Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognize the author's right to be identified as the author of this thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from their thesis.

General copyright and disclaimer

In addition to the above conditions, authors give their consent for the digital copy of their work to be used subject to the conditions specified on the Library Thesis Consent Form and Deposit Licence.
The professional use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Deborah Ann Stanfield

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work, the University of Auckland, 2019
Abstract

The novelty of social media provides a “wide open” space for social work research. Multiple questions are accumulating about practice relevance, professionalism, technical and ethical competence. Social work ethicist, Frederic Reamer (2017), describes the advent of social media as warranting our “explicit and sustained attention,” and depicts the task ahead as “the newest frontier in social work’s noble efforts to keep pace with the times and develop ethically-informed innovations to meet the needs of vulnerable people and communities” (p. 10). There is an urgent call for research and for social work students to be taught a critical approach to social media which “encompasses benefits and challenges that create ethical issues and have impacts that cannot be understood in simple, binary, or linear ways” (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017, p. 3).

The first phase of this exploratory, mixed methods study of Aotearoa New Zealand social workers and social media was initiated in 2013. The findings from analysis of 342 online survey responses showed a reticence amongst participants about the value of social media, citing concern about privacy, security and ethical issues as primary barriers to its professional use. Eleven key informants were interviewed concurrently to generate deeper insight into these daily practice realities. These participants, predominantly experienced users of social media as professionals, and/or leaders across various fields of practice offered ideas about the relevance of social media to the profession, its value in networking, generation of knowledge, communication and strategies for overcoming barriers to effective use.

Participants in focus groups held in phase two of the project were asked to consider the source and extent of their knowledge about social media, what more they wanted to know and how they could best develop this knowledge. The creative energy of these groups sparked ideas for professional development and grassroots application of practice principles, skills, and cultural knowledge to professional social media use. The general enthusiasm for social media, especially for social action, was tempered with deep caution about using social media in managerial, risk-averse practice environments.

A critical analysis of all data raised questions about the link between theory and practice, opening scope for deeper understanding of the lived experience of social media use in practice. Participants called for leadership, greater critical understanding of social media in society, ethical guidance and the establishment of ‘ground up’ best practice examples. Findings highlight how motivation behind, and knowledge about, social media use is fundamentally connected with social work identity. They highlight the extent to which forces of neoliberalism weave their way into attitudes and ethical decision making about social media, and how the dichotomy of the promise and perils of social media continues to confound, confuse and limit us in our development of expertise as a profession. The findings also suggest that social workers have the capacity and confidence to create a unique
relationship with social media based on social work principles, practice wisdom and the unique cultural attributes of Aotearoa New Zealand.
Acknowledgements

My Brian – your love and belief in me

Dr Liz Beddoe and Dr Ian Hyslop –
Your talent, vision and comradeship

The participants – your generosity and wisdom

My family and friends – your pride

The RSW Collective – your intelligence and leadership
My colleagues – your excitement and genuine interest
The social work students – your humility and our collegial late nights

My dog Moss – whose nose on my keyboard reminds me to walk.

My own room
# Table of contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................................................... iv
Table of contents ............................................................................................................................................................. v
Glossary of Māori words and concepts .......................................................................................................................... x
List of figures .................................................................................................................................................................. xi
List of tables ................................................................................................................................................................... xii

## Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The context: Social media ........................................................................................................................................... 1
1.2 The context: Social workers and social media .......................................................................................................... 2
1.3 The questions ............................................................................................................................................................. 3
1.4 The researcher ........................................................................................................................................................... 3
1.5 The thesis .................................................................................................................................................................. 6

## Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Overview .................................................................................................................................................................. 8
2.2 Scope: Social work and social media ....................................................................................................................... 8
2.2.1 Social work .......................................................................................................................................................... 8
2.2.2 Social media ......................................................................................................................................................... 10
2.2.3 Summary of scope .............................................................................................................................................. 11
2.3 Social media and social work in Aotearoa New Zealand ......................................................................................... 13
2.4 Social work and social media: challenges and resistance ....................................................................................... 17
2.5 Ethics of social media use – social work e-professionalism .................................................................................... 18
2.6 The social work imperative ...................................................................................................................................... 21
2.6.1 Social media in direct practice .......................................................................................................................... 22
2.6.2 Organisational use of social media ................................................................................................................... 23
2.6.3 Social work theorising ........................................................................................................................................ 24
2.7 Social work education .............................................................................................................................................. 24
2.8 Professional development and dissemination of research ........................................................................................ 28
2.9 Summary of literature review ................................................................................................................................ 29

## Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Epistemology and methodology ............................................................................................................................. 33
3.2 Mixed methods design and research aim ................................................................................................................ 34
3.3 Survey method ......................................................................................................................................................... 38
3.3.2 Survey development ............................................................................................................................................ 40
3.3.3 Survey participants .............................................................................................................................................. 41
Representativeness of sample (age, gender, ethnicity) ................................................................................................. 42
3.3.4 Summary of statistical analysis of survey ......................................................................................................... 43
3.4 Key informant interview method ........................................................................... 43  
3.4.1 Rationale for key informant interviews .............................................................. 43  
3.4.2 Participant selection .......................................................................................... 44  
3.4.3 Invitation to the project .................................................................................... 45  
3.4.4 Interview process ............................................................................................. 47  
3.4.5 Thematic analysis of interviews ....................................................................... 48  

3.5 Integration of the survey and interview analysis .................................................. 50  
3.5.1 Method of integrating survey and interview analysis ........................................ 50  
3.5.2 Summary of PHASE ONE findings and implications for PHASE TWO ........ 52  

PHASE TWO .............................................................................................................. 54  

3.6 Focus group method ............................................................................................ 54  
3.6.1 Rationale for focus groups ............................................................................... 54  
3.6.2 Participant selection and invitation to the project ............................................. 55  
3.6.3 Description of participants ............................................................................... 56  
3.6.4 Focus group questions and process ................................................................. 57  
Focus group questions .................................................................................................. 57  
Focus group facilitation ............................................................................................... 58  
3.6.5 Thematic analysis of focus groups ................................................................... 59  
The process of generating themes ............................................................................... 60  

PHASE THREE ............................................................................................................. 62  

3.7 Method for final analysis/interpretation ............................................................... 62  

3.8 Summary of ethical considerations ...................................................................... 63  
3.8.1 Survey confidentiality ....................................................................................... 64  
3.8.2 Key informant interviews ................................................................................ 64  
3.8.3 Focus groups ................................................................................................... 64  
3.8.4 Benefits of participating in this project ............................................................. 65  
3.8.5 Researcher reflexivity ...................................................................................... 65  

3.9 Summary of methodology ..................................................................................... 66  

Chapter 4: Findings ..................................................................................................... 67  

PHASE ONE FINDINGS .............................................................................................. 67  

4.1 Survey findings .................................................................................................... 67  
4.1.1 Data analysis .................................................................................................... 67  
4.1.2 Data preparation ................................................................................................ 68  
Data cleaning and preparation for Dataset A – Users ............................................. 68  
Data cleaning and preparation for Dataset B – Non-users ...................................... 69  
4.1.3 Description of findings .................................................................................... 69  
Frequency of use ....................................................................................................... 69  
Reasons for social media use ................................................................................... 70  
Importance of social media use ............................................................................... 72  
Satisfaction with social media use ........................................................................... 72  
Personal and professional use of social media ......................................................... 76  
Interest in using social media professionally .......................................................... 77  
Opinions about professional social media use ......................................................... 78  
Comparison of opinions about professional social media use between datasets .... 79  
Social media activity – receiving and viewing content ............................................ 81  
Age and professional use of social media ................................................................. 82  

PHASE TWO FINDINGS ................................................................. 117

4.3 Focus group findings ......................................................... 117
4.3.1 Generating professional meaning from personal experience .......... 118
Intrusiveness of social media ................................................. 119
Generational factors .............................................................. 120
Dominance of social media .................................................... 122
4.3.2 Generating meaning about social media as social workers ........... 123
Social work ‘kete’ ................................................................. 124
Reluctance and discontent ..................................................... 129
Confronting complexity (multi-dimensions of social media use) ............ 131
4.3.3 Discovering ways to learn ............................................... 132
Acknowledging power ......................................................... 133
‘Whanaungatanga’ and social media relationships ............................. 137
Gathering forces – developing peer support and generating data .......... 138
Seeking leadership .............................................................. 140
4.3.4 Summary of focus group findings ..................................... 142

PHASE THREE FINDINGS: Meta-themes ........................................ 143

4.4 Summary of all findings ..................................................... 143
4.4.1 Identity ................................................................. 144
4.4.2 Knowledge .............................................................. 145
4.4.3 Learning ................................................................. 145
4.4.4 Leadership .............................................................. 146
Chapter 5: Discussion ............................................................................................................. 148
5.1 Introduction and scope of discussion ............................................................................. 148
5.1.1 The interrelationship between knowledge and identity ........................................ 150
5.2 Social work identity and social media .......................................................................... 151
5.2.1 Contemporary social work identity: The profession of social work ....................... 152
5.2.2 Contemporary social work identity: Social workers and social action ................... 153
5.2.3 Multiple and blurred social work identities on social media ................................ 155
5.3 Social work knowledge: The social work kete .............................................................. 156
5.3.1 Technical skill – technological and informational literacy .................................... 157
5.3.2 Critical skills ............................................................................................................ 159
5.3.3 Interpersonal skill – the demise of face to face? ..................................................... 161
5.3.4 Social media – macro skills .................................................................................... 163
5.3.5 Ethical skills and professional conduct .................................................................... 164
5.4 Learning: Professional development and education ..................................................... 167
5.4.1 Professional Development ....................................................................................... 167
5.4.2 Social work education ............................................................................................ 169
5.4.3 Integrating knowledge about social media into social work learning ................... 171
5.5 Leadership and ways forward ....................................................................................... 173
5.6 Summary ....................................................................................................................... 174

Chapter 6: Conclusions ........................................................................................................... 176
6.1 Time ............................................................................................................................... 176
6.2 My voice and the voices of others ................................................................................ 178
6.3 Knowledge and power .................................................................................................. 180
6.4 The future ..................................................................................................................... 182

Appendix 1: Phase one ethics approval ............................................................................. 184
Appendix 2: Letter to ANZASW re use of membership (survey) ......................................... 185
Appendix 3: Survey questions ............................................................................................. 187
Appendix 4: Email invitation to participate in survey .......................................................... 189
Appendix 5: Survey Participant Information Sheet ............................................................. 191
Appendix 6: Key informant Interview Schedule ................................................................. 193
Appendix 7: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement ............................................................ 194
Appendix 8: Interviews Participant Information Sheet ......................................................... 195
Appendix 9: Interviews Consent Form ................................................................................ 198
Appendix 10: Mixed analysis table ...................................................................................... 200
Appendix 11: Phase two ethics approval ............................................................................. 203
Appendix 12: Focus group Participant Information Sheet ................................................... 205
Appendix 13: Focus group Consent Form ............................................................................ 209
Appendix 14: Email invitation to participate in focus groups ............................................. 211
# Glossary of Māori words and concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aotearoa</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hapū</td>
<td>subtribe; clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iwi</td>
<td>tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitiaki</td>
<td>guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karakia</td>
<td>prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaupapa</td>
<td>practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaupapa whanaungatanga</td>
<td>connectedness around a common purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kupu</td>
<td>word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kete</td>
<td>basket or kit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahi</td>
<td>work or practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marae</td>
<td>meeting house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mihimihi</td>
<td>greeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mokopuna (moko)</td>
<td>grandchildren; descendants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pākehā</td>
<td>New Zealander of European descent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepehā</td>
<td>introduction of heritage/identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Moana</td>
<td>local indigenous radio station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangatahi</td>
<td>younger generation; adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamariki</td>
<td>children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangata whenua</td>
<td>people of the land, indigenous people of Aotearoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tauiwi</td>
<td>non-Māori people living in Aotearoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te ao Māori</td>
<td>the Māori way of being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te reo Māori</td>
<td>the Māori language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Tiriti ō Waitangi</td>
<td>the Treaty of Waitangi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tika</td>
<td>to be correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tikanga</td>
<td>custom or rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tino rangatiratanga</td>
<td>sovereignty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wero</td>
<td>challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whakawhanaungatanga</td>
<td>establishing relationship or kinship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whānau</td>
<td>family and extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whanaungatanga</td>
<td>relationship or kinship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of figures

Figure 2.1 Number of social work references according to date published ........................................ 12
Figure 3.1 Research design ................................................................................................................. 36
Figure 3.2 Structure of survey questions ........................................................................................... 39
Figure 3.3 Comparison of age and gender distribution ....................................................................... 42
Figure 3.4 Thematic analysis of interviews ......................................................................................... 50
Figure 3.5 Thematic analysis of focus groups ...................................................................................... 62
Figure 3.6 Interpretive framework ....................................................................................................... 63
Figure 4.1 Focus group sub-themes: Generating professional meaning from personal experience ........................................................................................................... 118
Figure 4.2 Focus group sub-themes: Generating professional meaning as social workers ................................................................. 124
Figure 4.3 Focus group sub-themes: Discovering ways to learn ......................................................... 133
Figure 4.4 Focus groups: Samples of opening and closing remarks indicating change ...................... 134
Figure 4.5 Focus groups: Samples of opening and closing remarks indicating no change ................. 134
Figure 5.1 Meta-themes for discussion: Social workers and social media ...................................... 148
List of tables

Table 2.1 Literature search terms and phrases: Social work ................................................................. 9
Table 2.2 Literature search terms and phrases: Social media .............................................................. 11
Table 3.1 Representation of survey participants ................................................................................. 42
Table 3.2 Roles and demographics of key informant interview participants ..................................... 45
Table 3.3 Roles and demographics of focus group participants ......................................................... 56
Table 4.1 Use of social media for professional social work reasons: Two data sets ............................ 68
Table 4.2 Use of social media for professional social work reasons: Frequency ............................... 70
Table 4.3 Reasons for using social media ......................................................................................... 70
Table 4.4 Usefulness of social media to professional activities .......................................................... 71
Table 4.5 Users of social media: Professional importance ................................................................. 72
Table 4.6 Users of social media: Satisfaction .................................................................................... 73
Table 4.7 Limiting and preventive factors: Users and non-users of professional social media .......... 74
Table 4.8 Cross tabulation of personal and professional use of social media .................................... 76
Table 4.9 Non-users of social media: Interest .................................................................................... 77
Table 4.10 Opinion and attitude towards professional social media use: Comparison of mean and standard deviation ........................................................................................................ 78
Table 4.11 Cross-tabulation of use/non-use of social media, with opinion of its importance ............ 80
Table 4.12 Cross-tabulation of use/non-use of social media, with opinion about social work training in potential of social media .................................................................................. 81
Table 4.13 Users of social media: Activities ....................................................................................... 81
Table 4.14 Cross-tabulation of age demographic and professional use of social media .................... 82
Table 4.15 Joint analysis of all data ..................................................................................................... 144
Table 5.1 Social work curriculum with integration of social media learning .................................... 171
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The context: Social media
Social media occupies a space in our world so large it is rendered almost invisible. The term *ubiquitous* is used by many to describe the phenomenon, which perhaps only just captures the pervasive power of social media, and how quickly it has consumed us (Wolf & Goldkind, 2016). The social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr, for example, although only in existence since the mid-2000s, have penetrated our personal lives, our politics and professional relationships so deeply they have transformed how we relate to each other, and how we gain and share knowledge.

The definition of social media is contested and fluid, and its meaning is continually negotiated throughout the writing of this thesis, through the voices of the participants, and by the growing analysis contained in the literature. It can be said at the outset, however, that social media would not exist without the internet, which has provided opportunity to communicate and to share information electronically since the 1950s, marking the beginning of the digital revolution and information age. New capacities of the World Wide Web, introduced in 2004 (Web 2.0), combined with myriad other technological developments brought about a change “whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion” (Kaplan & Haenlien, 2010, p. 61). The evolution of high speed internet and commercialization of social media over the last decade have contributed to its proliferation across the globe. Social media is but one aspect of how the internet has changed our lives, and it means many different things to different people.

It was estimated that, by the end of 2017, three billion people globally were using the internet. New Zealand is ranked 13th out of 155 countries in its development of internet technology (International Telecommunications Union (ITU), 2017), and by the end of 2017, 84% of households in developed countries, including New Zealand, had access to the internet. Although the internet, and social media have significantly infiltrated the lives of people living in developed countries, this is less apparent in developing and least developed countries, where only 43% and just under 15% of households respectively use the internet. Alongside this stark global inequality of access and opportunity, there are also significant gender gaps, most notably in the least developed countries, where 41% of women do not use or have access to the internet (ITU, 2017). These figures represent clear evidence of what has been coined the *digital divide*, evidence of which also exists in Aotearoa New Zealand (Crothers, Smith, Urale, & Bell, 2015).

Crucial questions are being asked by scholars about the reality and promise of social media, including the shifting away from mass media and its “vertical” dissemination of information, to the promise of a more democratic, “horizontal” media which provides capacity for citizens to share and generate news.
of their own, and to choose from multiple sources. This fundamental shift suggests that “hierarchical relationships between mass media consumers and producers of media content are being further unraveled” (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012, p. 816). Questions are being asked, however, about whether social media is delivering on its seductive promise: does it inherently promote freedom and democracy? Is it contributing to a “coarsening of public discourse” (Standage, 2013, p. 4)? Is it a waste of time? Is it anti-social? Is it a fad? Does it trigger revolutions? (Fuchs, 2017; Ward, 2017). And importantly for this thesis, what role does social media play in the pursuit of social justice?

The omnipresence of the internet, and of social media, has indisputably led us unwittingly into a revolution – into a new age. Whether it be termed a digital revolution or fourth industrial revolution (Schwab, 2016), or whether we are living in a new informational, technological or connected age, it is likely only history will reveal to us the nature and extent of changes in our midst. We may need to wait to determine how correct we are in our perception that “there has ever been a time of greater promise or potential peril” (Schwab, 2016, p. 2).

1.2 The context: Social workers and social media
Social workers increasingly recognise the need to be ethically and critically positioned in their approach to social media: to discover how it can be used to communicate professionally, to evaluate how everyday service delivery is enhanced or restricted by it, and to critically understand the relevance of the digital divide to its social justice work (Schembri, 2008; Simpson, 2017; Steyaert & Gould, 2009; Turner, 2016; Wolf & Goldkind, 2016). As such, the profession is poised to develop a unique, critical understanding of social media on multiple levels – its use in practice, for professional development, social action, research and in the delivery of social work education. The emergence of digital and electronic technology in social work practice around the world has been described as dramatic, representing a paradigm shift for the profession, and worthy of close attention (Reamer, 2012).

It has been suggested that, although responsibility to develop competence in social media use lies with all professionals – indeed with all citizens (Hermida et al., 2012) – social workers should adopt added diligence in this regard. To pursue principles of social justice and social change, it has long been argued social workers require an expertise in networking, communication skills and “media consciousness” (Briar-Lawson, Martinson, Briar-Bonpane, & Zox, 2011; Gelman & Tosone, 2010; LaLiberte, Larson, & Johnston, 2011). The rationale for the acquisition of skills related to engagement with traditional media, extends to skills required for social media (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013). There are media literacy or digital skills to acquire related to the new technology of the internet. In addition, given the way social media weaves itself into our personal, public and professional selves, there is a need for social workers to revise their understanding of ethics and of how they communicate in new professional contexts. Social workers are challenged to make sense of the profound ways in which this new digital age impacts on the people they interact with in their daily work; how it impacts on existing vulnerabilities, and creates new ones.
1.3 The Questions
As established earlier, the intriguing "spectre" of social media (Kaplan, 2010) confronts and haunts our society with multiple conundrums and challenges. Equally, amid the rush to make sense of and control social media in our lives, important questions are emerging for the social work profession, in both global and local jurisdictions. In Aotearoa New Zealand for example, there is little evidence of the role social media plays in the everyday working lives of social workers. According to the most recent report by the World Internet Project New Zealand Team, 86% of New Zealanders accessed social networking sites such as Facebook in 2015 (Crothers et al., 2015, p. 22). Statistics New Zealand (2017) report that in June 2017, there were 3.8 million mobile phones with active internet connections in this country. Given the level to which society engages in social media, there are unanswered questions as to how social workers feel about their knowledge of the ethical and practical implications, both for the profession and for the people it serves. It is unclear how relevant it is perceived to be, how confident social workers are to engage with it, and what opportunities are available for doing so.

For example, New Zealand social workers are increasingly expected to undertake regular professional development (as requirements of professional registration); research activity and material to support this is increasingly available online and through social media. It is known that significant barriers exist for social workers to engage in research (Beddoe, 2011; Fouché & Lunt, 2010) and a question exists about whether social media provides a useful and “friendly” way of expanding this opportunity. In addition, networking is a core social work activity and opportunities available in social media to effectively maintain and develop professional links have significant potential; there is little knowledge about whether New Zealand social workers choose to engage in social media for this purpose, or whether there is enough opportunity to do so.

Given the initial need to limit the scope of this thesis I did not set out to investigate the use of social media in direct social work practice, however, participants found a way to offer their views (generally their worries) about this, highlighting the importance of this challenge in daily practice. This study therefore encompasses a broad spectrum of thinking about social media use by social workers suggesting a lack of information generally on the topic. It asks broad questions about how New Zealand social workers are participating professionally in social media and what their perceptions are of the professional benefits and challenges of social media. The study also asks questions about the knowledge New Zealand social workers have of social media, what further knowledge they require, and how they might best attain it.

1.4 The Researcher
I am Canadian by birth, British by ancestry and a long-time resident of Aotearoa New Zealand. My current role in the Aotearoa social work community is as a social work educator and academic. Previous to this, I was a child protection social worker and supervisor, and worked in a private capacity as a professional supervisor. My social work career, with exception of a short contract with
Essex County Council in the UK, has been all within one region of Aotearoa New Zealand over a period of 15 years.

This thesis is an extension of my interest in the relationship between social work and the media (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013), but is also driven from within my role as a social work educator to support students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for modern social work practice and a desire to contribute to the profession generally in this regard. The place of social media in our society as a key form of communication, expression and source of knowledge, suggests that social workers require a critical understanding of its complexity. My anecdotal professional experience of the demand for such understanding and guidance was an initial motivation behind this current inquiry.

