

Sarah Hazen  
BA (Hons) Public Relations

A photograph of a paved road curving through a landscape. In the foreground, the asphalt of the road is visible with a white dashed line. The road leads towards a valley filled with dry, golden-brown grass. In the background, dark, rugged mountains rise against a clear blue sky.

# Public Relations: exploring strategic communication in a changed media landscape

## Executive Summary

This study explores and analyses the changing media landscape, its effects on press, journalism and the news agenda, and subsequently, how those effects are changing the practice of media relations and the roles and relationships of public relations. Research addressed the characteristics of the new media landscape, identified current PR practices and explored new practices and relationships that could be more conducive for effective strategic communication online.

Methods of analysis included an in-depth review of surrounding literature and adapting a qualitative, Delphi Method research approach to bring the study to life with real-world expertise, and also, to provide a forecast of future outcomes for the PR industry.

Uncovered in the literature and Delphi research, there is evidence that the media landscape is changing the roles and relationships of current PR practice, and through the inherently social and communal developments online, these changes, when met with an appropriate knowledge of the media ecosystem, forecast an opportunistic time for the progression of public relations. Specifically, potential areas of growth include media fragmenting further, creating an opportunity to target specific audiences and demographics, and also PR professionals positioning themselves as a more direct, organisational voice, without the need of a media intermediary.

## Acknowledgments

William Shakespeare once said, “I can no other answer make, but, thanks, and thanks.”

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my dissertation supervisor, Paul Elmer, who frequently and promptly helped me out of the thick of the woods and back onto the right path. Also, to The Panel of Experts, who for ethical reasons cannot be named. I knew some of you personally, some professionally and, some of you, I have never met at all. It takes a selfless person to give up their time to indulge a student, so to you, a very sincere thank you. I couldn’t have done it without your support.

To Paul, for being my very own (UK) English and grammar spell checker, and for teaching me that dashes actually have a purpose - not just for smiley faces :-)

To my older, wiser sister, Jacqueline. You have a really big brain - thanks for letting me pick it.

To the 3rd floor library study-buddy-team! Sam B, Sam H, Rachel, Emma and Adam - thanks for making this whole experience bearable and for always helping me see the light at the end of the tunnel.

# Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review .....	6
Introduction	7
Public Relations and Media Relations	7
The Evolution of the Media Landscape	10
Laggards of Innovators?	15
Old Strategy and Changed Strategy	18
Conclusions	24
Methodology .....	25
Looking into the Oracle	26
Methodology Considerations	28
Number of Rounds	29
Panel of Experts	29
The Conclusive 10 Delphi Stages	31
Stage 1: Delphi Research Design	31
Stage 2: Panel of Experts	31
Stage 3: Design Round 1 Questionnaire	33
Round 1 Questionnaire	33
Stage 4: Pilot Questionnaire	34
Stage 5: Disperse and Analyse Round 1	35
Stage 6: Design Round 2 Questionnaire	35

Round 2 Questionnaire	35
Stage 7: Iteration of Round 1 Questionnaire	38
Stage 8: Disperse and Analyse Round 2	39
Stage 9: Iteration of Round 2 Questionnaire	39
Stage 10: Conclusion of Delphi	39
Limitations	39
<b>Delphi Results.....</b>	<b>41</b>
Introduction	42
Result's Key	44
Objective 1 Results	45
Objective 2 Results	52
Objective 3 Results	54
Objective 4 Results	57
<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>58</b>
Introduction	59
Objective 1 Discussion	59
Objective 2 Discussion	62
Objective 3 Discussion	64
Objective 4 Discussion	67
Conclusion	68
<b>Conclusion and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>76</b>

# Tables and Graphs

## Literature Review

Figure 1: New Media Ecosystem from We Media 12

Figure 2: ‘Prism of Media’ from Exploring Public Relations 20

Figure 3: Author’s Adaption of the New Media Ecosystem 20

## Methodology

Figure 4: Panel of Experts 32

## Delphi Results

Figure 5: Result’s Key 44

Figure 6- 12: Objective 1 Results: Mind Maps 45-51

Figure 13- 14: Objective 2 Results: Mind Maps 52-53

Figure 15- 17: Objective 3 Results: Mind Maps 54-56

Figure 16: Objective 4 Results: Mind Map 57

# PG. 1 Introduction

## Introduction

In the space of a little over 50 years, the world has witnessed an evolution of communication as well as a phenomenon of social media. From an era dominated by newspapers and radio broadcasts, the media environment has crescendoed via the creation of the World Wide Web into a fast paced, highly vivid, instant and interactive landscape. While the population going into retirement can remember a time when media was constrained to magazines, newspapers and possibly two or three basic black and white channels, a little over half a century later, Generation Z's 'digital natives' are traveling with the internet in their pockets. The technological advances of the 21st century have changed the way the world connects, consumes, digests and re-narrates information.

Social media lies at the heart of the new media environment, reinvented into a number of forms including text, audio, visual and video and syndicated through different forums including web blogs, Wikis, social networks, video sharing, message boards, podcasts and RSS feeds. These social tools have become a part of everyday life in the developed world, and in the developing world to a lesser degree, and are affecting the way in which people interact with one another, with a community, with a business and even with a government.

The changing media landscape has been a discussion popular in public relations literature and practice for over a decade. As the landscape evolves, strategic

communication is experiencing a rapid and significant transformation which has been argued to be both adopted, but also neglected and ignored by active public relations practitioners. The advances of technology have been reasoned by those in the industry to have strengthened the core roles and functions of public relations practice as a communicator, but as the paradigm shift in online communication changes from a traditional model of an authoritative, top-down, centralized, one-way communication to an interconnected, democratized, two-way symmetric discussion, some evidence suggests that practitioners are reluctant or slow to adapt their traditional methods to digital strategies (Porter et al., 2001; White & Raman, 1999).

The decline of a communications hierarchy has lead to the decline of the clear, delineated roles of producers and consumers, the media and its audience – each a crucial element in the practice of media relations. Surrounding literature shows a lack of consistency in defining media, its power and its role in a developing communications ecosystem, indicating a significant need for analysis that focuses on the changing roles played out in this evolving media landscape.

The above description paints a picture of weakness and strength, challenge and opportunity for the PR industry, and the definite need for further exploration into the changing media ecosystem than has already been researched and discussed.

With a goal to add greater and improved understanding to the wider investigation and the PR body of knowledge, this study aims to explore the changing media landscape, its effects on press, journalism and the news agenda, and subsequently, how those effects are changing the practice of media relations and the role of public relations within it.

The objectives of the study are:

- 1) To define media today and identify the key developments, trends and effects of the changed media landscape including the speed and availability of information, the democratisation of the media, citizenship journalism, ways of news-gathering and the shift of power in setting the news agenda.
- 2) To research traditional practices and theories of media relations and their level of purpose and effectiveness in the changed media landscape.
- 3) To explore new techniques and practices of media relations more suited to the new media ecosystem.
- 4) To investigate the possibility of a changed relationship between journalists and PR practitioners as a result of the new media landscape.

The nature of the problem to firstly, explore, and secondly, predict, will be accomplished by the adoption of a phenomenological research approach with an aim to illuminate from real-life experience, to give meaning to and interpret the phenomena, and also by the nature of the problem, predict future outcomes.

The Delphi research method was chosen for its appropriateness to explore a body of knowledge, experience and expertise on the phenomenon of the changing media landscape, with the goal of greater understanding on the adoption, impact and considerations of its effects on public relations practice. Gathering information and data from an elite panel of experts, the Delphi method is based on the filtering and shaping of informed knowledge for situations in which there is some evidence, but not yet complete knowledge, with the greater objective to structure insight for an improved understanding.

Firstly, to begin the exploration, the characteristics of the evolving media landscape, the roles of a PR practitioner and the traditional and advanced practices of media relations must be put into deeper context.

# PG.6 Literature Review

7. Introduction

7. Public Relations and Media Relations

10. The Evolution of the Media Landscape

15. Laggards of Innovators?

18. Old Strategy and Changed Strategy

24. Conclusions

## Introduction

Since the creation of the printing press, the media landscape has been evolving and the role of a PR practitioner has been progressing. As the landscape continues to evolve and more and more digital and online platforms are created, strategic communication is experiencing a significant transformation which could weaken or strengthen the PR industry's position in the media, serve as a challenge or become a platform for opportunity.

In relation to the evolving media landscape, this chapter will explore surrounding literature in three main areas: media relations and the roles and relationships of a PR professional within it; the evolving media landscape, its characteristics and the subsequent effects on the mainstream media; and traditional and current public relations practices and their adaptation to new media channels.

## Public Relations and Media Relations

The definition of media relations is generally focused on three elements: the mass media, PR practitioners and journalists. Supa and Zoch (2009) define it as "the systematic (Kendall, 1996) planned (Lesley, 1991), purposeful (Miller, 1984) and mutually beneficially relationship (Guth and Marsh, 2003) between journalists in the mass media and the public relations practitioners. Its goal is to establish trust and understanding and respect between the two groups (Lattimore, et. al, 2004.)"

Media relations is said to be centered around the symbiotic relationship between a PR practitioner and the media most often being described as a journalist, but also, reporter, editor, producer and writer. The majority of the terms used for 'media' are those which uphold a position of power and, ultimately, could be labeled as gatekeepers in the information supply chain. For example: "Media relations involves managing relationships with the media – all the writers, editors and producers who contribute to and control what appears in the print, broadcast and online media" (Tench and Yeomans, 2006: 312).

Zoch and Supa (2009) found that in media relations the relationship specifically between a practitioner and a journalist has been described in two ways: what makes something newsworthy; and the public relations, journalist relationship. In 2005, Zoch and Supa identified eight factors that made something newsworthy and of interest to journalists: immediacy, timeliness, localness, human interest, cultural proximity, unexpectedness, prominence and significance. However, while these are all attributes to the context of information and the manner in which it is sent, they noted that some studies have focused on the medium itself as the key to making something attractive enough for journalists to disseminate. For example, Baus (1954) believed it was more dependent on the communication vehicle and how the message was being tailored to meet the needs of the medium's readers at that time.

Though the industries have become better connected through technological advances, Zoch and Supa (2009) recently suggested that the relationship between journalists and practitioners has remained static for over 23 years due to lack of effort to understand each other's roles. Literature suggests that in order to practice effective media relations, practitioners must not only provide valuable information, but also practice "meaningful" publicity with the ideal of "quality over quantity."

Although the practice of media relations has been coined and defined in many different ways and with many different corresponding media 'players', literature always concludes that media relations is about mutually beneficial relationships. There has been little academic literature which encompasses a wider definition of *media*, one which could define the broadened scope of what it means to be a publisher in the world of social media and subsequently, what that means for media relations practice.

Literature suggests that there is a significant interest from PR practitioners in understanding how media relations is practiced, whether it is a strategic exploration of "why" or a tactical approach of "how to." Supa and Zoch (2009) suggest that in media relations literature it would be easier to explain what not to do, as opposed to best methods of practice since there is not one definitive answer or a "one size fits all" strategy. Therefore, for the most effective media relations, practitioners should always keep abreast of their external environment,

keep the public interest in mind at all times and, most importantly, keep the changing roles of the media and the media landscape under close observation.

## The Evolution of the Media Landscape

It would be an understatement to suggest that the changed media landscape and the creation of Social Media has not affected traditional forms of media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and TV. The decline in printed newspaper circulations began to accelerate in 2003 and have since only declined further and faster. In 2009, figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulations revealed that 24 out of the top 25 newspapers in America had declined in circulation while newspaper websites attracted more than 73 million unique visitors on average each month (Arango, 2009).

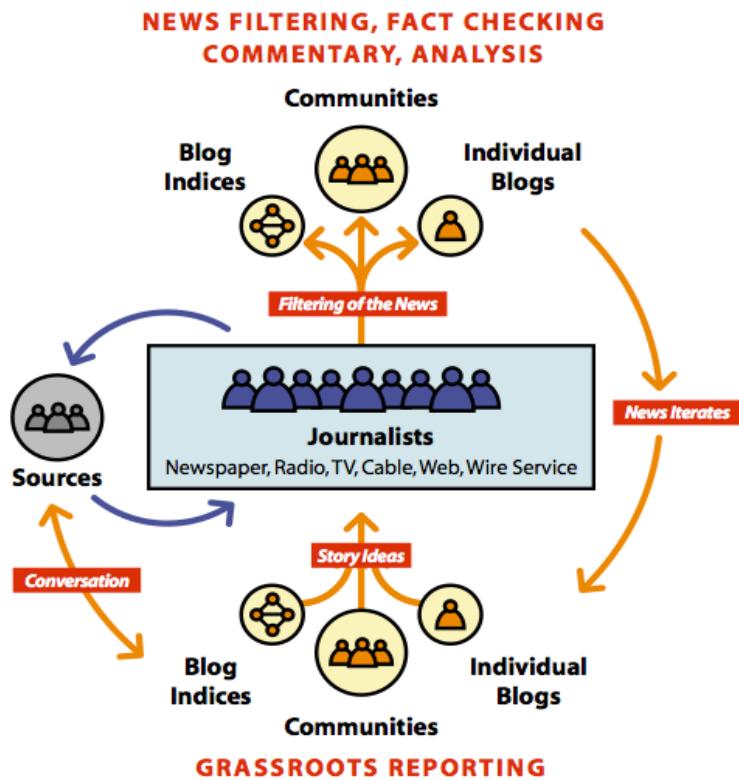
The new media environment has disrupted and intercepted the ‘traditional’ role of the media as a gatekeeper and undermined theories of press ownership. The new media landscape has increased the volume and speed of information that can be gathered, retrieved and transmitted; given greater opportunity for interactivity between a producer and consumer; created a platform that supports community development online and fragmented audiences; and arguably most importantly, has allowed the consumer to become the producer. Information on the real-time World Wide Web can be published instantly, beating the slower mainstream press infrastructure, which therefore, rivals their position and challenges their role as a gatekeeper.

A.J. Libeling, an American journalist, said, "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one" (ThinkExist.com, 2010). Now, everyone has the possibility to 'own' and therefore, produce and create. Literature has suggested that the growth of social media has shifted the power of the press to the public as a creator and influencer of the news agenda. The public's ability to create their own content and input news has formed an online phenomenon called citizenship journalism. The Media Centre describes the movement saying, "The venerable profession of journalism finds itself at a rare moment in history where, for the first time, its hegemony as gatekeeper of the news is threatened by not just new technology and competitors but, potentially, by the audience it serves" (2003:7). It is suggested that the online movement has contributed to the democratization of media, giving the power of publishing and Libeling's freedom of the press to the public. The literature also cites that the audience is increasingly becoming stakeholders in the news process through their interactivity and response with media outlets including comments and reviews, types of interactivity that can have the potential to either under mind the media's agenda or add value to it.

In Figure 1, We Media's adaptation of the new media ecosystem demonstrates where news is being sourced from, and in the new media ecosystem the variety of outlets including social networking sites that journalists are news gathering from. Statistical evidence from PR Week stated that 70% of journalists were using social networking to assist in reporting compared to only 41% in 2008

(Maul, 2009). The European Digital Journalism survey paralleled PR Week's initial statistic, further highlighting the transformation of the way news-gathering and content is produced through different social mediums and the high demand from the public for more output, faster. With almost a quarter of journalists regularly quoting bloggers and a third admitting to using blogs to source stories (PR Network, 2009), the pressure to produce more content is evident by the growing amount of journalists outsourcing information from online social media tools such as wikis, web blogs, online videos and social networking communities such as Twitter.

