Audrezet et al. (2020) proposed strategies for influencers about how to do this on Instagram suggesting being transparent and passionate. Describing those strategies in detail would lead too far in this paper but it should be noted that there are ways to present oneself authentically on social media and that this is necessary for building trust between journalists and PRPs on these channels.

Based on these findings, the conceptualisation of trust needs to be adjusted. Looking at the interviews it can be concluded that integrity and authenticity are the basis for trust building. If those are absent it is difficult to be perceived as competent, dependable, and benevolent. The dimensions of trust are closely connected. A visualisation of the adjusted conceptualisation based on the findings of this research can be found in Figure 8.

Figure 8

New conceptualisation of trust based on this study's results
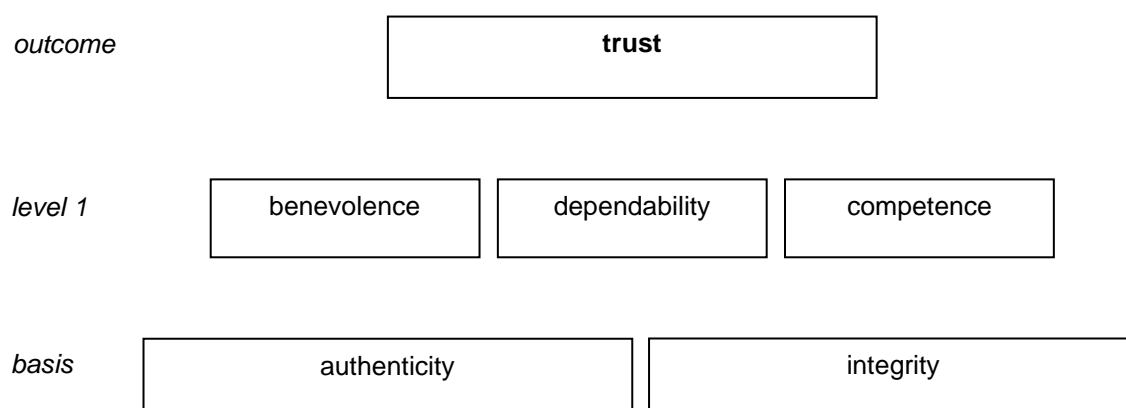
5.3 Strengths, limitations, and further research

Before deriving any practical implications from the presented findings and thereby answering the last sub-question, the limitations, as well as the strengths of this research, need to be considered as both influence the interpretation of the results. Moreover, both hold opportunities for further research adding to the theoretical discussion from above.

As mentioned before, all journalists participating in this study either already had a relationship with a PRP known to the researcher or were at least known to be open to collaborating with PRPs. From the theory discussed in the theoretical framework, it became clear that there are other journalists with a negative attitude toward PRPs seeing themselves as completely independent or even victims of PR (Macnamara, 2015). Having journalists with such an opinion in the sample would have probably led to different results. However, it is difficult to persuade such journalists to participate in a PR-related study, especially if it is "just" a small-scale bachelor thesis. As the sample still includes views from quite different journalists, PRPs, and people with a background in both professions, the bias was minimised. Therefore, those limitations in the sample should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results, but they do not take away their meaningfulness.

The research method, namely semi-structured qualitative interviews, can be judged as a strength of the research. The participants talked freely about their work and experiences and the researcher got to hear detailed descriptions of example situations that were insightful. Still, it needs to be kept in mind that this research is small-scale. To validate the concepts and findings at hand, a quantitative large-scale study could be considered.

The choice to limit the research to one country is a strength as well because compared to other prior studies from different countries differences in social media usage, like the preference for LinkedIn, could be detected that influence trusting relationship building. This means that when the setting of such research is too broad it might influence the interpretation of the results negatively. At the same time, this needs to be kept in mind, as therefore the

generalizability of this research is compromised. As generalizability in qualitative research is complex anyway (Boeije, 2010), this is not seen as a weakness of this research but as an encouragement to conduct other similar studies in different settings. Moreover, performing a study focusing on the differences between journalists covering different topics might be insightful as this research showed differences but due to the small sample size, these could not be validated. Furthermore, shifting the focus from the journalists to the PRPs and whether they trust could also lead to additional findings.

Lastly, more research regarding authenticity as a dimension of trust building in one-on-one interactions on social media and/or authenticity on LinkedIn can be interesting study topics. In this field, many studies focus on authenticity in influencer marketing or of politicians in front of a broad audience but the influence of authenticity in building trusting relationships in a more intimate setting has not been fully studied yet. Those studies could also relate to the conceptualisation of trust building on social media posed in this paper.

5.4 Practical implications

Looking at the results, the theoretical discussion, and considering the strengths and limitations of this study, it can be stated that, in Germany, it is indeed possible to build trusting relationships between journalists and PRPs over social media. This also means for PRPs that following and interacting with journalists on these channels is generally fine. However, it relates to some difficulties and people of both professions seem to hold some insecurities. Those shall be reduced by answering the final sub-question, namely "How do journalists imagine ideal relationship building to work on social media?". This section aims at advising PRPs to help them utilise social media in their daily work for trusting relationship building with journalists.

The most obvious advice to give is to be reliable, punctual, friendly, and respectful when trying to establish a relationship over social media. Even though these points seem natural, they were mentioned in most of the interviews. Moreover, being authentic was stressed by

participants of all groups. Things said or posted should be meant honestly and one should not be led by growth guides but by one's personality and values when deciding what to post or how to interact with somebody on social media. This also applies to the aspect of benevolence on social media. It is not wise as a PRP to just like or share everything a journalist posts because this takes away one's authenticity and portrays the image that something is expected in return, which should never be the case, even if a good relationship is already established. It can also be considered to focus on comments that might even start a meaningful discussion under a post, rather than just taking quick actions like a simple like or emoji reaction.

Furthermore, PRPs need to inform themselves about the journalists they want to contact to make use of the affordances social media offers and not start spamming and annoying the journalists. This applies on several levels. First, journalists only want to be contacted with content that is interesting to them. Thereby, it is important to not misuse social media as a pure pitching instrument. It is okay to contact journalists if there was a suitable post, for instance, but e-mail stays the prevalent channel for pitches. Social media should be mainly used for networking purposes. Moreover, some journalists have personal preferences regarding the channels they want to be contacted on. If one, for example, states in the profile description that this account is private only, this needs to be respected. Of course, this is not always made clear, but as soon as the other party voices such preferences, it should be adhered to. LinkedIn appeared to be a safe channel for professional purposes in this study.

Furthermore, social media should be used for interaction rather than just trying to get own news spread as broad as possible. This includes following other accounts and reacting to postings from others as well as personalised messages rather than copy-pasting. There seem to be differences between journalists covering different topics. In this study economical, tech and lifestyle journalists were fine with interactions over social media, while pure science journalists seemed more sceptical. Lastly, the language should be suitable for the conversational partner.

If a relationship is already established, some jokes or more casual language is fine but in a first exchange, the professionality needs to be kept also on social media.

This leads to the main advice retrieved from the interviews. It was stressed that integrity needs to be kept also in social media interactions. Examples are accepting when a journalist rejects an idea, not using too many buzzwords, not becoming impatient if a journalist does not reply immediately and being professional even if social media tends to create a more personal frame for interactions. Moreover, pretending to be in a closer relationship than is the case influences trusting relationship building negatively.

In conclusion, it seems like PRPs have a good feeling about how to build trusting relationships with journalists over social media. The dos and don'ts mentioned in the interviews were remarkably similar among all participants, no matter which group they belonged to. The only time journalists and PRPs contradicted each other, was when PRPs assumed that it is better to not show their intention directly, while journalists preferred if PRPs come straight to the point of why they think they should connect or interact.