I conducted this piece of research within the social work community of Aotearoa New Zealand and within its unique research culture, both of which are strongly underpinned by the ethical principles of Te Tiriti ō Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi). Te Tiriti ō Waitangi represents the founding constitution of Aotearoa New Zealand which provides a framework for partnership between tangata whenua (Māori people) and tauiwi (non-Māori people). As a registered member of the Aotearoa social work profession, I am accountable to the local principles of bicultural practice arising from Te Tiriti (ANZASW, 2015), and to the global principles of social justice and democracy, human rights and collective responsibility (IFSW, 2014). As a researcher, I am mindful of the overlapping ethical obligations and responsibilities of all researchers in this country towards Māori which arise from Te Tiriti (the Treaty); these include, among others, respect for cultural differences and ways of knowing (University of Auckland, 2016). I am obliged, as a researcher in Aotearoa New Zealand to use an approach to research that does not perpetuate colonisation, cultural imperialism and racism (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

Kaupapa Māori research is employed in Aotearoa as a research method undertaken by Māori for Māori to deepen understanding of matters pertaining to Māori (Walker, Ekenton, & Gibbs, 2006). Non-Māori researchers, like myself, are committed to the same aim of generating and sharing knowledge in a manner most useful for Māori; this commitment requires sustained focus on adopting a non-colonising, bicultural approach to research (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Indigenous wisdom suggests that to develop a useful stance in this regard relies on attention to how the voices of research participants are heard: to who is listening to what is being said, rather than a focus on who is speaking (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). It relies on attending to the relationship we have with indigenous knowledge:

Take up the mahi, sit alongside Māori and be an attentive listener and a genuine learner but respect the knowledge that is gained. Treasure the knowledge that is shared. The knowledge, together with sitting beside Māori and being attentive to that learning is one of the strongest ways, in my opinion, to understand and practice bi-culturally. (Crawford, 2016, p. 83)

To listen well and respectfully therefore it is important to offer clarity about who I am as the listener,
and what my relationship is with the knowledge being shared. Conducting research in accordance with Te Tiriti ō Waitangi depends substantially on an articulated awareness of my cultural position and identity (as a Canadian woman of European descent living in Aotearoa New Zealand), and there is a consistent focus throughout the project on how this influences my relationship with all participants, particularly those who are Māori.

Like most people today, I use social media. I engage with it personally, and have made choices about how to use it professionally. My relationship with social media has changed while undertaking this research, influenced by what I have learned, by the changing attitude of the profession towards it, and by my own sense of its usefulness to my practice. Although I do not have a prominent social media profile, there may be an awareness of those in my professional community of my changing behaviour on social media as a result of doing this research. As a social worker using social media therefore, I am very much a member of the group being researched:

> We cannot retreat to a distant “researcher” role. Just as our personhood affects the analysis, so, too, the analysis affects our personhood. Within this circle of impact is the space between. The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders. We now occupy the space between, with the costs and benefits this status affords. (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 62)

My ‘personhood’ as alluded to in the above quote, is inevitably woven throughout all aspects of this thesis. Use of reflexivity in research, where the experience and perspective of the researcher is made explicit to the reader, is acknowledged widely as a way of discerning the ‘self’ of the researcher within the research, adding credibility or authenticity to its findings (Creswell, 2013; Cumming-Potvin, 2013; Fook, 2011; Loftus, Higgs, & Trede, 2011). This attention to myself as the researcher, myself as the listener and gatherer of views generously offered by those I asked questions of, also aligns with how I set out to enact my responsibility as a researcher in bicultural Aotearoa New Zealand.

To this end, a research journal was kept over the five years of this project to maintain an ongoing account of my experience as a researcher – to capture my reflections about my personal experiences as a social work researcher using social media. These written reflections are referred to explicitly at times in this thesis to support the making of important decisions, to question my assumptions, to configure my cultural stance, and are revisited in the conclusion. Although formal analysis of these written recordings was not carried out as a research method per se, it was my hope that, by establishing a discipline of regular critical reflection, its effect would have a constant presence in this work, and would go some way to contribute to its integrity.

The reflective process undertaken for the duration of this thesis is underpinned largely by the critical practice ideas of Jan Fook (2011, 2012). The value of critical reflection in research as described
earlier, is also relevant to reflective social work practice, an approach to social work with which I identify because of the value it offered me in making sense of the complexity of my previous practice environment as a child protection social worker. Critical theory perspectives, those of Fook and others, also found their way into the discussion chapter of this thesis, admittedly because of my predisposition to them and knowledge of them, but also because of how issues identified by the participants of the research, those of identity, knowledge, dichotomy and power are ones for which critical theory offers a useful analytic framework. Fook’s notion of the use of critical reflection, using principles of deconstruction and reconstruction to integrate new ways of thinking into practice provides a practice modality that goes beyond thinking and analysing, into doing and bringing about change. This is important for social workers in their social justice mission. It is a method by which social workers can be responsive to current contexts of practice: political, economic, technological, social and cultural (Fook, 2012).

1.5 The thesis
This first chapter has outlined the context of this research, and the thinking that led to an interest in the relationship between social work and social media. I have introduced the research questions, myself as the researcher, and provided a general rationale for further research into the topic, highlighting in principle the close links between social work and the potential of social media in achieving its professional mandate. The second chapter reviews the literature, seeking out current writing about the professional use of social media by social workers from international and local perspectives, including the history of social media use by social workers, its use in social work education, ethical implications, and the findings of specific research projects that have been carried out in the field.

The methodological approach and research processes are outlined in Chapter 3; this is introduced with further explanation of the context of the research, rationale for the chosen epistemology and research design, and a description of the mixed methods approach. This chapter then proceeds in three parts, focussing first on the self-administered internet survey, secondly on the key informant interviews, and thirdly on the focus group interviews. This chapter will also describe how the analysis was approached for each phase of the research design. This is followed by Chapter 4 which also presents the findings in three parts; a statistical analysis of the survey, thematic analysis of the interview data combined with the survey findings, and thematic analysis of the focus groups. This chapter will describe how the findings of the first two research processes informed the analysis of the third and will analyse the combined findings. The discussion which follows, in Chapter 5, offers an interpretation of the findings which draws threads from the literature through the data results, incorporates my reflexive thinking as the researcher, and considers the key implications of the findings. The thesis concludes in Chapter 6 with a reflection on the writing of this thesis, its limitations, and recommendations for future research, education and professional development.
The writing of this thesis has been inevitably affected by the various, changing impacts of social media on society, on social work, and on myself as a citizen, social worker, and researcher. Technology is designed to be ever present, it offers efficiency and it collapses our sense of beginning and end (boyd, 2011). It demands our attention, is in our “face.” A challenge inherent in the writing of this thesis was to manage the pervasive power of the social media phenomenon, to understand the boundary at which it intersects with social work. Undertaking this task contributed to an understanding on my part of how difficult it is to discern the knowledge required by social workers to intelligently engage with social media, and to understand their role in supporting others in this digital, informational, technological environment.

In summary, the aim of writing this thesis was to contribute an Aotearoa New Zealand view of the unique relationship between the profession of social work and social media. It asked research participants how New Zealand social workers participate professionally in social media, and for their perceptions of the professional benefits and challenges of social media. It gave New Zealand social workers an opportunity to express their concerns, to share their wisdom, and to be part of a conversation about a phenomenon that is inevitably impacting on our day-to-day work, with all its delights and worries.
Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Overview
The aim of this review is to summarise literature focusing on the relationship between social work and social media. The Aotearoa New Zealand social work profession is the primary focus of this thesis. Accordingly, attention in this review was first given to social work academic writing and grey literature available in this country. International social work literature about social media usage is significantly more developed however, and a review of this writing has highlighted three major themes. First, discussion of the historical development of internet technology and social media in social work highlights the challenges and tensions present in the relationship. Second, the ethical implications are considered, again challenging the profession and offering guidance or ‘how-to’ advice to social workers and to the profession. Finally, the literature is concerned with the relevance of social media to social work practice and development. This will be discussed with specific attention to its use in education, research and academia.

2.2 Scope: Social work and social media
The search for literature about social work and social media was conducted within traditional library databases but also, significantly, by using social media tools: journal alerts, Twitter and Facebook notifications, and other academic social media connections. The following is a description of how terms were determined under the broad categories of social work and social media; the Boolean term ‘AND’ was then used to combine the keywords or phrases identified below in each category.

2.2.1 Social work
The definition of social work offers a clear place to start in delineating the scope of literature relevant to this review. The current international definition of social work, which was ratified in July 2014 by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) includes new concepts related to collectivity, diversity and indigenous knowledges. Its commentary outlines current professional activities carried out by social workers as those that span "a range of activities including various forms of therapy and counselling, group work, and community work; policy formulation and analysis; and advocacy and political interventions" (IFSW, 2014, para. 16). The knowledge base of social work is conceptually broad (Campbell & Fouchê, 2011), and ever-changing (Parton, 2008; Payne 2014), and its activities are not exclusive to the profession, which is described in the IFSW commentary as both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. These realities, which are key features of the social work landscape, led to a broad approach to this literature review, using search terms that captured the diversity of social work knowledge and practice.

This broad multidisciplinary approach was taken cautiously however, as “the affordances of a technology are not perceived in the same way among professionals from different disciplines” (Chan,
The experience of social media and its perceived usefulness for example, depends on context and on values informing practice, not all of which may be applicable to social work. Increasing the breadth of field to include other disciplines also carries the risk of diluting the character of social work. Given the extensive range of practice fields, theoretical approaches, and knowledge drawn from related disciplines, it is necessary for social workers to ‘guard’ the boundaries of their professional mandate (Gray & Webb, 2013b; Payne, 2014). This guardianship task was equally important in developing the scope of this review.

To achieve this balance therefore, literature chosen to inform this study included that primarily found in the social work and human services literature (peer reviewed social work journals, books and academic websites) and the grey literature generated by relevant government offices, social work services and social work professional organisations. It is worth noting that a significant body of relevant literature was found within the field of social work education. Its close relationship to professional development and other academic activities yielded literature about the use of social media as an educational tool and for the dissemination of research.

Finally, in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, the global definition of social work cited at the beginning of this section is extended to include a commitment to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the founding constitutional document of Aotearoa New Zealand: to promote tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty) for Māori, and challenge the continuing impact of colonial oppression on the wellbeing of tangata whenua, or indigenous people, of this country (ANZASW, 2015). The social work code of ethics in Aotearoa New Zealand is underpinned by these concepts therefore the literature review was approached with an interest in Māori literature about social media and how concepts of colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand are related to social media use. Due to the limited social work writing in Aotearoa New Zealand about social media, it was hoped this approach would serve to broaden the scope of related literature, although material was excluded if it went beyond the scope of social work practice as defined above.

Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Search Terms and Phrases: Social Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key words:</strong> Social work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>social work,</strong> social care, social services, social work education/academics, human services, community service/work, advocacy, child welfare/protection, social work education, policy analysis/formulation, advocacy, networking, social work research, social work professional development, human rights, social justice, Māori, colonisation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2.2 Social media

The participatory and collaborative qualities of social media came into being with the advent of Web 2.0 in 2004, therefore any writing about social work and its relationship with technology prior to this date is necessarily considered a very different form of engagement with the internet for most people, one that is focussed on consumption of information rather than an interaction with it. For this project, social media is defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). This is a widely used definition, and to fully understand it, it is also helpful to understand the concept of Web 2.0:

Web 2.0 is a term that was first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which software developers and end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web; that is, as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, pp. 60-61)

It is important to acknowledge, however, that social workers, alongside their human service colleagues, have been interested in the use of computers and information systems in practice for at least 30 years, when the first Human Services in Technology Association (husITa) held its inaugural conference (Ballantyne, Wong, & Morgan, 2017).

The above definition of social media is that of a software tool. Social media as a concept, however, is a complex term with many layers of meaning. It is the subject of academic analysis, debate and scrutiny across disciplines, the outcomes of which are at times contested, depending on how both the terms “social” and “media” are defined and understood (Fuchs, 2017). There are many ways to be social, or to define sociality, and there are many forms of media. “Understanding social media critically means, among other things, to engage with the different forms of sociality on the Internet in the context of society” (Fuchs, 2017, p. 7). This has resulted in the development of various interpretive frameworks (boyd, 2011; Papacharissi, 2011), and a varied analysis of social media; for example, that which promotes its democratic and collaborative features (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and that which critiques the exploitive impact of major social media platforms, encompassing the concept of “digital capitalism” (Fuchs, 2017; Standage, 2013), and “communicative capitalism” (Dean, 2010).

There are various “types” of social media including collaborative projects (like Wikipedia), blogs (personal web pages), content communities (Flickr, YouTube), and Virtual Game Worlds/Social Worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). There are also a growing number of collaborative workspaces (Basecamp, Slack). The most commonly used form of social media are social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook or Twitter, which are defined as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users
with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211).

Although not all these applications lend themselves to social work professional activities per se, it was important to recognise the variety of forums included in the realm of social media and their applicability to social work, thereby assisting to refine the search terms. It is apparent that the words ‘social media’ can mean many things to many people. For this review, and for the thesis itself, the definition has remained broad to encompass any aspect of internet use deemed to be social media in the literature or by participants in the research. This has come to include texting, instant messaging, emailing, podcasts and webinars, skyping, as well as use of social networking sites and blogs. As is pointed out by Fuchs (2017): “Some say that all media are social because they are part of society and aspects of society are present in the technological artefacts we use” (p. 4). This broad definition of social media led to the development of search terms and phrases contained in Table 2.2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.2</th>
<th>Literature Search Terms and Phrases: Social Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key words</strong>: Social media</td>
<td><strong>social media</strong>, social networking (sites) (SNS), Web 2.0, weblogs, blogs and blogging, participatory media, Facebook, Twitter, (and other social media platforms), user generated content (UGC), information &amp; communication technology (ICT), new media, digital technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.2.3 Summary of scope

It is important to acknowledge the revolutionary and transformative aspects of social media and its impact on society (boyd, 2011; Castells, 2010; Fuchs, 2017; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Smith, 2017), and on the future of our professional work with people (Susskind & Susskind, 2015). With its advent, the internet became a place which offers participants the capacity to be involved in the creation of online material rather than solely in the consumption of it, leading to the concepts of the online “participatory culture” (Jenkins et al., 2009) and the “networked society” (Castells, 2010). Key recent historical events (for example, the Occupy Movement, Arab Spring of 2011) have been analysed for the pivotal role social media played in bringing about political and social change (Fuchs, 2017; Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). The Spanish referendum and Catalan demonstration of 2017 were underpinned by the use of social media (Mason, 2016).

Attention has been paid to social media across disciplines, for example, technical and cultural understandings of social media are typically found within the disciplines of communication, journalism and information technology. Perspectives from sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, journalism, communication, education and other social science disciplines are evident in the increasing body of literature pertaining to analysis of the role of social media in society. Social media
can also be examined from an historic perspective: “The Romans did it with papyrus rolls and messengers; today hundreds of millions of people do the same things rather more quickly and easily using Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other Internet tools” (Standage, 2013, p. 248).

As discussed earlier, social work is a conceptually broad profession, underpinned by a range of theories from the social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges. Accordingly, it is reasonable to expect that research and analysis of social media carried out by these disciplines is potentially relevant for social work. However, for pragmatic reasons, the scope of this review does not include this analysis unless it is of an introductory nature (for example, Fuchs, 2017; Lindgren, 2017; Standage, 2013) and/or cited in the social work literature as relevant to the social justice and human rights project of social work. Non-social work journals which were accessed for literature relevant to this project included Journal of Technology in Human Services, Social Media and Society, Information, Communication & Society, and New Media & Society.

Another revolutionary quality of social media is how rapidly its use has advanced since its inception in 2004. It was relevant therefore to summarise the volume of social work writing about social media located for this project as described above, and plot how its publication has progressed over time. To this end, the following chart was generated by inputting bibliographic references (group: social work and social media) stored in the reference manager software Endnote 6 into the qualitative research software NVivo 11 and coding the references according to the year of publication (Figure 2.1).

![Number of references for the period 1996 - 2017](image)

*Figure 2.1*

Number of social work references according to date published.
Data on this chart illustrate that publications about social work and social media began to appear more consistently after 2004, which is to be expected given the time social media (Web 2.0) was introduced. Publications prior to this time refer more specifically to the use of technology by social workers. It is also noticeable that social work publications appear to spike after 2013. This thesis was written over a four-year period beginning in 2013, and the initial literature review underpinning this project was completed at the beginning of this time. Revisions to the original review have been significant, therefore signifying a shift in the profession, especially social work education, in recognizing the need for research and analysis.

A more sophisticated, systematic thematic analysis of the literature would be necessary to understand the nature of this change; a brief overview, however, suggests that the key ethical challenges encountered initially in the literature (Parker-Oliver & Demiris, 2006; Rafferty, 1997; Reamer, 2009; Schembri, 2008), are similar to challenges which are currently being addressed. (Parker-Oliver et al., 2015; Reamer, 2017; Ryan & Garrett, 2017). Advances in the literature include a more conceptual or critically theoretical approach to social media than that found in the earlier material, which tends to be more task focused and prescriptive – concerned with providing guidelines and advice.

A scoping review of social work literature with a focus on social work research was conducted by Chan in 2016. The review found that, although the profession identifies multiple practice applications, there is an unsatisfactory analysis of ethical issues arising from applying social media to practice; strong recommendations are made therefore for further practice, research and discussion. The findings of a second recent study, a meta-analysis of 70 articles related to the use of internet technology in social work, identified the emergence of a new field of online specialization for social work, or e-social work, and generated key recommendations: the need for training and the design of new programs specific to the needs of social work, for social workers to contribute to the design of these programs and to educational curriculum, and to be fully engaged in the necessary ethical debates (López Peláez, Pérez García, & Aguilar-Tablada Massó, 2017).

2.3 Social media and social work in Aotearoa New Zealand

The volume of social work writing about social media in Aotearoa New Zealand is low compared to that generated by other English-speaking nations. This country does have a comparatively early single contribution, however. The first reference to Aotearoa New Zealand social work and the internet was published in 2001 by a lone social work academic (O’Donoghue, 2001), who offered a review of international social work websites which, at the time, included networking sites, tips, guides, access to information, resources, discussion forums and sites which marketed educational institutions and agency services. An argument was made for expanding internet use by New Zealand social workers and their professional organisations, suggesting that in addition to a number of professional benefits, not to do so would “potentially run the future risk of our unique professional identity and bicultural critical reflective practitioner model being threatened again from the dominant discourse of
the North Western Hemisphere cultures” (O’Donoghue, 2001, p. 47). There is recognition in this article of the potential practice value of the internet for social workers, and a recommendation for the critical use of technology to avoid its dominance over the centrality of human relationships so important to social work.

Social work educators in Aotearoa New Zealand, alongside their international colleagues, have been involved in the growing delivery of online tertiary education since the late 1900s (Maidment, 2005; Rafferty, 1997). Although this did not always include the use of social media per se, it did prompt a call for critical debate on similar issues:

Juggling tensions lies at the heart of this discipline, as evidenced in the ongoing debates about social workers facilitating care or control, intervening at micro or macro levels, and grappling with questions of ethics. Striking the balance between harnessing the promise offered by online delivery of education, while ensuring students are not disadvantaged though this method of learning has now emerged as a further dilemma for social work educators to negotiate. (Maidment, 2005, p. 186)

Maidment further advises caution against “pedagogical imperialism” and counsels educators to address barriers in social work online education, which include cultural and environmental barriers, disparity of access to the internet, variation of teaching styles, differences of educational values and cultures, language diversity and technical challenges. As is highlighted in more current literature related to social media use in tertiary education, challenges continue to exist across all professions in this regard (Kellsey & Taylor, 2016; Susskind & Susskind, 2015).

A guest blog series on a New Zealand social work research blogsite in 2013 and 2014 served to revive the topic of social media in this country, inviting social workers to strongly consider the relevance of social media to their profession, citing the high use of social media by New Zealanders generally as inspiration, and offering tips and support to those wishing to use social media professionally (Ballantyne, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). This blogger makes an anecdotal observation that New Zealand social workers are less visible as professional users of social media compared with their peers from other developed countries. This is apparent despite the fact that New Zealanders generally use social media at a rate equivalent to other countries (Crothers et al., 2015).

Around the time this blog series was published, research being conducted for this thesis began to generate findings, thus providing a baseline of local data about the relationship between social media and social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. An early analysis of the key informant interviews was published, offering ideas about the place of social work identity in social media use, and the implications of this for social work education (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2016). Participants were reported as grappling with complex boundaries between personal, professional and organisational identities on social media, and between their public and private selves. They also explored their identities as social workers as presented on social media, and their sense of technological competence as social media
Although not directly related to the research conducted for this thesis, an article published in 2013 by the same authors argued for greater interprofessional collaboration between social workers and journalists (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013). It was suggested here that, given the social justice mandate of both professions, social workers require unique skills to be engaged in social change focused media activities and would benefit from working collaboratively with journalists in this regard. An argument was also made that journalists would benefit from the expertise of social workers, making this a reciprocal venture. It was argued that various social media platforms provide increasing opportunity for social workers to “forge a new boundary between themselves and traditional media: as ‘citizen journalists’” (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013, p. 285).

A closed Facebook group was started in 2014 for social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand (SWANZ) which became the subject of an exploratory case study, generating insight into what New Zealand social workers value about the professional use of social media, and what problems or issues they encountered in its use (Ballantyne, Lowe, & Beddoe, 2017; Stanfield, Beddoe, Ballantyne, Lowe, & Renata, 2017). Findings from this project aligned with what was being reported in the international literature, namely that social media offers opportunity to network, gain access to professional knowledge and to participate in debate and activism. Also congruent with existing literature was the identification of complex challenges around ethics, privacy and other professional issues, all of which will be discussed in more detail later in this review.

A further relevant advance in social media use by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand was the development of a blog space by social work academics entitled Re-imagining Social Work in Aotearoa New Zealand (RSW). Although this website has not generated research or been the subject of formal peer review, it is an example worth noting of how social workers can use social media to offer (and “publish”) critical analysis of current issues and generate discussion and debate about topics of interest to social workers and those who use their service. Although not alone internationally in using social media for this purpose, reference to it here serves to provide an example of social media as a distinct space for the collaborative dissemination of critical thought. Included in the RSW blog, which currently has over 500 subscribers, are posts relevant to this thesis, including a critique of social media as an assessment tool in practice (Joy, 2017) and the role of social media in a social work campaign against proposed reforms to the child protection system (Stanfield, 2015a).

Recent writing relevant to social work use of social media can also be found in government documents in the form of guidelines or handbooks for public servants. For example, the New Zealand Government first published a handbook in 2011 (Government Information Services, 2011) about how to manage social media in government, and more recently the Office of the Auditor General (2013) published a guide for marketing strategies for New Zealand government departments using social media. Government research is also growing in respect of Aotearoa New Zealand use of social
media, which assists with an understanding of the unique population attributes and how these may affect social media use by people in this country (Lips et al., 2015). These policy and procedure directions and new research initiatives highlight a growing recognition of the centrality of social media in everyday public/professional life and the need to promote and manage it.

Specific to the field of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand however, policy and ethical guidance is sketchy and inconsistent. By way of comparison, a seminal report commissioned in Scotland by the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) explored in detail how Scottish local authorities respond to the use of social media by professionals in social care. A strong case was made for government to support evidence-based and collaborative practice by embracing technology (IRISS, 2010). Similarly, extensive social media guidelines are provided by the Canadian Association of Social workers (CASW, 2014), the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) in America (ASWB International Technology Task Force, 2015), and the Health and Care Professions Council in the UK (HCPC, 2017).

The Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB), the regulatory authority for social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand, recently included a limited guide to social media use in its revised Code of Conduct (SWRB, 2016). The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) is this country’s voluntary professional body which provides membership competency assessment and advocacy services, and describes itself as active in providing online professional development opportunities for members (ANZASW, 2013). The association amended its practice standards in 2014, requiring that members are “able to evidence safe and ethical and competent use of digital and internet technology, in both personal and professional circumstances (ANZASW, 2014, p. 8). This standard is not accompanied by a social media guide, however.

There is a growing collection of Aotearoa New Zealand writing about social media from an indigenous perspective. There is exploration, for example, into how the identity of New Zealand Māori is affected by use of social networking sites, the role social media plays in the development of cultural identity (Muhamad-Brandner, 2010) and research about how rangatahi (adolescent) Māori use social media (O’Carroll, 2013a). A further study by the same author examines the effectiveness of using social media to facilitate whānau connections and communication. This study found that using social media for this purpose contributes to overall whānau well-being and simultaneously highlighted the complexity of online relationships and the skill needed to safely negotiate social networking sites. It also found that Māori use social media for a variety of different reasons, including to connect with other indigenous people around the world, to engage in kaupapa whanaungatanga (translated directly to mean connectedness around a common purpose) (O’Carroll, 2013b). Given social work’s reliance on indigenous knowledge to inform practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, this is a limited but important contribution to the profession.

In summary, there is very little social work academic writing about social media in Aotearoa New Zealand. Government documents, professional guidelines and some local research have become
available since approximately 2013 to support the profession; however, New Zealand social workers must largely draw on guidelines, research and theoretical analysis generated by their colleagues overseas and by their colleagues in related professions such as health and education.

2.4 Social work and social media: challenges and resistance

International English language social work literature about social media comes mainly from the UK, North America and Australia. In general, literature about the history of internet technology and social media in social work highlights the tensions still prevalent in this relationship. Regardless of the type of technology (either before or after Web 2.0), it continues to be viewed as “representing an intrusion into the person-centred project of social work, displacing the authenticity of the encounter between worker and service user and replacing it with preoccupations with accountability and bureaucratic efficiency” (Steyaert & Gould, 2009, p. 741).

Technology in practice is at times experienced by social workers as oppressive, irrelevant and in conflict with central importance of humanistic and relational aspects of practice (Baker, Warburton, Hodgkin, & Pascal, 2014; Parker-Oliver & Demiris, 2006; Ryan & Garrett, 2017). Arguments are made against use of simulated training, use of technology and social media in social work education because of their perceived inability to appropriately support development of the necessary interpersonal skills (Young & Delves, 2009). There is an urgent call to maintain focus on the relational and social aspects of social work in the face of the growing impact of internet communication technologies, for social work to develop a practice response to this (Parton, 2008), and manage the impact of what has been coined the “electronic-turn” in social work (Garrett, 2005).

By way of contrast, the social work profession compares itself unfavourably to other professions in developing technological competence and response to the challenges presented by technology. There is criticism that social work efforts do not match those of other local and global organisations, who “view ICTs as critical to improving the lives of disadvantaged and disenfranchised persons and necessary for all forms of civic engagement” (Perron, Taylor, Glass, & Margerum-Leys, 2010, p. 68). The lack of social work advancement in internet technology could lead to its role being surpassed by other professions (Giffords, 2009), and that without “immediate engagement, our profession risks becoming irrelevant and inaccessible” (Schembri, 2008, p. 119).

The “digital divide” is a phrase coined to describe inequalities of access to the internet, but also to opportunities to become culturally and socially competent so that full involvement is possible (Jenkins, et al., 2009; Pearce & Rice, 2017). It is suggested the social work profession become informed about the implications of this new reality and its impact on social justice, and develop a response to the issues arising from it (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010; Perron et al., 2010; Schembri, 2008; Steyaert & Gould, 2009).

More broadly, it is argued the social work profession must adapt to the demands of the social media
age if its relevance as a progressive voice is to be maintained. The American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare produced a working paper about practice challenges in the digital age as part of its “grand challenges for social work initiative” (Berzin, Singer, & Chan, 2015). Limited exposure to innovative applications of technology, limited empirical evidence of the usefulness of technology to social work practice, and financial limitations are all identified as barriers to innovation and effective incorporation of technology in practice. Other obstacles include negative perceptions about accessibility and ease of use, and lack of incentive or motivation to use social media (Thakray, 2014).

A separate, but related, grand challenge for social work is the growing use of big data to inform policy and practice (Coulton, Goerge, Putnam-Hornstein, & de Haan, 2015). Big data refers to the enormous quantity of information available from within government and non-government databases, (for example, health, social services and educational data), from social media posts, and other internet related technologies. The challenge for social work is to harness this data for social good, to “illuminate social problems and propel effective solutions” (Coulton et al., 2015, p. 3), while attending to significant issues of privacy and “dataveillance.” Other issues include the storage and deployment of private information; and of using, interpreting and applying this data morally and ethically. One example is the use of big data for predictive risk modelling (PRM) in child welfare (Keddell, 2015), where data related to past causes of child abuse are used to predict future harm. The use of big data is studied extensively across disciplines, and its many implications are of key concern to social workers (Gillingham & Graham, 2017; Keddell, 2015; Lupton, 2014; Lupton & Williamson, 2017; Reamer, 2017).

2.5 Ethics of social media use – social work e-professionalism

Almost all social work literature about social media focuses to some extent on the ethics and risks associated with social media communication (Cooner, 2013; Dolinsky & Helbig, 2015; Giffords, 2009; Hill & Ferguson, 2014; Lopez, 2014; McAuliffe & Nipperess, 2017; Smith & Wingerson, 2006; Voshel & Wesala, 2015). In the scoping review of social work literature about social media referred to earlier in this chapter, it was found primarily that “negative impacts of social media use were related to the problem of upholding professional ethics, and all comments about the impacts of social media on professional ethics were negative” (Chan, 2016, p. 269).

A report prepared for the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services in Scotland (IRISS, 2010) also referred to earlier in this review, considered (in part) the cultural and technological barriers to social work collaboration, learning and development. It found that reasons given by local authorities for not allowing employees to access to social media for this purpose were ethical in nature, including risk to the organisation’s reputation and security. Other frequently cited concerns in the literature include risk of fraud and breaches of confidentiality (Giffords, 2009; Hill & Ferguson, 2014). No studies could be found by this author examining the extent to which social workers are banned by their employers from using social media, however, given the attention paid to the issue by IRISS
report, it is expected this practice is common. A recent press release in Australia for example, warned all public servants about their personal use of Facebook and the risk of stating opinion publicly on this forum (Carp, 2017).

There is social work writing, however, about the reality of social workers being disciplined for what is deemed inappropriate conduct in the use of social media (Ryan & Garrett, 2017; Turner, 2016). The transgressions made public in the UK press, for example, relate to behaviour deemed in retrospect to have mismanaged boundaries between the private and the public, such as using Facebook to reflect on the detail of daily social work activities. The rulings made when such cases come before the courts provide precedents which, rightly or wrongly, proceed to inform and guide the profession on the ethical use of social media by social workers. The effect of negative media attention on social work in general, and to incompetent use of social media as professionals, creates an environment of fear for social workers, which is most easily dealt with by avoidance. This aversion is potentially further rationalised by the fear of trolling by those who hold the profession in contempt (Turner, 2016).

The work of Frederic Reamer, a recognised authority on social work ethics, provides a catalogue of how thinking about the ethics of social media use by social workers has advanced (or not) over time. In 2009 for example, Reamer wrote sensibly on the blog page of Social Work Today (an established American online social work magazine) that ethical considerations are ongoing and changing; social workers require vigilance and professionalism in any form of public communication and should pay heed to their existing codes of ethics (Reamer, 2009). He more vigorously counsels in a subsequent publication, however, that developments in digital technology “have transformed key elements of social work practice and warrant critical examination of the meaning and application of time-honoured social work concepts” (Reamer, 2012, p. 8). It is suggested that new communicative possibilities raise new ethical questions in need of new solutions. The ethical concepts most in need of re-examination in his view were those of privacy and confidentiality, commitment to clients, self-determination and paternalism, informed consent and professional–client boundaries, and dual relationships.

Even more recently, Reamer (2017) advises of a need for continuing ethical re-examination of social work practice, which he describes as being reconfigured by digital media. Further points for ethical consideration advised by Reamer and other social work scholars include development of professional competence to use social media, production and use of research to demonstrate effectiveness of social media in practice, a focus on the implications of social media for record keeping and documentation, and knowledge about cross-jurisdictional practice (Dombo, Kays, & Weller, 2014; Reamer, 2017; Barsky, 2017). Based on these recommendations, the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) in America, of which Reamer is chair, published standards for social work and technology in practice (ASWB International Technology Task Force, 2015); these standards also specify behaviours and conduct that breach acceptable ethical standards and, as such, represent an example of robust guidelines for other social work jurisdictions (McAuliffe & Nipperness, 2017).
The attention to social work ethics and social media use is inevitably ongoing. In a review of social work practice literature about social media referred to already in this review, professional boundaries were frequently alluded to, referring to boundaries between social workers and their clients, boundaries of time (work/non-work hours), and confusion of public/private boundaries for both social workers and clients (Chan, 2016). The *Australian Social Work* journal published a special edition in early 2017 dedicated to “e-professionalism” in social work. Ten years prior, an article written by Schembri (2008) and published in the same journal outlined the advantages of social media and encouraged social workers to embrace it. In retrospect, editors of the 2017 edition remark:

> Time has marched on, and in less than a decade since Schembri’s editorial we are immersed in a space and time where almost every major international social work journal has dedicated significant publication focus to how social work is engaging with technology, social media, digital communications, and virtual practice. (McAuliffe & Nipperess, 2017, p. 131)

The editors emphasise the ongoing nature of these challenges, “most of them falling squarely within the realm of ethics” (p. 131). Given the centrality and complexity of these concerns it is unsurprising that Chan (2016) identifies professional ethics as a dominant research concern in the review of social work literature about social media referred to earlier.

Ethical issues related to social media use sit at all levels of professional practice, and the social work literature reflects this. For example, in direct practice with clients there are ethical dilemmas inherent in the establishment of online personae, on Facebook or Twitter, for example, where there is the potential for networks to include both friends, colleagues and clients, and for these worlds to then “collide in unforeseen ways” (Kimball & Kim, 2013, p. 186). The challenge of managing dual relationships on social media is significant (Kirwan & McGuckin, 2014) and, while some actions on social media may not cross professional boundaries, other might adversely affect relationships with colleagues or introduce organisational risk (Kimball & Kim, 2013).

There is some agreement in the literature that ethical issues are manageable with close attention to existing social work ethics and codes of conduct (Beaumont, Chester & Rideout, 2017; IRISS, 2010; Kimball & Kim, 2013; Reamer, 2009; Sage & Sage, 2015), however, the increased complexity of ethical decision making as applied to social media use calls for a more sophisticated, creative interpretation of current professional ethics than has historically been the case. “Social workers have core values and principles related to human rights, social justice, integrity, competence, and respect to deploy in online space, but this alone is insufficient” (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017, p. 181). Social media and new technology have been described as “disrupting” the value network of social work by creating a new set of values, those which have been created by researchers who “explore possibilities and create new knowledge” (Goldkind & Chan, 2017, p. 271).
The literature overwhelmingly reflects the need for social workers to be fully informed and strategic as social media users (Barsky, 2017; Reamer, 2017). It has become imperative to develop the required competence, and banning or avoiding social media use is no longer a viable option. “Rather than stifling innovation and new approaches to using technology in social work, policies should provide encouragement and positive guidance, supporting effective and ethical uses of technology (Barsky, 2017, p. 10). Barsky goes on to caution against an assumption that non-technological ways of practice are inherently better, or vice versa, suggesting that decisions made about when to most appropriately use technology in practice should be based on research evidence which the literature acknowledges is still very much lacking (Barsky, 2017; Chan, 2016; Reamer, 2017).

The current social work literature has no shortage of information about how social media can be used by social workers; of the many challenges, risks and possibilities (Dombo et al., 2014; Halabuza, 2014; Strom-Gottfried, Thomas, & Anderson, 2014). Recommended currently is the provision of formal support for ideas to be generated in social work practice and social work education, and for the application of social media in these contexts to be fully informed by research. This advice has been offered to social workers for at least a decade: "Simply adopting technology without an extensive needs assessment and an evaluation of the innovation will not result in credibility or in effective social work practice" (Parker-Oliver & Demiris, 2006, p. 132). Although technology has changed significantly since this statement was made, there continue to be concerns 10 years later about the lack of progress made by the profession, of a “sporadic and sparse” knowledge base, and of the need for “a more informed and pointed use of technologies in social work education, linked to practice and practice readiness” (Taylor, 2017, p. 1).

2.6 The social work imperative

The literature acknowledges barriers to the use of social media by social workers, which are related primarily to ethical challenges as described earlier, and to the perceived loss of the traditional value of face-to-face social work practice. However, social work scholars also remind the profession of its ethical obligation to use social media; the persuasive case is made that information and communication technology “plays a major role in human relationships, which has implications for social work practice” (Perron et al., 2010, p. 5). It is impossible to escape the new reality of social media and its impact on the profession:

Technology has altered each component of the social work equation: redrawing the human environment, altering notions of self, and profoundly unsettling the fit of individual into context. Change of this transformative magnitude has to be pursued, researched, and accommodated by the discipline at every level—micro, mezzo, and macro—across the broad range of practice contexts. (Wolf & Goldkind, 2016, p. 2)

As discussed, social workers are increasingly discouraged from avoiding practice that involves digital and electronic media and simultaneously encouraged to “push the boundaries of traditional practice in
a constructive effort to create, implement and evaluate new yet effective ways of helping people who struggle in life (Reamer, 2013a, p. 171).

In summary, the view is put forward overwhelmingly in the literature that the social work profession should engage with internet technology on all levels (Bullock & Colvin, 2015; Edwards & Hoefer, 2010; Giffords, 2009; Perron et al., 2010; Schembri, 2008; Taylor, 2017). A clear message is made repeatedly that social workers cannot choose to ignore technology; rather they must be aware of, and critical of, the significant place it holds in society (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010). It is recommended that social workers advocate on behalf of those who experience disparity in accessing the internet and are active in providing information and conducting research into ethical and optimal use of social media and technology. Overall, social workers are challenged to take advantage of “every advocacy tactic available to the greatest extent possible to ensure timely policy change for vulnerable populations” (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010, p. 220).

2.6.1 Social media in direct practice
Regardless of the resistance to technology evident in the social work profession (referred to historically as “informatics”), the early 2000s saw an increasing call for engagement with it from within the profession (Parker-Oliver & Demiris, 2006; Giffords, 2009, Parton, 2008; Waldman & Rafferty, 2008). There was early encouragement for social work educators to adopt and develop expertise in internet use and to recognise “the concurrent realities of the physical and virtual world in our client assessments” (Gonchar & Adams, 2000, p. 594). Social workers were being asked to take seriously the reality of cyberspace, to develop skills in its use, to teach about it and to analyse its effectiveness. The promotion of the inclusion of online worlds as a legitimate aspect of the “person in environment” assessment continues to be recognised as essential for social work practice (Chakradhar, Raj, & Raj, 2009; Simpson, 2017).

The literature recognises a distinct educative and support role for social workers in helping clients to be internet savvy; to educate about the dangers of the internet (for example, cyber bullying and misuse of technology), to provide education and lead development of well-informed social media safety plans (Giffords, 2009; Gonchar & Adams, 2000; Taylor, 2017). To capture the integral role of ICT in human relationships, a practice-led approach to the use of ICT is promoted which includes incorporating “online social connections in assessment frameworks and intervention strategies, developing new approaches to assessment that allow for complexity and variability, and engaging in reflective practice that considers how networks impact both positively and negatively on social workers and their clients” (Baker et al., 2014, p. 473).

It has been evident for some time that social workers’ use of technology to engage younger generations is increasingly necessary (Schembri, 2008), and this trend continues as cyber-communication or ICT is recognised as an essential tool for “administrative and therapeutic
exchanges” with this group of citizens (Mishna, Bogo, Root, & Fantus, 2014, p. 179). The use of mobile technology has been studied to explore how it can foster effective professional relationships across all age groups (Simpson, 2017), and there are examples of how social media can augment and enhance traditional face-to-face engagement (Turner, 2016). Research is emerging about social media use in diverse fields of practice, from client-centred child protection social work (Dodsworth et al., 2013; Ryan & Garrett, 2017; Sage & Sage, 2015; Tregeagle, 2016), to community-based and macro social work (Gelman & Tosone, 2010; Hill & Ferguson, 2014; Shevaller, 2017), health social work (Dombo et al., 2014), adoption social work (Howard, 2012) and advocacy practice (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010; Sitter & Curnew, 2016).

The sampling of studies cited above respond to the ongoing call for research, and for best practice examples that social workers can use to “supplement their traditional knowledge base with the information and skills that are necessary for professionals to flourish in a high-tech world” (Giffords, 2009, p. 417). Internet communication technology and social media are presented in the contemporary literature as unavoidable and indispensable tools for social workers. Accordingly, it is urged that work be done to understand how social workers perceive their effectiveness and how they can be used to meet the goals of safe social work practice (Bullock & Colvin, 2015). Response to the need for skill development is emerging in social work textbooks (Beddoe, 2015; Dunlop & Holosko, 2013; Watling & Rogers, 2012), and there is a growing need for knowledge development evidenced by the number of practitioners who are being called to account for failing to demonstrate professional online behaviour (Ryan & Garrett, 2017; Taylor, 2017).

2.6.2 Organisational use of social media
The use of social media by social service organisations is also canvassed in the literature. Young (2013) argues that, although organisations understand its potential, it is not utilised to its full extent. "Social media offer the opportunity for non-profits to access and leverage multiple networks of individuals, to increase volunteer pools, raise awareness about a specific issue, tap into a new funding stream, or develop innovative strategies to address diverse challenges" (Young, 2013, p. 519). Significant barriers exist for organisations in their use of social media to support the social work pursuit of social justice, however, including anxiety about technology, lack of expertise, and budgetary constraints (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010). A further barrier to organisational support of social media is the inaccurate perception of it as a designated “IT” task. It is argued that skills and attitudes required to develop effective organisational use of social media are cultural, social, experiential, and technical, therefore require the skills and commitment from all agency professionals (IRISS, 2010).

It is equally important that agency technology is developed to meet the goals and structure of the agency; to support services rather than lead them (Clary, 2014; Gillingham, 2017). It follows that development of agency social media systems would include practitioner and service user input to ensure they are best suited to client needs (Baker et al., 2014). "Non-profit organisations that are transparent, accountable, and authentic should not have issues with this sense of letting their social
media community actively participate in the conversation” (Young, 2013, p. 525). However, the fear of how the public may make negative or damaging comments on an agency website is cited in research as a barrier to developing social media strategies (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010).

There is clearly a close relationship between the degree to which organisations support the use of social media, and the general professional use of social media by social workers. The banning of social media use by employers is an obvious barrier (Giffords, 2009; Hill & Ferguson, 2014), however, limited support from social service agencies, and misconceptions about social media as described above also provide significant limitations.

2.6.3 Social work theorising

Finally, amongst the literature promoting ethical and practical use of social media there is a growing anthology of conceptual and theoretical thinking by social workers to contribute to our professional understanding of social media. The use of Castell’s theory of the network society, for example, and related understandings of the power inherent in communication networks has been put forward as a way of guiding social workers in their critique of social media and technology, and in their relationship with it across all aspects of practice (Baker et al., 2014; Smith, 2013). Latour’s Actor Network Theory has been applied to analyse the complex experience of engaging in online social networking (Ballantyne, 2015; McKendrick, 2014). The sociological conceptual tools of sociality and social presence provide a further means for reaching a deeper understanding of where and how social media intersects with social work (LaMendola, 2010). Psychoanalytic theory has also been used to theorise the binary aspects of social media, using the concept of “splitting” to explain how social workers become vilified for their use of social media (Turner, 2016).

Boddy and Dominelli (2017) argue for the need to reconceptualise social work practice in the face of social media and, by applying a critical perspective alongside concepts such as neoliberalism, globalisation, professionalism and social justice, encourage social workers to apply critical reflection, to “question taken-for-granted assumptions about power and vulnerability, become aware of this potential danger, and undertake action ...” (p. 4). As mentioned, the impact of rapid technological change has inspired theorising from across a range of disciplines, much of which is of interest and value to social work. The above material represents a selection of how social work is beginning to contribute to this discussion.

2.7 Social work education

Writing and research focussed on the education of social workers about social media in practice constitutes a substantial portion of the social work/social media literature. This literature considers both what social work students should be taught about social media in preparation for practice, how social media can be incorporated into the curriculum as a tool to facilitate this learning, and how pedagogical approaches are being applied or developed to underpin this practice (Kellsey & Taylor, 2016). A strong argument is being developed for the inclusion of social media in social work education
as a core subject (Wolf & Goldkind, 2016), and there is increasing recognition of the impact of social media on the future of social work education, its pedagogy and course formats (Robbins, Coe Regan, Williams, Smyth, & Bogo, 2016; Waldman & Rafferty, 2008). A recent systematic review of literature related to use of technology in social work education (Wretman & Macy, 2016) found that the profession is critically short of social work effort to produce good research and pedagogy. The authors make a case for rectifying this as follows:

If anything, the potential democratization powers involved in innovations such as massively open online courses or mobile-based applications is entrenched within the very fabric of social work motivations and beliefs. (Wretman & Macy, 2016, p. 418)

The range of topics covered in the social work education text Social Work in the Digital Society (Watling & Rogers, 2012) offer a useful summary of what is and/or should be contained in the social work curriculum: social work practice issues, ethics, government responses, digital literacy and competence, an understanding of private and public online identities and the social significance of the internet including “the potential new category of twenty first century disadvantage and exclusion” (p. 1). A second social work education book, Social Work and ICT (Hill & Shaw, 2011), supports learning about how best practice can be maintained while using ICT, using a practice-led rather than technology-led approach.

Social work education occurs in the context of the wider tertiary education environment which is active in incorporating a range of new teaching theory and practices in response to, and in collaboration with, social media technologies. Blended learning and technology-enhanced learning are commonplace, and existing pedagogies have found their place in the new learning environments. Community of learning principles for example, fit well into the affordances of social media, offering online opportunity for students to learn and create knowledge together, and at a distance (Kellsey & Taylor, 2016). The value of technology in higher education to advance learning is generally acknowledged and encouraged (Megele, 2014a; Wretman & Macy, 2016).

