

SOCIAL PR STUDY 2015



A study of social media use among PR professionals

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings



1. PRs can't carry out their work without social media.

More than two thirds of PR professionals use social media daily. Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn are the most popular social media tools.



2. Promoting content and reposting content are the most important reasons for social media use.

Almost three quarters of PR professionals use social media to promote content.



3. Social media has improved productivity for PR professionals but it hasn't reduced their workload.

Rather, it has added new responsibilities.



4. PR professionals strongly believe that PR is about conversations.

Yet there remains a high number of PRs who are not responding to comments or engaging with conversations, posts and discussions on social media.



5. PRs at public sector and not-for-profit teams are most optimistic about the impact social media has had on PR.

Social media has made it possible for PRs in the public sector and not-for-profits, who mostly rely on external funding, to directly engage with audiences at a relatively low cost.



6. Email and telephone are the most common and preferred forms of communication with journalists.



7. Social media has changed the journalist-PR dialogue.

Nearly half of PR professionals believe social media has made them less reliant on journalists to get their story out.



8. A quarter of PR professionals report their relationship with their audience has changed fundamentally as a result of social media.

2. OVERVIEW

The objective of the first Social PR Survey by Cision and Canterbury Christ Church University is to understand how social media impacts PRs and their media relationships.

Overall, PR professionals state clearly that they could not manage without social media. But while social media has improved productivity for PR professionals, it hasn't reduced their workload; rather, new responsibilities have been added to their existing role. PR professionals demonstrated a good knowledge and frequent use of social media for a number of tasks, most of them related to directly promoting content.

While PRs used social media mostly for promoting and reposting content, the study found that there remain a high number of PR professionals who are not responding to comments, posts and discussions from media and consumers. This seriously questions whether PR professionals are implementing the idea of a conversation to its full potential or just using it as a vehicle to promote their existing work.

The study also compares the results of the PR research with data from our Social Journalism Study 2015 in order to identify correlations and disparities in the ways the two professions use social media. For the most part PRs and journalists are largely in agreement with how social media is changing their working environment. What is noticeable is the difference between how journalists like to be contacted and methods used by PR professionals to pitch their stories. While email and telephone are the most popular channels of communication used, the greatest disagreement is over the use of the telephone: 49% of PRs preferred to use telephone to pitch a story, while only 23% of journalists wanted to be pitched this way. This gap in the way PRs prefer to contact journalists and the way journalists like to be approached needs to be addressed if PR professionals want to maintain positive working relationships with the media.



3. SOCIAL MEDIA USE

3.1 More than two thirds of PR professionals use social media daily

The vast majority of PR professionals engage with social media, with over two thirds of respondents (69%) indicating that they use social media on a daily basis and only a very small group stating they use no social media at all (2%).