Despite this mostly unanimous view of PRPs and journalists, PRPs seem insecure about how to utilize social media correctly and effectively. Therefore, it is advised to not treat social media as something to do on the side but make a strategic plan when choosing to incorporate it. This plan can include the goals one has on social media, how one wants to present themself, and if it would be wise to have a separate private and a professional account. Such plans can also be made for a whole company or agency so that the employees have consistent guidelines. Then the guidelines must fit the values of the company and the ones of the employees so that an authentic self-presentation is possible. This way, they could take away the uncertainties and insecurities, that are still connected to social media, and help using the potential social media holds regarding trusting relationship building. As there is no clear step-by-step manual for building trusting relationships with journalists on social media, because all of them have

individual preferences, a bit of try and error is part of making an own plan. However, if the PRPs stick to the advice given in this study, the error part should not cause major problems.

5.5 Conclusion

This study aimed to add to the theory about relationship building on social media between journalists and PRPs and to equip PRPs with advice to enhance their media relations and social media skills, which shall make building trusting relationships over these channels easier. It was found that, even though the adoption of social media is high within the two professions and the accessibility has increased, building these relationships remains complex. Still, building relationships over social media between PRPs and journalists was found to be possible in this study. Contrary to prior literature also trust building was found to be achievable if the authenticity and integrity were kept and the parties acted dependable, benevolent, and competent.

Due to a high individuality in the preferences of journalists and PRPs alike regarding social media as well as trust and relationship building, no generally valid step-by-step guide could be concluded. Nevertheless, the importance of social media in this field was demonstrated. This underlines the importance of researching this field further and implementing social media in the worklife of PRPs and journalists to find individual strategies that work for oneself and one's own goals. Some advice, like the separation of private and professional channels or the focus on networking rather than on promoting and pitching, were given. In large-scale follow-up studies, more generalizable guidelines might be found.

For now, the research question, namely "How can public relations professionals use social media to build trusting relationships with journalists in Germany?", can be answered with: By respectfully networking. Even if there is no clear and complete guidance for the "how", based on the results it can be concluded that if a PRP aims for networking and not just pushing their content, and sticks to general behavioural guidelines like authenticity and integrity,

connecting with a journalist over social media is worth a try. It can lead to meaningful interactions that can evoke a trusting relationship, which is beneficial for both parties.

References

Alrajeh, A. M., Fearfull, A., & Monk, E. (2013). Qualitative research process using abductive approach. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/SSRN.2276609

Atabek, U., & Alikilic, O. A. (2020). Online pressrooms: Journalists' expectations from public relations practitioners concerning online media relations. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*, *22*(3), 65–83. https://doi.org/10.21018/RJCPR.2020.3.309

Audrezet, A., de Kerviler, G., & Guidry Moulard, J. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research*, *117*, 557–569. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JBUSRES.2018.07.008

Baerns, B. (1979). Öffentlichkeitsarbeit als Determinante journalistischer Informationsleistungen. Thesen zur realistischeren Beschreibung von Medieninhalten. *Publizistik. Vierteljahreshefte Für Kommunikationsforschung Bonn-Lessenich*, *24*(3), 301–316.

Bailey, J. (2008). First steps in qualitative data analysis: Transcribing. *Family Practice*, *25*(2), 127–131. https://doi.org/10.1093/FAMPRA/CMN003

Bajkiewicz, T. E., Kraus, J. J., & Hong, S. Y. (2011). The impact of newsroom changes and the rise of social media on the practice of media relations. *Public Relations Review*, *37*(3), 329–331. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PUBREV.2011.05.001

Bedi, D. S. (2021). *Contemporary Media Relations: Potential of Twitter in mediating relationships between public relations practitioners and journalists in New Zealand School of Communication Studies faculty of design and creative technologies* [Auckland University of Technology]. https://bit.ly/3bBsazX

Birks, M., Chapman, Y., & Francis, K. (2008). Memoing in qualitative research: Probing data

and processes. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, *13*(1), 68–75.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987107081254

Blois, K. J. (1999). Trust in business to business relationships: An evaluation of its status.
Journal of Management Studies, *36*(2), 197–215. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00133

Boeije, H. (2010). *Analysis in qualitative research*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Broersma, M., & Eldridge II, S. A. (2019). Journalism and social media: Redistribution of
power? *Media and Communication*, *7*(1), 193–197.
https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i1.2048

Chen, Y. R. R., Hung-Baesecke, C. J. F., & Chen, X. (2020). Moving forward the dialogic
theory of public relations: Concepts, methods and applications of organization-public
dialogue. *Public Relations Review*, *46*(1), 101878.
https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PUBREV.2019.101878

Colquitt, J. A., & Salam, S. C. (2015). Foster Trust through Ability, Benevolence, and
Integrity. In E. Locke (Ed.), *Handbook of Principles of Organizational Behavior* (Vol. 2,
pp. 389–404). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119206422.ch21

Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and
evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, *13*(1), 3–21.
https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00988593

Coyne, I. T. (1997). Sampling in qualitative research. Purposeful and theoretical sampling;
merging or clear boundaries? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *26*(3), 623–630.
https://doi.org/10.1046/J.1365-2648.1997.T01-25-00999.X

Cutlip, S. M., Center, A. H., & Broom, G. M. (2006). *Effective public relations* (9th ed.).
Pearson Prentice Hall.

Fiske, A. P. (1992). The four elementary forms of sociality: Framework for a unified theory of social relations. *Psychological Review*, *99*(4), 689–723. https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-295X.99.4.689

Godulla, A. (2017). *Öffentliche Kommunikation im digitalen Zeitalter. Grundlagen und Perspektiven einer integrativen Modellbildung*. Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.5771/0010-3497-2017-4-557

Goldstraw, D. (2015). Can PR practitioners build positive journalist relationships via social media? In E. Ordeix, V. Carayol, & R. Tench (Eds.), *Public Relations, Values and Cultural Identity*. P.I.E. Peter Lang. https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-0352-6527-9

Grunig, J. E. (2009). Paradigms of global public relations in an age of digitalisation. *PRism*, *6*(2), 1–19. https://www.prismjournal.org/uploads/1/2/5/6/125661607/v6-no2-a1.pdf

Hoffjann, O. (2013). Der PR-Journalismus-Diskurs: Verblassender Klassiker oder Evergreen? In S. Huck-Sandhu & O. Hoffjann (Eds.), *UnVergessene Diskurse* (1st ed.). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19121-8_12

Hoffjann, O. (2014). Presse- und Medienarbeit in der Unternehmenskommunikation. In A. Zerfaß & M. Piwinger (Eds.), *Handbuch Unternehmenskommunikation*. Springer Fachmedien. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-8349-4543-3_32

Hon, L. C., & Grunig, J. E. (1999). *Guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations*. https://www.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines_Measuring_Relationships.pdf

Hou, J. Z. (2019). Beyond 'love-hate' stereotype: Reflecting on the new dimension(s) of relationship between public relations and journalism in the 'post-truth' era. In J. Z. Hou (Ed.), *2019 International Association of Media and Communication Research Conference*. https://bit.ly/3nnyu0u

Jacobs, J. (2012). Faking it how to kill a business through astroturfing on social media. *Keeping Good Companies*, *64*(9), 567–570. https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/informit.800555218876654

Jiang, H., Luo, Y., & Kulemeka, O. (2016). Strategic social media use in public relations: professionals' perceived social media impact, leadership behaviors, and work-life conflict . *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *11*(1), 18–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2016.1226842

Kahneman, D. (2012). *Schnelles denken, langsames Denken*. Siedler.

Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (1998). Building dialogic relationships through the World Wide Web. *Public Relations Review*, *24*(3), 321–334. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(99)80143-X

Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2002). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, *28*(1), 21–37. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(02)00108-X

Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2016). From homo economicus to homo dialogicus: Rethinking social media use in CSR communication. *Public Relations Review*, *42*(1), 60–67. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PUBREV.2015.11.003

Kim, J. Y., & Hammick, J. K. (2017). Effects of corporate online communication on attitude and trust: Experimental analysis of Twitter messages. *Public Relations Journal*, *11*(2). https://prjournal.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Twitter-Messaging-2-2.pdf

Ledingham, J. A. (2003). Explicating relationship management as a general theory of public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *15*(2), 181–198. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1502_4

Ledingham, J. A., & Bruning, S. D. (1998). Relationship management in public relations: Dimensions of an organization-public relationship. *Public Relations Review*, *24*(1), 55–

65. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(98)80020-9

Li, C., & Kent, M. L. (2021). Explorations on mediated communication and beyond: Toward a theory of social media. *Public Relations Review*, *47*(5), 102–112. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PUBREV.2021.102112

Macnamara, J. (2014). Journalism-PR relations revisited: The good news, the bad news, and insights into tomorrow's news. *Public Relations Review*, *40*(5), 739–750. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PUBREV.2014.07.002

Macnamara, J. (2015). The continuing convergence of journalism and PR: new insights for ethical practice from a three-country study of senior practitioners. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *93*(1), 118–141. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699015605803

Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2010). Article I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, *13*(1), 114–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313

McGraw, A. P., & Tetlock, P. E. (2005). Taboo trade-offs, relational framing, and the acceptability of exchanges. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *15*(1), 2–15. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327663JCP1501_2

Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, *58*(3), 20–39. https://doi.org/10.2307/1252308

Muck Rack. (2019a). *The state of journalism 2019 How journalists find their news, use social media, and work with PR teams*. https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4272994/State of Journalism 2019 final deck.pdf

Muck Rack. (2019b). *The State of PR 2019 How PR teams are spending their time, money and attention*. https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4272994/Muck Rack State of PR 2019 Survey Results .pdf

Muck Rack. (2020a). *The State of journalism 2020 How journalists source news, use social media, and prefer to engage with PR pros*. https://cdn.ragan.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Muck-Rack-State-of-Journalism-2020.pdf

Muck Rack. (2020b). *The State of PR 2020 How PR teams build relationships, leverage technology and adapt to unpredictable times*. https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4272994/Muck Rack State of PR Survey Results 2020 final.pdf

Muck Rack. (2021a). *The State of Journalism 2021: Reporting, social media habits, and preferences for working with PR in the year of COVID-19*. https://f.hubspotusercontent40.net/hubfs/4272994/State of Journalism 2021/2021 State of Journalism results.pdf

Muck Rack. (2021b). *The state of PR 2021: How PR teams build relationships, measure success, and leverage technology in 2021*. https://bit.ly/3jGrfit

Muck Rack. (2022a). *The State of Journalism 2022 Social media habits, reporting strategies, PR pitching preferences and more*. https://4272994.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/4272994/State of Journalism 2022 -1.pdf

Muck Rack. (2022b). *The State of PR 2022 How PR teams connect with journalists, allocate budget, measure success and more*. https://4272994.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/4272994/State of PR 2022/State of PR 2022_.pdf

Nili, A., Tate, M., & Barros, A. (2017). A critical analysis of inter-coder reliability methods in information systems research. *ACIS 2017*. https://bit.ly/3HXVhJX

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.4770140111

Reed, C., & Thomas, R. (2021). Embracing indeterminacy: On being a liminal professional.

British Journal of Management, *32*(1), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12385

Roth-Cohen, O., & Avidar, R. (2022). A decade of social media in public relations research: A systematic review of published articles in 2010–2020. *Public Relations Review*, *48*(1). https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PUBREV.2022.102154

Schantel, A. (2000). Determination oder Intereffikation?: Eine Metaanalyse der Hypothesen zur PR-Journalismus-Beziehung. *Publizistik*, *45*(1), 70–88. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-000-0051-5

Sisson, D. C. (2017). Inauthentic communication, organization-public relationships, and trust: A content analysis of online astroturfing news coverage. *Public Relations Review*, *43*(4), 788–795. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PUBREV.2017.05.003

Suddaby, R. (2006). From the editors: What grounded theory is not. *Academy of Management Journal*, *49*(4), 633–642. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2006.22083020

Sundstrom, B., & Levenshus, A. B. (2016). The art of engagement: Dialogic strategies on Twitter. *Journal of Communication Management*, *21*(1), 17–33. https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-07-2015-0057

Supa, D. W. (2014). A Qualitative examination of the impact of social media on media relations practice. *Public Relations Journal*, *8*(2). https://prjournal.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2014Supa.pdf

Waters, R. D., Tindall, N. T. J., & Morton, T. S. (2010). Changing the practice of media relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *22*(3), 241–264. https://doi.org/10.1080/10627261003799202

Welch, M. (2006). Rethinking relationship management exploring the dimension of trust. *Journal of Communication Management*, *10*(2), 138–155.

https://doi.org/10.1108/13632540610664706

Wolf, C., & Godulla, A. (2020). Journalismus und Unternehmenskommunikation: Strukturen und Wandel der Zusammenarbeit. In A. Zerfaß, M. Piwinger, & U. Röttger (Eds.), *Handbuch Unternehmenskommunikation*. Springer Gabler. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-03894-6_11-1

Yang, S. U., Kang, M., & Cha, H. (2015). A study on dialogic communication, trust, and distrust: Testing a scale for measuring organization–public dialogic communication (OPDC). *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *27*(2), 175–192. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2015.1007998

Zbikowska, A. (2016). The use of social media by journalists: Guidelines for public relations practitioners. *International Journal of Business and Globalisation*, *17*(3), 299–312. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBG.2016.078847

Zhou, A., & Xu, S. (2022). Digital public relations through the lens of affordances: a conceptual expansion of the dialogic principles. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2022.2046585