There is also a recognised need to focus more comprehensively on the dynamics of distance learning (Kilpelainen, Paykkonen, & Sankala, 2011), its specific ethical implications (Reamer, 2013b), and the potential barriers for students implicit in this mode of learning (Maidment, 2005). From a social work perspective there is also a perceived “disjointedness” between the technology needed for learning and for practice, and a need to differentiate between the two so that social work educators are prepared to support students to become “fit for virtual practice” (Rafferty & Waldman, 2006, p. 19).

There is encouragement offered to social work educators to create a place for social media in the classroom, both as a teaching tool, and as a necessary knowledge base for future practitioners (Westwood, 2014). The editor of this volume suggests that the rationale for its use in social work education programmes begins with the reality of social media use, highlighting the mainstream use of
Facebook and Twitter and the importance of social media in bringing to our attention immediate information about social issues that are of core interest to social workers. The book explores ways that Twitter and other social networking services like Facebook, or the use of blogging, can be used to foster debate, to promote awareness of current events, and to foster critical thinking. They can also be used to apply social work theory, to network with other students and academics, to develop academic writing and to support students in their research or other academic pursuits, reducing isolation and encouraging inspiration.

The social work education literature reiterates these advantages. There are examples of exploration into specific social media activities being “embedded” into learning programmes (Megele, 2014a; Young & Delves, 2009). Social media platforms such as Facebook are used as learning mediums for students to explore and develop ethical boundaries prior to entering practice (Cooner, 2013; Knowles & Cooner, 2016; Voshel & Wesala, 2015). The use of Twitter (Anthony & Jewell, 2017; Hitchcock & Young, 2016; McAuliffe & Boddy, 2017; Megele, 2014b; Teixeira & Hash, 2017; Westwood, Taylor, & McKendrick, 2014), Pinterest (Baker & Hitchcock, 2017) and e-portfolios (Cowan & Peacock, 2017; Venville, Cleak, & Bould, 2017) as assessment and learning activities are becoming commonplace. Virtual world technology (for example, “Second World”) is used in social work education to support development of interpersonal communication skills (Martin, 2017; Thakray, 2014). Skype and Twitter were employed to develop relational skills across diverse groups to promote deeper understandings about social issues and social justice (Brady, Sawyer, & Crawford Herrera, 2016). Mobile apps have been developed by social work educators to aid with the learning about child development (Campbell & McColgan, 2016).

The community of learning/inquiry approach is applied favourably to online social work education and professional development (Bentley, Secret, & Cummings, 2015; Cooner, 2011; IRISS, 2010; LaMendola, Ballantyne, & Daly, 2009; Martin, 2017; Zorn & Seelmeyer, 2017). Online learning communities are recognised for their value in providing students with the opportunity to communicate easily with each other, to work collaboratively and receive support (Johansen & Ornelas, 2012), to explore their online and developing professional identity (Voshel & Wesala, 2015) and to experience and resolve the risks inherent in participating in social networking sites (Mukherjee & Clark, 2012). The use of a virtual social work book group in social work education also draws on the benefits of the community of inquiry approach to support critical reflection on a broad range of knowledge relevant to social work practice (Taylor, 2017).

There is evidence in the social work literature of the community of learning approach being blended with other pedagogies, for example with constructivist approaches, and computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) (Bentley et al., 2015). In addition, the concept of community of learning has been combined with that of social presence, a concept used to describe how genuine and immediate we are in our relationship with others when using mediated communication like online technology. It is suggested that the extent to which people achieve social presence influences the
quality of human relationships (LaMendola, 2010; La Mendola et al., 2009). Given the predominance of online teaching and learning in social work, and across all tertiary learning environments, (Robbins et al., 2016), there is a subsequent need to explore social presence and the impact on the success of online education processes (Bentley et al., 2015). This skill is also increasingly essential for social work practitioners who are urged to raise their “collective social work consciousness about forms of social presence that support sociality by relying on communication and information technology mediation” (LaMendola, 2010, p. 117).

Much of what is recommended in the literature related to what social work students should learn about social media is aligned with general discussion about ethics and the need to include a specific focus on this as part of social work education (Daly & Mansfield, 2014; Duncan-Daston, Hunter-Sloan, & Fullmer, 2013; Judd & Johnston, 2012). The literature also includes a small but important focus on social media guidelines for students (Fang, Mishna, Zhang, Van Wert, & Bogo, 2014). In a recent American report which investigated social media policies in social work education institutions, it was found that policies did not cover all aspects of social media use and necessary information was not all assembled in one place: divided between, for example, the social work school, the institution and/or the professional bodies (Karpman & Drisko, 2016). Recommendations for social work education social media policies offered by this report include attention to six domains: “understanding social media, understanding one’s ethical and legal obligations, the implications of one’s personal and professional online presence, institutional obligations to the program and agency, productivity implications, and possible consequences for violations of the policy” (p. 5).

Similarly, Curington and Hitchcock (2017) have produced an exhaustive social media guide for social work field educators. This toolkit includes “learning activities about why, when, and how to use social media as a practicing social work professional; skills for managing an online identity; guidelines for developing one’s own professional social media policy; and case studies to help develop professional and ethical competency” (Curington & Hitchcock, 2017, p. 4). This is a practice-focused guide designed to assist social work students achieve competencies required of them regarding use of technology in social work practice. As another example, an infographic for social work students produced by the University at Buffalo School of Social Work exemplifies a simple, interactive guide to social media use (2018).

Chan and Holosko (2016) propose a social work practice framework for social media use based on a case study undertaken of a social media youth outreach project. Because social media platforms change so quickly, these authors argue the need for social workers to develop a conceptual, rather than a prescriptive, understanding of social media tools or platforms. Decisions about which platforms to use, or analysis of the implications of using certain platforms must be based on a more enduring and complex understanding of how social media works. They contend “this minimally involves at least three interrelated modes of knowledge: knowledge about the practice tasks, knowledge about the
possibilities of social media, and knowledge about the step-by-step operations of particular social media tools (Chan & Holosko, 2016, p. 692).

The aim of social work education is to provide the profession with social workers who are “fit for practice.” There is clear evidence above of a profession striving to find innovative, contemporary ways to incorporate social media into social work education, however, as also agreed in the literature, it is essential to maintain the holistic relationship between research, innovation in practice and social work education. Preparing social work students for “e-practice” for example, is not useful if social work agencies continue to operate using traditional methodologies (Rafferty & Waldman, 2006).

2.8 Professional development and dissemination of research

The centrality of social media in society and its ubiquitous nature mean there is potential for professionals to have a bigger voice and increased autonomy than previously experienced in their employing and professional organisations.

The increased use of interactive sites such as blogs, forums and micro-blogging sites such as Twitter provide ways to share expertise and knowledge nationally and internationally and allow the “power” and “knowledge” to be transferred away from organisations and directly to professionals. (Ayres, 2011, p. 21)

This mechanism allows social workers to develop their own networks thereby increasing independence, individual professionalism, and more diverse professional development opportunities.

The potential role of social media in the dissemination of social work research and development of the knowledge base of social work has been recognised for some time. Internet technology and social media provide increased opportunity to access research and literature, and to share expertise; however, the literature suggests social workers are not grasping such professional development opportunities (McNutt, 2008; Rafferty & Waldman, 2006; Schembri, 2008). One small, UK study explored how social workers responded to a blended online community of inquiry approach to professional development which was designed to support integration of theory and research with practice. The study found that, although practitioners preferred face-to-face interaction, they competently engaged in online interactions, and appreciated the value of doing so. Completion of online tasks, however, was obstructed by limitations of time and workload pressures more so than tasks conducted via face-to-face meetings (LaMendola et al., 2009).

Social media is used in a wide range of social work professional development activities, supporting academic and practice relationships in many ways (Westwood, 2014). For example, an Australian study followed a group of social workers using a blogsite to assist with debriefing, networking, professional development, self-care (thereby preventing burnout), and to raise awareness of social
work practice issues (Hickson, 2012). The author commented on the diverse and unique ways social workers used social media concluding that it was largely a personal and creative activity.

Similar findings are generated across other studies, suggesting that online discussion forums help to develop learning communities, offer space for critical reflection and opportunity for life-long learning (Gandy-Guedes, Vance, Bridgewater, Montgomery, & Taylor, 2016; Hitchcock, Smyth, & Sage, 2017; Hylton, 2007; Yang, 2009). These are important advancements in the use of social media for social work professional development, and online professional development activities appear to be commonplace. The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers for example, has offered webinars to promote professional development since 2010 (ANZASW, 2018); Griffith University (2018) in Australia offers a series of professional development podcasts for social workers, and both these websites advertise the value of these recorded seminars in contributing to the annual continuing professional development requirements of social workers. However, it is unknown the extent to which social workers are engaging in online professional development activities, the value they perceive in them, or if they would choose these activities over face-to-face opportunities.

It is important to reiterate the need therefore, for a sustained focus on the integration of social work education, research and practice to ensure the profession moves forward in a proficient and united way. Successful application of online professional development activities depends on a range of factors:

We have argued that social work is developing innovative online services but that managers, practitioners, educators and learners are operating within a traditional mindset of practice methodologies. Virtual practice brings new challenges in relation to social work knowledge, methods and skills and places additional ethical and practical demands on social work education, training and practice. (Rafferty & Waldman, 2006, p. 19)

2.9 Summary of literature review
This review of literature began with the challenge of negotiating the relationship between social work and social media, of considering where the profession and its work intersects with the social media landscape. In defining the concepts used to explore the literature it was recognised that both social media and social work are informed by multiple knowledge bases, and each reside within multiple contexts. The extent to which these sets of knowledge and contexts intersect offered an exponentially broad area of potential interest which both highlights the importance of advancing our understanding of social media’s influence on society (hence on the work of the profession), and the enormity of the task at hand.

To harness literature most relevant to the profession and to this project, this review was carried out by maintaining a focus on the definition and principles of social work, and in the first instance, on ideas about social media presented by social work researchers and scholars. This approach also served to guard the boundaries of the social work profession, a task necessary in any multidisciplinary environment, and even more so in the new technological era “characterised by a fusion of
technologies that is blurring the boundaries across almost all disciplines” (Goldkind & Chan, 2017, p. 271). This approach resulted in the development of broad themes related to social media in social work practice, education and professional development, and included the challenges and benefits of social media to the profession, the resistance to it, and the power and inevitability of social media.

The aim of this study is to investigate how social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand use social media, to query their opinions and perceptions of it. In the first instance therefore, local social work reference to social media was sourced to support exploration of these questions. The search was then expanded to include writing by Māori about social media pertinent to the mission of social work, and research of other Western English-speaking countries. It became apparent that most writing relevant to this project was generated predominantly by social workers in North America, the UK and Australia, and that the volume of literature proliferated during the writing of this thesis, reaching a peak in 2017, when the writing for this project ended. It is hoped, given the repeated urgency expressed in the literature for further research, this trajectory will continue with increased vigour. In addition, given the low level of contribution from a Māori perspective, it is hoped there will be future evidence of Kaupapa Māori research so important to the social work practice environment of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Writing about social media in this small country has a scattered presence in the literature, with some early thinking (O’Donogue, 2001; Maidment, 2005) built upon a decade later by some initial findings from this project, and a small research project related to a local social work Facebook group (Ballantyne et al., 2017; Stanfield et al., 2017). Social work membership in this, and other Aotearoa New Zealand Facebook groups, together with the establishment and followership of the Reimagining Social Work in Aotearoa New Zealand blogsite is anecdotal evidence of a growing use of social media by social workers in this country who are joining their international colleagues in using social media to discuss professional matters, share research and knowledge. The professional organisation and registration bodies for social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand have produced social media guidelines and amended ethics to respond to the social media reality, however, alongside its international jurisdictions, there is a distinct lack of research to inform guidelines and professional leadership in this regard.

A metaphor used widely by scholars cited in this review is that of “closing gaps.” Finding ways for example, of closing gaps between practice, research and education; filling knowledge gaps to support ethical and effective use of social media; addressing gaps in society between those with access to social media and those without; the perceived gap between the polarities of face-to-face, and online communication. There is also a gap between the opinion held in the literature that social workers should creatively embrace and critique social media, and support in the literature for how to do this ethically. Ethical guidelines available to practising social workers as they currently stand in the literature tend to be organisationally risk-averse, and therefore do not necessarily inspire the courage required to break new ground. Deeper understanding is required therefore, of the social work
professional and organisational reality of using social media, and to do this without leaving social workers vulnerable to the risk of transgressing unclear boundaries (Chan & Holosko, 2017).

Concurrently, without evidence of how social workers are using social media, however innovative, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of it in practice. "Simply adopting technology without an extensive needs assessment and an evaluation of the innovation will not result in credibility or in effective social work practice" (Parker-Oliver & Demiris, 2006, p.132). This point is reiterated by Reamer (2013a): “Unfortunately, currently available digital and other electronic interventions tools are so new that there is very little high-quality, compelling research evidence demonstrating their effectiveness” (p. 169). This chicken-or-egg scenario is problematic for the profession; it is possible, however, that solutions are beginning to emerge in the field of social work education.

For example, as described in the review, there is increasing evidence in the social work education literature of the community of learning pedagogy that incorporates the use of social media as a learning tool (Kellsey & Taylor, 2016; Westwood, 2014). There is a call for knowledge about, and critical analysis of, the impact of social media on society, for robust learning about the ethical implications of social media use in the professional context, on the educative role social workers can play in supporting service users to use the internet safely and how to include online social connections in social work assessments (Baker et al., 2014; Giffords, 2009; Gonchar & Adams, 2000; Taylor, 2017; Watling & Rogers, 2012). Numerous research projects that incorporate this learning have been described in this review, signalling that students are graduating with new skills and understandings of social media to take into the workplace. It is unclear, however, just how much skill development is occurring, or how welcoming social service agencies are to what new social workers are bringing from tertiary institutions into practice (Goldkind, Wolf, & Jones, 2016; Rafferty & Waldman, 2006).

It is argued in the literature that social media has introduced a communicative framework to which the social work profession must adapt (Hill & Ferguson, 2014). The power of the internet however, and according to some its colonising effect, necessitates a critical and principled discovery of its place in our professional world, of how social media can be best harnessed for professional purposes (Hill & Fergusson, 2014). The links between social work principles of collectivity for example, and social media concepts of participatory culture and collaborative problem solving, are worthy of exploration (Jenkins at al., 2009). The profession is strongly encouraged to take the initiative, to understand more deeply the impact of social media on society and on professional relationships.

The drive in the literature for using social media as social workers is based on a contested mix of practical, ideological and principled rationales. Social work writing includes “how-to” articles, summaries of ethical concerns and guidelines, calls for the profession to become digitally literate, to move more quickly to take advantage of social media on behalf of vulnerable people, and to incorporate its use into social change and social justice work. There is little research about the actual
social work experience of using social media for professional reasons. This omission minimises the valuable experience of social workers, rendering invisible the impact of everyday practice environments on decisions about social media, all of which would usefully inform, from a grassroots perspective, how the profession could usefully move forward. The gaps in the literature apparent here provide a rationale for this research project. Information about the lived reality of social workers and their use of social media would provide a much-needed link between the apparent academic imperatives and practice wisdom.

This study aims to develop this link by offering an overall beginning picture of social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand, and how they operate in their social media landscape, both in education and in practice. It asks for what purpose social media is used by the social work profession generally, and specifically in New Zealand; how relevant it is perceived to be, how confident social workers feel about engaging with it, and what opportunities are currently available for doing so. It also considers how social workers feel about their knowledge of the ethical and practical implications, both for the profession and for the people it serves. The goal of this study is to provide some insight into these issues, identifying strengths and limitations in need of further study. It is unknown how confidently New Zealand social workers embrace this technology, or how fundamental they feel it is to good practice; this study joins others in determining the need for specific knowledge and support in this regard.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Epistemology and methodology

This study is guided by the nature of social work as a profession and my identity as a social work practitioner; it is grounded in the values and ethics of the profession. The definition of social work, so important in determining the scope of literature considered for this project, is also critical to the description of its methodology. The philosophy I bring to this project as a social worker is the eye through which the research is viewed, the epistemological assumptions I make about what it means to be a social worker profoundly influence the questions I ask and my analysis of the answers offered (Creswell, 2013).

Social workers promote social change and endorse ethical principles grounded in commitments to social justice, human rights, diversity and collective responsibility (IFSW, 2014). Social work focuses on the complexity of the human condition which requires attention to multiple factors. It also relies on practice methods that highlight the strengths of people and communities as sources of empowerment. In Aotearoa New Zealand the profession is accountable to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to ethical standards of bicultural practice and indigeneity (ANZASW, 2015). Social work research, as a professional activity, promotes rights to self-determination and participation, and challenges unequal distribution of resources and unjust policy (Campbell, & Fouché, 2011).

A unique feature of social work research is described as a “willingness to tackle complexity, a commitment to collaboration, a resolve to improve the knowledge and effectiveness of professional social work action in accordance with the profession’s value base and guided by consumer views” (Campbell & Fouché, 2011, p. 398). The value base of social work is contextual; social workers understand their profession to be “a socially constructed activity in that the parameters of practice are influenced by dominant societal perceptions of what is normative and desirable” (Hyslop, 2009, p. 63). At the same time, social work is a practical, problem solving, evidence-based enterprise that must inevitably function within a bureaucratic and political landscape. The use of algorithms or big data (Gillingham & Graham, 2017), and application of information systems (Parton, 2008) are examples of positivistic mechanisms applied to determine interventions and measure outcomes by a profession whose work is exclusively relational and dependent on context. These opposing orientations lead some to argue that social work sits within both constructionist and positivist epistemologies creating an inevitable “paradigm war” (Payne, 2014).

The mixed methods approach chosen for this research also features this tension and has been subject to critique through the “incompatibility thesis of the paradigm warriors” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 12). Mixing the explanatory techniques of quantitative research, and the interpretive exploratory features of qualitative research, results in what is considered by some to be a problematic mixing of paradigms (Giddings & Grant, 2006). However, the focus on whether studies are either “quantitative” or “qualitative” can also be criticised for being “polemic” and disregarding of the common features and close relationship between the two forms of research (Bergman, 2011; Pearce, 2012). Increasingly it is recognised that the
positivist approach often associated with quantitative study and the constructivist approach commonly aligned with qualitative research, are both affected by the need to manage the reality (and evasiveness) of subjectivity. This debate has led to the development of a third “pragmatic” or “post-positivistic” approach to research, which “accepts that there is a both a single “real world” and that all humans have their own unique interpretations of that world” (Pearce, 2012, p. 833).

It is argued here that social work sits in this same pragmatic space and is thus aligned with a pragmatic, post-positivist epistemology. Social work is situated in the very real world of human experience, applying theories in a flexible way which allows for understandings of that experience from multiple perspectives (Payne, 2014). As with social work theorising, where it is ethically necessary to consider foremost the needs of the client, so it is with mixed methods research, where it is argued by pragmatists that “the method is secondary to the question itself” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 21). As with social work, “pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis” (Creswell, 2014, p. 11). Mixed methods research “allows congruence with the principles of social work to study things holistically” (Bronstein & Kovacs, 2013, p. 354) and reflects the reality that “social experience and lived realities are multi-dimensional and that our understandings are impoverished and may be inadequate if we view these phenomena only along a single dimension” (Mason, 2006, p. 10).

This project has been undertaken with a post-positivist, pragmatic approach to research, one which advocates “methodological pluralism,” and which is “based on the assumption that the method being applied in a particular study should be selected based on the research question being addressed” (Wildemuth, 1993, p. 450). This decision was based on the epistemological parallels between the pragmatism of mixed methods research and of the social work profession as argued above, and on the broad exploratory nature of the research aim which will be described in more detail below.

3.2 Mixed methods design and the research aim

Mixed methods research involves the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (Creswell, 2014; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). There are a variety of mixed methods research designs and advantages to using this approach. Firstly, it combines the advantages of quantitative research, achieving a broad coverage of an issue, and of qualitative research, offering more texture and depth (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). This method also offers the researcher greater opportunity to answer different kinds of research questions, and to answer the same questions in different ways.

The aim of this study is to provide an overall beginning picture of how Aotearoa New Zealand social workers operate in their social media landscape, and an account of their opinions and attitudes about the professional social work use of social media. The specific research questions emerging from this aim are as follows:
1. How are New Zealand social workers participating professionally in social media?
2. What do New Zealand social workers perceive to be the personal professional benefits and challenges of social media?
3. What is the opinion of New Zealand social workers about the value of social media to the profession?
4. What are the perceptions of social workers about their knowledge of social media?
5. What are the desires of New Zealand social workers regarding the development of their knowledge and skills related to social media, and (if relevant) how would their learning be best facilitated?

The broad, exploratory nature of this project suggests both the need for a method that can efficiently access the greatest possible number of views of New Zealand social workers enhanced by a method that can interrogate the meaning behind behaviour more closely and gather deeper thinking about opinion and motivation. Mixed methods research calls for the integration of qualitative and quantitative research questions, a combination of what and how (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). In this study for example, the what questions are about how many social workers use social media (how frequently and to what purpose) are best answered using a quantitative method (a survey), and the how questions, about attitudes and opinions, generate deeper answers using qualitative methods (interviews and focus groups) (Bryman, 2008). A variation of an exploratory sequential mixed methods design was chosen to answer these questions and achieve the aim of the research (Creswell, 2014).

This research is designed in three phases. The description of the rationale behind its approach and of the methods incorporated into it are organised in this chapter to reflect this design (Figure 3.1). The first phase will be presented by describing methods used to conduct both the survey and the interviews, followed by a description of how the data analysis and interpretation from each of these processes were mixed or combined to inform the subsequent phase. The second phase will be presented by describing the method used to conduct the focus groups, followed by discussion of how data collected in these groups was analysed. The chapter will be concluded by describing the third phase, which is where the findings from the first two phases are brought together for joint interpretation.
Three data sets were analysed in this study: 1. a survey which collected both quantitative and qualitative data; 2. qualitative interviews; and 3. qualitative focus groups. The analyses were carried out both concurrently and sequentially; that is, the data from the survey and the interviews were generated concurrently, analysed separately, and then interpreted jointly for meta-themes. These themes led in a sequential manner to the formation of new and revised questions and to the use of focus groups to answer these questions. The sequential aspect of this design offers opportunity for the research questions to be refined or reframed for further exploration. It is a further advantage of this mixed methods research design that all three data sets could be compared for triangulation, be clarified and elaborated on (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005).