Figure 1

*Figure 1.2 - The Emerging Media Ecosystem*

Source: Based on "Blogosphere: the emerging Media Ecosystem" by John Hiler, Microcontent News

In light of this, the media's agenda has been disrupted by the change of the landscape. In traditional media, for example, when a PR practitioner sends a press release to a journalist, it is up to the journalist to decide whether it is newsworthy – the same with journalists and their editors. If there is not enough space in print media or enough time for a broadcast, the hierarchy of what is important is decided by the media institution. In the new media landscape, however, the question is not “why publish?” it is “why not?” Clay Shirky, author of *Here Comes Everybody*, notes that in this media era, personal communication and publishing overlap, “one result is to break the older pattern of professional filtering of the good from the mediocre before publishing; now such filtering is increasingly social and happens after the fact.” (2008:81) The Annual Report of American Journalism: The State of News Media highlighted that there is also a growing trend that the public is gravitating toward individual writers and voices, and away from journalistic institutions (2009). Though it would appear that these trends as an effect of the new media system could prove what E. Katz (1993) hypothesized as the death of journalism, there has been research to suggest that the public still quote and source information from such institutions or government bodies as opposed to other social media sources unaffiliated with a professional organization, especially in a crisis situation (Liu, 2009).

The continual shift of power in the online world highlights what is arguably one of the most significant changes of the media landscape for the PR industry – the changing relationship between the media and the audience. The traditional

model of a hierarchy of information and totalitarian control of the mainstream press has shifted in the new media ecosystem and the power of the public has increasingly become more apparent and impressionable on the media.

This changing relationship between the traditional model of producer and consumer in the digital domain suggests that these changes will ultimately affect media relations between public relations practitioners, the press and the audience. The decline of a communication's hierarchy has lead to the decline of a clear, defining role of the producer and consumer, and subsequently, the power, control and influence they each have on the information supply chain. Therefore, it could be hypothesized that the target and focus of a media relations strategy could shift in two ways:

- 1.) While it has been argued that in an era where social media could develop as an integral role in the agenda-building and setting process, it would be expected and required of practitioners to engage in social media, which could therefore, increase the desire of a journalist to work with a practitioner (R.W. Lariscy et al., 2009);
- 2.) or if the audience has become a powerful influencer and an opinion shaper to a target media outlet, it would also suggest that PR practitioners would be more inclined to move to the centre of the emerging landscape, and understand the influencers of their target media as opposed to focusing on the target media outlet itself (PR Network, 2009).

## Laggards or Innovators?

The development and evolution of communication technology has empowered businesses, individuals and communities with media opportunities to strategically communicate to a wide variety of internal and external audiences. It has changed the way businesses speak to their employees, customers and other stakeholders, and the movement has not gone unnoticed. This progression has been termed the ‘groundswell’ by Li Charlene and Josh Bernoff (2009:9), which they define as “a social trend in which people use technologies to get the things they need from each other, rather than institutions like corporations.” They deduce that there are five objectives companies can pursue in the groundswell. These are: researching to better understand their customer; to spread messages about their company; energizing their brand through enthusiastic customers; helping customers help each other; and integrating customers into the way the business works. In their book, *The Groundswell*, Charlene and Bernoff describe one of the most common problems with organisations utilizing the groundswell is that organisations know they should be utilizing social media, but other than competitive motives, they don’t know why (2009:68-69). It is a fear that Elmer-Dewitt describes as “the rush to get online, to avoid being left behind in the online revolution” (Elmer-Dewitt, 2006: 14). This fear has played a double-edged sword in the PR industry’s adaption to the new media landscape, both hindering and encouraging practitioners integration into the digital world.

Many in the field of PR have criticised the industry for a lack of uptake and for being too slow to adapt to the changing media landscape due to fears of changing technology and the landscape's disownment of the traditional methods of top-down PR practice. A prominent media strategist recently blogged that the PR industry is "woefully slow (or maybe fearful) at learning and developing expertise about latest developments in today's online world" (Henderson, 2009). In the past, practitioners have been labeled "laggards" for their slow adaption, and literature has also found fault in their practice which was claimed to not be embracing the Web to its full potential for research, planning or evaluation (Porter et al., 2001; White & Raman, 1999). Literature has shown that the "fear factor" is playing a key role in driving communication's teams to use digital media for campaigns" (PR Week, 2009).

Fears aside, surrounding literature has shown doubt that the revolution of the online world will be a hinderance to PR practice, and instead, the impact should be "for the better" (Marlow, 2001:xi), "offer great opportunities", "deploy the creative spark" (Middleberg, 2001:1) and be the "perfect communications tool to target audiences of one" (Haig, 2000:6). Many practitioners believe that the skills required for effective media relations and PR campaigns are complimented by the characteristics of the new media landscape. Kathy Cripps, President of the Council of Public Relations Firms, said, "Public Relations has always been rooted in earned media, conversation and influence, which are the essence of social media." (2009:3) These affirmations were also reflected in the Council of Public

Relations Firm's 2009 survey of practitioners, with a quarter optimistic about opportunities and growth for public relations in online media. But while it would appear that many in the field of public relations are confident in the PR industry and its embrace of social media, survey results also suggest the opposite: while "fifty-two percent of PR executives agreed that their 'firms are doing a good job identifying the specific interests of bloggers and sending them relevant information,' 65% of bloggers disagree with that notion" (Council of PR Firms, 2009).

In an international survey by Wright and Henson (2009) regarding public relations practitioners' knowledge and practice in the field of social media, results suggested meaningful and statistical gaps which existed between what practitioners say is happening in terms of social media, and what they say should be happening. The study indicated that practitioners believed that more activity should be happening than is currently being practiced in each category of social media, which were ranked from what they thought were the most important to the least: search engine marketing, blogs, social networks, video sharing and forums or message boards. Research from the population of 574 practitioners also found that the use of traditional media, such as newspapers, magazines and television, as a news source for PR practitioners was more prevalent than it is for the general population, but for PR news, practitioners were more likely to read blogs or message forums. When the Council of Public Relations Firms surveyed 285 practitioners, they found 79% believed that social media was the campaign

element to have the most potential for growth in 2009, although similarly to Wright and Henson's study, over half felt technology is underused in public relations campaigns (2009).

Looking back at PR practice in history, practitioners have championed the 'new wave' media, and have so far, been successful in embracing and utilizing print media, radio and also broadcast. With the evolution of digital media, however, there is still a debate to whether practitioners are embracing and adopting effective digital communication to position themselves as strategic, innovative online communicators. Though many in the industry believe it has "the potential to be a key public relations tool" (Callison, 2003), research would also suggest that the perceived value is greater than the actual practice and that new technology is not being used to its maximum capability due to the fear of adoption of new strategy and reliance on traditional media and traditional methods as a priority.

## Old Strategy and Changed Strategy

Whether the PR industry as a whole will be perceived as embracing the new media landscape, reluctantly adopting it or ignoring it, is yet to be determined. However, motives aside, since the flourish of new media and the dawn of the Internet, many in the PR field have attempted to adapt their communication strategies to the new media landscape. Just as mainstream press has evolved, the planned strategies, tactics and methods of communication have developed

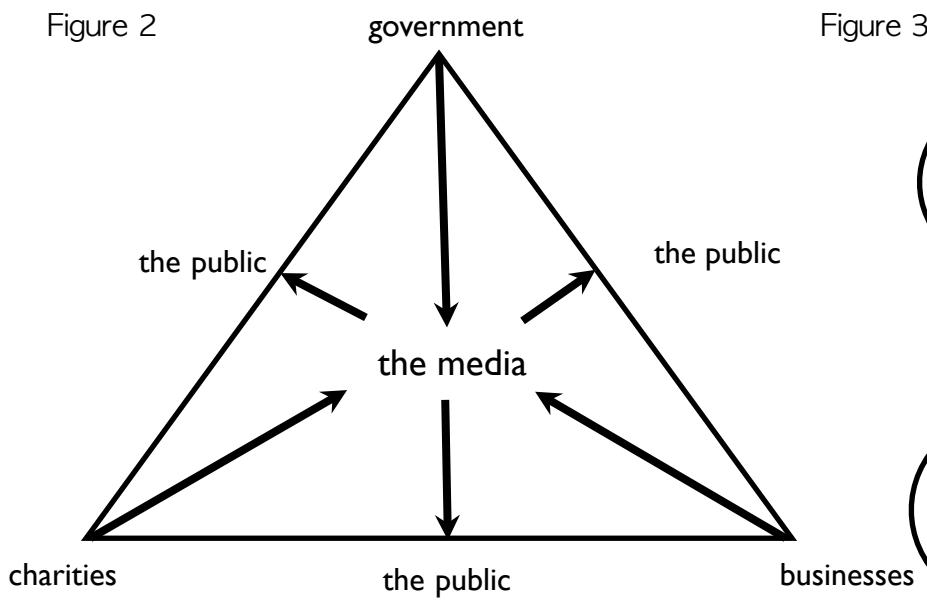
and progressed in media relations practice, notably sidelining snail mail, for a fax, for an email and now for real time, virtual conversations.

Scoble and Israel (2006) suggest that in today's business environment there are two types of PR practice or 'schools'— one which focuses on the conventional or standard strategies, and one which has adapted to ideologies of conversation within the new media ecosystem. The first is a school of "command and control" which "argues that companies should keep communicating in the same manner and with the same rules that they have always practiced," while the second encompasses a new strategy of "listen and participate." (2006:100)

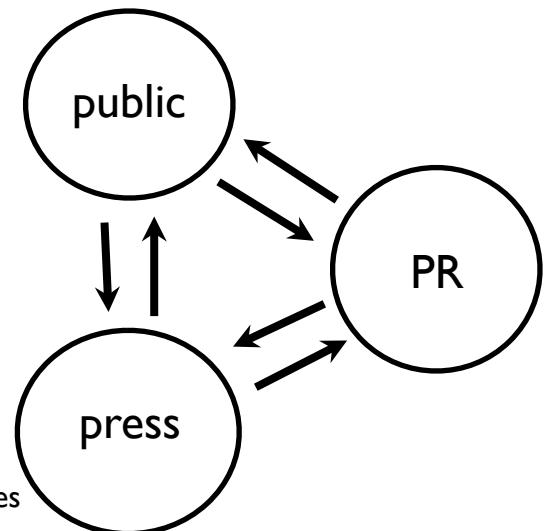
As an example of what could be argued as tactics of the 'first school', *The Public Relations Handbook*, published almost 10 years ago, describes media relations as an interchangeable term with public relations— a reputation enhancer that influences a target audience (Theaker, 2001). When describing what media relations consists of, the text is weighted heavily with words such as 'press release', 'the 5 w's', 'press conferences,' 'media briefings' and 'photo opportunities.' Most of the common tactical methods described in media relations literature, focusing heavily on the press release and pitch strategy, can be described in comparison to Grunig and Hunt's two-way asymmetric communication theory which is "rooted in persuasive communications and aims to generate agreement between the organization and its audience by bringing them around to the organisations way of thinking" (2006:146). With this model,

feedback is used not to alter the organization's position, but to help modify communications in a more influential way (Tench and Yeomans, 2006).

Comparatively, the new media landscape is focused on discussion, community and interaction, which if applied to theory, would be more similar to a mixed motive, two-way model (Tench and Yeomans, 2006). To compare, below [Figure 2] is a 'prism of media' from *Exploring Public Relations*, describing the 'media' as a medium for editorial endorsement which is the "the defining characteristic of media relations" (Tench and Yeomans, 2006:317). Taking into account the relationship between the media and the public as one-way asymmetric, and then comparing it to an adaption of the new media ecosystem [Figure 3], one theme that occurs within the diagrams is the apparent dialogue and interaction between groups and third parties in comparison. (Figure 2 is the author's adaptation of We Media's New Media Ecosystem)



Communications through the prism of the media (source: Bailey 2005a)



As an effect from new trends in the new media ecosystem, many practitioners have adapted their practices to better suit the new media environment and meet the needs of journalists in a virtual landscape. The development of online press rooms and media specific web sites have extended the reach of practitioners assisting journalists in news gathering. It was revealed that in 2001, the majority of Fortune 500 Company web sites had a specific 'news room' or 'press room' dedicated to assisting news journalists in gathering information— though the study also found that higher-ranking companies were more often to have a dedicated website or page for this material which could suggest that smaller business would not have the infrastructure to maintain or support the material (Callison, 2003).

In a similar study conducted a few years later in 2006, analyzing 120 virtual news rooms in large businesses in Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Singapore, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States, paralleled the outcome from Callison's study observing the importance of virtual news rooms in the new media landscape to meet journalists' informational needs. The outcome of this study however, focusing more on content verses a presence, highlighted the lack of maintenance of each site, and suggested that the material was unreliable and out-of-date, therefore wasn't an ideal use of virtual newsrooms as an effective tool for media relations ( R.W. Lariscy et al., 2009.)

With the flourish of new media, tactics other than the virtual news room have been explored, adopted and, in some cases, strengthened by the media landscape. An article from ComPRhension summed up the practicality and complimentary aspects of applying public relations practice to the expansion of conversation through online mediums, questioning: “In this new era of ‘citizen journalism,’ where anyone can spread information about your brand, is client relations quickly becoming the new media relations?” (Church, 2008)

The first rule for ‘effective media relations’ from *Exploring Public Relations* is: “Act as a service to the media: answer questions, return phone calls before the deadline, provide information and context” (Tench and Yeomans, 2006:318). All these attributes – usually in reference to press – could help argue that customer relations practices are an effective tool for PR campaigns directed towards the online audience. Ferguson (1984:160,162) originally argued for relationships to be the central unit of study in public relations, which has been researched and applied to PR theory from Broom, Casey, and Ritchey as well as Grunig’s theory of dialogue between practitioners and their publics to nurture and sustain long-term behavioral relationships.

Using the new media landscape as a platform for reputation and relationship management, American cable giant, Comcast, is one example of hypothetically turning client relations into media relations. Using Twitter to seek out complaints, Comcast engages with unsatisfied customers to help find a solution (Siegler,

2009). The outcome has been a flourish of media attention for their pioneering efforts, but while in this case it has proved to be a strategic success, the outcome does not distinguish whether these tactics should be adopted by PR practitioners or if it is an area that should remain dominated by customer relations' departments.

*Public Relations as Relationship Management* argues that “traditional mass media models lack the level of sophistication needed to understand, develop, maintain, grow and nurture relationships between organisations and their publics,” (2000:199) but if adapted to the new media landscape, perhaps this area of PR could be adopted into mass media strategy. For example, the Dimensions of Communication Behavior Model could be applied to the Comcast case study, where public relations practitioners can visualize the relationship through different mediums of communication, “focusing on interrelationships between involvement, control and temporality so that adjustments can be made as necessary for the relationship management.” (2000:200)

Though there have been changes and adaptations to tailor ‘traditional’ media relations strategies to an online world, literature suggests that while the new media landscape has changed the interaction and movement of conversation between an organization, the media and the audience, practitioners are still not adapting their tactics to be two-way (Kirat, 2006). Kirat (2006) noted, “Most public relations activities on the Internet are limited to using it as yet another channel for

the one-way, top-down publishing of information under the traditional formula of mass communication" and that these activities were also not strategic, measurable or targeted to a specific audience. Literature also suggests that the Internet has "magnified" the weaknesses of the PR Industry to meet the needs of the media, which could impact and reflect poorly on an organisations' brand and reputation as a reliable source (Alfonso and Miguel, 2006).