Appendix

Appendix A – Search log

Database	Search string	total hits	Remarks
Scholar	Media pitching	63.500	It was just a first search, scrolled through the first pages and read through one but decided to specify a bit
Scholar	PR pitching to media	16.100	again scrolled through the first pages, read through one and then decided to go to Scopus
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY "Media relations"	791	sorted for relevance and scrolled through the first pages as it was still mostly for orientation, found 10 articles that I looked at closer
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY Journalism AND PR	147	7 relevant articles
Snowball Sea	Wolf & Godulla, 2020		2 relevant articles on the basic PR-journalism relationship
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY Journalis* AND "Public Relations" AND "relationship building" AND "social media	no hits	
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY Journalis* AND "Public Relations" AND relationship AND "social media"	15 hits	nothing relevant
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY Journalis* AND ("public relations" OR PR OR "communication specialist" OR publicity OR consultant*) AND relationship* AND ("social media" OR Twitter OR Facebook OR Instagram OR LinkedIn OR Snapchat OR reddit OR TikTok OR Twitch)	25	2 okay articles, one really covering my topic of interest, there'll be indepth reading and source checking
Snowball Sea	checking the sources of Goldstraw (2015)		eight relevant articles on relationship building and trust in PR (backward)
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("professional relationship*" AND ("social media" OR twitter OR linkedin OR facebook OR reddit OR snapchat OR instagram OR twitch OR youtube))	63	nothing relevant, too specific to other professions mostly
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY relationship W/15 building AND ("social media" OR twitter OR linkedin OR facebook OR reddit OR snapchat OR instagram OR twitch OR youtube)	no hits	
Find UT	TITLE-ABS-KEY Journalis* AND ("public relations" OR PR OR "communication specialist" OR publicity OR consultant*) AND relationship* AND ("social media" OR Twitter OR Facebook OR Instagram OR LinkedIn OR Snapchat OR reddit OR TikTok OR Twitch)	187 hits (limit to 2013-2022 because social media didn't exists bevor and peer reviewed)	two relevant
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (build* W/15 trust OR establish W/15 trust OR creat* W/15 trust) AND ("social media" OR Twitter OR Facebook OR Instagram OR LinkedIn OR Snapchat OR TikTik OR Twitch OR reddit OR YouTube OR "social networks" OR platform)	1346 hits	I took this search as I decided to focus more on trust building within relationships because the sources I got from snowball search showed me how many subset relationship building has) decided to specify the search term more
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (build* W/15 trust OR establish W/15 trust OR creat* W/15 trust) AND ("social media" OR Twitter OR Facebook OR Instagram OR LinkedIn OR Snapchat OR TikTik OR Twitch OR reddit OR YouTube OR "social networks") AND communication	217 hits	sorted for relevance and opened two articles but decided to specify even more
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (build* W/15 trust OR establish W/15 trust OR creat* W/15 trust) AND ("social media" OR Twitter OR Facebook OR Instagram OR LinkedIn OR Snapchat OR TikTik OR Twitch OR reddit OR YouTube OR "social networks") AND "interpersonal communication"	12 hits	nothing relevant so I stuck with the two hits from before
Find UT	TITLE-ABS-KEY (build* W/15 trust OR establish W/15 trust OR creat* W/15 trust) AND ("social media" OR Twitter OR Facebook OR Instagram OR LinkedIn OR Snapchat OR TikTik OR Twitch OR reddit OR YouTube OR "social networks") AND "interpersonal communication"	92 hits	one relevant article
Statista	COVID AND social media usage	a whole page for it	an interesting hit but let me to explore older Muck Rack studies which was very insightful (added the ones from 2020 and 2019 because they had slightly different and interesting questions than the most recent one)
Snowball Search	checking the sources of Chen et al. (2020)		six relevant articles
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY(build* W/5 trust OR establish W/5 trust OR creat* W/5 trust) AND ("social media" OR Twitter OR Facebook OR Instagram OR LinkedIn OR Snapchat OR TikTik OR Twitch OR reddit OR YouTube OR "social networks") AND "interpersonal communication"	638 hits then filtered from everything from 2016 to ensure a good enough social media adoption and limited to German and English results --> 384 results	I wanted to check if the search string with way too many hits can be narrowed down more effecientyl if I change the proximity sorted for relevance, 8 articles for further inspection
Snowball Sea	Bajkiewicz et al. 2011	60 hits	5 relevant articles (I did forward search)
Snowball Search	Supa 2014	33 hits	4 relevant articles (I did forward search)
Snowball Search	Supa 2013	1 hit	none relevant
Snowball Search	Avery et al 2010	90 hits	5 relevant (forward)
Snowball Search	(Zbikowska, 2016)	1 hit	one relevant article (forward)
Snowball Search	Macnamara 2015	82 hits	4 relevant articles (I did forward search)
Snowball Search	Goldstraw 2015	5 hits	1 relevant (forward)
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (journalis* AND ("public?relation*" OR pr OR "communication specialist*" OR "strategic communicat*") AND (relationship OR "relation* build*" OR "relation* maintain*"))	66 hits	2 relevant
Web of Science	journalis* AND ("public relation*" OR pr OR "communication specialist*" OR "strategic communicat*") AND (relationship OR "relation* build*" OR "relation* maintain*")	195 hits	I reduced the original hits by language (English), year until 2016 to only include recent insights also in social media, and fields (comm., business, social science interdischiplinary, management, psychology multidisciplinary, public administration, sociology) 6 relevant
Web of Science	Journalis* AND ("public relations" OR PR OR "communication specialist" OR publicity OR consultant*) AND relationship* AND ("social media" OR Twitter OR Facebook OR Instagram OR LinkedIn OR Snapchat OR reddit OR TikTok OR Twitch)	70 hits	4 relevant

Source	Search/Method	Hits	Result
Public Relations Journal	Journalist	4	nothing new and relevant
Public Relations Journal	Relationship	43 hits	1 new and relevant
Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly	browsed current issues (from September 2020 on)		nothing relevant
Public Relations Review	browsed Media Relations collection	17 hits	1 relevant
Public Relations Review	browed PR and Engagement collection	14 hits	nothing relevant
Journal of Public Relations Research	browsing the latest and the most important articles	24 hits	two relevant
Journal of Communication Management	search for relationship and limited it from 2016 on	151 hits	1 relevant
international journal of strategic communication	go through newest and most important articles	30 hits	1 relevant
Public Relations Inquiry	going through newest and most important articles	36 hits	nothing relevant
Journal of Communication	going through all articles fromm 2020 on	63 hits	nothing relevant
Journalism Studies	searching for Public Relations and social media and limit from 2016 on	337 hits	1 relevant
	checked Mendeley suggestions	5 hits	nothing relevant
Snowball Search	Bedi 2021		I looked backwards, saw many that I already included, opened 3 new ones
Scopus	"relationship norms"	137 hits	
Scopus	"relationship norms" AND public relations"	1 hit	was interesting but I decided that it would be more helpful at this stage to have the original article about relationship norms. Mirjam gave me the authors already with her feedback for my theoretical framework and this way I found the article by Fiske
Scopus	"relationship trade-offs"	20 hits	most were not that relevant but I read one article in detail that explained the theory of relationship trade-offs well based on Fiske that was really helpful
Scopus	authenticity AND "social media" AND trust	67 hits	I looked closed at 6 of them
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (authenticity AND influence AND trust AND ("direct messages" OR posts OR "social media" OR linkedin OR twitter))	15 hits	looked at one in more detail
Scopus	"self-presentation" AND "social media" AND authenticity	26 hits	looked at five in more detail
Scopus	"self-presentation" AND ("social media" OR Twitter OR LinkedIn) AND authenticity AND trust	1 hit	I already had this one open
Scopus	"self presentation" AND "social media" AND relationship AND authenticity	5 hits	nothing new and relevant
newsletter			I got the information that the Muck Rack studies 2022 were published so included the insights

Appendix B – Consent form

Dear _____

Thank you for considering participating in our study. In this study, I aim to investigate how social media influences the relationship and trust building of journalists and public relations professionals.

To do this, I would like to ask you a few questions regarding your professional social media usage and your perception of the relationship and trust building process.

Preparation

Before the interview, I will send you the main questions. Thus, you are able to briefly look at the different questions. Please carefully read all of them. In case you feel uncomfortable answering one of them, please let me know.

Interview

The interview itself will take place in the form of a video call. To participate in this call, please join through this link. If you are unable to join the call or would prefer a different application, please let me know beforehand. To make sure this call goes as smoothly as possible, please prepare the following things:

- Make sure your available on _____
- Find a quiet area where you have an internet connection and a laptop or desktop computer to yourself. Use a microphone-enabled device. You don't need a webcam, necessarily, although it would be nice.
- Make sure you have access to the web application at _____

Consent

To make sure you can make an informed decision about your participation in the interview, please take a look at the following information.

- This study is aimed at German journalists and public relations professionals and investigates if and how social media influences relationship and trust building.
- I would like to record the interview to make our analysis easier. I will ask you at the beginning of the interview if you agree with that. This recording will be stored for a maximum of 30 days.
- The interview will be transcribed as text with all personal information removed, and recordings of the interviews will be destroyed afterwards.
- The information provided during the interview will be stored on the personal computer of the researcher, in a Google Drive folder only accessible by the researcher and on the servers of the used (video)calling service.
- All information that can be used to identify you, such as [e.g., your name or your workplace], will not be shared.
- If you would like to withdraw from the study or rectify your provided information, please contact us through the contact information provided at the bottom of this email.
- This research project has been reviewed and approved by the BMS Ethics Committee.
- If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Secretary of the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences at the University of Twente by ethicscommittee-bms@utwente.nl.