This study also employed a partially mixed methods design, whereby “both the quantitative and qualitative elements are conducted either concurrently or sequentially in their entirety before being mixed at the data interpretation stage” (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009, p. 267). This is a mixed methods research design in which data are “analysed separately but integrated when interpretations of the data are made” (Bronstein & Kovacs, 2013, p. 358). By comparison, a fully mixed methods design would see data integrated at all stages of the research process. This research was variable-driven rather than case-driven, that is, the same cases (participants) were not used across the study, but the same variables in the research questions were; those questions related to learning and knowledge development were emphasised within the focus group method (Onwuegbuzie, Slate, Leech, & Collins, 2009). Greater detail about analysis and interpretation of the data is contained in this chapter as it moves through the descriptions of each phase.
In summary, this study integrated findings from a quantitative survey of social workers with perspectives gained from expert key informants via semi-structured interviews, then sought to enhance the findings with the use of focus groups. Given the number of methods employed, it was important to be clear about how the research focus and related questions were situated across the design, and how they related to the qualitative and/or quantitative strands of the project (Creswell, 2014; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). The survey addressed the broader aspects of the project by asking general questions about the actual behaviour of social workers in their use of social media; for example, the frequency and purpose of use, followed by questions seeking opinions about the value of social media to the profession, and competence related to social media use. Questions asked of the key informant participants explored the same set of concepts; however, these were framed as open questions to encourage elaboration on observations and opinions. Questions of focus group participants, which were generated in part by the findings of the survey and interviews, were more specifically focused on those related to skills, knowledge and knowledge development – inquiries best suited to the focus group method (Bryman, 2008; Travers, 2013).

It was the goal of this research method to generate data from the survey, the interviews and the focus groups to provide a rich, comprehensive understanding of social workers’ relationship with social media (Creswell, 2014). There was an opportunity for a diversity of views to be offered and for these views to be enhanced in the process of analysis (Bryman, 2008). This mixed methods approach offers an element of “utility” to the findings, that is, in combination, the information provided is potentially useful to a variety of stakeholders (individual social workers, social work educators, social work agencies, the social work profession).

For this project, analysis is defined as the “deconstruction of data into various component parts” and interpretation as the process of “meaning making and theory building” (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 73). The analysis of data is presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis (Findings), and the interpretation largely in Chapter 5 (Discussion). The presentation of analysis and interpretation in this way is typical of mixed methods designs (Creswell, 2014). Although the processes of analysis and interpretation of data are largely presented separately in this research project, they are transactional and intertwined, offering a further “mixing” of the data as the project reaches its conclusions (Hesse-Biber, 2010). In addition, the multi-phase, sequential nature of this project meant interpretation occurred as it progressed through the phases, for example, interpretation of the survey and interview data occurred to develop an approach to the focus groups.
PHASE ONE

The first phase of this study includes the concurrent use of two methods: a quantitative survey supported by a small number of qualitative questions (QUAN-qual), and key informant interviews (QUAL). These two methods are described below with an explanation of how the findings were analysed. Phase One of the study received ethical approval from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) on 18 December 2013 (see Appendix 1).

3.3 Survey method

3.3.1 Rationale for and description of online survey

A self-administered internet survey was used to seek broad, shallow, mainly quantitative data from New Zealand social workers about their professional participation in social media. Using Likert-type scales and multiple-choice questions, information was sought about the social work experience (behaviour, opinions, attitudes) of using social media for professional reasons, including motivations, limitations and challenges. Questions were accompanied by (a limited) opportunity to offer “other” specific views to support answers, and participants could also choose to provide a final short answer comment at the end of the survey.

Participants were drawn from the membership of Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), a voluntary professional organisation that provides competency assessment and advocacy services to social workers. The request was made of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of ANZASW for approval to survey its membership, and the letter is appended (see Appendix 2).

The survey questionnaire was designed to gather information about the actual behaviour of social workers in relation to their professional social media use, and the opinions of social workers about the professional usefulness of social media. (See Appendix 3.) It sought to capture both their wisdom and their uncertainties about social media use. Participants were given a link to an online survey which the author created using SurveyMonkey (http://www.surveymonkey.com), which began with a brief definition of social media supported with examples of well-known platforms (for example Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs).

Survey participants were then asked whether they used social media for professional social work reasons and were then prompted to answer a series of questions related to this use. The survey used predominantly closed questions; open questions were used minimally to seek further information. The first question: “Do you use social media for professional social work purposes?” served to set up two cases for analysis – those who answered yes and those who answered no.

Within this context (the use or non-use of social media), the survey questionnaire focused on two main areas of inquiry. The first part of the survey asked about the actual behaviour of social workers in their use of social media, namely the frequency and purpose of using social media, levels of satisfaction and perceived barriers to use. The second part sought opinions from participants about the value and importance of social media to the social work profession and opinions about the need
for competence and training in the use of social media professionally. Opportunities were offered to add further comment, to capture information that did not fit into the categories provided by the multiple-choice questions and a final comment was requested to be sure that all respondents had the opportunity to fully express their view. Figure 3.2 (below) illustrates how participants were moved through the survey.

Figure 3.2. Structure of survey questions.
3.3.2 Survey development

It is of primary importance that surveys encourage participation by being convenient and accessible (De Vaus, 2002). It is essential therefore that all attempts were made to ensure invited participants could easily find their ways to the survey link, and be provided with what was hoped to be clear information and an unambiguous guide through the mechanics of the survey. This clarity is especially important given that not all desired participants have comfort with, or interest in, using technology, which is a considerable limitation of internet surveys (Bhaskaran & LeClaire, 2010). To especially encourage those social workers reluctant to use technology, the survey was designed to be invitational and collegial, assurance was offered that participation was meaningful and straightforward, and would take a very short amount of their time. This assurance was communicated to the invitees via the email invitation (see Appendix 4), the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 5) and by information contained in the introduction to the survey (see Appendix 3).

An awareness derived from the literature of the wide scope of understandings of social media (Fuchs, 2017; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) informed the need to provide as an introduction to the survey a clear, focused definition of social media for participants. In addition, given the range of opinion in the literature about the usefulness of social media for social workers, it was important to provide this definition in a neutral manner to encourage participation of all social workers regardless of their opinion. Related to this need for neutrality is the concept of social desirability in research, described as the tendency for research participants to adopt what they perceive to be a desirable attitude in relation to the research topic (Babbie, 2010). There was a need therefore to develop a survey and its questions in a way that manages the bias inherent in this.

Given the small size of the project, the survey was designed so that all data collected would be simple and quick to analyse (De Vaus, 2002). For this reason, a small number of quantitative questions were asked, supported by only a few, short-answer, qualitative questions.

Pilot testing of survey

Pilot testing of the survey was carried out to improve the questions asked of participants, to assess the usefulness of the scales and to gauge the length of time taken to complete. This first group of people involved in this pilot were the author’s colleagues, all social work academics and registered social workers. It was helpful to understand how much information was needed about social media to form a platform for the questions, and a balance needed to be struck between providing an adequate definition to be sure no assumptions were made while not providing too much information that could potentially lead participants to provide particular answers. For example, social workers who use social media on a regular basis may understand the extent to which it could be used for professional purposes; however those who never use it may need to be prompted in terms of its potential uses. The need for such guidance was weighed against the risk of leading or limiting information provided by participants or creating bias.
One pilot participant, for instance, asked to complete the survey again after exposure to a different definition of social media. Another respondent asked directly for a definition of social media and what activities it encompassed. Other feedback incorporated into the survey post-pilot was that more clarity was required regarding social work activities, and that a clearer definition be given about the nature of those activities. Other feedback included observations of unclear, complex statements and obscure use of language which led to greater clarity in the question design.

A second pilot was held after the survey was developed online, to be sure the links and other technical aspects of the survey were functioning. People involved in trialling the survey at this stage again included social work colleagues, however, the number of people was extended to include a small number of registered social workers outside the author’s workplace. It was confirmed that the survey took approximately five minutes to complete, and minor technical adjustments were required before the survey was distributed.

3.3.3 Survey participants
A total of 342 social workers completed the survey and participants were drawn from the membership of ANZASW, a voluntary professional organisation that provides competency assessment and advocacy services to social workers and of which there were 3430 members at the time the survey was distributed (ANZASW, 2013). The membership of ANZASW provides a sample of New Zealand social workers from which to collect cross-sectional data. The “convenience sample,” that is, a naturally formed group, is in this case a professional organisation comprised of social workers who choose to be members. There were 4029 registered social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand when this survey was run (SWRB, 2013), however as registration is not yet mandatory in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is difficult to establish how many people in this country are employed as social workers, a title that the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) is trying to protect via a drive for mandatory registration under the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 (SWRB, 2013). Acknowledging the debate around the current unprotected title of social worker, (therefore its definition), it is fair to say that the 3430 members of ANZASW offer a reasonable representation of 4029 registered social workers practising in Aotearoa New Zealand during the period over which this survey was distributed.

The population used in this study is finite because it is limited to the membership of ANZASW, therefore is not a random sample of social workers and offers a confidence limit of 95%. Given that some members of ANZASW choose not to receive emails from the organisation related to research or surveys the entire population did not receive a request to participate in the survey. Information is unavailable as to exactly how many members this involves, for example 313 members unsubscribe from research requests and 155 unsubscribe from survey requests. It is impossible to know how these groups of members overlap, however, statistically the difference is unimportant when considering the margin of error (Table 3.1).
Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n</th>
<th>ANZASW membership</th>
<th>% Social Worker Population</th>
<th>Margin Of Error %</th>
<th>Correction for Finite Population (&gt;5%)</th>
<th>Corrected Margin of Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>342</td>
<td>3400 membership</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>+/- 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>342</td>
<td>3100 membership unsubscribe surveys</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>+/- 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>342</td>
<td>2800 membership unsubscribe research</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>+/- 1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Representativeness of sample (age, gender, ethnicity)

Comparison of the age demographic information of ANZASW with that of the survey participants (Figure 3), shows that distribution of survey participants represents the population of interest. Although different age designations were used in both sets of information, and it is difficult to compare directly, the trend clearly shows fewer people representing the age range below early to mid-thirties, with very few members/participants under the age of 30. There is a close similarity of gender, with approximately 83% being female and 17% male.

Figure 3.3. Comparison of age and gender distribution.
Survey participants could choose from seven age groups, and descriptive statistics suggest that the average age group of the survey respondents is 45 to 54 years ($m = 4.08$, $SD = 1.17$). The average age group of the ANZASW membership is 46 to 55 years ($m = 4$, $SD = 1.1$). These figures reflect the aging demographic and the skewed gender balance of the social work profession in Aotearoa as can be seen in Figure 3.3 (above).

Demographic data about ethnicity were collected from the survey however, because of the significant differences in how the data were collected, it is difficult to demonstrate statistically how representative the survey sample is in relation to the ANZASW membership. Ethnicities were categorised differently, and while the survey offered an opportunity for respondents to identify with more than one ethnicity, the ANZASW data collector did not. In addition, almost one quarter of the survey respondents ($n = 81$) chose not to answer the question about ethnicity and 14% ($n = 47$) answered “other” to the question, meaning that, for 37% of the survey respondents, information about ethnicity is not available. For these reasons, it was not feasible to confidently calculate the degree of representation of survey respondents to the ANZASW membership regarding ethnicity. It is noted, however, that 17% of ANZASW membership and almost 21% of the survey respondents identify as Māori. That there is a higher number of people identifying as New Zealand European in the survey (84%) than in ANZASW (50%) could be partly because survey participants chose to be members of both categories, and because there were other categories of ethnicity offered for multi-choice.

3.3.4 Summary of statistical analysis of survey
To fully capture the significance of the data gathered via this survey in-depth statistical analysis was carried out including measures of central tendency and frequency distribution. The relationship between the respondents and their answers was analysed using bivariate analysis that explores, for example, the relationship between the demographics of the respondents, and their use of social media, by cross-tabulating variables. Comparisons are offered between specific sets of data, for example a comparison between those who use social media and those who do not in relation to their views about its usefulness and importance to the social work profession. Qualitative comments were arranged into themes, and a selection of comments is presented in the analysis, allowing for a more contextual interpretation of the quantitative data. The process of data analysis was completed using the program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 24 (SPSS).

3.4 Key informant interview method

3.4.1 Rationale for key informant interviews
The relationship between social workers and social media in Aotearoa New Zealand is a relatively new field of study, therefore it was prudent to explore the research questions with social workers able to offer informed opinions on the topic, and/or in the position to directly experience the impact of social media on the profession. The use of social media is a recent social phenomenon which has
had significant impact on society (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), and the use of key informant interviews in this project offers opportunity “to examine how large-scale social transformations are experienced, interpreted and ultimately shaped by the responses of strategic social actors” (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002, p. 202).

Selected leaders in the New Zealand social work community were invited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews as key informants. Eleven interviews were conducted in face-to-face meetings, or by video or voice communication depending on the geographic location and preference of the interviewee. An informal interview format was followed; the questions were designed to explore interviewee experiences of using social media, their views and opinions about its importance to social work in Aotearoa New Zealand (the Key Informant Interview Schedule is appended as Appendix 6). The interviews lasted between one and two hours, were audio recorded and transcribed by a third party for analysis (Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement is appended as Appendix 7).

3.4.2 Participant selection
To select participants for the interviews, a “narrative approach” to participant sampling was used, where the researcher chooses who to sample depending on convenience, their importance in the field, but primarily on the need for participants “to have stories to tell of their lived experiences” (Creswell, 2014, p. 155). Using my professional networks, I chose social workers based on their ability to tell stories about social workers and social media, and two sets of criteria were used to do this: social work leaders with a professional social media presence, and/or social work leaders with the opportunity to observe the impact of social media on the profession, regardless of their opinion about it (Fetterman, 2008). Threaded through these criteria was a desire to select participants to represent a range of demographic characteristics, namely field of practice, ethnicity and gender. This is a small sample size, and the intent of the interviews was not to generalise the information offered by participants, but rather to “elucidate the particular, the specific” (Creswell, 2014, p. 157). These participants provide an “example” as opposed to a “sample” of the larger population they represent (p. 150).

At the time of the study, 29% of New Zealand’s registered social workers were employed by government departments, 26% by District Health Boards and 21% by the NGO sector. Self-employed social workers made up 5% of registered social workers and 4% were social work educators (SWRB, 2013). For the purpose of these interviews and in an attempt to provide examples from practice fields, practice leaders from both the Ministry of Social Development and a District Health Board were invited to participate as interviewees, as well as two NGO managers representing both family services and advocacy/prevention services. Interview participants were chosen to represent cultural diversity present in Aotearoa New Zealand: two participants were Māori, three were new migrants (Asian and European) to New Zealand and the remaining six identified as New Zealand European (see Table 3.2). As reported earlier in this chapter, approximately 17% of the membership of ANZASW (ANZASW, 2013) identified as Māori at the time of this study, and 50% as New Zealand European.
Table 3.2

Roles and Demographics of Key Informant Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key informant interview participants</th>
<th>Māori woman</th>
<th>European woman</th>
<th>European man</th>
<th>Asian woman</th>
<th>European woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social work academic and private practitioner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work academic and private practitioner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work academic, private practitioner, NGO manager</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work academic and private practitioner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work academic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work academic and NGO practitioner (youth)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work manager health setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work manager NGO setting prevention services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work manager NGO setting women’s services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work manager professional organisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work manager/practice consultant child protection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final group of 11 social workers who agreed to be interviewed was over-represented by those in academic social work roles. Academics typically have more freedom to openly engage in professional social media activities than their practice colleagues therefore are more likely to have more informed views about it. Most participants held numerous roles, for example, academic, supervisory and private practice responsibilities, and some social work educators had recent practice experience. The managers and practice leaders also described roles in social work education and within their professional bodies. The number of interviews conducted was based on pragmatic reasons related to the size of the study, but also on the degree of saturation achieved through the interview process (Creswell, 2014).

3.4.3 Invitation to the project

All participants were initially approached by an email which was individually designed to uniquely engage with the social worker dependent on the nature of the relationship that existed between the researcher and the invitee (Creswell, 2014). For example, the process by which the social worker was chosen to participate was made explicit, and the network through which the researcher became aware of their potential value to the project. Some participants, for example, had published work on social media in the social work literature, had an online presence via blogs, Twitter or other social media platforms, or offered public training or workshops on the use of social media in social work. It was explained to each participant why they uniquely were chosen to participate; that is, the unique voice they could offer to the study.

Fifteen people were approached and 11 agreed to be interviewed; only one invitee actively declined to participate, the remainder who did not participate were those who did not respond to the invitation. Invitees were sent two emails, the first with a personal invitation and accompanying Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 8) which provided information as to the focus, benefits and risks of
the study, participant rights, and confidentiality and anonymity issues. The second was either a “reminder” email, to those who had not responded, with an attached document of informal interview questions (see Appendix 6) and the Consent Form (see Appendix 9), or a “thank you” email to those who had agreed to participate, with the same attachments and suggestions for setting up an interview. If there was no further correspondence from the invitee, they were not contacted again.

It is necessary for ethical reasons to be explicit about the nature of the relationship between the researcher and research participants. In this project, I did not perceive myself to be in a position of authority or seniority in the social work community therefore was not aware of undue power or pressure associated with the invitation to participate. It is true, however, that as a social work colleague I was a “member” of the group of people being studied (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Creswell (2013) suggests that in the case of working with participants who are “in your own backyard,” it is recommended to find other ways to add credibility and authenticity to findings (p. 151), and argues that the mixed methods approach and the use of researcher reflexivity goes some way to manage this complexity.

In the case of this project for example, I was mindful of the approach taken to invite participants into research (Creswell, 2014) and in all instances the invitees were offered information about the research and about me, for example, where I worked, my cultural background, where I live and have lived. This level of disclosure is culturally expected in Aotearoa New Zealand, and necessary to ensure confidence and comfort with the research process (Walker et al., 2006). The level of disclosure varied depending on ethnicity, prior relationship and was led by the participants; in all cases this process of engagement continued into the interview itself.

It was also essential to consider how interviewees were influenced in their answers because of their relationship with the me or unique understanding of who I was as the interviewer (Wilson & Sapsford, 2006). The characteristics ascribed to me as a social media user for example, (i.e., expert, non-expert; frequent; infrequent), or as a social worker, no doubt influenced the type of responses from interviewees in a variety of ways. It is difficult (if not impossible) to know how these perceptions played out during the interviews, however, awareness of the possibilities led to a reflexive approach to the interviews, influencing for example how I introduced myself and responded to statements made by participants. The inability to “measure” the influence of the researcher on participants is considered a limitation of qualitative research which, as mentioned, can be managed by a using a mixed methods approach, and by explicit use of researcher reflexivity (Creswell, 2014).

Relying on current professional relationships to assist with research has value in the research process (Creswell, 2014), and in the case of this project I had both historically worked alongside participants, or drawn on my networks to develop new relationships. There was a clearly expressed commitment from all invitees to participate and it was evident that time was spent by participants prior to the interviews to develop some views and opinions about the research questions. An expressed interest
in the topic led to a positive response to being interviewed, and this leads to the notion of the participants as co-researchers (Fook, 2011). There was a sense that interviewer and interviewees were working together to develop knowledge related to the research topic, for a variety of different reasons. Professional organisations for example, were looking for ways to support social workers, academics were interested in how to teach about social media, and agencies were seeking information about safety and ethical use. Interviewees were interested in being part of the project because they were aware of gaps in knowledge and had a vested interest in filling these gaps.

3.4.4 Interview process
The semi-structured interview schedule was designed to gather views and opinions from key informants about how they and other social workers in New Zealand use social media for professional purposes (the interview schedule is appended as Appendix 6). The general questions (described below) were used to guide the interview and it was intended, given the inductive nature of this exercise, that any additional questions asked by the interviewer would be used only to explore answers in greater depth. This follows a naturalistic or informal interview structure whereby “supplementary questions can be put according to the replies received, in a way that does not interfere with the natural flow of conversation” (Wilson & Sapsford, 2006, p. 6). The qualitative interview is described as one which is flexible and continuous, with questions that can be redesigned throughout the study (Babbie, 2010). For example, I could (and did) generate new questions within each interview to build on what was being expressed. In some cases, I also asked interviewees to build on comments made in previous interviews.

Interviews were conducted using a range of micro-communication skills (open-ended questions, paraphrasing, summarising) all of which are also recognised as both research and social work practice skills (Kadushin & Kadushin, 1997). Social work interviews have at their centre a focus on the relationship developed between interviewee and interviewer, incorporating Rogerian qualities of genuineness, respect, unconditional positive regard and warmth (Rogers, 1957) and a focus on principles of empowerment and antidiscrimination (Fook, 2012). These principles are aligned with ethical social science research activity (Babbie, 2010) and with the social work and transformative research paradigms underpinning this study.

The questions asked of participants, or topics introduced to the discussion, included a request for a description of the interviewee’s current social role(s), their use of social media in these roles and its value. They were asked for thoughts about the challenges and benefits of using social media as professionals and for their opinions about the value of social media to the Aotearoa New Zealand social work profession generally. Their observations and opinions were sought about how other social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand use social media and if appropriate, some were asked for suggestions about how social media could be used differently. Finally, the interviewees were asked for their views about the uniqueness of Aotearoa New Zealand social work and the impact this has (or could have) on professional social work use of social media. Interviewees were offered the
opportunity to provide any further information and to email further views if necessary – two interviewees used this method to offer final thoughts and these were incorporated into the data. In summary the interview schedule acted as a guide to encourage a free flow of descriptive and analytic information from participants about their own use of social media, about how other social workers use social media, and about how the profession uses it.

3.4.5 Thematic analysis of interviews

It is important the researcher is explicit about how themes are determined in thematic analysis so that readers of the research can understand how certain conclusions are reached (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Braun and Clarke (2006) introduce two principles which informed my approach in this regard. First is the element of reflexivity:

An account of themes “emerging” or being “discovered” is a passive account of the process of analysis, and it denies the active role the researcher always plays in identifying pattern/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers. (p. 80)

The importance of being explicit about who I am as the researcher was introduced at the beginning of this thesis (Chapter 1), and the reflective methods used to maintain reflexivity in this regard are attended to throughout the project. In the case of thematic analysis, it was important for me to be actively and critically aware of the choices I was making about what constituted a “theme.” For example, I was required to establish awareness of my own immediate (and daily) experiences of engaging in social media, and to understand how these experiences subsequently influenced the importance I attributed to the words of the participants.

The second principle informing my approach to thematic analysis was determining whether the thematic analysis would take an inductive or deductive approach. In considering this, I was drawn to information already available to the study from the survey data, which had been a deductive exercise, with survey questions derived primarily by information from the literature. In response to this I chose to emphasise a more inductive approach to the interview analysis, to give precedence to new information and surprises, rather than that which fits into what we already know via the literature and the survey. The deductive approach is theoretically driven, relying more on the “researcher’s theoretical or analytic interest in the area” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). This offers an overall balance to the mixed methods research design.

Thematic analysis of the interviews occurred systematically and involved a number of steps, the first of which was to confirm accuracy of the transcriptions of the audio recordings. This was followed by repeated reading of the data, highlighting and recording impressions so that beginning patterns and/or an intuitive sense of the data set could be captured. Familiarity with the data at this point led to the development of initial codes which were then arranged into themes and sub-themes (Attride-Stirling,
The process was undertaken using the simple highlighting, pasting and review capacities of Microsoft Word.