## Conclusion

It is clear from the surrounding literature that the changing media landscape suggests that there will be new practices, roles and relationships in PR - and equally, that this study and these changes are exceptionally relevant to the PR industry and worth investigating in more depth. The online revolution has reconstructed strategic communications and as the media landscape evolves and shifts onto more and more digital platforms, it would suggest that both the dynamics, purpose and tactics of public relations practice is changing, and that the relationships linking these are refocusing.

To examine the issues and findings identified in the literature in a truer context, the following chapter will map out the research approach to helping uncover a better understanding of public relations in a changing media environment.

PG.25

# Methodology

26. Looking into the Oracle

31. The Conclusive 10 Delphi Stages

39. Limitations

## Looking within the Oracle

The nature of the problem to firstly, explore, and secondly, predict, was actualized by adopting a phenomenological research approach with an aim to illuminate from real-life experience, to give meaning to and interpret the phenomena, and also by the nature of the problem, predict future repercussions. The Delphi method was chosen for its appropriateness to explore a body of knowledge, experience and expertise on the phenomenon of the changing media landscape, with the goal of a greater understanding on the adoption, impact and considerations of its effects on public relations practice.

The Delphi method has been described as “a scientific methodology that is well suited to issues that require the insights of subject matter experts” (Grisham, 2009) when “there is incomplete knowledge about a problem or phenomenon,”(Skulmoski et al, 2007). It is “based on a structured process for collecting and distilling knowledge from a group of experts” (Adler & Ziglio, 1996:3) by means of “structured communication” (Grisham, 2009) and “data collection and analysis techniques interspersed with feedback.” (Skulmoski et al, 2007)

On the information continuum, Dalkey (1969) describes each opposing side, or the two extremes, as ‘knowledge’ and ‘speculation,’ in between these, he argues, is ‘insight and informed judgement.’ (cited from Adler & Ziglio,1996:6) The Delphi

method is based on the filtering and shaping of this middle ground for situations in which there is some evidence, but not yet complete knowledge, with the greater objective to structure insight for an improved understanding. In this case, as the media landscape crescendos and the effects are becoming heightened and more pronounced, this could be argued as a significant time of decreased speculation, an increased amount of insight and opinion from practitioners, and arguably, an “incomplete state of knowledge concerning either the nature of the problem or the components which must be included in a successful solution.” (Delbecq et al, 1975, cited from Adler & Ziglio, 1996:6)

Though the research style of Delphi is flexible and there are no universally agreed guidelines for practice (Keeney et al, 2006), a general assessment of researches agree that the Delphi practice should include: a panel of experts; two or more rounds of questioning, usually in the form of structured questionnaires; a qualitative, quantitative or mix method approach to analysis; and controlled feedback. Rowe and Wright (1999) suggested that the traditional method of the Delphi had four attributing factors: anonymity of Delphi participants to freely express their opinions without any social pressure; iteration from round to round to allow the panel members to refine, clarify or change their views in light of other's responses; controlled feedback; and an analysis and interpretation of data. Though there is no ‘one-fit-for-all’ research design, Adler & Ziglio (1996:9) suggests that in “virtually every use of the Delphi method” two phases can be identified: the “exploration phase”, firstly, and the “evaluation phase”, secondly.

To tailor the Delphi method as best suits this research question, three considerations framed the design:

- 1.) The methodological choice of qualitative, quantitative or a mix method approach;
- 2.) How many rounds and iteration were to take place and;
- 3.) The recruitment criteria and size of the panel of experts.

## 1. Methodology Considerations

The Delphi method has been approached from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, though literature does not suggest one method, or mixed methods over another.

To fulfill the overall objective and explore how the changing media landscape is being interpreted, understood and experienced within the Public Relations industry, a qualitative, phenomenological approach was adopted to the design of the Delphi. In qualitative research, the aim is to produce a holistic understandings of rich, contextual and detailed data (Mason, 1996). For this research, data was collected by structured questionnaires and analyzed through qualitative coding.

## 2. Number of Rounds

When using qualitative questionnaires as the sole method of data collection, it has been suggested that “if the goal is to understand nuances... than fewer than three rounds may be sufficient to reach consensus, theoretical saturation, or uncover sufficient information.” (Skulmoski et al, 2007) Literature also suggests that “two or three iteration Delphi is sufficient for most research,” (Delbecq et al, 1975, cited from Skulmoski et al, 2007) which has been the norm for a review of published Delphi studies.

After a review of literature, two rounds of questions and iteration were determined as the most promising number to achieve the required amount of data as well as keeping the research manageable within a specific timeframe.

## 3. Panel of Experts

A critical element of the Delphi methodology is the recruitment and development of the elite panel of experts. Considerations for the panel are centered around two aspects: the size of the panel and the ‘expertise’ of each panel participant.

Similarly to the Delphi’s ‘freestyle’ design guidelines, Keeny et al (2006) suggests that “no guidance exists on the minimum or maximum number of experts on a panel, rather it appears to be related to common sense and practical logistics.” Literature also argues that though the Delphi sample size is not a statistical one,

“with a homogenous group of experts, good results can be obtained even with a small panel.” (Adler & Ziglio, 1996:14) Delphi panels have been created from as little as 3 participants to over 100 (Skulmoski, G. et al, 2007), but due to a limiting timescale, a smaller number of 8 participants, with a rich media background, was predetermined as the most appropriate and manageable panel size for this research.

Participants were invited to contribute due to their perceived expertise and knowledge, which in past Delphi studies have been categorized into criteria including “gender, professional experience, education, employment or designation” (Keeney et al, 2006). Though there is not a scientific barometer put in place for the Delphi to rigorously measure how proficient a candidate is, a correct composition of the panel is vital for the research outcome. Therefore, a preeminent level of knowledge or experience in Public Relations and/or the changing media ecosystem was the principle criteria in recruiting and organising the panel.

## The Conclusive Ten Delphi Stages

After a review of literature around the Delphi method and a reflection on the pros and cons of each design consideration, the following 10 stages were adopted as the research framework.

### Stage 1. Delphi Research Design

To explore the insights and informed knowledge surrounding PR practice in a changing media landscape, the Delphi method was tailored to best meet the study's objectives and investigate the issues identified in the literature review.

After a review of past and present Delphi practice and structure, it was concluded that the most promising and effective research design would include:

- Two rounds of questionnaires and iteration to a specifically selected panel of experts.
- Qualitative data coding and analysis to interpret, organize and relate data.

### Stage 2. Panel of Experts

As this is an exploratory study of a mass phenomenon which can be engaged with in a variety of ways, the panel was carefully selected of participants who had, firstly, a broad knowledge of communication in a changed media landscape, and secondly, a specific expertise or discipline within the new media ecosystem as academics or professionals. Other criteria included: practical engagement with

the issue in question; ability to suggest meaningful responses; and capacity to meet the time requirements.

To achieve a wide variety of views and capture all aspects of the changing media within the research, a diverse selection of participants with differing backgrounds and levels of experience within the media industry created the panel of experts below. Keeping with the traditional method of Delphi, all the participants remained anonymous to each other as well as in the research discussion.

Figure 4

PANEL OF EXPERTS	
<b>Senior Lecturer (PR), Leeds Met University:</b>	engages in social media professionally and personally
<b>PR Manager, Top Commercial Charity:</b>	engages in social media personally
<b>Head of Communications and Marketing, British Council:</b>	engages in social media professionally and personally
<b>Senior Communications Consultant, Prominent PR Agency:</b>	engages in social media professionally and personally
<b>BBC Press Officer:</b>	engages in social media personally
<b>BBC Senior Broadcaster:</b>	creator of 606, the BBC's biggest online community; and the Editorial lead for all Sport blogs and 606.
<b>Graduate Research Assistant (Communications):</b>	MA in Communications; engages in social media professionally and personally
<b>PR freelancer:</b>	background in tech PR agencies and Commercial in-house PR; engages in social media professionally and personally

### Stage 3. Design Round 1 Questionnaire

The first round of the Delphi was used to broadly explore the issues of the changing media landscape identified in the literature review. The questionnaire aimed to generate a wide array of views and identify the key agreements, disagreements or new revelations within the topic.

#### Round 1 Questionnaire

RQ1. Who were the media in 2000? Who are the media in 2010?

RQ2. What is the one aspect of social media that has had the greatest effect on the media industry as a whole?

RQ3. What do you see as the next big development or trend in social media- and how will that impact the PR industry?

RQ4. What is the most common thing the PR industry is getting wrong when it comes to social media campaigns?

RQ5. Driven by the internet and subsequent social media inventions, the traditional way of newsgathering has altered drastically. From an editorial perspective, do you feel this social media invasion has had any negative effects on output? Or the quality of journalism?

RQ6. In your opinion, is social media sidelining journalists in favour of the public or independent voices?

RQ7. In this new era of ‘citizen journalism,’ where anyone can spread information about a brand, it has been suggested that client relations is becoming the new media relations. What is the future of media relations?

RQ8. Social media has empowered the public to become self publicists and abandon traditional PR methods- is this a concern? A challenge? Or a positive achievement to champion?

RQ9. In a changed media landscape, can traditional methods of media relations still satisfy the needs of the organization, journalists and the audience?

RQ10. Does social media have the strength and longevity to marginalize traditional media?

RQ11. Could there ever be a world without traditional journalists? Why?

RQ12. Have changes in the media landscape led to any changes in how journalists and PR practitioners interact?

#### Stage 4: Pilot- Round 1 Questionnaire

Before R1 was distributed, a pilot questionnaire was assessed to help foresee any future issues of comprehension or misinterpretations. To replicate the chosen panel of experts’ varying level of expertise and knowledge, the questionnaire was piloted on three media specialists with expertise in different areas of media: a Senior Lecturer of Public Relations, a BBC Journalist and a Public Relations

undergraduate. After the pilot, amendments were made and the R1 questionnaire was sent to the panel of experts.

#### Stage 5: Disperse and Analyze Round 1 Questionnaire

It has been suggested that the first Delphi round is the most crucial round because it sets the tone of the study, and any misinterpretations or misunderstandings of a single question or the overall objective could potentially effect the validity of responses, and also, the subsequent questionnaire. To lower the risk of any misinterpretations, each participant was given the opportunity to raise any concerns regarding the study's objectives or questions at this stage.

After R1 had been released and re-collected, responses were analyzed by qualitative coding to organize, identify, interpret and relate the concepts.

#### Stage 6: Design Round 2 Questionnaire

The design of R2 was based on the data collected from the first round. At this stage, the focus of the questionnaire shifted from broad to concentrated and any specific disagreements or revelations from the first round were examined in more detail.

#### Round 2 Questionnaire

RQ1. Do you agree or disagree? Agree? Disagree? If so, why?

2000 was dominated by ‘traditional’ media (i.e. television, radio, newspapers) and sources of authority, trusted voices or names. In 2010, the media is harder to define and is a mix of ‘traditional’ and participatory media. Newspapers have become weaker and technologically able citizens, social networks, and ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ voices online are all a part of the media.

RQ2. Identified from the first round’s results, please highlight the two aspects of social media which you think have had the greatest effect on the media industry as a whole.

- Ubiquity of the internet as a channel of receiving and delivering information
- Immediacy
- Social Networking
- Conversational web
- Participatory web
- The democratization of journalism
- Shift of power from organisations to the consumer

RQ3. Identified from the first round’s results, please highlight what you believe to be the two next big developments or trends in social media.

- Further media segmentation and the fragmentation of social media.
- Blur of public/private boundaries in conversational web.
- End of social media as a “unique” communications tool.
- Consolidation of news sources.

RQ4. Identified from the first round's results, please highlight what you think are the two most common things the PR industry is getting wrong when it comes to social media campaigns.

- Traditional communications strategies replicated onto social media.
- Campaigns 'ticking the box' with social media sites and using the same social media procedures.
- Neglect of social media and a strong desire to still attain 'traditional' media coverage i.e. TV and newspapers.
- Lack of knowledge and understanding of the networking and conversational effects of social media.
- Social media campaigns are too branded.

RQ5. Which is the most accurate? In the next 10 years:

- There will be little to no traditional print media outlets.
- Traditional print media outlets will become niche.
- Major traditional print media outlets will still be in demand, but regional and local print media will have died out.
- Traditional print media will primarily be online based.
- There will still be a demand for traditional print media.

RQ6. Do you think that every PR practitioner should have an understanding of and ability to practice social media today, or is it a specialist area?

RQ7. If social media segments further, what opportunities could exist for the PR industry?

RQ8. Results from the first round suggested that social media has affected the top-down structure of publishing; before the model was filter then publish and now in the online world, it is publish then filter. How can the PR industry use this to their advantage?

RQ9. It has been argued that journalism is more important than ever, but the newspaper industry is continuing to diminish and Round 1 results suggested that social media has had some negative effects on output including sacrificing quality for quantity. How can the journalism industry strengthen its position in the media landscape?

RQ10. Does every PR campaign need to incorporate social media tactics to make it successful?

RQ11. The new media landscape has enabled a PR practitioner to have direct contact to an audience or single consumer without the need of a media intermediary. Should this interaction be applied in all areas of PR? At all? Or is it more beneficial to a specific area of PR?

#### Stage 7: Iteration of Round 1 Questionnaire

At this stage, participants were given the opportunity to verify that their responses had been interpreted correctly. They also had the option of refining or changing their views in light of other's responses.

### Stage 8: Disperse and Analyze Round 2 Questionnaire

Just with R1, once R2 had been released and re-collected, responses were analyzed by qualitative coding to interpret, develop and relate concepts.

### Stage 9: Iteration of Round 2 Questionnaire

As in Stage 7, participants were given the opportunity to verify that their responses had been interpreted correctly, and had the option of refining or changing their views in light of other's responses.

### Stage 10: Conclusion of Data

After the iteration of R2, all data was analyzed and conclusions were drawn from the research.

## Limitations

With all types of researches there is no way of being 100% certain of the validity of the research outcome, but it is crucial to take steps to reduce any implications caused by leading questions, misunderstood and/or biased responses or human error in the analysis.

The Delphi's structured method would suggest that it would reinforce the validity of a participant's responses by the iteration of each response between rounds for each participant to verify that their responses had been interpreted correctly. But

of course, their responses are in light of their interpretation of the question, which could also impact the validity if misunderstood. To lower the risk of misinterpretation and improve comprehension, the first questionnaire was piloted on three individuals who are involved in the media industry, but removed from the study.

The Delphi method has been criticised as an unscientific method of analyzing qualitative data as a means of foretelling the future of a phenomena. Sackman (1974) stated, “The future is far too important for the human species to be left to future tellers using new versions of old crystal balls. It is time for the oracle to move out and science to move in.” Though reviews of studies have proven that some researches have conducted the Delphi with less scientific measures than suggested, Turnoff and Linstone (1975) concluded that the Delphi is simply “meeting a demand that otherwise cannot be met.” (cited from Keeney et al, 2006)

PG.41

# Delphi Results

42. Introduction

44. Results Key

45. Objective 1 Results

52. Objective 2 Results

54. Objective 3 Results

57. Objective 4 Results

## Introduction

This chapter will reveal the outcome of both Round One and Round Two of the Delphi research. The insight and data from the panel of experts will be used as evidence to support further discussions, conclusions and recommendations in the following chapters.