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**Yes**	**No**
Taking part in the study		
I have read and understood the study information dated 04.04.2022, or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	□	□
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.	□	□
I understand that taking part in the study involves audio and/or video recording of myself.	□	□

At the beginning of the interview, I will ask you if all information is clear and if you consent to the things mentioned above.

I hope all information is clear! If you have any further questions, don't hesitate to contact me with the contact information provided at the bottom of this email.

Kind regards,

Lisa Marie Scholten – l.m.scholten@student.utwente.nl

04.04.2022 _L. M. Scholten_

Signature and date   Signature and date

Researcher   Participant

This is the original version, sent to all participants

Sehr geehrte/r _____

Vielen Dank, dass Sie über eine Teilnahme an meiner Studie nachdenken. In dieser Studie möchte ich untersuchen, ob und wie sich der Gebrauch von Social Media im beruflichen Kontext auf den Beziehungs- und Vertrauensaufbau zwischen Journalisten und PRlern auswirkt.

Zu diesem Zweck möchte ich Ihnen einige Fragen zu Ihrer beruflichen Social Media Nutzung und Ihrer Wahrnehmung des Beziehugs- und Vertrauensaufbaus stellen.

Vorbereitung

Vor dem Interview sende ich Ihnen die wichtigsten Fragen. So können Sie kurz auf die verschiedenen Fragen eingehen. Bitte lesen Sie alle sorgfältig durch. Falls Sie sich bei der Beantwortung einer dieser Fragen unwohl fühlen, teilen Sie mir dies bitte mit.

Interview

Das Interview selbst findet in Form eines Videoanrufs statt. Um an diesem Aufruf teilzunehmen, melden Sie sich bitte über den unten genannten Link an. Wenn Sie nicht an der Konferenz teilnehmen können oder eine andere Anwendung bevorzugen, teilen Sie mir dies bitte im Voraus mit. Um sicherzustellen, dass dieser Anruf so reibungslos wie möglich verläuft, bereiten Sie bitte die folgenden Dinge vor:

- Stellen Sie sicher, dass Sie am _____ (vereinbarter Termin) verfügbar sind
- Suchen Sie sich einen ruhigen Ort, an dem Sie über eine Internetverbindung und einen Laptop oder Desktop-Computer verfügen. Verwenden Sie ein mikrofonfähiges Gerät. Sie brauchen nicht unbedingt eine Webcam, allerding wäre es schön.
- Stellen Sie sicher, dass Sie unter _____(Link zur Anwendung) Zugriff auf die Webanwendung haben

Zustimmung

Um sicherzustellen, dass Sie eine fundierte Entscheidung über Ihre Teilnahme am Interview treffen können, lesen Sie bitte die folgenden Informationen.

- Diese Studie richtet sich an deutsche PRler und Journalisten und untersucht, wie sich Social Media auf den Beziehungs- und Vertrauensaufbau auswirkt.
- Ich möchte das Interview aufzeichnen, um die Analyse zu vereinfachen. Ich werden Sie zu Beginn des Interviews fragen, ob Sie damit einverstanden sind. Diese Aufzeichnung wird maximal 30 Tage gespeichert.
- Das Interview wird als Text transkribiert, wobei alle persönlich identifizierenden Informationen entfernt werden. Die Aufzeichnungen der Interviews werden anschließend vernichtet.
- Die während des Interviews bereitgestellten Informationen werden auf dem PC des Forscher, in einem Google Drive-Ordner, auf den nur der Forscher zugreifen kann, und auf den Servern des verwendeten Videoanruf Dienstes gespeichert.
- Alle Informationen, die zur Identifizierung von Ihnen verwendet werden können, (wie z.B. Ihr Name oder Ihr Arbeitgeber) werden nicht mit Externen geteilt.
- Wenn Sie von der Studie zurücktreten oder Ihre angegebenen Informationen korrigieren möchten, kontaktieren Sie mich bitte über die Kontaktinformationen am Ende dieser E-Mail.
- Dieses Forschungsprojekt wurde von der BMS-Ethikkommission der University of Twente geprüft und genehmigt.
- Wenn Sie Fragen zu Ihren Rechten als Forschungsteilnehmer haben oder Informationen erhalten, Fragen stellen oder Bedenken bezüglich dieser Studie mit einer anderen Person als dem Forscher diskutieren möchten, wenden Sie sich bitte an das Sekretariat der Ethikkommission der Fakultät von Verhaltens-, Management- und Sozialwissenschaften an der University of Twente unter ethicscommittee-bms@utwente.nl.

Bitte kreuzen Sie die entsprechenden Kästchen an   **Ja   Nein**

Teilnahme an der Studie

Ich habe die Studieninformationen vom 04.04.2022 gelesen und verstanden,   □   □

oder sie wurden mir vorgelesen. Ich konnte Fragen zur Studie stellen und

meine Fragen wurden zu meiner Zufriedenheit beantwortet.

Ich bin freiwillig damit einverstanden, an dieser Studie teilzunehmen, und   □   □

verstehe, dass ich die Beantwortung von Fragen ablehnen und mich jederzeit

ohne Angabe von Gründen von der Studie zurückziehen kann.

Ich verstehe, dass die Teilnahme an der Studie eine Audio- und / oder   □   □

Videoaufzeichnung von mir beinhaltet.

Zu Beginn des Interviews werde ich Sie fragen, ob alle Informationen klar sind und ob Sie

den oben genannten Dingen zustimmen.

Ich hoffe, dass alle Informationen klar sind! Wenn Sie weitere Fragen haben, zögern Sie

nicht, mich mit den Kontaktinformationen am Ende dieser E-Mail zu kontaktieren.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Lisa Scholten l.m.scholten@student.utwente.nl

04.04.2022   *L. M. Scholten*

Unterschrift und Datum Researcher   Unterschrift und Datum Teilnehmer

Appendix C – Outline of the interview questions

This is the English version, the interviews took place in German; this is the first outline, questions about, for instance, authenticity were added during the data collection process because of what was found in the analysis, which happened at the same time

Research question: *How can public relations professionals use social media to build trusting*

relationships with journalists in Germany?

Intro:

Can you shortly introduce yourself?

> *I need profession (which profession are you currently working in and do you have a*
>
> *background in the other one?), professional experience in years, age*

Content:

1) On which channels and how do journalists and PRPs engage and build relationships?

- Which social media platforms do you use for your work?
  - For what do you use these platforms? *(affordances of social media)*
- Have you had contact over social media with a PRP?
  - Who initiated the contact? *(mutuality)*
  - What was it about? *(propinquity → did they talk about things that were yet to be worked on together, did they engage in it)*
  - Did you feel it was helpful for your work? *(usefulness of information)*
    - Did you achieve your goal? (exchange of information, interview, article, …)
  - Was it an ongoing conversation or rather a short interaction? (is there an exchange every now and then, do you follow each other, ...?) *(dialogic loop)*
  - Did you care if the interaction stopped or went on? *(commitment)*
    - Why (not)?
    - Did you feel like the conversational partner was committed?
  - Did you feel like you were seen as equal in the interaction? *(mutuality)*
  - Did you put yourself in the other person's shoes during the interaction? *(empathy)*
  - Do you feel there is risk involved in interacting with PRPs/journalists on social media? *(risk)*

For journalists only:

- Do you check out the profiles of PRPs or agencies on social media? *(generation of return visits)*
  - If yes, on which platforms?