To develop these themes, the data were approached with a range of “scrutiny techniques” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 88). For example, qualitative data can be searched for repetitions, metaphors or analogies, similarities and differences, or missing data (things that are not said). Also relevant in the identification of themes was consideration of where “qualitative data illuminates questions of importance to social science” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 93). It is important in this project to consider data that highlight matters of importance to social work – for example; social justice, empowerment and professional behaviour. Key concerns identified in the social work literature about social media relate to both ethical use and equality of use, and particular attention was paid to where these principles were highlighted in the data.

Another approach to the generation of themes in thematic analysis is the consideration of responses to specific questions in the interview schedule (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Given the desire to be inductive in this stage of the research, to ask open-ended questions and offer an informal interview structure, this approach was deliberately not taken. Despite this intent however, it was difficult to bypass the themes generated by certain questions.

In summary, the process of generating themes was completed as follows:

1. First read of interview transcriptions while listening to recordings to confirm accuracy and to gain sense of the data.
2. Second read of interview transcriptions and highlighting of text that stands out, with stream of consciousness comments about it.
3. Summary at end of each interview highlighting general impressions, feelings, comments about possible themes being identified and named.
4. Development of initial themes via a reflective writing process.
5. First review of data to test themes.
6. Themes adapted reflexively over several readings.

To conclude, the qualitative data was initially scanned and “pawed” to gain familiarity and to generate initial patterns; it was arranged into themes using observational or scrutiny techniques. The data were reviewed to test the themes and refined over several readings (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). Creswell (2014) uses the concept of inductive reasoning to describe the process of building themes from the bottom up “into increasingly abstract units of information” (p. 45). The researcher also applies deductive thinking to this process because the developing themes are “constantly being checked against the data” (p. 45). This is the complex, iterative process of thematic analysis, and a feature of the pragmatic research paradigm of this project which calls for “the complementary and constant dialectic between inductive and deductive theoretical development rather than a reliance on one or
the other” (Pearce, 2012, p. 833). Figure 3.4 below shows the themes generated in this process, highlighting a dual focus on the realities of current social worker use of social media, and future possibilities.

Figure 3.4. Thematic analysis of interviews.

### 3.5 Integration of the survey and interview analysis

As discussed, an exploratory sequential mixed methods design was chosen to achieve the aim of this research. The first phase described above incorporates the concurrent collection of data using both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interviews) methods. The survey contained predominantly quantitative questions (scales and multiple choice) augmented by a small number of short answer questions (QUAN-qual). Qualitative data were collected via key informant interviews (QUAL). This section will discuss the process undertaken to manage the blending of survey and interview analysis leading to findings which were then applied sequentially to guide the next phase of the research (focus groups).

#### 3.5.1 Method of integrating survey and interview analysis

Mixed methods research offers opportunity for data to be combined at the analysis stage, with the advantage of being able to triangulate findings, to elaborate on them, further illustrate or enhance them, to clarify them, or to expand the range of inquiry (Bronstein & Kovacs, 2013; Bryman, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004). It can also be used to explore the question of how to get the data to “speak the same language” (Lieber & Weisner, 2010, p. 567). This approach provides the possibility
of generating new questions to ask the data and to generalise qualitative findings because of their close relationship with the quantitative findings (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004).

Qualitative data helps us to see what is outside the measurements captured in quantitative research and to answer the how and why questions brought about by quantitative data, offering an “explanatory edge” (Mason, 2006, p. 15). According to Bryman (2007) “… it is about forging an overall or negotiated account of the findings that brings together both components of the conversation or debate. The challenge is to find ways of fashioning such accounts when we do not have established templates or even rules of thumb for doing so” (p. 21).

To meet this challenge, a table was devised to record and guide the process of analysis, to capture the relationship between the research questions and the research method thereby prompting thinking about how the data could be combined to enhance the findings (variation of Creswell, 2014, p. 162). (See Appendix 10.) After completing data analysis of both survey and interviews, the survey findings were systematically searched with the themes generated by the interviews to tap into where the data answered the same research questions, “touched” each other, or veered away. For example, points at which the data represented similar themes, or introduced new ones. This “layered” process was repeated with the interview findings and was qualitatively driven, meaning that the interpretation was offered with a “qualitative spirit of reflexivity, nuance, creativity and flexibility” (Mason, 2006, p. 22). In this approach to mixed analysis, a merging or connection of the findings occurred, rather than a merging of the data (Creswell, 2014, p. 230). A summary of the process of interpretation is as follows:

1. Statistical analysis of survey data
2. Thematic analysis of interview data
3. Recording of findings according to method and research questions
4. Systematic search of survey findings using interview themes
5. Systematic search of interview themes using general survey findings

Although the survey and interviews in this first phase of the research occurred concurrently, for pragmatic reasons, the survey was completed and analysed first; gathering survey data is a more linear and predictable process than generating interview data and it was practical and efficient to begin the survey analysis while still pursuing the more chaotic task of contacting and interviewing key informants. It is impossible to say that the survey findings did not, in some subliminal way, influence the interviews, however, a deliberate attempt was made to hold the findings back so as not to influence the interviewees. This stance was taken both to reserve an opportunity to triangulate findings and to promote originality of participants’ thinking.
Given the design of this research, analysis of the qualitative data occurs on a semantic level whereby the data are written up in such a way as to capture what was said, and “organised to show patterns in semantic content and summarized” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Interpretation then occurs after this process, “where there is an attempt to theorise the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Although interpretation of data is a natural, constant endeavour, semantic analysis contrasts with approaching the data from a latent level of analysis, where interpretation and theorising of underlying ideas occur as the data is analysed, producing an interpretive piece of work rather than descriptive. The decision was made to carry out thematic analysis of the interviews at the semantic level so all data could be integrated before undergoing final interpretation in the Discussion Chapter (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009).

3.5.2 Summary of PHASE ONE findings and implications for PHASE TWO
This research asked social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand about their professional use of social media, how they use it, and what their opinions and attitudes were about it. The full findings generated by the first phase of the research are contained in Chapter 4 (Findings), however, to introduce how these results led to the next phase of the research, how they were used to expand the range of inquiry (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004), the significant findings from this mixed analysis are summarised as follows:

1. That use of social media is influenced by how social workers define and manage the complexity of their professional identity. This has an emotional impact on social workers.
2. That adoption of social media by the profession is in a state of flux, which leads to extreme responses to its use on both ends of the spectrum – love it or hate it – and to high levels of uncertainty.
3. Social media use is a relevant professional tool for social workers, and social workers agree that learning about its use (ethical issues and potential) is important. Findings emphasise organisational use of social media and the need to develop good strategies and leadership in this regard.
4. Social workers are generally neutral and/or risk-averse in their use of and attitudes toward social media, are concerned primarily about privacy, ethical and security issues, and about the risk it presents to face-to-face communication and on the quality of information available.
5. Social workers advise each other to take a critical approach to social media, to understand it more holistically and to not ignore the risks or the impact it has on society and on the profession.

Inherent in these findings is a theme of uncertainty and anxiety that accompanies complexity and change. There is a broad theme about the nature of professional identity including notions of privacy and ethical behaviour. There is agreement about the need for knowledge development and deeper understanding of the social work relationship with social media, and there is some evidence of critical thinking about this. These findings align with what is found in the social work literature about social
media highlighting gaps in social work analysis, knowledge and skills, and the need for learning and development (Reamer, 2017; Simpson, 2017; Wolf & Goldkind, 2016).

Mixed methods research offers opportunity for researchers to “zoom in to microscopic detail or zoom out to indefinite scope” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004, p. 771). This dual focus has operated effectively in this research project: the findings from each lens, the micro and macro, are merged to produce a layered understanding of the research question, in turn generating new questions. This is an example of the “cyclical use of data to inform decisions for next steps related to additional research or to program changes” (Mertens, Bledsoe, Sullivan, & Wilson, 2010, p. 199). Acknowledging the broad findings that social workers have varying degrees of knowledge about social media, and that social workers believe new knowledge is necessary, the additional research questions generated by the first phase of this research project are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of social workers about their knowledge of social media?
2. What are the desires of New Zealand social workers regarding the development of their knowledge and skills related to social media, and (if relevant) how would their learning be best facilitated?

In my role as social work educator I have personal, anecdotal knowledge about the social work tertiary education environment in Aotearoa New Zealand and began this thesis with an opinion about the need for teaching and development strategies related to the professional use of social media. A curiosity about how to approach this was inspired by the literature and deepened by the combined findings of the survey and interviews.

The pragmatic realm of mixed methods research encourages researchers to “Study what interests and is of value to you, study it in ways that you deem appropriate, and use the results in ways that can bring about positive consequences within your value system” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 30). It is important to me as a social work educator and supervisor, to consider the relationship between the knowledge generated by this research, and its place within social work learning and development. The participants in this research project thus far have revealed the complexity of the learning landscape for social workers and their use of social media, and the need to untangle and clarify our next steps as a profession in relation to learning more about it.
PHASE 2

3.6 Focus group method

Focus groups were employed sequentially in this inquiry to explore how social work practitioners perceive their knowledge about the professional use of social media, and their learning or development needs in relation to this. The focus group is a qualitative data collection method which, like the key informant interviews, enables deep investigation of attitudes and opinions. The focus group also has the potential to capture the significance of interaction between participants while discussing a specific topic, and an opportunity for joint construction of ideas and meaning (Bryman, 2008; Travers, 2013). Phase two of this project received ethical approval from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) on 27 May 2016 (see Appendix 11).

3.6.1 Rationale for focus groups

The benefit of using a focus group in the context of this project, and in learning or knowledge development generally (in this case the learning about social media), is that discussion and interaction between participants gives opportunity for concepts to arise that are previously unknown to some and for these concepts to be built on, argued over and further understood. It also provides opportunity for differences of opinion to be explored, leading to greater insight and a more textured understanding of the issues and their implications (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In effect, group participants are learning from each other, and generating collective ideas, and this process can be observed and captured by the researcher.

The focus group in this sense is aligned with contemporary concepts of adult learning. It advocates shared ownership of the research project; its analysis located in the community with those who are affected by the issue under study; and it has a moral focus on action for change (Dick, 2014; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Focus groups are collaborative exercises, reflecting the importance of developing knowledge alongside others and as such have been used historically to explore matters related to pedagogy (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013).

Data generated from focus group conversations have several advantages over those from most other data-collection strategies. It approximates natural interaction between people, allowing the observer to witness how gaps in knowledge are filled, how complexities and contradictions are managed, how discourse is created. Focus groups offer opportunity for connections to be made between participants which in turn create “opportunities for solidarity building and political action” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013, p. 40). This last dynamic was apparent in both focus groups held for this project.
3.6.2 Participant selection and invitation to the project

As with the survey participants, focus group participants were drawn from the membership of ANZASW. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of ANZASW was provided with a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 12), the Consent Form (see Appendix 13), and evidence of the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee approval (see Appendix 11), and was asked for access to the membership of two local branches of the organisation. Branches were chosen to provide voices from different regions of the country and for practical reasons (for example, to coincide with other professional activities). My own branch was not invited to participate as it had hosted workshops and presentations by me about social work and social media. The CEO of ANZASW, acting as “gatekeeper” to the organisation (Creswell, 2014, p. 188), approved the request and forwarded the invitation to the conveners of the chosen branches (see Appendix 14).

The first invitation sent to two local branches of ANZASW in November 2016 was not successful in recruiting enough participants to run focus groups. Two social workers from one branch did express interest, were thanked and advised they would be contacted again. There was no response from the second group and contact was made with ANZASW to confirm the email was sent and received by branch members. It is thought the low response to the initial invitation was hindered by time of year (summer season) and by the volume of other research requests being made of the social work community at the time.

A second invitation was sent via ANZASW in early 2017 and the two interested respondents from the previous invitation were re-contacted individually by the researcher. Given the lack of response from the second branch, a third branch was chosen to draw participants from. To augment the number of participants recruited by email, a snowball approach to participant selection occurred – participants who accepted the invitation by email were invited to forward the email to interested social work colleagues, reminders were published in the ANZASW online newsletter and a reminder email was sent via the branch conveners. The invitations occurred over four months and were sent to almost 600 social workers over three different regions (Bay of Plenty = 128, Canterbury = 363, South Auckland = 93).

This second invitation led to the successful formation of two focus groups, one in a small city in the North Island of New Zealand, and the other in a large South Island city. Five social workers from each region responded to the invitation, and subsequently received an email from me with information about the research, including the questions to be addressed in the focus group, summary of emerging findings to support the research questions, the ethics approved Consent Form, and a suggestion for how details about time, venue and cultural approaches to the group could be negotiated. It was expected and hoped that Māori social workers would choose to be members of the focus groups and the participants were advised in this email that I would be prepared to facilitate (or support facilitation of) the opening and closing of the group using a culturally agreed format as desired and negotiated by the group. Both focus groups were held in March 2017, were audio-recorded and transcribed by a third party (see Appendix 7).
The decision about how many focus groups to hold in any given study “is conditioned by the nature of the study, the diversity of the participants’ exposure to the topic of discussion, and the differences that reflect social, ethnic, geographic diversity” (Krueger & Casey, 2005, p. 88). The initial decision to hold two focus groups was guided in part by the size of the study, however, there was some flexibility initially dependent on the outcome of the first two groups, for example, if there was limited demographic diversity, or if the focus groups produced very divergent data in need of further exploration. Neither of these two concerns eventuated and given the similarity of data generated collaboratively by each group, the diverse views held by members within each group, and being led by the low response rate from previous invitations, a decision was made not to facilitate further groups.

3.6.3 Description of participants

Participants were not directly asked to share demographic information or to introduce themselves in a consistent or prescribed way, so the description of the group participants is dependent on my subjective observation and on what they chose to share about themselves while the focus group was being recorded. This was an intentional facilitation approach to encourage group autonomy and to model a shared leadership style (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). This decision to take this approach is discussed in more depth below.

Each focus group had five participants; this was an ideal size for the groups, which is typically recommended as being between five and eight participants (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001, p. 10). All participants in the first focus group were over the age of 40, two identified as Māori, and the rest as non-Māori, either as Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent) or as European. This group consisted of three social work academics, one social work researcher/writer and one practitioner. The second focus group had one young (under 30) social work student, one social work academic, two practitioners and a social work manager; there were no participants in the second group who identified as Māori and there were two participants in this group who shared with the group that they were immigrants to New Zealand. There was one male participant in each focus group (see Table 3.3 below).

Table 3.3

.Roles and Demographics of Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group one</th>
<th>Group two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Māori practitioner</td>
<td>Female Pākehā social work student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Māori researcher/writer</td>
<td>Female Pākehā practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Pākehā Academic</td>
<td>Female European academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Pākehā Academic</td>
<td>Female Pākehā social work manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male European Academic</td>
<td>Male European practitioner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further description of the participants is offered in the Findings Chapter as it pertains to the focus group analysis. The members of each focus group had in common their profession and the region where they lived and worked, therefore knew each other (or of each other) to varying degrees. The focus groups therefore were “exploiting pre-existing social networks that encourage collegiality” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013, p. 40). In the first group, there was one member who had not met anyone prior to the day; in the second group this was true of two members.

3.6.4 Focus group questions and process
The focus groups were facilitated by myself as the researcher; my role was to pose the research questions, to support dialogue and to assist the group to maintain focus on the questions. I was responsible for ensuring a safe, non-discriminatory and enjoyable experience for participants; this intended approach was communicated to the participants prior to the group meetings (described above).

Focus group questions
To maintain focus on the aim of the research, a set of prompting questions was developed, roughly based on a model of experiential learning conceived by Kolb (1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005), who defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). It is posited by experiential learning theorists that we best develop new knowledge by individually reflecting on a concrete experience, making sense of our thinking about the experience (conceptualizing it), and then examining the implications of it. The experiential learning model offers a clear structure to guide learning and knowledge development. Applied to the focus group method, this structure serves to establish a baseline of collective group experience which group members can jointly explore, (or conceptualise) and examine for implications.

This thinking, together with that of Boud (2010) who developed ideas about the use of individual reflection in professional group contexts as a method of co-constructing new knowledge, underpinned my preparation for the group. Co-construction of knowledge as a group activity is aligned with focus group methodology and had additional personal appeal because of my experience applying it in practice with social work and supervision students, and my confidence in its capacity to generate new ideas in group settings. Participants were thus offered an opportunity to gather their collective knowledge, explore their need for new knowledge, and if relevant, generate thoughts about how best to acquire this new knowledge.

In summary, the experiential learning model and ideas about how reflection and learning can occur in groups as described above, led to the development of the general approach to the focus group process, and to the following questions. The questions were designed as a rough guide, keeping in mind that qualitative research is situational in nature, and questions are adapted as the exploration unfolds (Krueger & Casey, 2015):
1. What is your existing knowledge about social work and social media?
2. What knowledge would you like to develop?
3. How would you like to develop this knowledge?
4. What are the implications of this new knowledge for your social work practice?
5. What are the implications of this new knowledge for the social work profession?

An analysis of how successfully this process inspired contributions to the research questions is offered in Chapter 4 (Findings), however, it was instrumental in managing the movement of discussion from what was already known by participants, to what new knowledge was desired, as is highlighted in the following excerpt:

This is fascinating. I just want to let you go on but I think there’s a little turn in what you’ve just said … in terms of the next question, which is what do we need to know more about, what other knowledge do we need? And it’s not just knowledge I’m hearing you say, it’s behaviour – what other ways of behaving do we need? (Facilitator/researcher, focus Group 1)

**Focus group facilitation**

Focus groups are described as falling within a continuum between “group interviews and collective conversations” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013, p. 7). A decision was made to strive for free-flowing focus groups, uninhibited by the researcher, to promote conversation rather than conduct interviews and allow for a more natural exchange of ideas. It was hoped that by observing participants undertake this natural discussion about social media, useful data would be generated about how social workers might go about developing knowledge about social media in group settings, including any dynamics that encourage or inhibit learning. Managing the leadership of the group was combined with other tasks of generating ideas, elaborating on key themes and encouraging contribution (Bloor et al., 2011; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013).

This desire to achieve natural group interaction also relies on the need to “de-centre the authority of the researcher” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013, p. 21). The group was encouraged to be autonomous in its conversation and an excerpt is provided below of the guidance I offered the group to achieve this after its initial foray into the topic:

You all took turns and that’s fine but I’m happy now for there to be some cross pollination, if you heard something that someone else said and you identified with that, or you feel like you want to add to it or ask more about it, that would be absolutely fine. It’s very informal, we don’t have to take turns speaking. So, maybe we’ll just keep going with that a little bit. Is there anything you heard while you were listening that you wanted to add to or you had further thoughts about? (Facilitator/research, focus Group 2)
Audio recording of the focus group did not begin until the group was comfortable to do so, until the ethical issues were spoken to and agreed, and I was confident of a collegial connection and appropriate level of trust in the room. Managing this process is an essential task of the focus group facilitator (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2015), which included acknowledging current relationships in the group and offering space to discuss issues that may hinder open and safe discussion. The concept of whanaungatanga (establishing relationship) is used in Aotearoa New Zealand to describe aspects of this process. This was additionally important because the topic of social media heightens awareness of relationships in that public space, a shared history and potential for “unfinished business” in need of face-to-face resolution or acknowledgement.

Both focus groups were professional groups and participating in them was a professional activity. Assumptions were made by me (and likely by all participants) that the standard of professional behaviour would be high, leading to a level of trust that participants would behave in ways conducive to open and respectful discussion. This process was initially guided by me, but because of the high level of professionalism in both groups, it quickly and appropriately became a shared process.

Focus group participation can be inhibited by several factors, such as a dominant participant or an external event – factors that also need to be considered when deciding how many groups to hold (Krueger & Casey, 2015). It was my assessment of both groups that equality of participation was managed collaboratively by the group members, including myself as the facilitator. It is my view that the time taken at the beginning of each group to disclose or discuss any factors that might inhibit participation led to confidence that external factors were of minimal influence.

In summary, the choice of approach to focus group facilitation was influenced by my experience as a social work educator, and philosophy underpinning my practice about group learning, reflection and generation of ideas. It also relied on the unique value of focus groups as a research method by finding ways to best capture not only the ideas generated by the group, but how the group worked together to produce them.

3.6.5 Thematic analysis of focus groups
As with analysis of the key informant interviews in the first phase of this project, thematic analysis was chosen as an analytic method for the focus groups. The complexity of this mixed methods research design is well served by thematic analysis, which is adaptable to, or congruent with, a range of research approaches and can be carried out in different ways depending on methods used, and the epistemology that informs the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important that the “theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher wants to know, and that they acknowledge these decisions, and recognize them as decisions” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80). For this reason, although there were similarities, it is important to articulate why and how the focus group data analysis was carried out differently from that of the key informant interviews. This will include discussion about how
decisions were made about how the data was approached for analysis; the processes employed to generate themes.

The research questions most important to this phase of the research were about social work knowledge of social media – what is known, not known, and how knowledge can be best developed. The purpose of using focus groups to answer these questions was threefold: to gather what was already known (or not known) by the participants, to capture any new ideas generated by the group, and to observe how the group members behaved and interacted in a group to achieve this. This deductive or theoretical approach to analysis is driven by “the researcher’s theoretical or analytic interest in the area and is thus more explicitly analyst driven” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). It carries the advantage of “making the connection between data and important research questions” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 95). This contrasts/provides balance with the more data-driven approach taken to analyse the key informant interviews and harnesses the value of focus groups in capturing interaction between participants and the joint construction of ideas and meaning (Bryman, 2008; Travers, 2013).

The data analysis in this phase was focussed on the groups as collectives, as opposed to the groups as collections of individuals (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Group dialogue generates insight and knowledge and, as such, is considered a product of the group rather than that of individual participants.

For the reason described above, I chose not to do a “case analysis” of the conversations, that is, to analyse what the individual participants contributed according to gender, ethnicity or professional role. This approach contrasts with the key informant interview analysis where the key informers were explicitly asked to participate in the research because of their ability to represent the views of others, and, where applicable, the data were analysed accordingly.

In summary, the data were deliberately approached from a theoretically driven perspective to maintain a strong focus on the research questions important to this phase, on the group as a collective, and on the nature of the interactions between participants.

**Process of generating themes**

The analysis of the focus groups relied on research memos recorded by the myself as the sole facilitator, audio recording of each focus group, and transcription of the recordings completed by a third party, generating roughly 23,000 words. To begin familiarisation with the data, I created two sets of research memos (approximately 500 words per memo), the first completed after each group was held, and the second as I listened to the recorded interviews alongside the transcriptions for the first time. All four memos were creative, reflexive recordings of general impressions and initial thoughts about themes emerging from the groups, about the unique nature of each group, my personal feelings and thoughts as they arose, and general impressions about how the participants interacted with each
other. This process was in keeping with the reflexive approach taken to the whole of this thesis, as initially presented in Chapter 1.