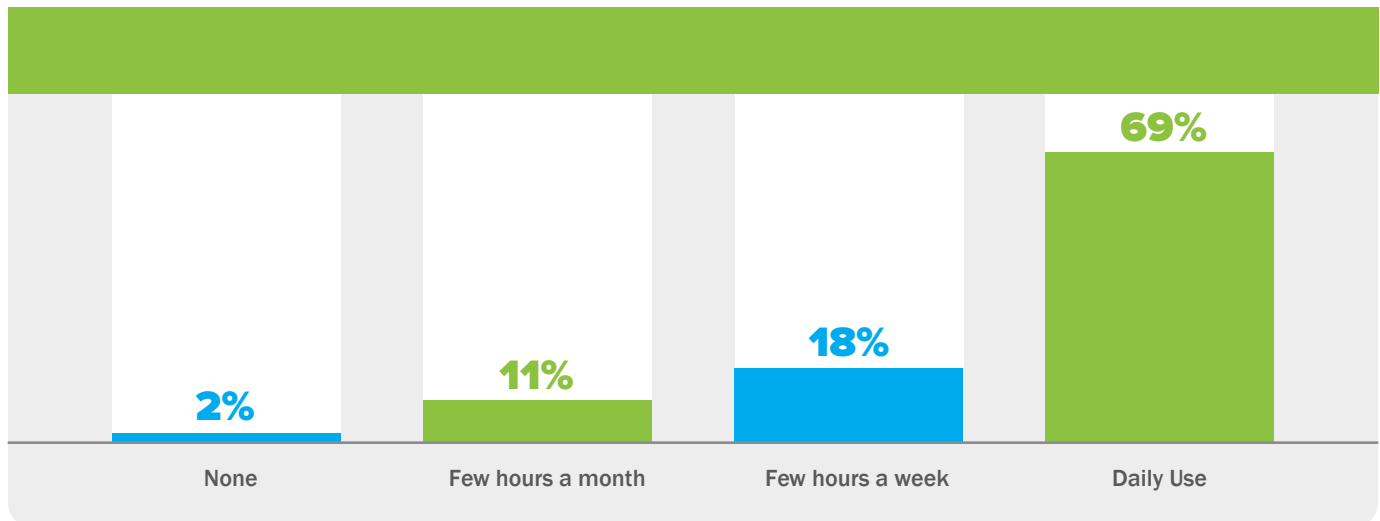


Figure 1: Time spent using social media for work

Length of time	% Percent
None	2%
Few hours a month	11%
Few hours a week	18%
Up to 1 hour a day	23%
1 - 2 hours a day	23%
2 - 4 hours a day	13%
4 - 8 hours a day	8%
more than 8 hours a day	2%

The majority of respondents spend either 'up to one hour per day' or '1-2 hours per day' on social media, suggesting that PR professionals are not 'always on' but have a strategic approach and use social to carry out specific, perhaps scheduled, PR activities.

Table 1: Time spent using social media for work





It is also evident that heavier users tend to be younger, with 15% of 18-27 year olds using social media for 4-8 hours per day compared to just 8% of 28-45 year olds and 4% of 46-64 year olds. As social media becomes more embedded in PR, it is likely that employees will dedicate more time to it, depending of course on their specific role or job title.

Length of time	18-27	28-45	46-64
None	2%	2%	2%
Few hours a month	6%	8%	15%
Few hours a week	16%	18%	17%
Up to 1 hour a day	16%	22%	26%
1 - 2 hours a day	27%	25%	20%
2 - 4 hours a day	16%	15%	13%
4 - 8 hours a day	15%	8%	4%
more than 8 hours a day	2%	2%	3%

Table 2: Time spent on social media by age





3.2 Almost three quarters of PR professionals use social media to promote content

Most PR professionals indicated that in an average week their main use of social media is to promote their own content (74%) and the second most important use is to identify and engage with the media (44%). Only around a quarter use social media to pitch a story, suggesting that it may not be considered an effective tool for reaching media professionals.



Figure 2: Tasks undertaken by PR professionals using social media





3.3 Most favoured social media tools are Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn

Twitter (83%) and Facebook (80%) are favoured by PRs for promoting content but Twitter in particular is identified as the preferred tool across all key PR activities. Twitter is also the channel most likely to be used for pitching a story although this only represents about a quarter of respondents, suggesting that overall social media is not used for pitching.

Length of time	Promote content	Identify / engage with media	Pitch stories	Monitor brand	Outreach
Professional social networking e.g. LinkedIn	61%	43%	19%	31%	43%
Blogs	69%	39%	33%	26%	38%
Social networking e.g. Google+, Facebook	80%	49%	27%	52%	43%
Audio-visual sharing e.g. YouTube, Flickr	74%	27%	13%	27%	29%
Microblogs e.g. Twitter	83%	65%	36%	52%	50%

Table 3: Professional tasks undertaken in a typical week

When asked specifically which social channels were preferred for publishing content, Twitter (89%), Facebook (84%) and LinkedIn (80%) were top of the list, but over 50 different other social tools were mentioned, including those listed below in Table 4 and others such as Neatly, Banjo, Tango, Vine, Vimeo, ThingLink, Topsy, and Tableau. The variety suggests PR professionals are using tools that cater specifically to their needs or customers' needs.