To effectively illustrate and identify the wide range of themes and to show how Round 1 and Round 2 were interlinked, the findings are presented in a series of mind maps.

The data has been coded and summarized, and is displayed under the corresponding objective to the study:

**Objective 1:** to define media today and identify the key developments, trends and effects of the changed media landscape.

**Objective 2:** to research traditional practices and theories of media relations and their level of purpose and effectiveness in the changed media landscape.

**Objective 3:** to explore new techniques and practices of media relations more suited to the new media ecosystem.

**Objective 4:** to investigate the possibility of a change in relationship and attitude between journalists and PR practitioners as a result of the new media landscape on PR practices.

Answers that do not directly correspond to the question, but were seen to add value to the research, are coded as an ‘Anomaly.’ Answers coded as an anomaly are represented as quotes. For certain questions, quotes have been used to explain an answer in further detail.

In Round 1, all eight of the panel responded, but in Round 2, one panel member withdrew from the study.

To see the text version of the Delphi Results chapter, please refer to Appendix 1 on PG.86.

Figure 5

# Result's Key:

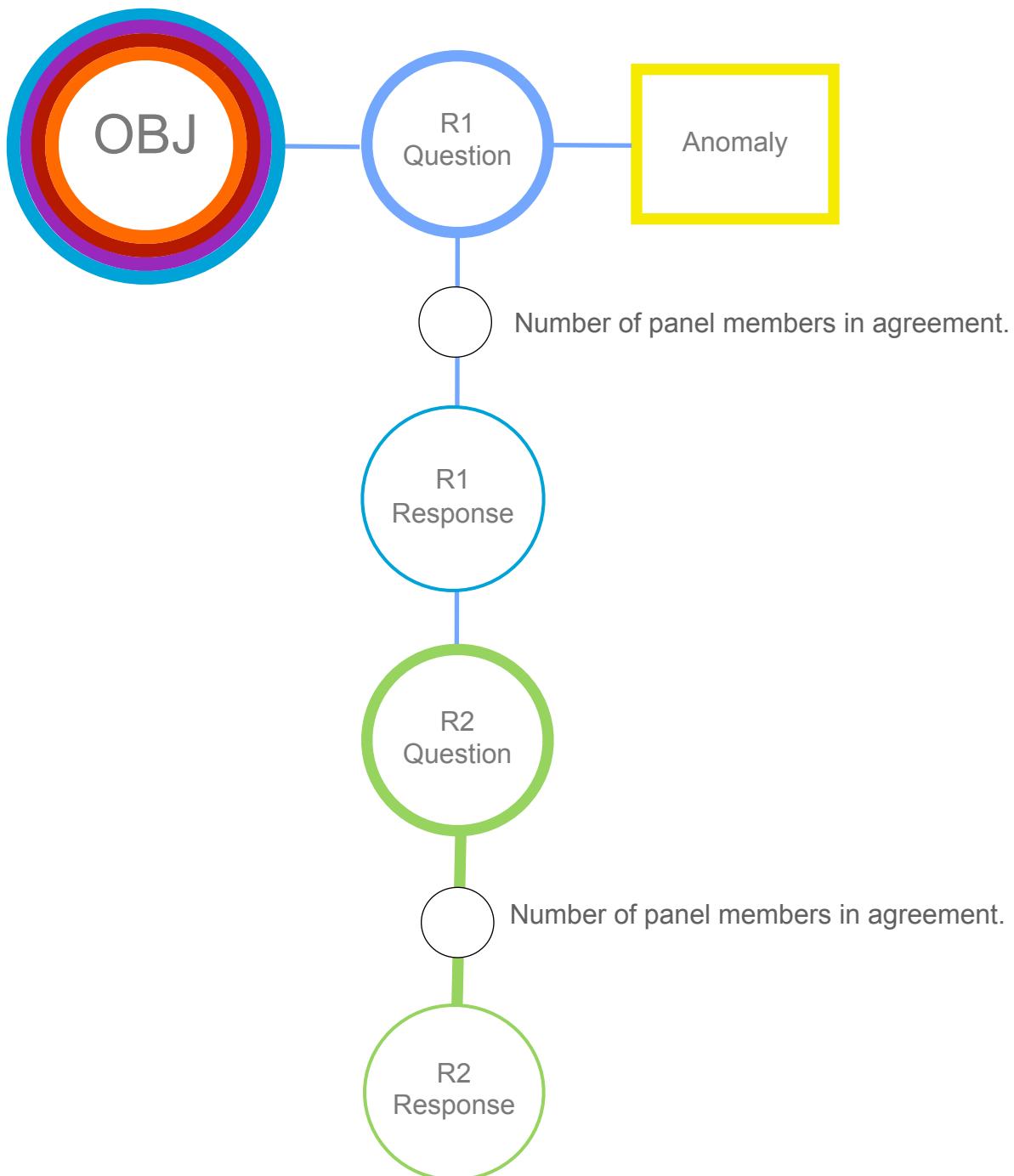


Figure 6

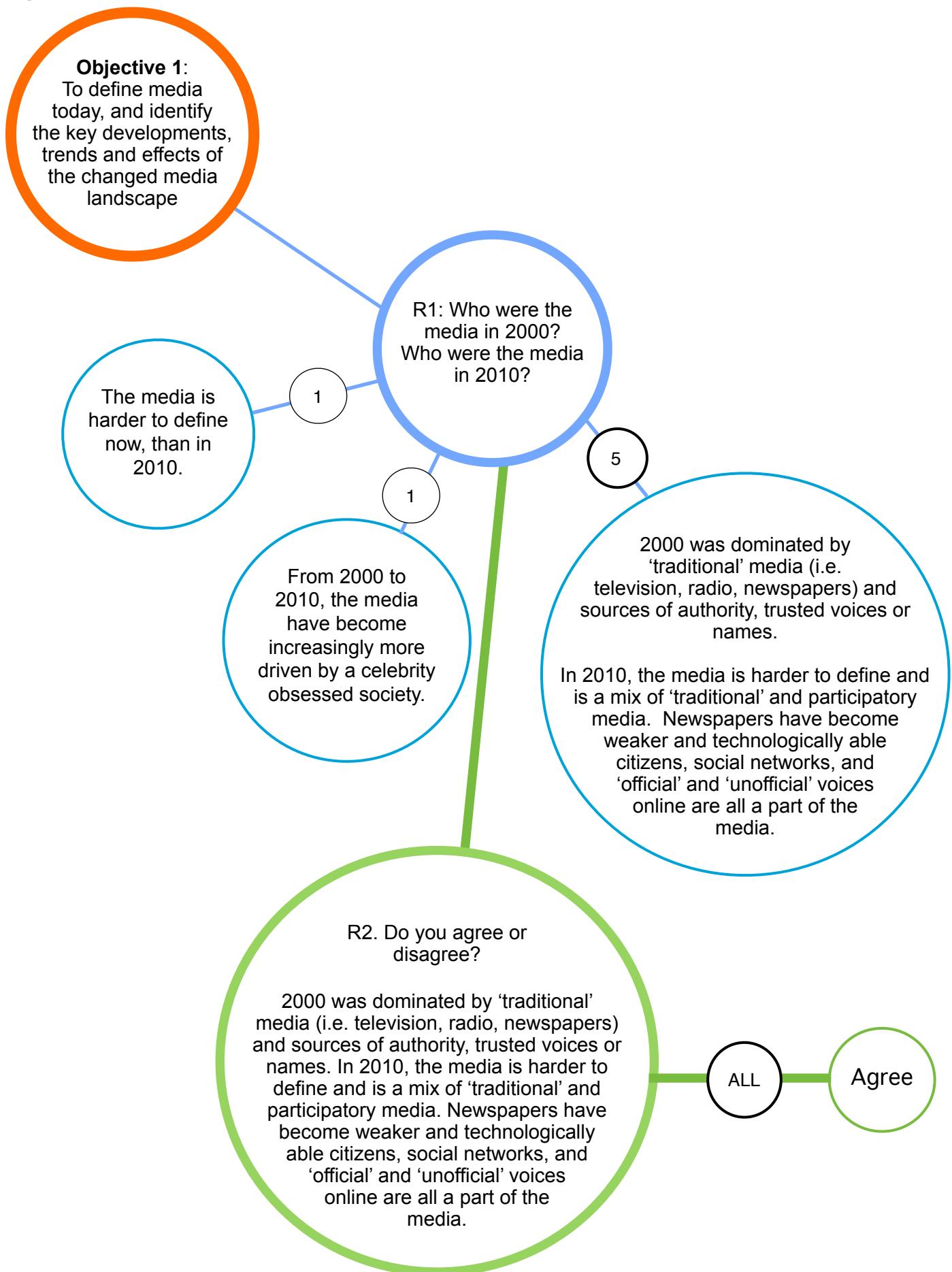


Figure 7

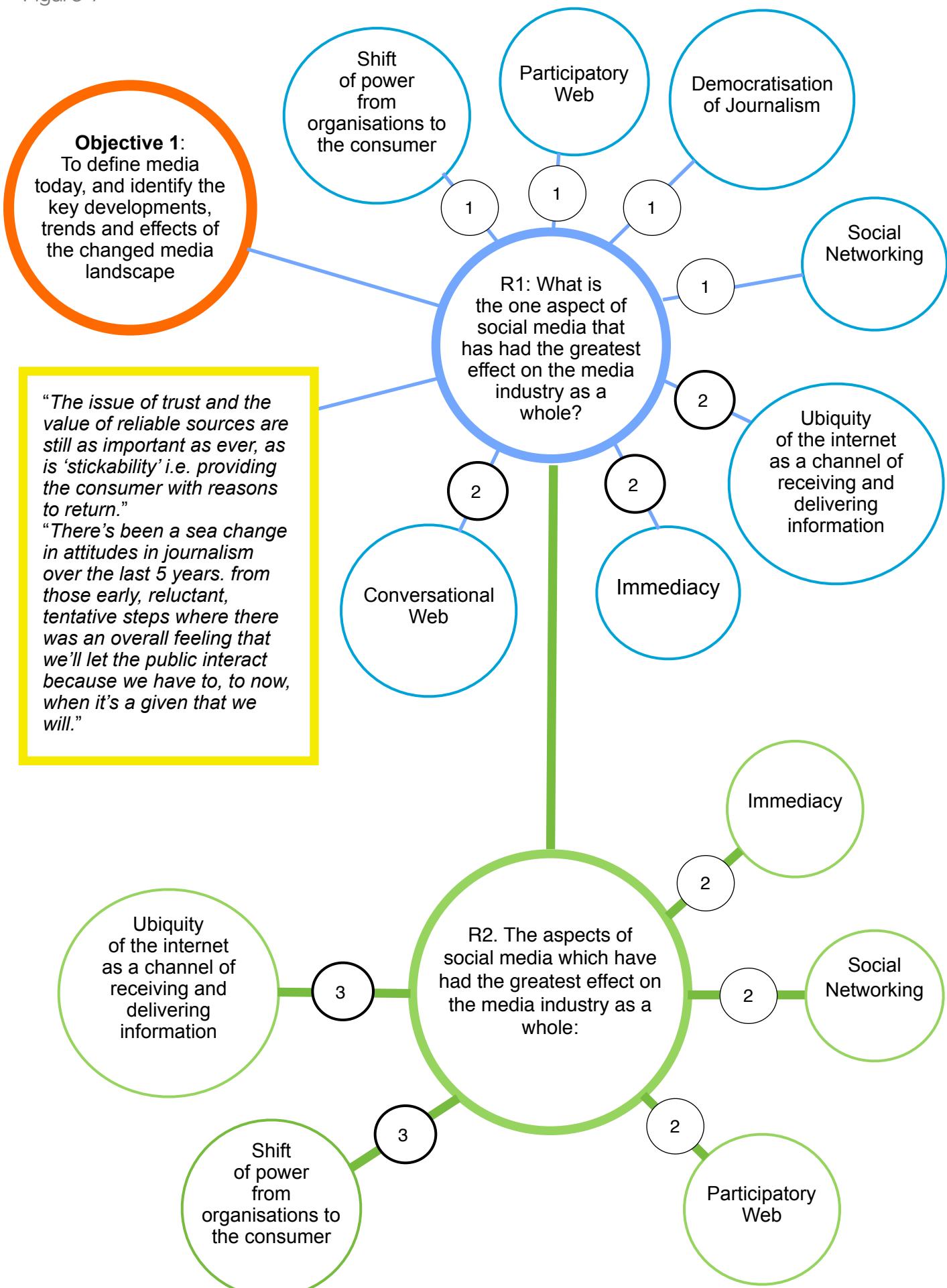


Figure 8

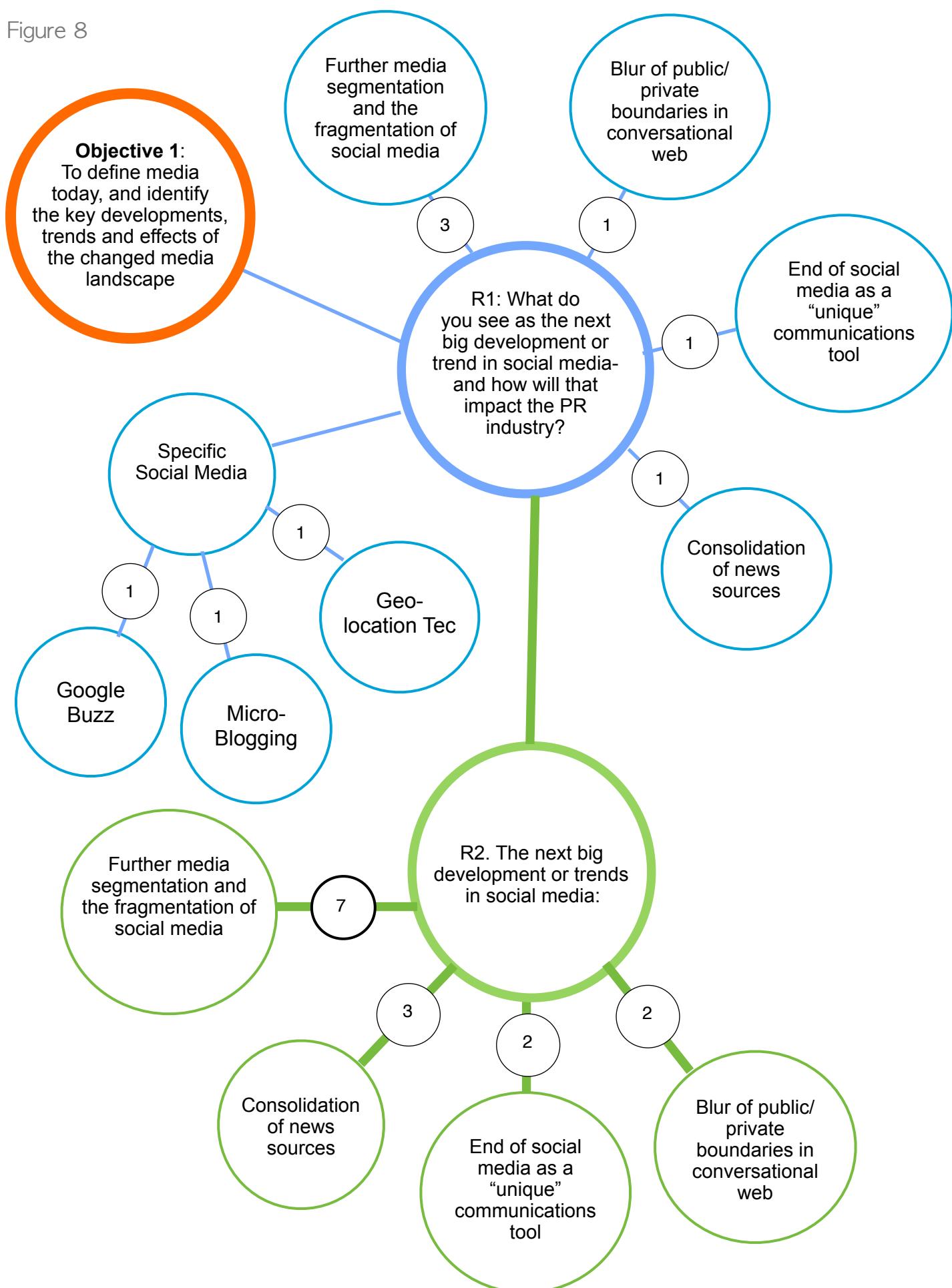


Figure 9

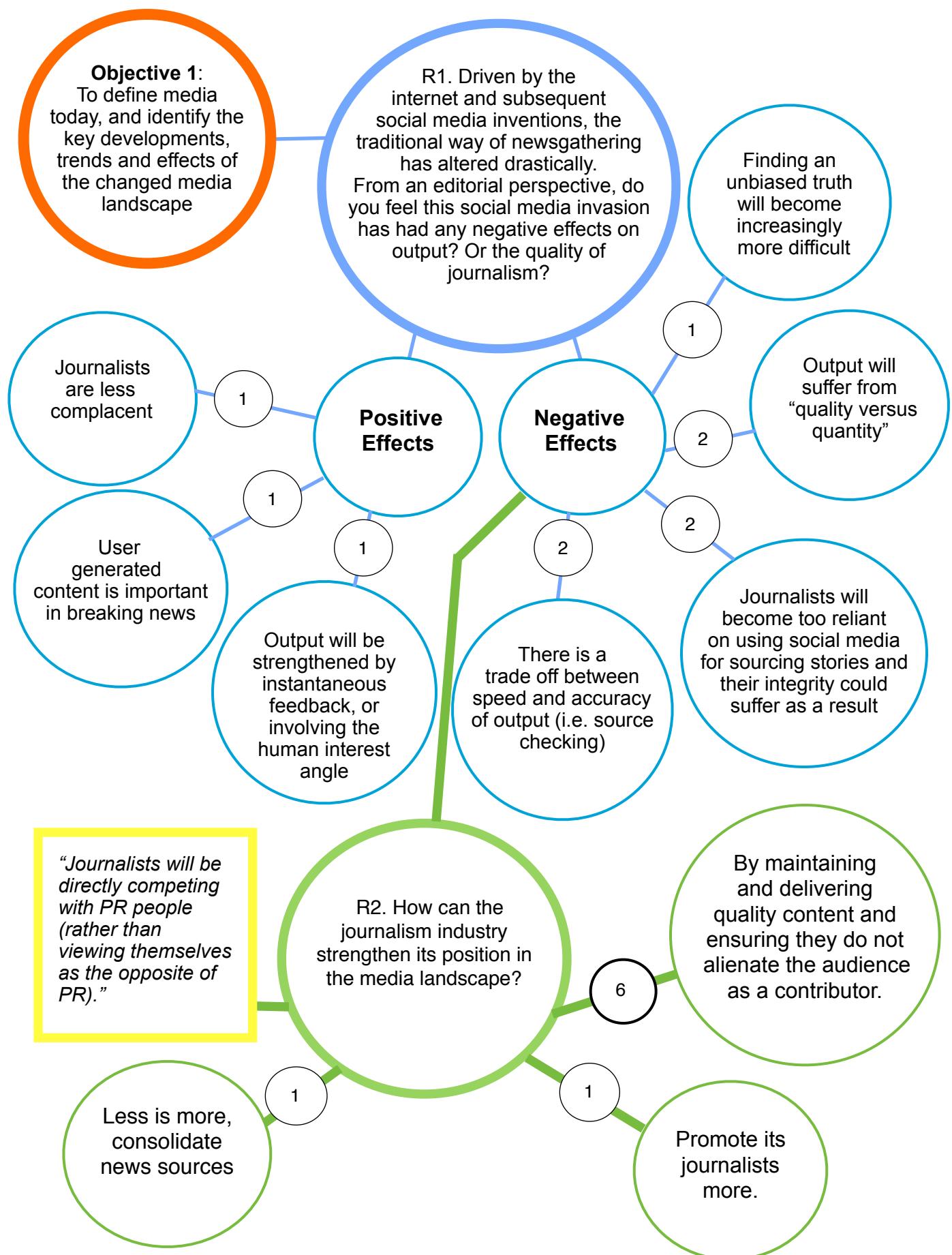


Figure 10

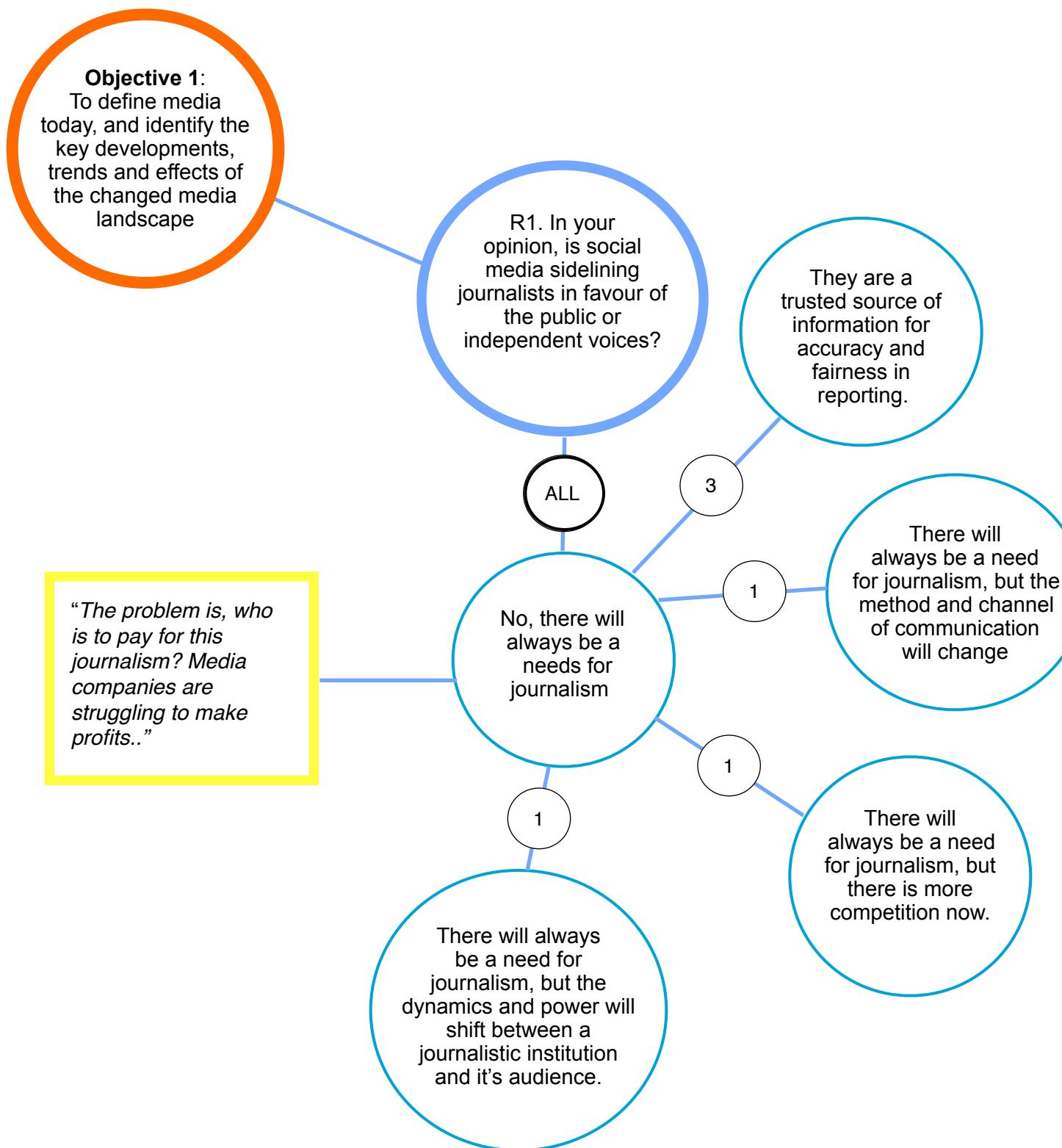


Figure 11

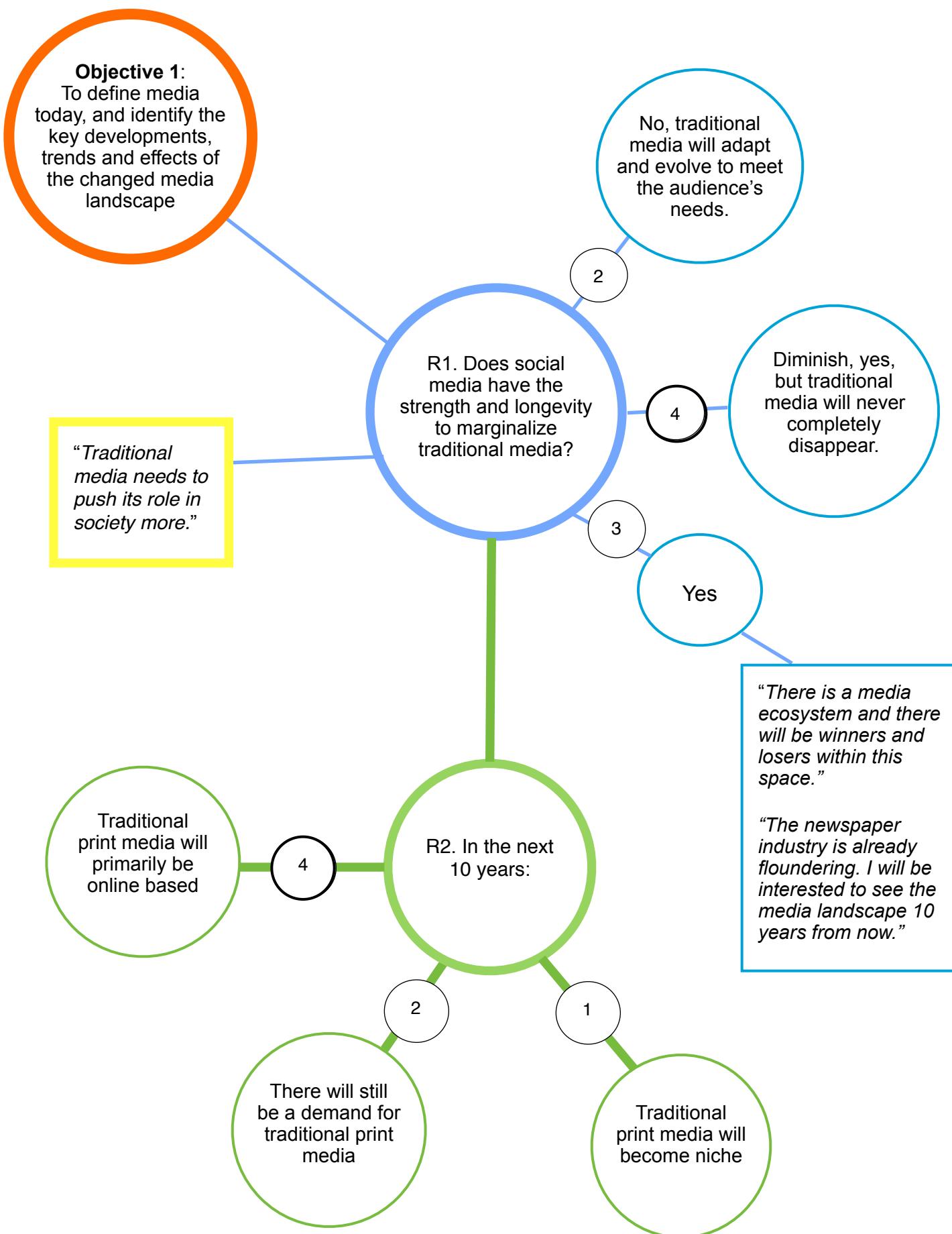


Figure 12

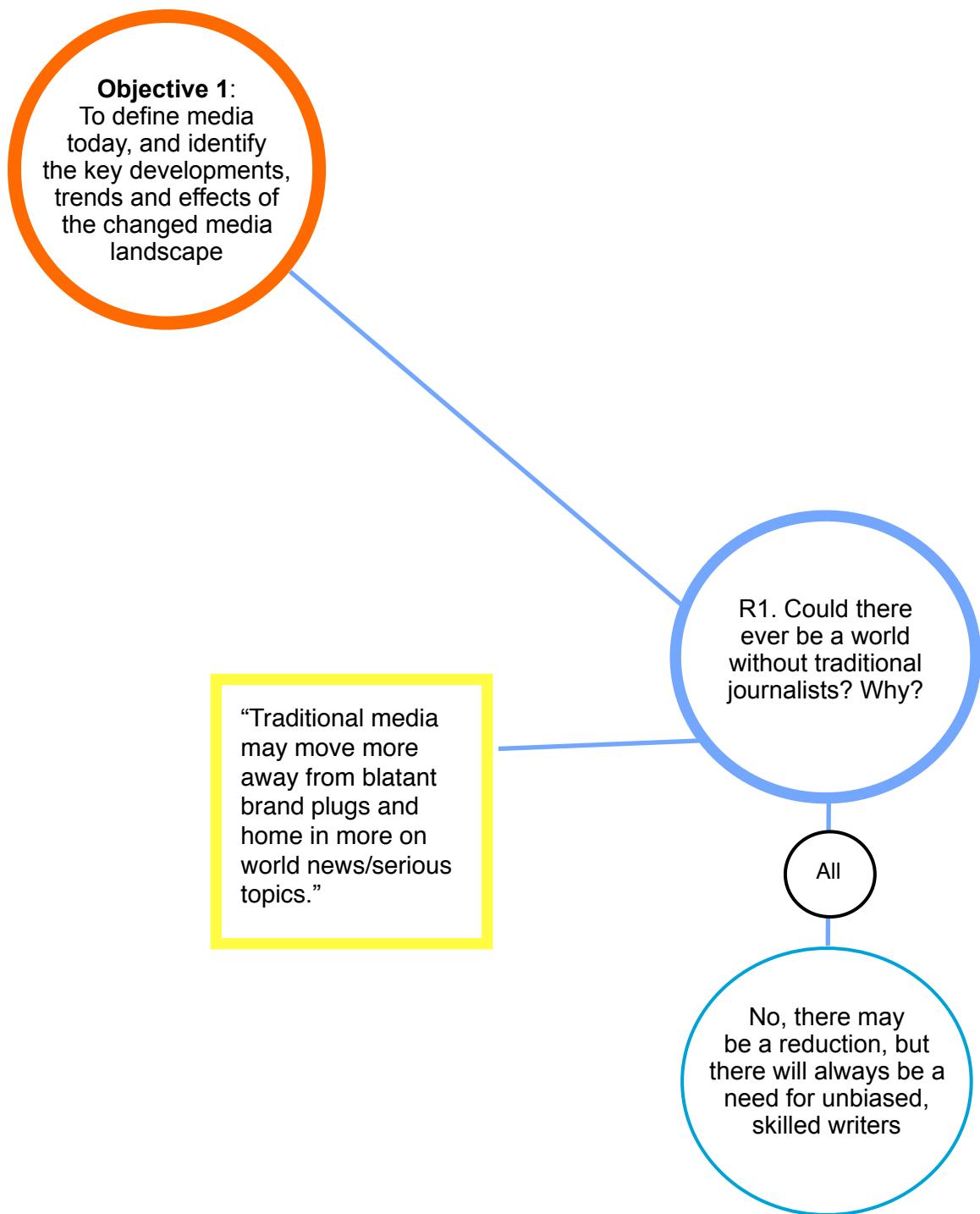


Figure 13

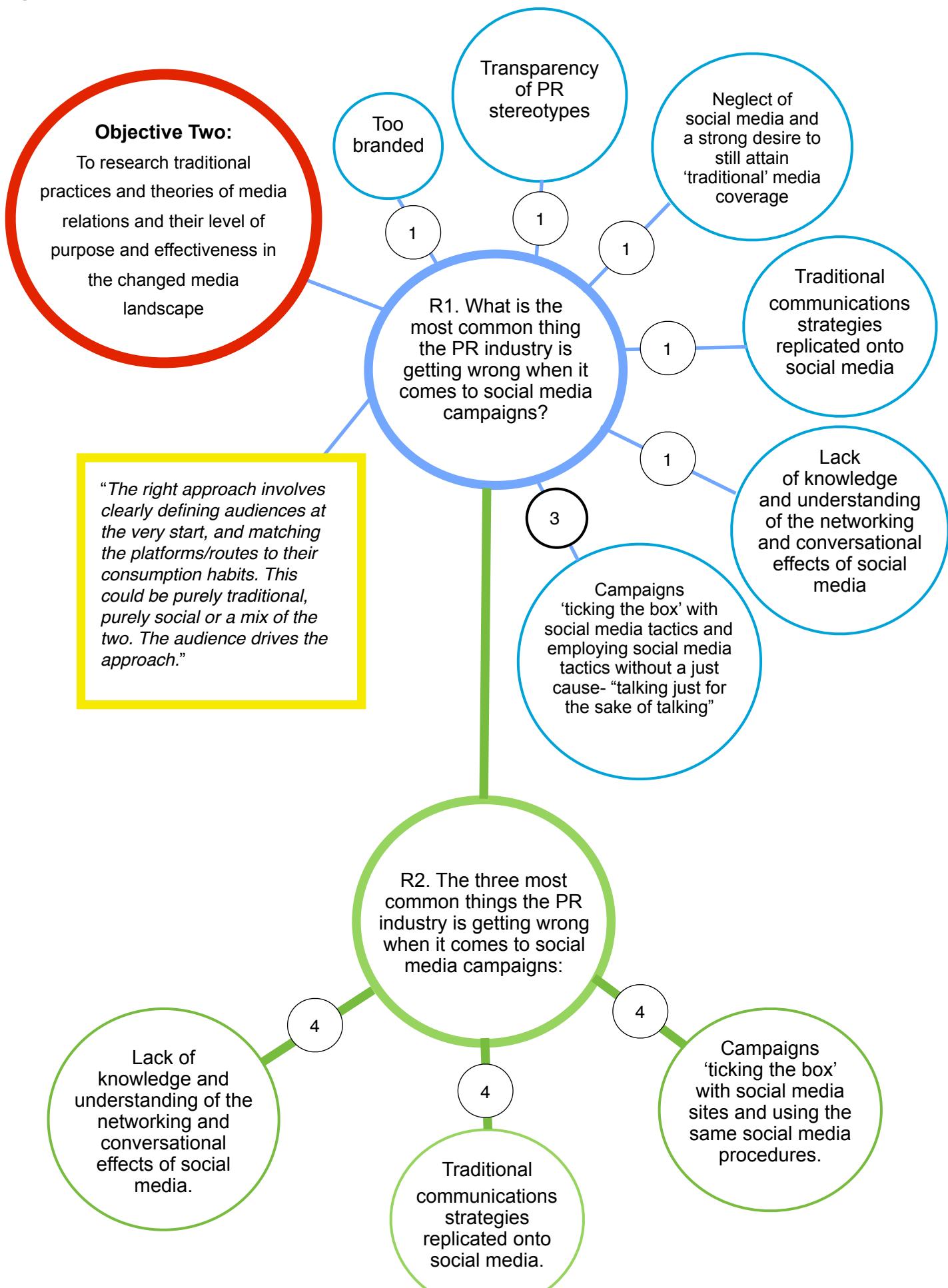


Figure 14

Objective 2 Delphi Results 53

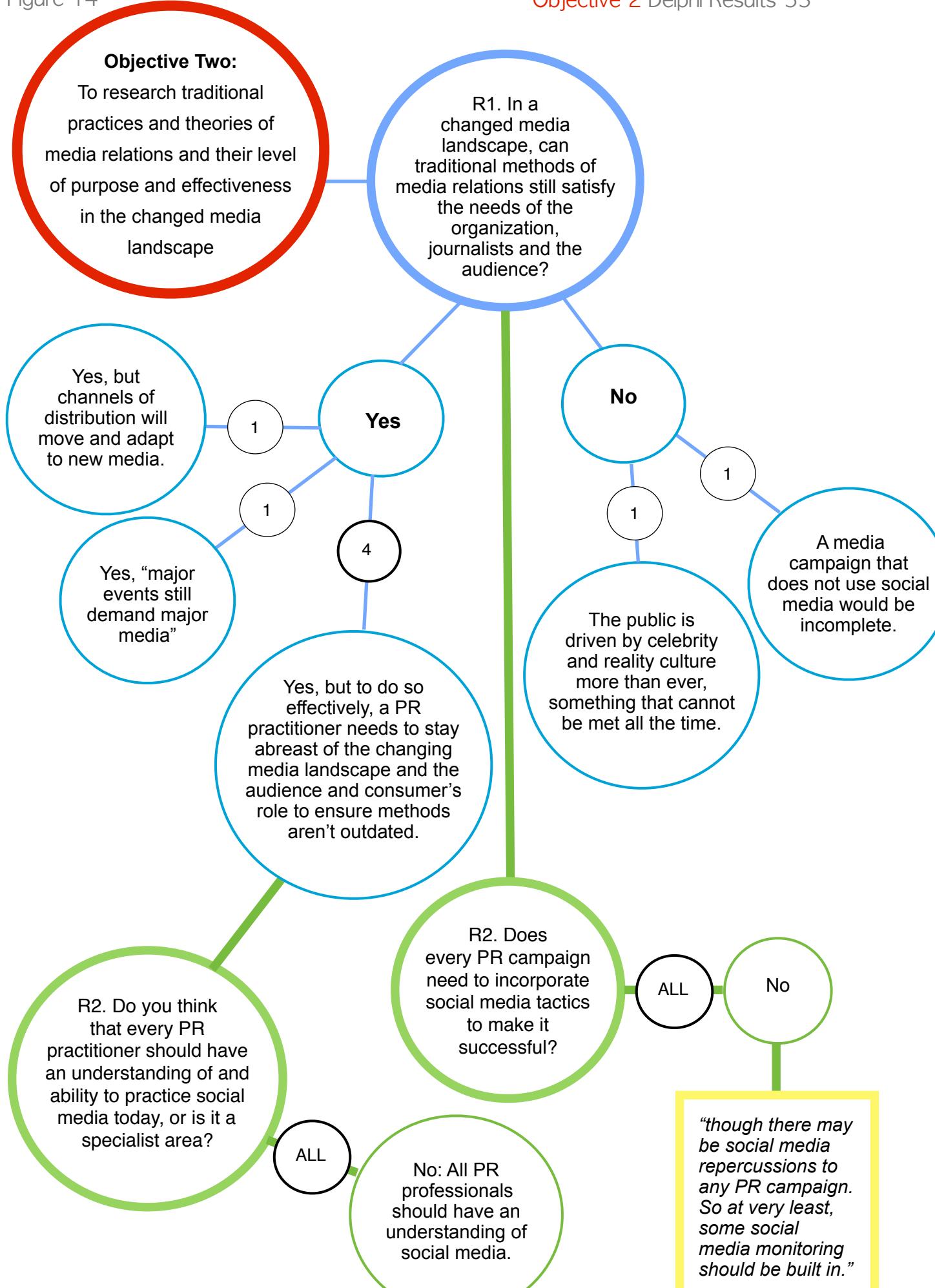


Figure 15

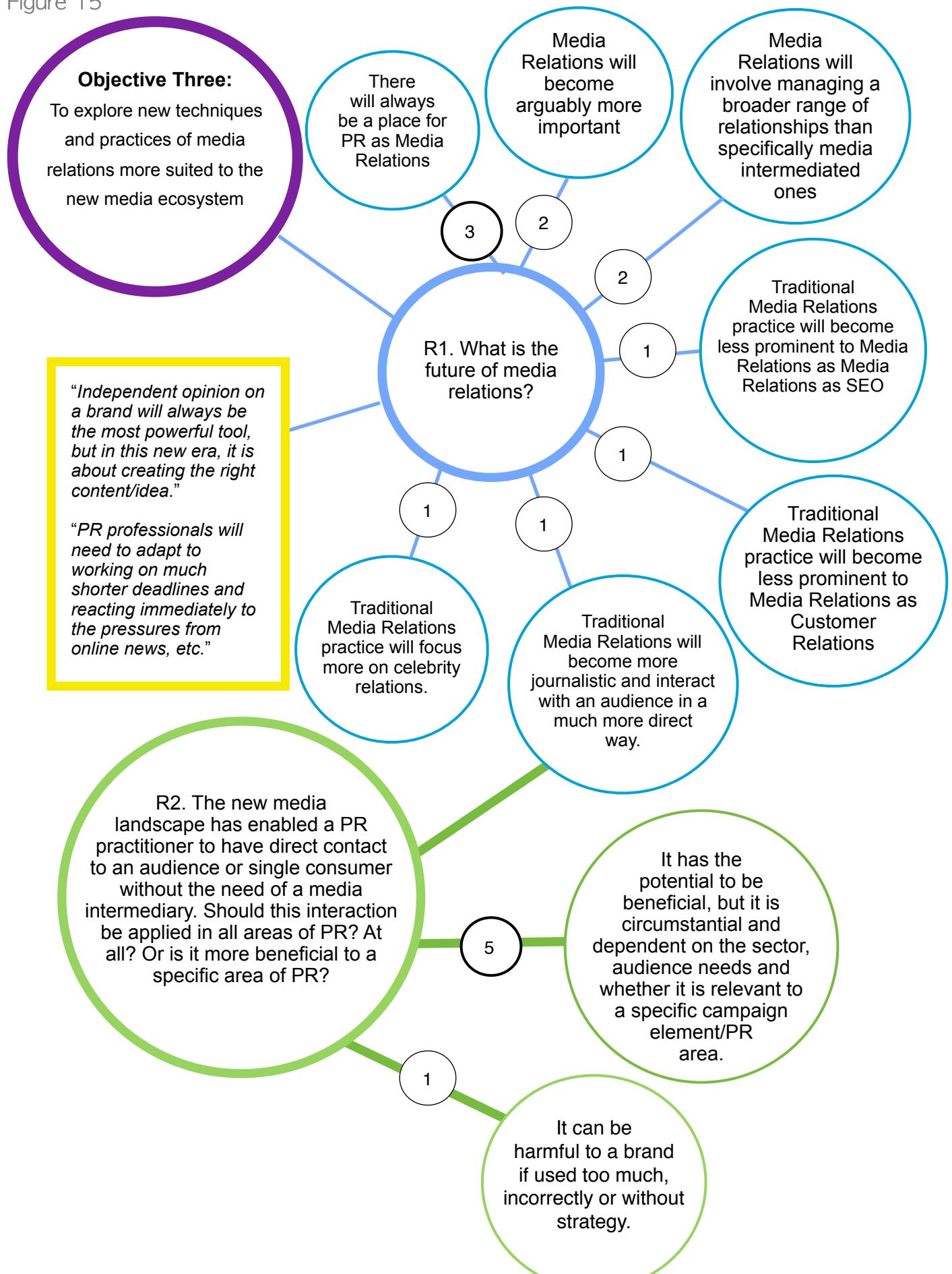


Figure 16

Objective 3 Delphi Results 55

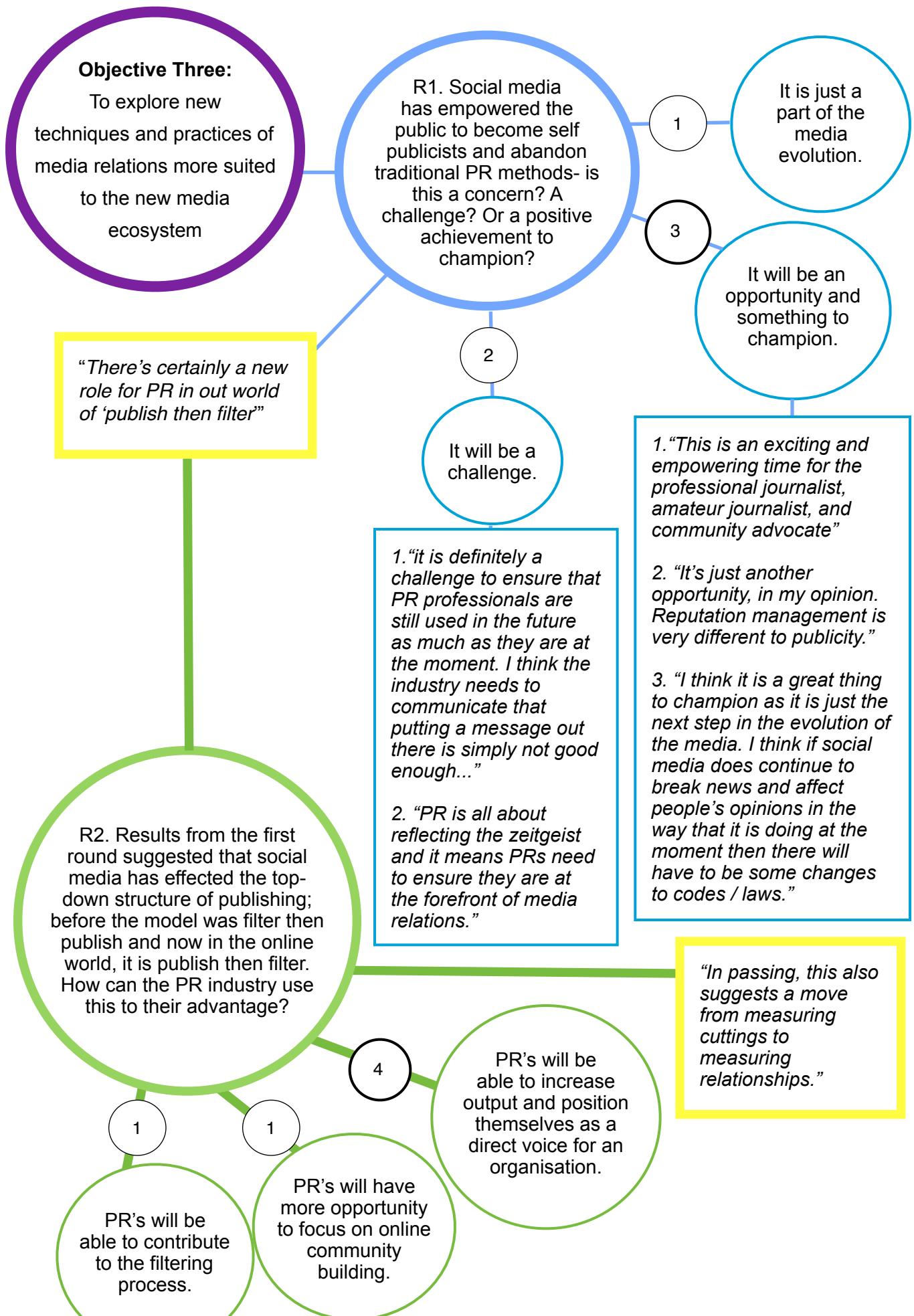


Figure 17

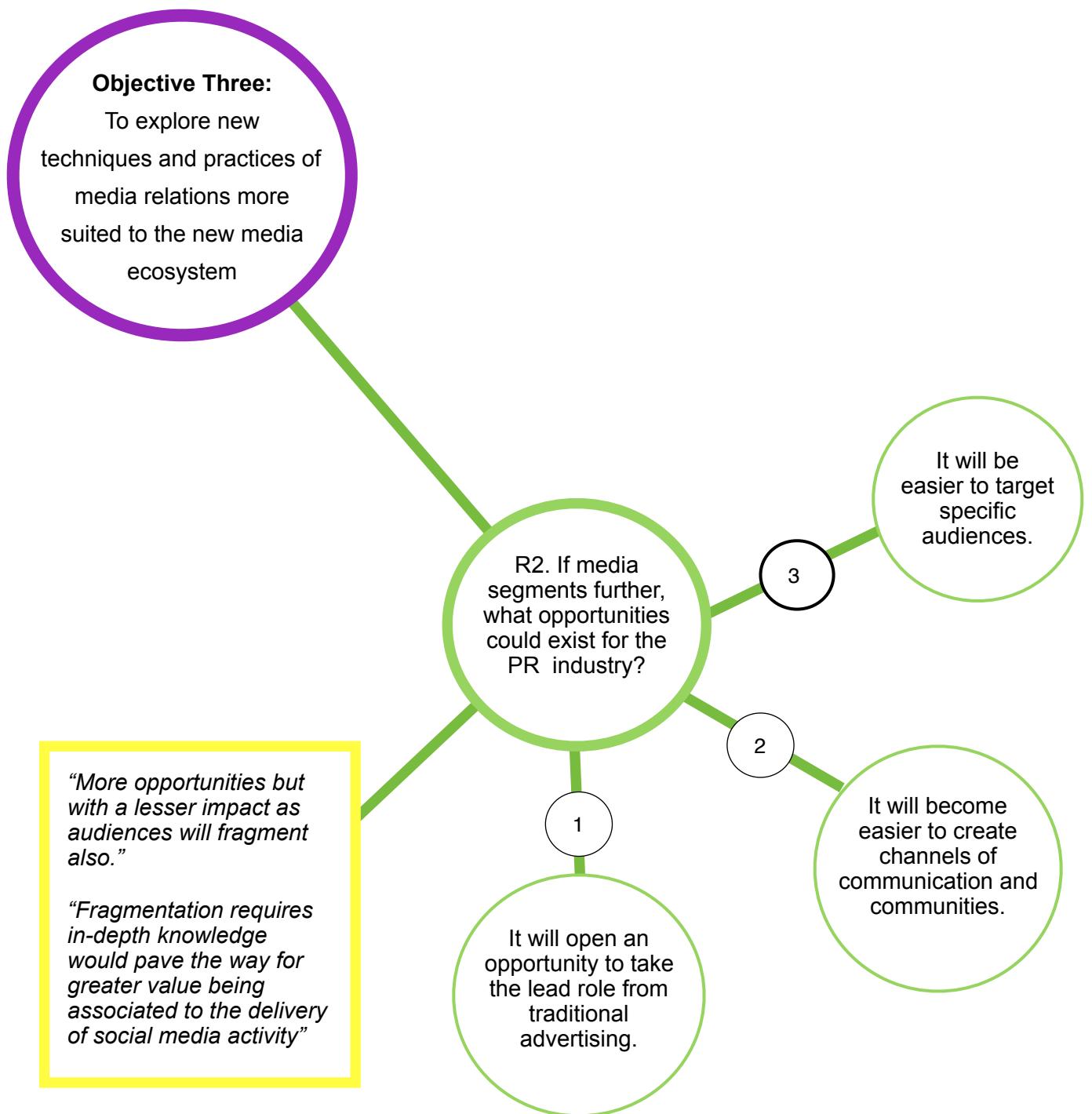
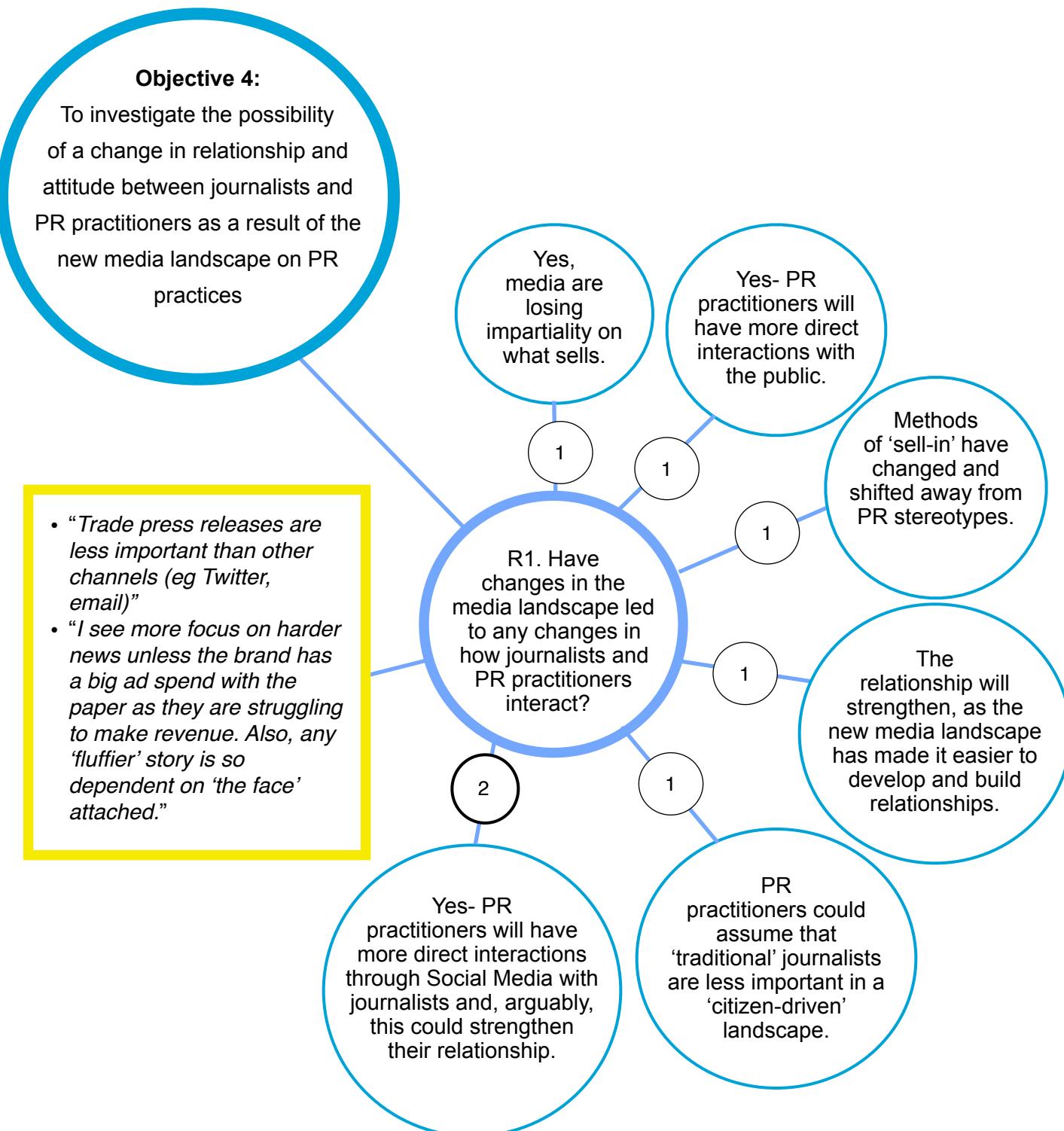


Figure 18



# PG.58 Discussion

59. Introduction

59. Objective 1 Discussion

62. Objective 2 Discussion

64. Objective 3 Discussion

67. Objective 4 Discussion

68. Conclusion

## Introduction

This chapter will merge and analyse the Delphi results and literature review to identify conflicts, agreements and gaps, and ultimately, draw conclusions and predict future outcomes. The discussion will be framed in order around the study's original objectives, and filter down into the conclusion of all of the findings. Quotes from the panel have been used to illustrate and support certain themes. All quotes are *italicised*.