- o What are you looking for?
  - General information about the agency
  - Information about clients
  - Information about the trustworthiness of the agency
  - Information about the way and style of cooperation
  - Opinions of the agency on specific topics
- o Is it important to you how those profiles look, how they are built, how the navigation is, …? (*conservation of visitors*)

Concluding question part one: Do you feel like you (can) form relationships with journalists / PRPs on social media?

→ If there are journalists/PRPs not interacting with PRPs at all on social media, I'll ask why and go to question 4 then

> 2) *Do journalists trust the PRPs they engage with on social media?*

- Do you feel like PRPs treat you fairly during these interactions? / Do you think journalists feel fairly treated by you in these interactions? (examples of unfair action: posting information needed for publication publicly on social media, spamming and stalking, …) *(Integrity)*
- Can you rely on the PRPs with whom you interact over social media? Do you have the feeling you can rely on those more than on others with whom you haven't interacted on social media before? / Do you have the feeling journalists rely on you (more) when/ after you interacted on social media? (e.g., because you are easier accessible and the relationship is more personal, people are more likely to stick to what they promise) *(Dependability)*
- Do you feel like PRPs you interact with on social media consider your side and needs? Do you think they do that more/less than PRPs that don't interact with you over social media? (e.g., stick to your focus topics, repost or react to your postings as well, …) *(Benevolence)*
- Do you feel confident in the skills of PRPs you form relationships with over social media? More/less than with others? *(Competence)*
- Does any of this differ depending on the platform you are on or the content that is shared?

Conclusion part 2:

Would you say, you trust PRPs you engage with on social media? More/less than PRPs with whom you only interact over other channels? //Do you think journalists trust you when interacting with you over social media? More than when only interacting over other channels?

Do you think building trust is possible over social media?

> 3) *What do you think are the reasons you choose to build or not build trust with PRPs on social media? / What do you think are journalists' reasons for building or not building trust via social media?*

4) *How do journalists imagine ideal relationship building to work on social media? / How do you think journalists imagine ideal relationship building to work on social media?*

- Are there preferred channels
- Preferred ways of reaching out?
- Preferred content or reasons for interaction?
- 3 do's & don'ts

Ending:

Is there anything else you would like to add or mention that hasn't been addressed so far?

Original German version

Forschungsfrage: Können PRler soziale Medien nutzen, um vertrauensvolle Beziehungen zu Journalisten aufzubauen, und wenn ja, wie?

Die kursiven englischen Begriffe sind die Konzepte aus dem theoretical framework, auf die

sich die Frage bezieht. Frage 1-4 würden vorher an die Teilnehmer geschickt (also nur die

Hauptfragen, nicht die Unterpunkte)

Einleitung:

Können Sie sich kurz vorstellen?

Ich benötige Beruf (derzeitiger Beruf und eventueller Hintergrund als PRler/Journalist), Berufserfahrung in Jahren, Alter

Inhalt:

1) Auf welchen Kanälen und wie treten Journalisten und PRler in Kontakt und bauen

Beziehungen zu auf?

- Welche Social-Media-Plattformen nutzen Sie für Ihre Arbeit?
  - Wofür nutzen Sie diese Plattformen? *(affordances of social media)*
- Hatten Sie schon einmal über soziale Medien Kontakt zu einem PRler/Journalisten?
  - Wer hat den Kontakt initiiert? *(mutuality)*
  - Worum ging es dabei? *(propinquity → did they talk about things that were yet to be worked on together, did they engage in it)*
  - Hatten Sie das Gefühl, dass es für Ihre Arbeit hilfreich war? *(usefulness of information)*
    - Kam es zum gewünschten Ziel? (z.B. Artikel, Interview, regelmäßiger Infoausstausch, …)

- War es ein fortlaufendes Gespräch oder eher eine kurze Interaktion? (gibt es immer mal wieder einen Austausch, folgen Sie einander, …?) *(dialogic loop)*
- War es Ihnen wichtig, ob die Interaktion aufhörte oder fortgesetzt/wieder aufgenommen wurde? *(commitment)*
  - Warum (nicht)?
  - Hatten Sie das Gefühl, dass es dem Gesprächspartner wichtig war?
- Hatten Sie das Gefühl, dass die Interaktion auf Augenhöhe stattfand? *(mutuality)*
- Haben Sie sich während der Interaktion in den anderen hineinversetzt? *(empathy)*
- Haben Sie das Gefühl, dass die Interaktion mit PRlern/Journalisten in den sozialen Medien mit Risiken verbunden ist? *(risk)*

Nur für Journalisten:

- Schauen Sie sich die Profile von PRlern oder Agenturen in den sozialen Medien an? *(generation of return visits)*
  - Wenn ja, auf welchen Plattformen?
  - Wonach suchen Sie?
    - Allgemeine Infos über die Agentur und ihre Struktur
    - Hinweise zum Kundenportfolio
    - Hinweise zur Vertrauenswürdigkeit
    - Informationen darüber wie ich mit der Agentur zusammenarbeiten kann…
    - Standpunkte der Agentur zu bestimmten Themen
  - Ist es für Sie wichtig, wie diese Profile aussehen?

Abschließende Frage Teil eins: Haben Sie das Gefühl, dass Sie über soziale Medien Beziehungen zu Journalisten/PRler aufbauen (können)?

Wenn es Journalisten/PRler gibt, die überhaupt nicht mit PRlern/Journalisten in sozialen Medien interagieren, frage ich nach dem Grund und gehe dann zu Frage 4 über

2) Vertrauen Journalisten den PRlern, mit denen sie in den sozialen Medien

zusammenarbeiten?

- Haben Sie das Gefühl, dass PRler Sie bei diesen Interaktionen fair behandeln? / Glauben Sie, dass Journalisten sich von Ihnen bei diesen Interaktionen fair behandelt fühlen? (Beispiele für unfaire Handlungen: Veröffentlichung von Informationen, die zur journalistischen Veröffentlichung benötigt werden, in sozialen Medien posten; Spamming und Stalking, ...) *(Integrity)*
- Können Sie sich auf die PRler verlassen, mit denen Sie über soziale Medien interagieren? Haben Sie das Gefühl, dass Sie sich auf diese Personen eher verlassen können als auf andere, mit denen Sie zuvor noch nicht über soziale Medien interagiert haben? / Haben Sie das Gefühl, dass Journalisten sich (mehr) auf Sie verlassen, wenn/ nachdem Sie in den sozialen Medien interagiert haben? (z. B. weil Sie leichter

erreichbar sind und die Beziehung persönlicher ist, halten die Leute eher, was sie versprechen) *(dependablilty)*

- Haben Sie das Gefühl, dass PRler, mit denen Sie über soziale Medien interagieren, auf Ihre Seite und Bedürfnisse Rücksicht nehmen? Glauben Sie, dass sie das mehr oder weniger tun als PRler, die nicht über soziale Medien mit Ihnen interagieren? (z. B. bleiben sie bei Ihren Schwerpunktthemen, posten oder reagieren auch auf Ihre Beiträge, ...) / Nehmen Sie auf Social Media Rücksicht auf die Bedürfnisse von Journalisten? Ist das leichter/schwerer als auf anderen channeln? *(benevolence)*
- Haben Sie Vertrauen in die Fähigkeiten der PRler, mit denen Sie über soziale Medien Beziehungen aufbauen? Mehr/weniger als bei anderen? / Haben Sie das Gefühl, dass Journalisten, mit denen Sie über Social Media interagieren, (mehr) in Ihre Fähigkeiten vertrauen? *(competence)*

- Wird ihre Einschätzung durch die Plattform oder den geteilten Inhalt beeinflusst? (LinkedIn Kommentar glaubwürdiger als Tweet, sie vertrauen grundsätzlich dem PRler, aber ein Post außerhalb der Expertise oder ein retweet scheint z.B. weniger vertrauenswürdig)

Schlussfolgerung Teil 2:

Würden Sie sagen, dass Sie PRPs, mit denen Sie über soziale Medien in Kontakt treten, vertrauen? Mehr/weniger als PRPs, mit denen Sie nur über andere Kanäle interagieren? //Glauben Sie, dass Journalisten Ihnen vertrauen, wenn Sie mit Ihnen über soziale Medien interagieren? Mehr als wenn Sie nur über andere Kanäle interagieren?