The focus group transcriptions were imported into NVivo 11 (http://www.qsrinternational.com), software that supports qualitative and mixed methods research, and the narratives contained in the transcripts were arranged into initial codes guided by a range of factors. The first was in response to what the participants said about their use of social media, for example, their negotiation of professional boundaries or its use as activists. The second was in response to how the group interacted when discussing social media, for example, when there were strongly opposing views, when participants were working with each other to generate ideas, and how discussion was encouraged or inhibited by participants. Thirdly, the data were analysed for strong social work voices, for powerful statements and stories.

The research memos and the research journal were used alongside this process of creating initial codes to assist with a deeper understanding of how and why the codes and themes were being noticed by me therefore offering more insight into the “sincerity” of the observation. For example, it was useful to be attentive to how my cultural position within the group, or my growing relationship with the subject of social media influenced my noticing of themes and impacted on the level of importance I gave to opinions shared. It is important that researchers attempt to give equally weighted attention to all the data items when coding (Braun & Clark, 2006) and this reflective work assisted with this process.

As discussed above, codes were developed based on content insofar as it related to the research question about social workers learning about social media. A set of questions was developed to support this focus and was referred to when scanning the data for initial codes and then for refining the codes into more general themes (Krueger & Casey, 2015). A series of mind maps were created, both hand-drawn and electronically (using NVivo), to assist with refining the data, establishing connections between ideas. All nodes were finally collapsed into three broad “action” themes (each with three sub-themes) based on the various activities of the group as they carried out their discussion. These themes were reviewed by putting them alongside the dataset and refined further into the following thematic map (Figure 3.5):
The above themes were repeatedly “tested” by reviewing the transcriptions, searching for sub-themes and finding key quotes to support or further illustrate them. The themes were summarised in paragraph form and writing began on the presentation of the findings, during which further refinement of themes occurred. As with the key informant interview analysis, the findings were largely analysed at the semantic (descriptive) rather than latent (interpretive) level to allow for the interpretation of all data to occur in Chapter 5 (Discussion) of this thesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009).

**PHASE THREE**

**3.7 Method for final analysis/interpretation**

This study used a mixed methods research design, whereby the quantitative and qualitative data were analysed in their entirety before being combined at the stage of data interpretation (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). A description has been provided of how the data from the first stage of the research (survey and interviews) were integrated (3.4), and how the findings from this analysis were then used sequentially to expand the focus of the research. The final task of the methodology was to determine how these two sets of findings: 1. integrated survey and interview findings, and 2. focus group findings could be merged to produce meta-findings, or a framework, for interpretation or discussion as illustrated in Figure 3.6:
As was discussed earlier when establishing the method by which to combine the survey and interview data, the task of merging the findings of two independent studies is about “forging an overall or negotiated account of the findings that brings together both components of the conversation or debate” (Bryman, 2007, p. 21). To achieve this, the findings of the key informant interviews (augmented by the survey data) were juxtaposed with the findings of the focus groups so that the findings from each could be “in conversation with one another and appear to weave a richer and more complex story” (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 67). This was practically achieved by creatively comparing the themes from each study aided by mind-maps representing themes and sub-themes. The themes were interrogated for where they diverged and converged with each other and “joint” or “enriched” themes were developed. Finally, themes most worthy of further exploration were chosen depending on their strength and relevance to the research questions and to the research participants. The outcome of this analysis created a template for the Discussion (Chapter 5). The themes generated for the final discussion are as follows:

- Social work identity and social media use
- The place of social work knowledge in social media practice
- What and how to learn about social media
- Leadership and ways forward for the profession

### 3.8 Summary of ethical considerations

This study received ethical approval from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) on two occasions. The first approval was granted to carry out the survey and key informant interviews on 18 December 2013 (Ref. 010883), and the second approval was granted to conduct the focus groups on 27 May 2016 (Ref. 017069). The two approval outcome letters are contained in Appendices 1 and 11 respectively.
3.8.1 Survey confidentiality
Issues of anonymity and confidentiality in the survey were managed as follows. The survey software (questionnaire) had no coding or identifying information (technical identifiers) from which the researcher, or anyone else, could identify participants. Given the anonymous nature of the questionnaire, ethical issues of conflict of interest and the rights of participants to withdraw from the research, or withdraw their data did not apply, and it was assumed that the act of completing an anonymous questionnaire implied consent. This was made explicit in the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (see Appendix 5), which was sent via email in June 2014 to ANZASW members, and which also included other relevant information pertaining to the focus and value of the research. The researcher arranged for the first contact to be conducted by ANZASW so that the researcher did not have access to the personal details of individual participants. Data are stored in encrypted computer files and will remain there for 6 years after its initial date of storage (October 2014).

3.8.2 Key informant interviews
Issues of anonymity and confidentiality in these interviews were managed via the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 8) and Interview Consent Form (see Appendix 9), which contained the following information and consent options. Participants were offered the right to withdraw from participating in the research at any time and the right to withdraw their data from the research over a period of six months, at which time data analysis began. They were offered the option of having the interview recorded, and options regarding the storage of the recordings and/or transcriptions. They were also offered the option of reviewing the transcript and having publications about the research forwarded to them. (Copies of the social work education article were sent via email to the participants soon after publication.) As the research involved interviews with small numbers of individuals and well-known members of the community, confidentiality with respect to the participant's identity could not be guaranteed, and this was made clear to participants in the Consent Form. One participant requested a copy of their transcript, however, did not ask for any changes to be made to the narrative.

Because there was a small pool of people identified as experienced social work practitioners, every care was taken to ensure their confidentiality. Participants were given the option of giving themselves a pseudonym – no participants felt the need to do this. They were asked to describe the professional label by which they would like to be described should any data be attributed to them in any research report or subsequent publication, for example, social work manager or educator. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were made clear in the Consent Form.

3.8.3 Focus groups
Issues of anonymity and confidentiality in the focus groups were managed via a Consent Form (see Appendix 13) and Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 12) which contained the following information and consent options. Participants were offered the right to withdraw from the focus group
meeting or discussion at any time without giving a reason, however they were advised that they would be unable to withdraw their data as the information belonging to other focus group members would be on the same recording. Participants were offered the right to refuse to answer any questions, however because of the nature of the group situation, were advised that the recording device could not be turned off during the discussion and, if participants withdrew from the research, information they had contributed up to that point could not be withdrawn. This was made clear in the Consent Form.

Every attempt was made to maintain confidentiality of the participants in the focus group, however, as the research involved focus groups with small numbers of individuals from the same practice community and because of the nature of focus groups it was not possible to guarantee confidentiality. The research invited participants as expert practitioners to engage in reflection about their own utilisation and understanding of social media, as such, it was emphasised that the focus group had a non-intrusive focus and does not seek any sensitive information about clients or professional colleagues.

3.8.4 Benefits of participating in this project
Participants were offered an opportunity to contribute their experience and perceptions to inform the research and add to the knowledge base about this current and important topic. Participation in research offers an intrinsic learning experience, as the expertise and curiosities about the research topic are shared, and questions asked to promote reflection. As such, participants had an opportunity to maintain a key professional competency of contributing to the social work research environment. Participants were also offered the opportunity to be provided with any information about outputs, for example, an article was sent to all participants based on findings from this research (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2016) and findings have been shared in conference presentations (Stanfield, 2015b, 2016, 2017) and in local ANZASW branch presentations.

3.8.5 Researcher reflexivity
Philosophical assumptions and personal perspectives are implicit in any qualitative research and are important to acknowledge as an intrinsic aspect of the methodology (Creswell, 2013). As described in the Introduction to this thesis, a research journal was kept while conducting this research and is referred to at various points throughout. The aim of research journal was defined at the outset as a place to record and critically reflect on my experience as a social work researcher of social media.

The presentation of reflexivity in this thesis is offered in two parts; the first being a description of myself as a social worker and user of social media, which is largely contained in the introduction to this thesis. The second part is the result of my “consciousness about how these experiences may potentially have shaped the findings, the conclusions and the interpretations drawn in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 216). These reflections are offered throughout the writing of this thesis, however are predominantly contained in both the Discussion Chapter and in the Conclusion. However, as stated in the Introduction,
it was intended that this reflective activity would serve to enhance the overall integrity of the study, and that my personal learning would in some way benefit the findings.

3.9 Summary of methodology
The aim of this research project was to study the broad, unexplored landscape of social media use by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. To achieve this aim, the views of three different groups of participants were sought, blending three different research methods. Firstly, the survey drew on the membership of New Zealand’s professional social work organisation providing a convenience sample of New Zealand social workers from which to collect cross-sectional data. Secondly, the key informant interview participants were purposely selected from New Zealand social workers who occupy senior or leadership positions in the profession and/or who have social media expertise. Thirdly the focus groups again drew on New Zealand’s professional social work organisation, seeking interest from a range of social work practitioners. Hence each group of participants offered a unique perspective to the questions asked within this project and the findings generated from these various research methods were blended using a sequential mixed methods exploratory research design.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the inevitable mixing of paradigms in mixed methods research is seen by some as uncomfortable and problematic (Mertens et al., 2010). The qualitative data collection and analytic methods used for the interviews and focus groups were informed by a constructivist paradigm and sit in tension with the quantitative survey method and statistical analysis which sit within a positivist paradigm. To maximise the benefit of both research approaches, which is the rationale behind mixed methods research, it is necessary to transcend the divide between them (Mason, 2006). This is achieved by ascribing to a pragmatic paradigm, by conducting a research inquiry “conscious of its underlying assumptions, beliefs, and politics,” with a hope that by doing this we are reminded of the “complexity of the social world that we are attempting to understand and intervene in (Giddings & Grant, 2006, p. 59). A limitation of mixed methods studies is the complexity of its design (Giddings & Grant, 2006), and it is hoped that the description and illustrations used to highlight the flow of research activities offer clarity, and the use of researcher reflexivity in this project go some way to maximise the integrity of the findings (Creswell, 2014).
Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings of all three research methods used in this project: the survey, key informant interviews, and the focus groups. As outlined in the Methodology Chapter (3.4.1), the statistical analysis of the survey and its findings are the first to be presented in this chapter (4.1). Following this, findings from the thematic analysis of the key informant interviews are presented in conjunction with the survey findings, where both sets of findings are interwoven and interpreted together (4.2). The joint interpretation of these findings concludes Phase One of the research process, which is then used to inform Phase Two, in which focus groups are employed to further explore the research questions. Focus group findings are then presented (4.3), and a summary of all findings in Phase Three of the project, concluding Chapter 4, and providing a framework of meta-themes for the final discussion (Chapter 5).

PHASE ONE FINDINGS

4.1 Survey Findings
The self-administered internet survey was undertaken concurrently with the key informant interviews, and was used to gather general, predominantly quantitative data from social workers about how they use social media professionally, and about their opinions and attitudes towards it. The survey was designed to explore how frequently social workers use social media, what their purpose is for using it, how satisfied they are with this use, and the barriers they encounter. I was also interested in how social workers value social media professionally and explored opinions about the need for competence and education related to its use. The following presentation of the survey findings will begin with how the data were prepared and analysed, followed by a description of the findings in relation to each question and finally thematic analysis of the final comments offered by respondents.

4.1.1 Data analysis
Analysis of the survey data will be presented in this chapter as: “descriptions, relationships, comparisons and predictions” (Fink, 2003, p. 25). First a description of the data will be provided – of the survey respondents, and of the answers they provided to the survey questions. This univariate analysis (Bryman & Cramer, 2006) considers the measures of central tendency and frequency distribution. Secondly, the relationship between the respondents and their answers will be explored, a bivariate analysis that explores, for example, the relationship between the demographics of the respondents, and their use of social media, by cross-tabulating variables. Thirdly, comparisons will be offered between specific sets of data, for example a comparison between those who use social media and those who do not in relation to their views about its usefulness and importance to the social work profession. And finally, analysis will be provided to offer information about the best predictors of social media use amongst social workers, including factors which promote its use and barriers that prevent it. Qualitative comments gathered via open questions in the survey were thematically analysed and a selection of comments is presented in the analysis, allowing for a more contextual interpretation of the quantitative data.
The process of data analysis was completed using the program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the researcher’s use of this program was guided in part by Bryman and Cramer (2006). The data set was prepared, coded and entered into SPSS; practical guidance with this was received from the Data Analysis and Research Unit, School of Learning, Development and Professional Practice, University of Auckland (Dr Matthew Courtney, Research Fellow).

### 4.1.2 Data preparation

All data were exported from SurveyMonkey.com into IBM SPSS (2015). Two separate datasets were created for those who specified that they use social media for social work purposes (Dataset A) and those who do not (Dataset B). This resulted in a 159-case dataset for those respondents who specified that they use social media, and a 183-case dataset for those respondents who specified that they did not. Data checking and cleaning was carried out separately on each dataset (see Table 4.1 below). Final datasets for analysis contained 144 cases (users) and 166 cases (non-users).

#### Table 4.1

**Use of Social Media for Professional Social Work Reasons: Two Datasets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you use social media for professional social work reasons?</th>
<th>n=342</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>183</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data cleaning and preparation for Dataset A – Users**

For this dataset, questions pertaining to the prevention of social media usage (question 8) were not considered relevant. Therefore, only 19 binary questions were initially assessed in terms of excessive repetition. Analysis suggested that 15 respondents gave the same response, *No* 18 of the 19 times. This was considered feasible so no threat to validity was found. In addition, for this dataset, there were 19 ordinal questions of interest. Analysis suggested that the maximum number of repeated ordinal responses was no higher than 12, so no threat to validity was determined.

At this point, the nature of the missing values in the 19 relevant ordinal questions in the user dataset were assessed using IBM SPSS 23 (2015). Analysis suggested that 15 respondents missed more than half of the 19 ordinal questions and were subsequently removed. This meant that the dataset contained 144 cases. Thereafter, results of Little’s Missing Completely at Random test (MCAR) suggested that the data were missing in a systematic way: Chi-Square = 381.458, df = 222, p < .001.
Therefore, imputations could not be carried out. Thus, finally, 144 cases remained in the user dataset ready for analysis.

**Data cleaning and preparation for Dataset B – Non-users**

For this dataset, questions pertaining to the frequency (question 2), reasons for usage (question 3), importance of social media (question 4), satisfaction with usage (question 5), limitations of use (question 6), and specific forms of social media activity (question 7) were considered irrelevant. Therefore, only 11 relevant binary questions were assessed. A total 24 respondents responded No to all 11 binary questions. This was considered feasible and not a threat to validity.

A total of 12 ordinal questions of relevance were presented to the non-users. Analysis suggested that 17 respondents missed more than half of the 12 questions. These 17 were removed leaving 166 cases. Thereafter, results of Little’s Missing Completely at Random test (MCAR) suggested that the data were not missing in a systematic way: Chi-Square = 113.261, df = 104, p = .251. Therefore, imputations could be carried out. Imputations (Expectation maximization algorithm; IBM SPSS) were carried out and, where necessary, adjusted to fit within the logical initial limitations of the scales. Thus, finally, 166 cases (non-users) remained in the user dataset ready for analysis.

**4.1.3 Description of findings**

The findings will firstly be presented from within each dataset – the unique behaviour of those social workers who use social media (46.5%, n = 144), and those who don’t (53.5%, n = 166). Findings will then also be presented across the two datasets (n = 310), exploring the opinions and attitudes of all social workers who participated in the survey. Some survey questions offered an opportunity for respondents to offer further comments to specific questions, and there was a space for general comments at the end of the survey. As mentioned, some of these comments (as summaries or direct quotes) are included in the following discussion to animate the findings.

**Frequency of use**

Participants who declared using social media professionally were asked about frequency of this use (see Table 4.2); descriptive statistics for this question suggest that on average respondents used social media between once a week and a few times a week (m = 4.7, SD = 1.7). Use of social media therefore can be interpreted as being part of a regular routine with a sustained rather than casual or ad hoc interest in what is happening in their social media worlds. Just over 12% of respondents use social media every day, and approximately one quarter of respondents use social media once a month or less.
Table 4.2

Users of Social Media for Professional Social Work Reasons: Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often do you use social media?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cum %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a month</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>45.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a week</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons for social media use

Respondents could choose more than one response to describe their reasons for using social media professionally (Table 4.3). Choices offered in this question were developed to reflect themes presented in the literature. There is an acknowledged overlap in these categories, for example, professional networking is a form of professional development, as is research. Client communication or intervention could also include forms of advocacy or information sharing. There are rarely clear distinctions between different forms of professional activity, however, it is useful to note here that social media is less commonly used by the participants for client work and advocacy reasons.

Table 4.3

Reasons for Using Social Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional networking</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client work</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were invited to expand on their answers to this question and 11 responses were gathered. These comments include those about social work education – using social media to connect with students, or look for educational resources. Specific examples were offered about types
of client work; for example, to connect with youth, to locate missing young people, or to locate birth families or adopted people. Facebook was used to connect with families, agencies or to locate resources.

There were additional comments made to expand on the use of social media for information sharing and networking: for example, using social media to gather information about current events or issues, to contact agencies and local advocacy groups for information about events and to gather information to inform opinions on “issues of discussion at a national level.”

All respondents (both users and non-users of social media professionally) were prompted to rate their opinion on a five-point Likert scale (1 being very useful and 5 being not useful at all) about the usefulness of social media across the same range of professional activities. Participants could make more than one choice in answer to this question, and for ease of comparison the mean for each category was calculated and is presented below (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4
Usefulness of Social Media to Professional Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional development</th>
<th>Mean (m)</th>
<th>Standard deviation (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service delivery</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>1.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>1.274</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average, all participants were of the opinion that social media was at least more than useful for all professional activities listed in the survey, and the results were similar across categories with service delivery being described as marginally less useful than advocacy or information sharing. There is no notable difference between the mean or the standard deviation across the categories of use.

These results are somewhat in contrast to the actual use of social media by social workers shown in Table 4.3, where activities of networking and information sharing were used by more than half of those respondents who use social media professionally. However, choosing to use social media for certain activities, and the opinion of the usefulness of such activities do not necessarily correspond. It could be that lack of knowledge about using social media for certain activities (i.e., advocacy) or concerns about ethics related to others (service delivery) restricted actual use for those who maintain a positive opinion about potential usefulness. Further research into significance of this relationship would be useful to further understand the level of competence of social workers across the various affordances of social media.
**Importance of social media use**

Social workers who use social media were asked how important this activity was to them professionally (Table 4.5). Descriptive statistics for this question suggest that, on average, survey participants considered social media as being somewhat important to their role as a professional social worker ($m = 3.76$, $SD = 0.93$).

Table 4.5

*Users of Social Media: Professional Importance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very unimportant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat unimportant</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither important nor unimportant</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>79.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just under half of the social workers who use social media professionally indicated that this activity was somewhat important to their professional roles, with 20% believing it to be very important and approximately the same number taking a neutral stance. About 10% of respondents in this category felt that social media had little or no importance to them professionally. This distribution is skewed towards social workers who find social media to be of some importance in their professional role, suggesting a position of reticence and uncertainty perhaps best described by this participant:

> I can see that a knowledge of social media is the very bottom line for social workers, but for me personally it’s not part of what I choose to use so I have not explored the uses professionally. I can see all sorts of potential for its use in social work terms – being where the client is at, in its widest sense!

**Satisfaction with social media use**

All survey participants, regardless of the extent to which they used social media, were asked to gauge their level of satisfaction with this use. In hindsight this was an ambiguous question to ask of non-users, therefore this data was not deemed useful. Analysis of answers to this question therefore, is focused only on those offered by the users of social media (Table 4.6).
Table 4.6

Users of Social Media: Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of satisfaction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat dissatisfied</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>85.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With a mean of 3.74 on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very dissatisfied and 5 = very satisfied), descriptive statistics for this question suggest that, on average, survey participants who use social media professionally were less than somewhat satisfied with their use (SD = .86). This result indicates that a significant number of social workers found their use of social media wanting in some way which may or may not indicate an interest in changing how they use social media. Information about desire to change use of social media was not gathered directly by the survey; however, questions about the need for education in social media use referred to later in this chapter (Table 4.10) go some way to indicate desires regarding future development. In addition, the literature speculates about limiting factors thought to influence social worker use of social media and thoughts were collected from survey participants about these (Table 4.7). That participants are generally less than satisfied with their use of social media overall indicates the degree to which these limiting factors could be impacting on their behaviour.

The key features of social media identified in the literature thought to hinder or challenge its use generally relate to various types of risk (privacy, reputational, security, ethical), to lack of time or knowledge and to employment-related factors. Survey participants were offered these factors as possible limitations (users of social media) or barriers (non-users of social media), and prompted to choose one or more answers to the question about what limits or prevents them from using social media professionally (Table 4.7). Participants were also invited to offer further comments about factors which may prevent them from using social media and the comments have been included in the following presentation of data.
Concern about privacy dominates the response to this question, indicating that over half of the social workers responding to this survey were constrained by this perceived or real risk, and the data presented from both users and non-users of social media were similar in this respect. The same pattern can be seen for concerns about security risk, reputational risk and ethical concerns, with both users and non-users putting similar weight on those factors. Comments were made regarding ethical implications of social media in direct client work, one commenting that they would only use it in situations of limited confidentiality (i.e., safety), and another stating a wish to safeguard client confidentiality (i.e., what they might post on Facebook). One survey participant expressed no faith in being able to manage risks presented by social media while others highlighted risks inherent in social media including concern about ethical boundaries and fear of posted content being misused or misquoted.

Time constraints featured as a significant preventive factor for all participants – however it is more of an issue for users (40.3%) than for non-users (30.7%). Perhaps this can be explained by the reality of social media being more apparent to users, therefore the experience of time consumption is a more obvious constraining factor. There is also a difference between users and non-users in relation to how lack of knowledge about social media acts as a hindrance. A total of 21% of non-users see this as a barrier to use, whereas a higher number of users (27.8%) cite this as a limitation. Again, this might be a result of users having experienced the complexity of social media and are therefore more cognizant of the knowledge required to use it well:

I would love to use social media more in my work as I work with teenagers and that is their world. I see that my limitation is my lack of knowledge, I have a very supportive working
environment where we are all working to enhance our technological knowledge as we see this is crucial in our work.

Furthermore, non-users were more likely to be affected by lack of employer guidance (30%) than users (14.6%), and non-users were more likely to be advised by their employers not to use social media (30%) than those who use it (22.9%). Related to this, one participant commented on the desire for professional guidance in social media use: “I would be really interested on thoughts around the possibilities adding ‘professional use of social media’ as part of a competency requirement with ANZASW/SWRB.” And several comments were made about the organisational barriers to professional social media use: “I only do social work from my place of work, and social media is NOT allowed on work computers.” A further comment illuminates the reality of this for some:

In the context of using social media at work, this is a no-no. Access to social media is banned/blocking. I am however linked to ANZASW through Facebook at home and the social action sites and use these to keep up knowledge...learning and development I guess...in my own time however.