Objective 1 : to define media today and identify the key developments, trends and effects of the changed media landscape.

*"It's possible to describe the twentieth century as the golden age of mass media and mass communications. We're now entering another world."* Media has become increasingly more difficult to define in the last decade, and as more platforms are created and interconnectivity expands further and deeper, the *media* can no longer be defined in a traditional sense that it once was 10 years ago - a time dominated by print media, television, radio, sources of authority and trusted names. After two rounds of the Delphi, a unanimous agreement came to light of how media can be defined today: In 2010, media is a mix of traditional and participatory media - newspapers' position of power have weakened in light of falling circulations and technologically able citizens, social networks, and 'official' and 'unofficial' voices online are all a part of the media ecosystem.

In the new media landscape, literature suggested that the power of the public has become increasingly apparent in the news process and, at a juxtaposition, that the audience is both gravitating away from journalistic institutions, but also, remaining loyal, seeing them as a credible, trustworthy source of information above all others. While literature indicated evidence for each argument, results from the Delphi were unanimous: social media is not being seen as sidelining journalism in favour of the public or individual voices - there will always be a need for journalism and, while there may be a reduction of traditional journalists, there will always be a need for unbiased, skilled writers: "*What journalists can do is work to their USPs - their diligence, impartiality, the fact they can report with accuracy and fairness, and keep doing what they do best - if they're the best conduit for the news, people will come to them. I think there will always be a place for journalists, they've just got more competition now.*"

Though journalism is arguably more important than ever, social media is changing the structure of traditional journalism which is being perceived to have both positive and negative effects on the quality of output and some of the very characteristics of journalism that make it inherently important: accuracy and fairness. Literature suggested that the traditional way of newsgathering has altered, and the panel of experts took opposing sides in arguing that it both strengthened: "...*the information that news outlets are able to gather through*