Glauben Sie, dass eine Vertrauensbildung über soziale Medien möglich ist?

3) Was sind die Gründe für ihre Entscheidung, Vertrauen zu PRlern in sozialen Medien aufzubauen oder nicht aufzubauen? / Was glauben Sie, sind die Gründe von Journalisten Vertrauen über Social Media aufzubauen oder nicht aufzubauen?

4) Wie stellen sich Journalisten den idealen Beziehungsaufbau in sozialen Medien vor? / Wie glauben Sie, stellen sich Journalisten den idealen Beziehungsaufbau in sozialen Medien vor?

- Gibt es bevorzugte Kanäle?
- Bevorzugte Wege der Kontaktaufnahme?
- Bevorzugte Inhalte oder Gründe für die Interaktion?
- 3 Do's & Don'ts

Zum Schluss:

Gibt es noch etwas, das Sie hinzufügen oder erwähnen möchten, das bisher noch nicht angesprochen wurde?

Appendix D – Example e-mail to the participants

Hallo xx,

ich bin Lisa. Erst einmal vielen Dank für's Teilnehmen an meiner Studie, das ist eine große Hilfe!

Was die Interviewdaten angeht, bin ich recht flexibel. Nennen Sie mir gerne einen Tag in den nächsten drei Wochen, an dem Sie eine halbe Stunde Zeit für mich haben. Wenn wir einen Termin haben, sende ich Ihnen einen Einladungslink zu einer online Konferenz zu.

Damit Sie sich schon etwas auf das Interview vorbereiten können, hier einmal die Leitfragen:

1) Auf welchen Kanälen und wie treten Journalisten und PRler in Kontakt und bauen Beziehungen zu auf?

2) Vertrauen Journalisten den PRlern, mit denen sie in den sozialen Medien zusammenarbeiten?

3) Was sind die Gründe für ihre Entscheidung, Vertrauen zu PRlern in sozialen Medien aufzubauen oder nicht aufzubauen? / Was glauben Sie, sind die Gründe von Journalisten Vertrauen über Social Media aufzubauen oder nicht aufzubauen?

4) Wie stellen sich Journalisten den idealen Beziehungsaufbau in sozialen Medien vor? / Wie glauben Sie, stellen sich Journalisten den idealen Beziehungsaufbau in sozialen Medien vor?

Das Interview soll aber recht frei ablaufen, also erzählen Sie gerne von Ihren persönlichen Erfahrungen, die Sie in Ihrem Beruf auf Social Media, besonders in Hinblick auf die Zusammenarbeit mit PRlern/Journalisten gesammelt haben. Ganz wichtig ist, dass es bei dieser Studie keine falschen Antworten gibt.

Damit ich das Interview verwenden darf, müssen Sie eine Zustimmungserklärung unterschreiben. Diese habe ich angehangen.

Wenn Sie noch Fragen zu dem Interview oder der Zustimmungserklärung haben, lassen Sie es mich gerne wissen!

Viele Grüße und nochmal vielen Dank

Lisa

Appendix E – First version of the codebook

Main Code	Subcode	Meaning	Quote
Channel			
	Social media	Which social media channel do they use? Also used if it otherwise doesn't get clear from the code that this concerns social media.	„Ach so ja natürlich Twitter benutze ich auch" – B2
	Use of social media for	e.g., for work or private purposes	„Ganz viel Kollegen sind auf Twitter unterwegs, um alles Mögliche aufzusaugen." – J1
	Traditional channels	Use of e-mail, phone or face to face meetings	„Würde aber schon sagen, dass der größte Austausch schon noch über E-Mail oder auch über Telefon stattfand und stattfindet." – B2
Relationships			
	Relationship positive	The described action has positive influences on the relationship development, or the person says something positive about developing relationships This is treated as a sentiment code	„Definitiv. Also ich halte Social Media immer noch für eine der der Besten Möglichkeiten, um das zu machen aufgrund der schieren Größe dieser Netzwerke." – B1
	Relationship negative	The described action has negative influences on the relationship development, or the person says something negative about developing relationships This is treated as a sentiment code	„Ich glaube, dass so überhaupt keine Sympathie aufkommen kann, sondern nur nach dem Motto „What?". Ich glaube, das ist dann wahrscheinlich eher dieser Empathie und dieser empfundenen Sympathie hinderlich." – B1
	Contact	Do they have contact with journalists/PRPs? Who initiated it, is it mutual?	„Wir hatten ja das nebenbei Projekt, wo wir Gründerinnen und Gründer und ihren Familien und Freunden helfen sich in der Region niederzulassen und ich glaube der Tagesspiegel hatte mich darüber angeschrieben und der MDR glaube ich auch." – B1
	Content	What is the interaction about?	„Also Details für zukünftige Gespräche klärt man dann doch noch über E-Mail, aber so ist es erstmal ein bisschen unverbindlicher." – B2

Dialogic loop	Is it an ongoing or one-time interaction?	„Ne, das ist kurz und nicht mehr. Also irgendwie 2 Nachrichten pro Person und dann ist ja gut." – B2
Commitment	Was it important for the involved parties to keep the interaction going?	„Ich eine der wichtigsten Sachen im Bereich Social Media ist, dass man dieses konstante Hintergrundrauschen braucht." – P3
Empathy	Do they see the other party as a person with feelings and needs? Is there a sympathy?	„Aber lange Rede kurzer Sinn, es führt dazu dass wir uns glaub ich gegenseitig hassen auf LinkedIn." – B1
Risk	Does the interaction on social media pose any threats which influence relationship building?	„Außerdem kann es sein, dass du dich in deinem Habitus vertust." – P1
Affordances of social media positive	Opportunities that social media offers like reachability, personal interaction, …	„Auf ihrem Social Media Profil und das hilft mir auch dabei vielleicht ein besseres Bild davon zu bekommen […]" – B2
Affordances of social media negative	Threats that social media poses like being overwhelmed with information, being contacted by the wrong people, …	„Wie gesagt, ich bin kein großer Freund mehr von von Social Media, das dauert dann alles lang und dann denk ich immer, macht mir lieber eine Mail, da steht alles drin." – B2

Trust

Trust positive	The described action has positive influences on the trust development, or the person says something positive about developing trust This is treated as a sentiment code	„Ich glaube in dieser Wahrhaftigkeit und dieser Ehrlichkeit und Transparenz sind 2 wesentliche Faktoren, um diesen Vertrauens Aufbau Prozess […]" – B1
Trust negative	The described action has negative influences on the trust development, or the person says something negative about developing trust This is treated as a sentiment code	„Du hast halt dann schnell mit Verkäufer zu tun und die verkaufen die Halt voll viel so und das versuchen sie dann auch irgendwie auf Social Media zu machen." – B2
Integrity	People either behave fair, choose the right tone of voice or they spam, and behave unfairly, …	„Freundlich sein. Immer ganz wichtig also freundlich und respektvoll, ganz klar die Absichten auch sagen, um was es geht. Also auch Ehrlichkeit. Und auch Geduld ist glaube ich auch wichtig." – B2