Social media tool	Percent %	Social media tool	Percent %	Social media tool	Percent %	Social media tool	Percent %
Twitter	89%	Google +	53%	Flickr	22%	Flipboard	4%
Facebook	84%	Instagram	44%	Tumblr	16%	Journalisted	4%
LinkedIn	80%	Hootsuite	44%	Slideshare	15%	Scoop.it	3%
Youtube	68%	Pinterest	38%	Other	16%	Ping.it	2%

Table 4: Social media tools used for publishing stories





3.4 On a daily basis PR professionals most keen on posting and reposting content but are not developing conversations

Respondents indicated that on a daily basis, the most frequent tasks to be completed are reposting on a microblogging site (47%) and posting original comments on social networking sites (41%), reinforcing the view that social media is used primarily for publishing content.

Monitoring discussions on social media about companies or brands (44%) ranked second, indicating that social media monitoring and measurement have become important aspects of the PR toolkit.

It is surprising that over 38% of PR professionals stated they never respond to questions from the media on social media, with only 21% of PRs responding weekly and 28% responding on a monthly basis, signifying that social media is not being used regularly to develop conversations with the media. In addition, 21% of respondents said they never reply to queries from consumers and 19% claimed to do so only on a monthly basis, raising questions about the nature and extent of conversations PRs are having.

Activities	Never	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
Repost on microblogging site e.g. retweet on Twitter	13%	11%	29%	47%
Monitor discussions on social media about own company/brands	9%	17%	30%	44%
Post original comments on social networking or microblogging sites (e.g. comment on Facebook)	12%	15%	32%	41%
Reply to comments received in relation to your work on social media	12%	19%	32%	37%
Reply to queries from consumers/ community outreach	21%	19%	29%	31%
Use social media to identify and engage with media contacts	17%	30%	31%	22%
Use social media to respond to questions from the media	38%	28%	21%	13%
Write/review blogs for clients	45%	28%	20%	7%
Contribute to content communities or crowdsourcing sites	46%	29%	18%	7%

Table 5: Frequency of activity undertaken by PRs





4. VIEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

4.1 PR professionals strongly believe that PR is about conversations

Views on social media are generally consistent across all the different PR sectors with most respondents agreeing that PR is more about conversations than merely pushing out information/news to audiences (69%). Nearly two thirds of respondents also agreed that social media has improved their productivity (64%) and they couldn't work without social media (61%). Furthermore, almost two-thirds still think journalists are important despite the use of social media to reach their audience directly.

Comparing the PR responses with those of journalists (Social Journalism Study 2015), it can be seen that both PR professionals and journalists strongly agree that the use of social media has not decreased their workload. Although important and in many cases essential, social media represents another layer of work for both parties.

	Journalists			PR professionals		
	Disagree	Ambivalent	Agree	Disagree	Ambivalent	Agree
I would not be able to carry out my work without social media	36%	10%	54%	26%	13%	61%
Social media has improved the productivity of my work	24%	18%	58%	16%	20%	64%
My workload has decreased because of social media	69%	20%	11%	68%	19%	13%
I have serious concerns over privacy and data security	25%	26%	49%	36%	32%	32%
Journalism/PR today is more about conversations than pushing out information/news to audiences	34%	25%	41%	14%	17%	69%
Because of social media I am less reliant on PR/media professionals	35%	30%	35%	27%	26%	47%

Table 6: Comparing journalists' and PR professionals' attitudes

¹Question phrasing depends on the respondents asked. Media professionals were asked about journalism and PR professionals about PR





A key area of agreement across all PR professionals working in different sectors is that PR is more about conversations although it is striking the extent to which in-house public sector PR staff agreed with this (76%). This sector also stated they were most happy with their relationship with media professionals (72%), closely followed by agency PR staff (71%).

75% of in-house (not-for-profit) PRs felt that social media has improved the productivity of their work, while PR agency staff were the least likely to agree with that sentiment. Non-profit PR, for both public sector and charities, appears to be sophisticated and pro-active in directly engaging audiences at relatively low cost.