*social media resources can strengthen stories by involving instantaneous feedback or the human interest angle” and weakened the quality of journalism: “...there has always been a trade-off between speed and accuracy. Social media streams make this balancing act even harder to maintain.”*

The amount and immediacy of information online is unparalleled in comparison to traditional print media, but over the next decade, Delphi results predicted that traditional print media will mostly be online based. If print media does continue to diminish, Delphi results forecasts the potential consolidation of news sources, and in turn, a shift of focus to only ‘hard’ news, leaving a smaller opportunity for PR professionals to ‘sell-in’ to print outlets.

Overall research has argued that journalism is more important than ever, but contradicting literature revealed that the newspaper industry is continuing to diminish and Round 1 results suggested that social media has had more negative effects on output than positive. It would appear that there is an integral role for journalism in society, but the industry is beginning to flounder as an effect of the changing media landscape. When there is a clear need for quality journalism, the question is: how can the journalism industry strengthen its position in the media landscape?

While there is currently no one-fit-for-all solution put in place for funding the model of traditional media outlets and journalists, the majority consensus of the

Delphi panel agreed that the strength of the industry relies on the ability to successfully deliver journalists' core competencies and not alienate the public as a contributor.

**Objective 2:** to research traditional practices and theories of media relations and their level of purpose and effectiveness in the changed media landscape.

Though literature suggested that the traditional or 'first school' methods of media relations were not conducive to an effective PR campaign, when asked if traditional methods of media relations could satisfy the needs of an organization, a journalist and an audience in the changed media landscape, the majority consensus from the panel concluded it could. However, effectiveness was reliant on a PR professional staying aware and abreast of the changing media landscape and the audiences' role to ensure methods were not outdated.

In both the literature and Delphi research, results highlighted knowledge and awareness of the media landscape as a core competency that was necessary to achieve effective media relations. But, contradictory to this, the PR industry's lack of understanding was listed as one of the most common things the PR community is getting wrong when it comes to implementing campaigns onto digital platforms: “*(...) the PR industry need to be fully across all the new ways in*