Dependability	People stick to agreements, are on time, … or not	„Also ich glaube, es wird sogar mehr eingehalten. Mein Bauchgefühl sagt, das wird sogar mehr eingehalten, weil es eine persönliche Beziehung ist, die du da nutzt also gesetzt den Fall du gehst auf die persönliche Ebene." – P1
Benevolence	If people are interested in the needs of the other party and support them.	„Da wiederum also ich bin Riesenfan von der berühmten Win-Win-Situation. Ich meine, wenn ein Journalist etwas veröffentlicht, dann gibt es heute auch ganz neue Möglichkeiten sich dafür auch erkenntlich zu zeigen." – B1
Competence	If the other party on social media is believed to be competent and if social media influences this perception	„Du hast halt professionelles Zeug und ganz viele Leute, die einfach die ganze Zeit rumschreien und gefährliches Halbwissen haben und die glauben nur weil sie laut sind, dass sie irgendwie Recht haben." – B2
Authenticity	If people are honest or only show the best version of themselves	„Also ich persönlich würde es nicht machen, einfach weil ich weiß, dass Social Media ist einfach nur das ist die beste Seite, die du von dir geben kannst." – B2

Advice

Do's	Personal advice on how to build trusting relationships on social media	„Meine das was du sagst aus vollem Herzen. Keine Floskeln, sondern meine das wirklich." – P1
Don'ts	Personal advice on how not to behave	„ […] weil wenn du anfängst, Leute zu nerven, dann geht es ganz schnell, dass das irgendwie anstrengend wird und dann so eine Beziehung irgendwie keinen Spaß mehr." – B2

Appendix F – Final version of the codebook

Main Code	Subcode	Meaning	Quote
Sample		All codes are a sample description to make it easier to check for differences between the participants based on their background	

	Age
	Journalist
	   Economic
	   Technical
	    /science
	   Lifestyle
	   Big outlet
	   Small outlet
	PRP
	   Agency
	   Company
	PRP &
	Journalist		

Channel			
	Social Media	Which social media channel do they use? Also used if it otherwise doesn't get clear from the code that this concerns social media.	„Ach so ja natürlich Twitter benutze ich auch" – B2
	Purpose of social media use	e.g., for work or private purposes The focus lies on the reasons for the usage (the why) not the how.	„Ganz viel Kollegen sind auf Twitter unterwegs, um alles Mögliche aufzusaugen." – J1
	Other channels	Use of e-mail, phone or face to face meetings	„Würde aber schon sagen, dass der größte Austausch schon noch über E-Mail oder auch über Telefon stattfand und stattfindet." – B2
Relationships			
	Relationship positive	The described action has positive influences on the relationship development, or the person says something positive about developing relationships This is treated as a sentiment code	„Definitiv. Also ich halte Social Media immer noch für eine der der Besten Möglichkeiten, um das zu machen aufgrund der schieren Größe dieser Netzwerke." – B1

Relationship negative	The described action has negative influences on the relationship development, or the person says something negative about developing relationships This is treated as a sentiment code	„Ich glaube, dass so überhaupt keine Sympathie aufkommen kann, sondern nur nach dem Motto „What?". Ich glaube, das ist dann wahrscheinlich eher dieser Empathie und dieser empfundenen Sympathie hinderlich." – B1
Mutuality	Do they have contact with journalists/PRPs? Who initiated it, and is it mutually?	„Wir hatten ja das nebenbei Projekt, wo wir Gründerinnen und Gründer und ihren Familien und Freunden helfen sich in der Region niederzulassen und ich glaube der Tagesspiegel hatte mich darüber angeschrieben und der MDR glaube ich auch." – B1
Usefulness of information	What is the interaction about and was it useful? Did they achieve a shared goal (like an article) or was it uninteresting information?	„Also Details für zukünftige Gespräche klärt man dann doch noch über E-Mail, aber so ist es erstmal ein bisschen unverbindlicher." – B2
Dialogic loop	Is it an ongoing or one-time interaction?	„Ne, das ist kurz und nicht mehr. Also irgendwie 2 Nachrichten pro Person und dann ist ja gut." – B2
Commitment	Was it important for the involved parties to keep the interaction going?	„Ich eine der wichtigsten Sachen im Bereich Social Media ist, dass man dieses konstante Hintergrundrauschen braucht." – P3
Empathy	Do they see the other party as a person with feelings and needs? Is there a sympathy?	„Aber lange Rede kurzer Sinn, es führt dazu dass wir uns glaub ich gegenseitig hassen auf LinkedIn." – B1
Risk	Does the interaction on social media pose any threats which influence relationship building?	„Außerdem kann es sein, dass du dich in deinem Habitus vertust." – P1
Affordances of social media	Opportunities that social media offers like reachability, and personal interaction, … as well as threats that social media poses like being overwhelmed with information, and being contacted by the wrong people, … Positive and negative will be differentiated by the codes relationship positive/negative	„Auf ihrem Social Media Profil und das hilft mir auch dabei vielleicht ein besseres Bild davon zu bekommen […]" – B2 „Wie gesagt, ich bin kein großer Freund mehr von von Social Media, das dauert dann alles lang und dann denk ich immer, macht mir lieber eine Mail, da steht alles drin." – B2

Trust			
	Trust positive	The described action has positive influences on the trust development, or the person says something positive about developing trust This is treated as a sentiment code	„Ich glaube in dieser Wahrhaftigkeit und dieser Ehrlichkeit und Transparenz sind 2 wesentliche Faktoren, um diesen Vertrauens Aufbau Prozess […]" – B1
	Trust negative	The described action has negative influences on the trust development, or the person says something negative about developing trust This is treated as a sentiment code	„Du hast halt dann schnell mit Verkäufer zu tun und die verkaufen die Halt voll viel so und das versuchen sie dann auch irgendwie auf Social Media zu machen." – B2
	Integrity	People either behave fair, choose the right tone of voice or they spam, and behave unfairly, …	„Freundlich sein. Immer ganz wichtig also freundlich und respektvoll, ganz klar die Absichten auch sagen, um was es geht. Also auch Ehrlichkeit. Und auch Geduld ist glaube ich auch wichtig." – B2
	Dependability	People stick to agreements, are on time, … or not	„Also ich glaube, es wird sogar mehr eingehalten. Mein Bauchgefühl sagt, das wird sogar mehr eingehalten, weil es eine persönliche Beziehung ist, die du da nutzt also gesetzt den Fall du gehst auf die persönliche Ebene." – P1
	Benevolence	If people are interested in the needs of the other party and support them.	„Da wiederum also ich bin Riesenfan von der berühmten Win-Win-Situation. Ich meine, wenn ein Journalist etwas veröffentlicht, dann gibt es heute auch ganz neue Möglichkeiten sich dafür auch erkenntlich zu zeigen." – B1
	Competence	If the other party on social media is believed to be competent and if social media influences this perception	„Du hast halt professionelles Zeug und ganz viele Leute, die einfach die ganze Zeit rumschreien und gefährliches Halbwissen haben und die glauben nur weil sie laut sind, dass sie irgendwie Recht haben." – B2
	Authenticity	If people are honest or only show the best version of themselves	„Also ich persönlich würde es nicht machen, einfach weil ich weiß, dass Social Media ist einfach nur das ist die beste Seite, die du von dir geben kannst." – B2

Advice			
	Do's	Personal advice on how to build trusting relationships on social media	„Meine das was du sagst aus vollem Herzen. Keine Floskeln, sondern meine das wirklich." – P1
	Don'ts	Personal advice on how not to behave	„ […] weil wenn du anfängst, Leute zu nerven, dann geht es ganz schnell, dass das irgendwie anstrengend wird und dann so eine Beziehung irgendwie keinen Spaß mehr." – B2