PR sector	In-house (Corporate)	In-house (Not for profit)	In-house (Public sector)	Agency	Consultant
I would not be able to carry out my work without social media	60%	64%	62%	65%	60%
Social media has improved the productivity of my work	62%	75%	62%	61%	64%
My workload has decreased because of social media	14%	16%	10%	9%	16%
I have serious concerns over privacy and data security	27%	33%	31%	37%	36%
PR today is more about conversations than pushing out information/news to audiences	72%	68%	76%	65%	70%
I am happy with my relationship with media professionals	53%	63%	72%	71%	54%
Journalists are no longer as important to me as I can reach my audience directly	36%	33%	41%	24%	39%
Media professionals are less reliant on PRs because of social media	50%	43%	53%	44%	51%

Table 7: Percentage of PR professionals who agree with the statements





4.2 PR professionals report good knowledge of social media

With daily use of social media becoming the norm, it is not surprising that PR professionals reported their knowledge of social media is good-to-expert (83%) and only 17% stated their knowledge is limited.

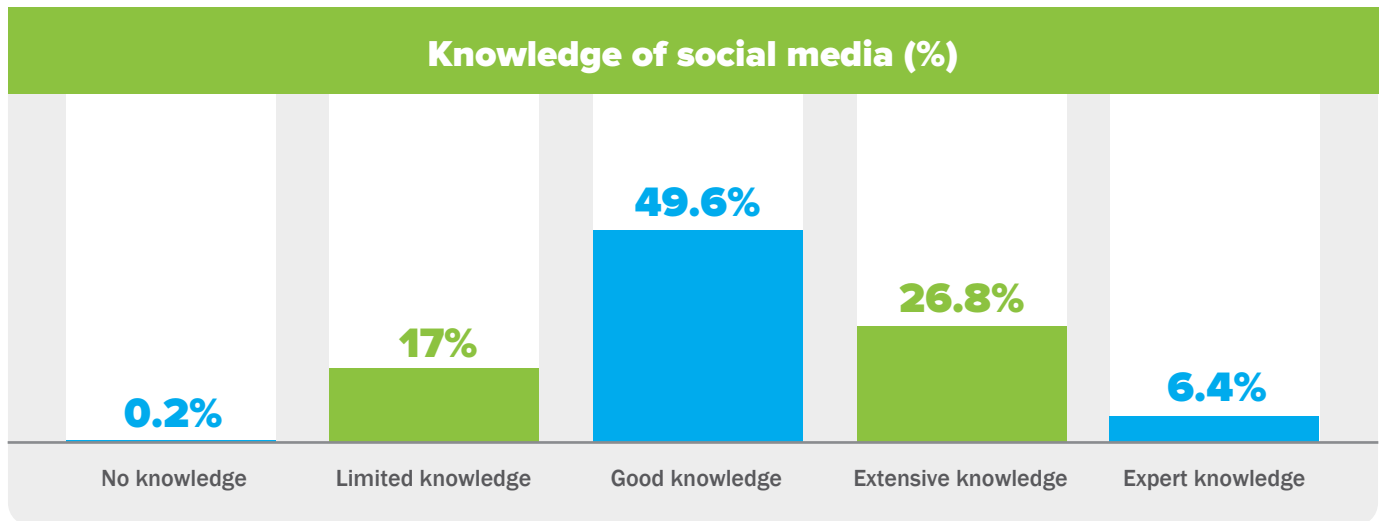


Figure 3: Knowledge of using social media

Using data gathered from the Social Journalism Study 2015 it is interesting to see that there is only a slight difference between the knowledge that journalists and PR professionals claim they have of social media, with journalists slightly more confident of their expertise.

Level of Knowledge	Journalists	PR professionals
None	0.7%	0.2%
Limited	17.1%	17%
Good	42.9%	49.6%
Extensive	32.7%	26.8%
Expert	6.6%	6.4%

Table 8: Comparison between journalists' and PR professionals' self-reported knowledge of social media





What is noticeable is that consultants and in-house (not-for-profit) PR professionals reported both the lowest levels of expert knowledge (4%) and the highest levels of limited knowledge (22% and 19% respectively).