*which people now communicate and adapt these into campaigns.*" The other most common mistakes highlighted in research were PR professionals replicating traditional communications strategies online, followed by social media campaigns 'ticking the box' and 'talking for the sake of talking.' Both of these faults could be happening as an effect from a lack of knowledge of social media tools and a lack of understanding of how and when to communicate through new media platforms and channels.

Even when a campaign is not focusing on online channels of communication, results revealed a general grasp of the new media environment is still important. While the Delphi panel was unanimous in saying that not all PR campaigns need to incorporate social media tactics to be successful, because of the interconnectivity of the landscape, "*there may be social media repercussions to any PR campaign. So at very least, some social media monitoring should be built in.*" To support this further, the panel believed that every PR professional should have the skill and ability to practice communication through online mediums, and that the online domain was not specifically a specialist area. "*It is an extension of the job, another string to the PR bow and every PR should be able to understand social media and how they can implement it for their client.*"

Objective 3 : to explore new techniques and practices of media relations more suited to the new media ecosystem.

Even though the panel deduced that traditional methods of media relations, with the appropriate surrounding knowledge, would still satisfy a media campaign today, the effects and developments of the changing media landscape still suggest a change to the practice of media relations. When asked, "What is the future of media relations?", the majority of the panel deduced that there would always be a place for PR as media relations, and in the future, it will become arguably more important and involve managing a broader range of relationships than specifically media intermediated ones.

It was hypothesized from the literature that traditional media relations could shift and become less prominent to media relations as relationship management, or specifically customer relations, as an effect of 'citizen journalism.' This hypothesis was supported by some on the panel, but it was also suggested that media relations could shift in three other ways as well:

- Traditional media relations could become more journalistic and interact with an audience in a much more direct way.
- Traditional media relations practice could become less prominent to media relations as SEO (Search Engine Optimisation)
- Traditional media relations practice could focus more on celebrity relations.