	In-house (Corporate)	In-house (Not for profit)	In-house (Public sector)	Agency	Consultant
Limited knowledge	15%	19%	16%	9%	22%
Good knowledge	48%	52%	55%	54%	46%
Extensive knowledge	30%	25%	22%	29%	28%
Expert knowledge	7%	4%	7%	8%	4%

Table 9: PR professionals knowledge of social media by sector





5. COMMUNICATION WITH MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

5.1 Email and telephone still most common and preferred forms of communication with journalists

When PR professionals were asked what their top two preferred and most common methods to contact and pitch to journalists were, email topped the list, followed by telephone. However, social media appears to be the third most favoured method for both pitching and general communication. Of particular interest is that face-to-face is not part of the PR professionals' toolkit for general conversations but when pitching a story it is as important as social media. When asked directly, nearly half of all respondents said they were likely to pitch a story on social media (see Table 10).

Method of Contact	Journalists		PR professionals	
	Common ways	Preferred way PR contact	Common ways	Preferred way PR contact
Face-to-face	4%	8%	8%	28%
Telephone	39%	23%	55%	49%
Newswires	7%	5%	8%	5%
Email	86%	84%	89%	80%
Social media	32%	34%	30%	28%
Post/hardcopy	6%	8%	2%	3%

Table 10: Comparison of PR contact methods as seen by journalists and the PRs themselves

When comparing how journalists prefer to be contacted and how PR professionals prefer certain tools to pitch their stories, it seems journalists would like to see a little more email (4%), post/hardcopy (5%) and social media (6%). They further stated that they want to reduce contact by telephone by a quarter and face-to-face by a third. This considerable difference suggests that PR professionals need to evaluate carefully the methods used to pitch their stories to maintain a good relationship with media professionals and achieve greater success with their pitches.





5.2 Social media has changed the PR-journalist dialogue

The majority of PR professionals felt they were on the whole happy with their relationship with media professionals. However, social media has shifted the working dynamics between journalists and PRs. The study found that social media has made PRs and journalists less dependent on each other. PRs felt that nearly half (47%) of media professionals were less reliant on them because of social media while 34% agreed that they themselves were less dependent on journalists as they could reach their target audiences directly via social. This shifting balance within this relationship is likely to change over time as tailored social media tools enable PR professionals to reach their target audience directly. Equally, journalists will use different digital platforms to source stories from social media thus bypassing PR professionals.

	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree
I am happy with my relationship with media professionals	15%	26%	59%
Media professionals are receptive to being contacted on social media	14%	29%	57%
I am likely to pitch a story on social media	29%	23%	48%
Media professionals are less reliant on PRs because of social media	27%	26%	47%
Journalists are no longer as important to me as I can reach my audience directly	48%	18%	34%

Table 11: Attitudes towards media professionals and the role social media plays in the relationship





5.3 A quarter of PR professionals report their relationship with their audience has changed fundamentally as a result of social media

Just less than a quarter of respondents stated that their relationship with their audience had changed fundamentally and almost a fifth stated it had changed the way they work and what PR is all about. In contrast almost a third (34%) stated that the way they contacted media professionals hadn't been impacted or had changed only to a small extent, supporting the finding that email and telephone continue to dominate their contact methods.

	Not at all	Small extent	Moderate extent	Large extent	Fundamentally
The way I work	4%	14%	26%	37%	19%
The way I contact media professionals	13%	29%	34%	19%	5%
My relationship with my audience	3%	10%	23%	40%	24%
What PR is about	4%	12%	27%	39%	18%
The way media professionals contact me	14%	30%	30%	19%	7%

Table 12: To what extent has social media changed PRs' relationship with their audience





6. CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

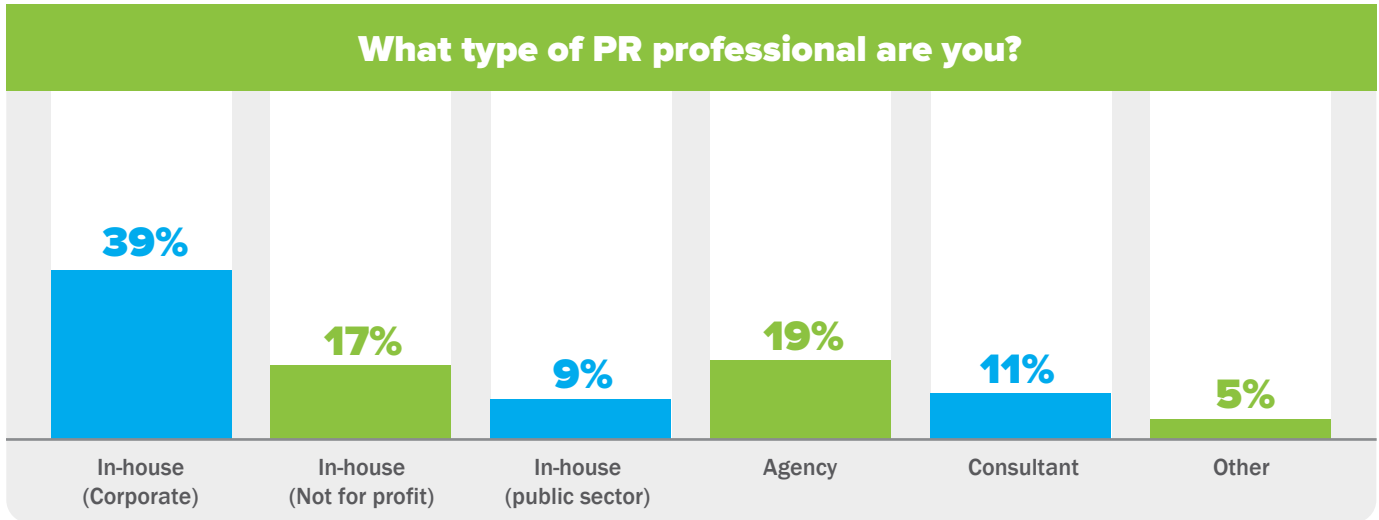


Figure 4: Type of PR Professional who responded



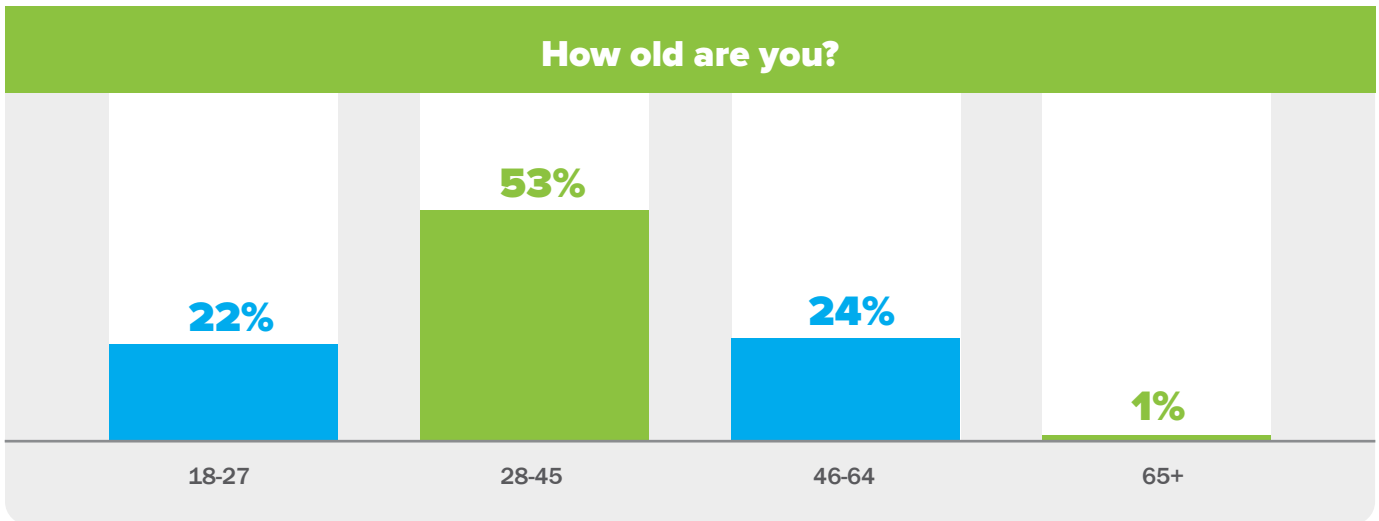


Figure 5: Age of respondents

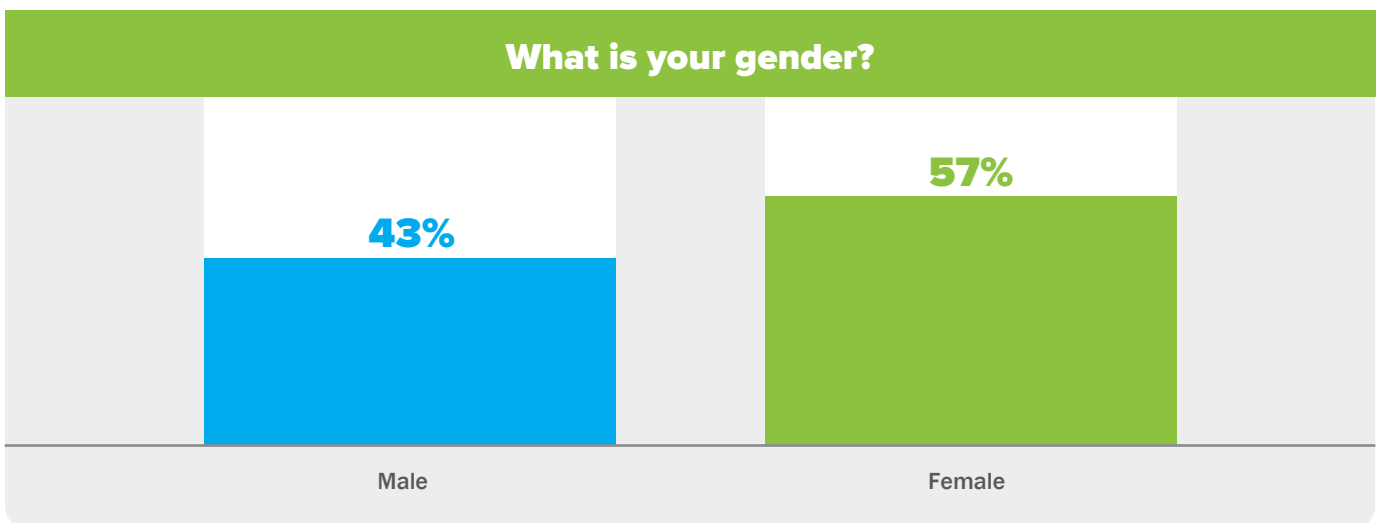


Figure 6: Gender of respondents





ABOUT THE SURVEY

Cision UK and Canterbury Christ Church University conducted an online survey about the social media use among PR professionals. The survey is based on 748 responses from PR professionals collected during March 2015. To conduct this research 8,000 verified PR professionals were contacted through the Cision database, giving a response rate of 9.35%.

The survey is designed to explore the impact social media technologies have on PR professionals' work. The findings are also compared to the Cision Social Journalism Study, an annual survey of journalists' social media habits.

The PR Study has been conducted to inform on best practices within the PR and communications field and to deepen the industry's understanding of how PR professionals and journalists use and value social media and other resources. The research examined the patterns of social media usage of PR professionals, the professional tasks they use social media for, their views on Social PR and the impact this has on the relationship with media professionals.

For more information about the survey, please contact:

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