As the media landscape evolves, it suggests more opportunities will arise for PR professionals to position themselves as better communicators. Revealed in the literature and explored in the Delphi research, there are notably three developments of new media that forecast a future opportunity for PR practitioners to take advantage of. These are:

1. Further segmentation of media platforms.
2. The ability to have direct interaction with an audience.
3. The reshaping of the hierarchy of publishing.

### 1. Further Segmentation

If media segments further, this study predicts it will become easier to create channels of communication, conversation and, therefore, a community and audience (called the “*future of PR*” from one panel expert); to communicate messages targeted to specific audiences and demographics; and possibly, PR will be able to “*take over the lead role on campaigns from traditional advertising agencies – because campaigns will be led by conversations not broadcast messages.*”

### 2. Publish than Filter

In an era of citizen journalism, the traditional publishing system has flipped. Instead of ‘why publish?’ it’s ‘why not?’ and messages are first published, then filtered. This addition to the traditional system has suggested an opportunity for

PR professionals to increase their output and become a more distinct and direct voice for an organisation, focusing on creating communities online. This could therefore change the measurement of how effective PR is, once again moving the focus back onto the audience instead of the media intermediary: "*In passing, this also suggests a move from measuring cuttings to measuring relationships.*" It was also suggested, that through this opportunity, PR professional will become a part of the filtering process. "*(...) the information that PR practitioners would release is already published, they now have the opportunity to become the clarifying or filtering voice for the organization.*"

### 3. Direct Interaction with Audience

Though this study's results both support and criticise the use of direct interaction with an audience, it has been suggested that direct interaction can be effective but is circumstantial and dependent on the sector, the needs of the target audience and the more authoritative, powerful or trusted figure. "*If people seek information 'from the horse's mouth', then PR has a prominence through its role as organizational voice. But if the public seeks confirmation through influential third party sources (eg the news media), then that suggests the media remains a dominant player.*"

Literature and Delphi results have both suggested that the intervention of an organization can be beneficial in reputation management, but the messages and means of direct communication must be strategic and apply conversation to

avoid being seen as advertising: “*...an unbiased journalist writing about your product is a more powerful endorsement than advertising and this is what makes PR powerful and relevant. The day when all brands are publishing about themselves means the end of PR.*”

**Objective 4:** to investigate the possibility of a change in relationship and attitude between journalists and PR practitioners as a result of the new media landscape on PR practices.

Social media is a platform for interconnectivity which is inherently social and communal, and therefore, if the foundation of media relations is based on the building and maintaining of mutually beneficial relationships, it can be hypothesized that relationships between a journalist and PR practitioner would benefit from the online revolution. Though the panel did not come to a majority consensus on the tactical ‘*how*’ it would be benefited, this affirmation was proved correct in the Delphi study, where over half of the panel believed that the media landscape could strengthen the relationship. “*I think we’re closer... I have a window in their daily lives and vice versa.*”

However, it was also suggested and hypothesized in the literature that the relationship between a journalist and PR professional could shift, and in turn, this relationship would be sidelined for a more direct relationship with the audience.

This notion was both supported “*...in the future as newspapers in the printed form become less and less utilized, the communication channels between PR & journalist may change and the PR may interact more directly with the public*” and criticised by the Delphi panel: “*The negative that might result is PR people thinking that ‘traditional’ journalists are less important ... That’s a dangerous path to take, because one traditional journalist can reach an audience of millions in one hit, where as a million citizen journalists could (arguably) not reach any.*”

The motives to seize or relinquish this opportunity for a more direct relationship with the audience are clearly fueled by the audience themselves - a key component in traditional media relations which is arguably only increasing in importance. “*The key is audience trust. PR practitioners will always aim to service the media that their audience consumes and trusts the most and at the moment it still favours the traditional outlets, although this is changing by the day.*”

## Conclusion

10 years down the line, as the media landscape evolves, develops and even deteriorates, the position of the PR community as an innovative leader in communications cannot yet be determined. However, today, there is evidence that the media landscape is in fact changing the roles and relationships of current

PR practice, and through the inherently social and communal developments online, it forecasts an opportunistic time for the progression of public relations.

It is clear from the literary evidence and research outcome that a heightened knowledge and awareness of the external environment and changing media landscape is even more crucial to successful communications and effective media relations. Specifically, an increased insight and recognition into the role of the audience and the participatory effects of new media to harness conversation and two-way communication is key.

This study has forecasted areas of potential growth for PR professionals. Specifically, if media continues to segment further, opportunities for targeting specific audiences will become more apparent. The new media landscape has given anyone the ability to create channels of communication and conversation without the need of a media intermediary, which suggests an opening for PR to position themselves more prominently as an independent voice. This development could also lead PR practitioners to morph into a more journalistic role in future, though this transformation could appear more beneficial than it actually is since traditional journalism is still favoured by the consumer at present.

As the media landscape evolves, this study predicts the focus of media relations will shift and public relations will be centered around managing a broader range

of relationships than specifically media intermediated ones, while still keeping a focus on mutually beneficial relationships. The role of the audience is still a key component to effective media relations and is arguably becoming increasingly more important as the driving focus for media relations. Though new media has opened up doors for direct interaction between the PR community and its target audience, it is still an area that needs to justify its appropriateness in current PR practice. Perhaps in the future, as the media landscape evolves and print media matures, this relationship will become more opportune.

PG.71

# Conclusions & Recommendations

## Conclusion

Evidence from the review of literature and Delphi research justifies the purpose of this study, further emphasising the importance in having a greater understanding of the changing and developing media landscape. While this study was limited in time, and research was modest in size, it has provided a snapshot of the changing roles and relationships of public relations, and some of the opportunities that lie ahead for practitioners.

Every day the media landscape is changing and new communication platforms are developing. It's rapid, it's interactive, and there is an opportunity for everyone to produce their own content. The changing media ecosystem has reconstructed strategic communications. As the media landscape evolves and shifts onto more and more digital platforms, this study suggests and shows evidence for the change of dynamics, purpose and tactics of public relations practice, and the relationships linking these. At the beginning of the study, it was evident that the evolution of media was impacting public relations practice, but at a juxtaposition, there were studies that suggested that PR professionals were at the centre of the emerging landscape, but also, that they were not adapting their methods strategically to the new landscape. Exploring this further, it appeared that this could be linked to a lack of knowledge around the new media ecosystem, and specifically, a lack of understanding around one of the landscape's main characteristics of two-way, conversational communication.

With a onset of knowledge and understanding of the new media, the study predicted an opportunistic future for PR professionals in the changed media landscape. The panel of experts forecasted a media landscape that made it easier to target specific audiences; that would allow a PR professional to position themselves as an independent voice and creator of content and, therefore, a community developer online; and also, in the future, potentially have more direct interaction with the audience themselves.

Within a manageable timeframe, this study explored PR practice in the changing media landscape and produced some true and relevant results from the predictive, Delphi method and from the panel of experts. This study has provided a broad overview of the effects of the media landscape on PR practice and also forecasted how these may shift, but in-depth research into each opportunity in new media, in comparison to specific areas of PR, would bring a greater richness into the wider investigation. If there was more time allocated for this research, more Delphi experts would have been recruited and the addition of secondary research to address the core competencies asked of PR professional's today, in light of the changed media landscape, could have supported or contrasted the Delphi results and brought another layer of depth to the research.

Ultimately, the role of a PR practitioner will continue to evolve alongside the landscape, and as media continues to change, technology advances and more and more new media platforms are created, the landscape will require constant

academic attention and a refresh of new research to benefit professional practice.

## Recommendations

There is undoubtably space for another layer of research to be added to the foundation and the aims of this study, recommended to be on a larger, quantitative scale to measure how accurate these findings are to the wider body of PR professionals.

Throughout the study, gaps and areas of further research were highlighted, which were seen to have had little to no present research around them. As an extension of the changing media landscape, research is recommended in the following two areas of PR which are both practical and relevant in today's practice:

- There is an apparent need for knowledge around the changing media landscape and social media tactics, but there is no research that is currently addressing if the academic PR community is meeting these needs, or if it is beneficial in teaching. Further research into PR studies, including undergraduate and Masters programs, is recommended to address this gap. In the past, a PR degree's worth has been criticised. With a change in the media ecosystem, has this benefited the perception of the PR degree - or is it the same?

- Results from this study have illustrated the changes in practices and roles of PR professionals, but it would be interesting to compare these changes to job advertisements - 10 years ago, today and forecast for the future. Would the core competencies of PR professionals match more and more to those of a journalist's? As the media landscape evolves, does this also equate to more work to meet the demands of immediacy in the online world?

# PG. 76 References

Adler, M. and Ziglio, E. (1996), Gazing into the Oracle, Jessica Kingsley Publishers: London.

Alfonso, G. and Miguel, R. (2006), "Trends in online media relations: Web-based corporate press rooms in leading international companies," *Public Relations Review* 32 (2006) 267–275.

Arango, T. (2009), "Fall in Newspaper Sales Accelerates to Pass 7%," *New York Times Online*. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/28/business/media/28paper.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/28/business/media/28paper.html?_r=1)

Barret, N. (2008), "Don't confuse Public Relations with Media Relations," *Content Marketing Today* [Online] June 18th. Available: <http://contentmarketingtoday.com/2008/06/18/dont-confuse-media-relations-with-public-relations/>

Bowman, S. and Willis, C. (2003), "We Media- How audiences are shaping the future of news and information," [Online] Copyright © 2003 Shayne Bowman, Chris Willis and The Media Center at The American Press Institute. Available: <http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/weblog.php>

Callison, C. (2002), "Media relations and the Internet: how Fortune 500 company web sites assist journalists in news gathering," *Public Relations review* 29 (2003), 29-41.

Charlene, L. & Bernoff, J. (2009), The Groudswell, Forrester Research, Inc: USA.

Church, G. (2008), "Is Client Relations The New Media Relations?" ComPREhension [Online] April 18th. Available: <http://comprehension.prsa.org/?p=86>

Council of Public Relations Firms (2009), "Industry Facts," Prfirms.org, NY: New York. [Online] <http://www.prfirms.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=599&parentID=474>

Council of Public Relations Firms (2009), "The PR Factor: Advertising Age Edition", October 26, 2009. [Online] <http://adage.coverleaf.com/advertisingage/20091028pf#pg2>

Dalkey, N. C. (1969), "An experimental study of group opinion." *Futures*, 1 (5), 408-426.

Delbecq, A. L., Van de Ven, A. H., & Gustafson, D. H. (1975), "Group techniques for program planning." Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, and Co.

Grisham, T. (2009), "The Delphi technique: a method for testing complex and multifaceted topics," *The International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, Volume 2, Issue 1 Pg 112-130.

Haig, Matt (2000), E-PR : the essential guide to public relations on the Internet. Kogan Page: London.

Katz, Elihu (1993), 'The End of Journalism? Notes on Watching the Gulf War', *Journal of Communication* 42(3): 5–13.

Keeney, S., Hasson, F., McKenna, H. (2006), "Consulting the oracle: ten lessons from using the Delphi technique in nursing research," *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 53 No.2, pp.205-12.

Ledingham, J and Bruning, S (2000), Public Relations as Relationship Management: A Relational Approach to the Study and Practice of Public Relations, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: Mahwah, NJ.

Liebling, A.J. (2010), A.J. Liebling Quotes: *ThinkExist.com*, Copyright ® ThinkExist 1999-2010. [http://thinkexist.com/quotation/freedom\\_of\\_the\\_press\\_is\\_guaranteed\\_only\\_to\\_those/220714.html](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/freedom_of_the_press_is_guaranteed_only_to_those/220714.html)

Liu, B. (2009), "Distinguishing how elite newspapers and A-list blogs cover crises: Insights for managing crisis online," Public Relations Review: Volume 36, Issue 1, March 2010, Pages 28-34.

Linstone, H., Turnoff, M. (1975), "The Delphi Method: Techniques and Applications," Addison-Wesley Reading: MA.

Linstone, H. and Turnoff, M. (2002), The Delphi Method: Techniques and Applications, New Jersey's Science and Technology University. [Online Book] Available: <http://www.is.njit.edu/pubs/delphibook/>

Marlow, Eugene and Sileo, Janice (2001), Electronic Public Relations, Wadsworth: Belmont.

Maul, K. (2009), "Number of journalists sourcing stories via social media on rise," PR Week USA Edition [Online] Available: <http://www.prweekus.com/pages/login.aspx?returl=/number-of-journalists-sourcing-stories-via-social-media-on-rise/article/149438&pagetypeid=28&articleid=149438&accesslevel=2>

Middleberg, Don (2001), Winning PR in the wired world : powerful communications strategies for the noisy digital space, McGraw-Hill: New York ; London.

Porter, L. V., Sallot, L. M., Cameron, G. T., & Shamp, S. (2001), "New technologies and public relations: Exploring practitioners' use of online resources to earn a seat at the management table," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78(1), 172–190.

PR Network (2009), "European Digital Journalism Study: How the Digital Age has affected journalism – and the impact for PR," [Online] Copyright © Oriella PR Network MMIX. Available: <http://www.europeandigitaljournalism.com/>

Rowe, G. & Wright, G. (1999), "The Delphi technique as a forecasting tool: Issues and analysis," *International Journal of Forecasting*, 15(4), 353 - 375.

R.W. Lariscy et al. (2009), "An examination of the role of online social media in journalists' source mix," *Public Relations Review* Vol 35, 314-316.

Sackman, H. (1974) "Delphi Assessment: Expert Opinion, Forecasting, and Group Process," The RAND Corporation, R-1283-PR, April 1974.

Scoble, R. & Israel, S. (2006), Naked Conversations, Jon Wiley & Sons Inc: New Jersey.

Shirky, C. (2008), Here Comes Everybody, Penguin Group: London.

Siegler, M.G. (2009), "Comcast: Twitter has changed the culture of our company," Tech Crunch [Online] Available: <http://www.techcrunch.com/2009/10/20/comcast-twitter-has-changed-the-culture-of-our-company/>

Skulmoski, G. et al (2007), "The Delphi Method for Graduate Research," Journal of Information Technology Education: Volume 6, 2007.

State of the Media (2009), "Annual Report of American Journalism: The State of News Media 2009, The Project for Excellence 2009," Copyright: The Project for Excellence in Journalism. <http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2009/index.htm>

Supa, D. and Zoch, L. (2009), "Maximising Media Relations Through a Better Understanding of the Public Relations-Journalist Relationship: A Quantitive Analysis of Changes over the past 23 Years," Public Relations Journal Vol 3 No. 4, Fall 2009.

Tench, R. and Yeomans, L. (2006), Exploring Public Relations, Pearson Education Limited.

Theaker, A. (2001), The Public Relations Handbook, Routledge.

Watson, Tom (2008), "Public relations research priorities: a Delphi study," Journal of Communication Management Vol. 12 No. 2, 2008 pp. 104-123.

Wright, D. and Hinson, M. (2009), "Examining how Public Realtions Practioners Actually Are Using Social Media," Public Relations Journal Vol 3, No. 3 Summer 2009.

White, C., & Raman, N. (1999), "The World Wide Web as a public relations medium: The use of research, planning, and evaluation in Web site development," Public Relations Review, 25(4), 405–419.

**Front Cover Image.** SXC: Image ID: 1261183: <http://www.sxc.hu/browse.phtml?f=download&id=1261183>