This comment, made by a non-user of social media for professional reasons highlights the grey area between the professional and the personal in the social media space, and the difference between individual and organisational perceptions of the value of social media. It could indicate that social workers who use social media at home to extend and develop themselves as social workers, do not describe it as a professional use because it is not supported by their employer, or used in the workplace. It is very difficult therefore to fully understand how social workers differentiate between professional and personal use of social media. The following comment highlights this dilemma further:

I use my personal social media for professional reasons. Networking, advocacy and information sharing. I find it challenging to consider how to keep my personal and professional life separate in this context (i.e., My Facebook “friends” who should really be professional contacts).

In addition to grappling with issues related to personal and professional boundaries, participants also identified the lack of relevance to their work as a limiting factor to social media use:

I think there would need to be a clear purpose, so far it has not come up as a need or something that could be appropriate in my role.

Other limitations identified in the comments include lack of faith in the veracity and usefulness of information found on social media. From the user dataset, a very small number of participants ($n = 11$, 7.5%) said that nothing prevents them from using social media, indicating how very few participants have an experience of using social
media free of limitations or worries. The following comment highlights the enthusiasm with which one participant embraces social media, perhaps illustrating the experience of this minority:

I believe social media use is imperative for social work because there are various movements overseas, e.g., against sexual assault, against male entitlement and misogyny, for indigenous rights, LGBT rights and marriage equality, economic equality, self care (e.g., mindfulness meditation, yoga), against organisational and corporate oppression, as well as a huge diversity of spiritual communities and training attended by people from all over the world. If NZ social workers are not using social media, we are not part of the worldwide social change movement and the valuable networking that is available to help us to connect clients with resources.

**Personal and professional use of social media**

Participants were asked about their personal use of social media to understand the potential relationship between personal and professional use of social media for social workers. The results showed that 91.5% \( (n = 130) \) of respondents who describe themselves as using social media professionally, use social media personally, and that 68% \( (n = 115) \) of those who do not use social professionally, use social media personally. There were a small number of respondents \( (n = 12) \) who professed to using social media on a professional basis only (Table 4.8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional use of social media</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>115</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It would be expected that non-users would be less engaged in social media generally, however, further investigation into what constitutes "social work" activity on social media would be valuable. As seen in the preceding discussion, the boundary between personal and professional use can be difficult to define, therefore, there also may be a blurred distinction between social work and non-social work activities. The following comment helps to illustrate this reality:
The social media has been a way to connect with youth and friends of my children. I see they have issues that they couldn't talk to other people about. I made myself available to them in the hope it kept them safe, gave them hope, resources and other information. This was all before I got my qualification. I maintain there is such a short supply of non-judgemental support to children, who have no idea of the agencies in their communities, or who are too embarrassed to ask for help. Social media helps me keep an eye out for those who may need that support. Plus now, I have access to networking and connecting to non-profit organisations.

Those who use social media personally constitute nearly 80% of the survey respondents \((n = 245)\). At the time of this survey nine out of 10 New Zealanders used the internet, 81% thought the internet was an important way to find information, 60% read blogs, 65% used social networking sites (Crothers, Gibson, Smith, Bell, & Miller, 2014, p.17). Although it is difficult to compare the data from these two sources given the use of language (social media; internet), a rough correlation can be observed between the number of social workers in this study who use social media, and that of the general population of Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Interest in using social media professionally**

Non-users of social media for professional reasons were asked to indicate their interest in doing so. Descriptive statistics for this question indicate that, on average, non-users of social media for professional reasons were neither interested nor disinterested in using it professionally \((m = 3.08, \text{ SD} = 1.22)\). This neutral stance offers some insight into the desire of non-social media users to become engaged, however, it is also useful to consider the cumulative percentage figures to further understand the responses. Approximately one third of respondents are actively disinterested (33.2%), and almost half of the respondents (46.3%) are actively interested, and approximately 20% take a neutral stance in this regard, indicating a level of indifference and/or cautious openness (Table 4.9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very disinterested</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disinterested</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither interested nor</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disinterested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat interested</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>91.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very interested</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>166</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents were prompted to offer comments in response to the question about their interest in using social media. Of the eight comments, all but one expressed uncertainty and/or a desire for more information before engaging in social media use. As representative of these comments, one participant expressed: “social media needs to be a safe and responsible option, but I don’t have enough information to decide as I have limited information what the possibilities are.” Two single comments were made to express more extreme opinions; one a belief that social media is “essential for modern practitioners,” the other saying they “don’t think social media can help.”

**Opinions about professional social media use**

All survey participants were prompted to answer the same set of questions seeking their opinions about, and attitudes towards, social worker use of social media. These included questions about the potential and value of social media to the social work profession, and about the need for further knowledge and training. Participants were asked to use a five-point Likert scale of response alternatives between strongly agree (5) and strongly disagree (1) to rate their opinions and attitudes. In order to best understand and compare the data collected from these questions, the mean was calculated for each question and is presented for comparison below (Table 4.10).

**Table 4.10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree = 5</th>
<th>Mean (M)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree = 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree = 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Competent social media use is important to the profession | 3.25 | 1.218 |
| Social workers should be trained in how to use social media safely | 3.77 | 1.120 |
| Social workers should make professional use of social media | 2.92 | 1.129 |
| Social workers should be competent in their use of social media | 3.27 | 1.164 |
| Social workers should be trained in the potential use of social media | 3.79 | 1.101 |

It is clear from this table that participants essentially offered at least a basic agreement with each statement about professional social media use. Those statements generating a stronger level of agreement were related to training about the safety of social media, and its potential for use, and deeper exploration of these opinions will be undertaken (Tables 4.11 and 4.12 below). Participants were, on average, less enthusiastic about the idea that social workers should use social media,
however agreed that competence is important, either to the profession generally, or as an expectation of all social workers.

Comments offered by participants help in understanding the difference in the level of agreement between opinions related to the need for social workers to use social media, and the need for training.

I think if people are using social media they need to be well trained in it but I do not see social media as necessary. I acknowledge that I am one of the few!

Regardless of this participant’s perception of being in a minority regarding their position, it suggests an “inevitability” of social media use, and a corresponding requirement for it to be used professionally. Overall, this data indicate a general desire of social workers for training to be offered in the professional use of social media and there is little difference noted between means and standard deviations across categories.

**Comparison of opinions about professional social media use between datasets**

The use and non-use of social media by the respondents to this survey resulted in data that essentially divided the survey users in half, with just over 53% of the respondents saying they do not use it professionally and the remainder saying they do. Gaining insight into the attitudes and thinking behind decisions was one of the goals of this survey, with an assumption that understanding these dynamics would assist to develop professional use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa and to learn from social workers how the profession could respond. The last two tables were generated to further understand the differences between the two user groups in relation to their belief about how important social media is to the profession, and about the need for training or further education into its use.

As might be expected, non-users of social media are generally less agreeable than users to the statement that competent use of social media is important to the social work profession. Users are more likely to strongly agree with the statement (34%) than non-users (13%); the cumulative percentage of non-users who show a level of disagreement (between strongly disagree and agree, and strongly disagree) is 44%, while the equivalent level of disagreement within users is 16% (Table 4.11).
Table 4.11
Cross-tabulation of Use/non-use of Social Media with Opinion About Its Importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competent use of social media is Important to the profession.</th>
<th>Non-users</th>
<th>Users</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Count 16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.6% 0.7%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between strongly disagree and agree</td>
<td>Count 57</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34.3% 15.5%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Count 50</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.1% 28.9%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between agree and strongly agree</td>
<td>Count 22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.3% 21.1%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Count 21</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.7% 33.8%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count 166</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0% 100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Chi-Square Test of independence was performed to investigate the relationship between users and non-users of social media for professional reasons, and the opinion about the importance of social media to the social work profession. A significant relationship was found ($X^2 (4) = 39.78, p < .01$). Users of social media are more likely to value the importance of social media to the profession than non-users. Although this was an expected result, it was an important question to put to the data. Given the number of limitations to professional social media use cited in the literature, and the degree to which all survey participants experienced these limitations, it could not be assumed that opinions about usefulness are linked to social media use.

A Chi-Square Test of independence was also performed to explore the relationship between user and non-user datasets, and the opinion about the importance of training for social workers in the potential uses of social media (Table 4.12 below). A significant relationship was found ($X^2 (4) = 21.7, p < .01$) showing that users of social media are more likely to value the importance of training than non-users. Nearly 50% of users strongly agreed that social workers should be trained in the potential of social media for the profession, compared to 28% of non-users; however, the cumulative percentage of non-users who show a level of agreement (between strongly agree and agree) is 87%, while the equivalent level of agreement within users is 93%. This indicates a high level of agreement with only a slight difference between the two user groups; a higher degree of agreement however, was expressed by the users of social media.
Social media activity – receiving and viewing content

Jenkins et al. (2006) describe the internet as a place where participants have the capacity to be involved in the creation of material rather than simply in the consumption of it, leading to the concept of an online “participatory culture.” Technically, therefore, social media users have opportunity to both share and receive information and survey participants were asked to describe their activity in this regard. Just over one third of the respondents (36%, n = 51) engage in both sending and sharing information equally (Table 4.13).

Table 4.13
Users of Social Media: Activities (n = 142)
This question was asked to gain understanding of how respondents define what social media means to them and of the complexity of social media use by social workers. Those self-declared social media users who engage only in the receiving or viewing of information and who represent more than half of the respondents, are using social media in a consumptive rather than collaborative fashion. This might account for the anecdotal impression that New Zealand social workers are less visible on social media platforms than the survey data suggest (for example that just under 50% of social workers use social media professionally). It also raises questions for future study about the link between the complexity of social media activities, and levels of confidence or knowledge about social media use.

**Age and professional use of social media**

Most participants (almost 70%) were over the age of 45; 30% under the age of 45 and 8% under the age of 34. As already presented in Chapter 3, this demographic represents the population of social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand (Figure 3.1). Table 4.14 below shows age groups in relation to professional use of social media, highlighting the marginal difference between those who use social media professionally and those who do not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>No $n = 169$</th>
<th>Yes $n = 143$</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 34</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>65.4%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main difference between users and non-users of social media and age group can be seen in the category containing respondents over the age of 65 who represent just over 8% of all survey respondents. One third of people over the age of 65 use social media for professional purposes, and although the small sample number deters us from generalising the findings, anecdotal comments from respondents support a commonly held belief that older people are less frequent/competent users of social media, as is reflected in these comments:

> There unfortunately is a generational split when it comes to our profession. Those who accept these types of changes, those who have known no other way of being and those who don't see the relevance. It is all very relevant and I believe if you don't keep up with what is
happening especially within the existence of our young people you will be inevitably left behind. We need to continually evolve or we become stuck in a fishbowl.

I note that the use of social media becomes more relevant for younger social workers, youth workers and younger clients, which is why I think it is useful for us “older generations” to “get with the programme”!

A Chi-Square Test of independence was performed to investigate the relationship between users and non-users of social media for professional reasons and their age. A non-significant relationship was found ($X^2(2.6) = 4, p = .63, ns$). Although the percentage of people over the age of 65 years who do not use social media is over 65%, that age group represents only 8% of respondents ($n = 26$).

**Gender, ethnicity, and professional use of social media**
Approximately 83% of survey respondents are female and 17% male; this ratio is representative of the survey population as reported in Chapter 3 (Figure 3.1). A significant relationship was not found between professional use of social media and gender ($X^2(1.2) = 1, p = .73, ns$). As discussed, the demographic information about ethnicity was collected by offering respondents the opportunity to choose more than one category. This manner of collection makes it difficult to confidently compare use of social media between ethnicities.

**4.1.4 Thematic analysis of final comments**
Respondents were offered the opportunity to add further comments to questions in the survey related to how they use social media (11 comments), and what prevents or limits them from using social media (36 comments). These comments were summarised and presented above to support the statistical analysis of related questions. Respondents were also asked for their final thoughts about social media, and this generated 55 comments. Qualitative data generated from this final question were thematically analysed, sorted into simple first order categories of use or potential uses, support for social media and ambivalence about social media. These themes are expanded below in this order.

Within comments about how social media is, or could be, used professionally, respondents typically re-emphasised activities offered in the survey as options – networking, advocacy and professional development. Using social media in social work with youth, however, was identified strongly by several respondents. The following four comments highlight different dimensions of social media use in work with children and youth:

Social workers need to be aware of the things that influence the client group. I work a lot with teenagers and I need to be aware of the sites they are accessing and the potential risks for them.
I find electronic information media useful to use in communicating with clients particularly young clients and in supporting them to find information.

I maintain there is such a short supply of non-judgemental support to children, who have no idea of the agencies in their communities, or who are too embarrassed to ask for help. Social media helps me keep an eye out for those who may need that support.

Facebook is useful to trace truant kids, and kids in the custody of CYF who are missing.

Comments offering overall support and push for social worker use of social media created a second theme highlighting a strength of opinion by some about the importance of it to the profession:

I believe social media is the way forward, training of social workers is important to upskill. Social workers must become media competent to survive.

Respondents typically reiterated the need to overcome barriers such as attitudes related to age, ethical competence and lack of knowledge or interest:

I think it would help the SW profession if more social workers engaged in social media, but many seem to be older and not so conversant with it. I train social workers and I would like to see more emphasis placed on the importance and use of social media.

Survey participants also took the opportunity in their final comments to express ambivalence about social media or a dismissal of its use by social workers. Again, respondents identified limitations in social media use already explored in the survey, including lack of employer support and ethical concerns. Further uncertainty, however, was expressed about a perceived risk to face-to-face contact as expressed by this respondent:

There are so many ethical dilemmas that surround social media. It is not safe and could have the tendency to eliminate face to face contact. This reduces the human factor.

The ambivalence expressed by respondents is identified in the following comments which highlight the co-existing “good and bad” of social media:

I would like to be able to hear about great research and CPD etc. but worry that it may not be the quality work we should hear about but it ends up being people's personal opinions.

I am concerned in my role as an employee about ethical issues of client contact via Facebook etc. We were told great tool – police use it to track clients – a red flag for me.
Social media at once offers the strength of accessibility but with questions about quality, the usefulness as a practice tool but with questions about ethics. Overall, the themes generated by these final comments, whether they support the use of social media or not, illustrate an overall uncertainty and sense of being in the midst of change:

I work for CYF, answers may change radically as CYF are due to roll out iPads & iPhones, & to update policies & access to social media.

4.1.5 Summary of survey findings

In summary, the survey questionnaire was designed to gather information about the actual behaviour of social workers in relation to their professional social media use, and the opinions of social workers about the professional usefulness of social media and need for training. Tests on the data included establishing the mean and range of responses, and cross-tabulations were undertaken to investigate the differences between those who use social media and those who do not in relation to their opinions about its importance, need for training and demographic information.

Users of social media reported using it on average between once and a few times a week; they were somewhat satisfied with their use of social media and considered it to be somewhat important to their role as professional social workers. Reasons for using social media, for example, professional development, research and networking were all assessed generally to be of equal value, except for direct client work or service delivery for which there was less value attributed. Concerns about privacy, security and ethical issues were presented as primary limitations to the use of social media by both users and non-users – however, non-users were more likely to be prevented by their employers to use social media, and on average maintained a neutral stance regarding their interest in using it.

The age of survey participants in relation to their use of social media professionally did not present as statistically significant. Although the data lean towards supporting the belief that older people are less likely to engage in social media, it was not a strong association; neither was there a significant relationship between gender and whether social workers choose to use social media professionally. As expected, users of social media are more likely to believe in its value to the profession, and in the need for further training; however, on average, there was a high level of agreement between all users that social workers should engage in training related to the potential of social media, and to its safe and ethical use.

This survey did not collect demographic information related to field of practice and it is recommended that future research focus on the link between fields and use of social media. Given the different ethical considerations and workplace environments across social work fields (for example social work with youth) it would be useful to discover the nature of this relationship to inform details of social
media policy and education. It would also be useful to further understand variables affecting the complexity of professional social media use: for example, to explore what restricted 50% of the respondents to viewing social media platforms only, rather than engaging in a more complex interactive manner with the affordances of social media. Investigation into the relationship between level of knowledge about using social media for certain activities and the actual use of social media is recommended. And finally, further exploration of limiting demographic factors as shared in the literature (for example, ethnic and socioeconomic factors) would add depth to our understanding of professional social media use in Aotearoa.

Fewer than half of the survey participants in this project responded affirmatively in 2013 that they use social media for social work reasons. We can only speculate about how those same people would respond to the same question in 2018. Other indicators, such as the increased general use of social media in Aotearoa New Zealand (International Telecommunications Union, 2017) or the growing quantity of social work writing about social media evidenced in the literature review may assist to make an argument that professional social media use amongst social workers has increased since this time. Despite strong anecdotal evidence of increased use of social media in society, further research is required to confirm this hypothesis. The fast-moving reality of technology and social media use in society presented an inherent challenge to this thesis as a whole and is further addressed in the chapters ahead.

4.2 Key Informant interview findings

As described in Chapter 3 (Methodology), the findings from the survey and the interviews were analysed separately in the first instance, however, where the tools were used to investigate the same research question, the findings from each method were interwoven and interpreted together. This creative approach to mixed analysis was used to maximise the usefulness of the findings – to show in an iterative fashion how the survey data were used to better understand the interview data, and vice versa (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). This process also served to identify gaps in the survey, highlighting future research questions.

The following presentation of findings focuses predominantly on qualitative analysis of the interview data however, as described above, it also incorporates relevant findings from the survey. First, the survey was analysed, secondly, thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted and finally, theme by theme, the survey findings were systematically searched for commonalities and for gaps. Major themes are discussed under the following headings, concluding with a summary of significant findings.
4.2.1 Identity

The notion of identity in professional social media use was a broad theme to emerge across all interviews and at several points within each interview. The theme ranges from personal identities as social media users through to ideas about the boundaries between both personal and professional, and public and private selves, and the identity of the New Zealand social work profession. It is helpful to begin with this theme as it serves to introduce the interview participants to the reader, offering a sense of the unique voices contributing to this aspect of the research.

Identity as individual social media users

Identification of metaphors in narrative is a valuable way to develop themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2006), and in this case, words chosen by participants to describe themselves as social media users offer rich insight into the role of identity in social media use. All interviewees held leadership positions which require them to develop positions on a range of practice issues, including professional use of social media, however they all defined themselves as social media users in very different ways.

The question was not asked, but almost all interviewees volunteered a description of themselves as social media users and a range of descriptors were offered, from a promiscuous user of social media and a social work geek (9), to old fashioned, and a social media virgin (4). They perceived others as seeing social media as dangerous and approaching it with reticence (3). To highlight the intensity of emotion expressed, one participant used three distinct metaphors to describe the experience of doing their first “Tweet”:

I think it’s probably doing the first one and realising that the sun will rise in the east and set in the west. That it’s actually okay to do it. It is really getting over that stage fright and leaping off the edge (7).

Interviewees who, after expressing a well-considered opinion about the professional use of social media, would follow it up by saying they didn’t feel qualified to say (2), or further qualify their comment as coming from someone who is not a social media expert (10). They spoke as if knowledge about social media was a specialty area outside their expertise as social workers, belonging within some other undefined professional realm.

Other interviewees happily placed themselves within this realm – on the other end of the spectrum; describing themselves as technologically fluid (6) and knowledgeable about social media activities:

I’m someone who before 2.0 happened I was on IRC [internet relay chat] and using forums and all that kind of stuff, so the mechanics, the process, of interacting online has been very familiar to me for a long time. And I know that not everyone is in that position. (3)
Participants like this one, who position themselves as experienced social media users, do so with an awareness of how they may be different to others. The following comment highlights how this participant used metaphor to place value on this difference, assuming extensive use of social media to be an unfashionable personal quality:

Before this thing called social media came along I was a social work geek and have been for many years; even before the worldwide web, believe it or not, I was engaging in online conversations. I have a strong presence on the internet. I use Twitter, I use LinkedIn, I use a whole host of them, I’m a very promiscuous user of social media. (9)

The following comment was made in the context of a discussion about the power of Facebook and illustrates how this participant positions themselves relative to others:

You sign your life over. And you’re either particularly brave and transparent and unafraid to do that, or really dumb, or you don’t do it and you limit being part of the world at that level. I, as an individual, am very clued up about teaching myself about these things, educating myself. (11)

The qualities referred to here, of being brave, transparent, unafraid, or dumb can be interpreted as naïve binary ways of self-representation in relation to social media. This participant also identifies as a self-educated user of social media, this being a desirable identity.

Another place where metaphor dominated the text was in the description of emotion related to social media use: “the emotional part of me says don’t make a fool of yourself” (7). The following comment highlights the vulnerability felt by interviewees in their relationship with social media, and the caution with which some participants approached social media:

And all of my reservations, which was really just the fear of putting myself out there – well I felt quite vulnerable at first I should say – but once I did that, I found it really, really… not mind blowing but definitely exposed me to a whole new world. (8)

Metaphorical words such as *virgin, nerd, geek, and promiscuous, brave, dumb*, offer a useful aid to understand the experience of using social media. These examples are typically used to situate people outside of general ways of being, distinguishing them as different (and in most cases unfavourably so) to most other people.

Quantitative data collected in the survey do not directly reflect issues of personal identity as professional social media users; however, the diversity of emotion described in the interviews suggests the value of further study into the role of emotions like fear in relation to social media use,
the place of risk in the generation of such emotions, and how such feelings influence decisions made about engaging in social media.

**Aotearoa New Zealand social work identity**

Interviewees were prompted to offer their views of how New Zealand social workers uniquely approach the use of social media. Minor themes generated from this question were largely related to the concept of identity based on nationality and geography, and on the primary influence of tangata whenua (indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) and Māori tikanga (custom or correct practice) on what makes Aotearoa New Zealand unique country and how the practice of social work is influenced accordingly.

Firstly, the geographic influence on the identities of people living in Aotearoa New Zealand is linked to its small population and relatively large physical distances. Social media is promoted as an opportunity to connect when physical connection is not easy or possible. There is an assumption that social networking via the internet is an advantage to a country like Aotearoa New Zealand because it offers people a greater opportunity to connect with each other both within the country, and globally:

> We have our neighbouring countries like Australia and different countries in the Pacific Islands, but we don't have the same access to crossing borders I suppose as what others would do in Europe. For us to travel it does take a lot of time, money, all of that kind of thing so I think my assumption is that what social media has done is really given us that access, we can cross borders over the internet without having to physically travel. (8)

Small population size was also cited as a reason for not using social media. The higher likelihood of being known in a small community or nation equates with an increased need to guard privacy:

> Our small population and the amount of boundary crossings that we have in our society is such that it creates unique challenges and those unique challenges are that you can readily identify people and things that are happening to people because of the stories that are around in our society. (6)

Another cultural marker pointed out by an interviewee is related to the fear of the “tall poppy syndrome,” the tendency of New Zealanders to understate their achievements, which again has the potential to influence online presence and behaviour:

> Maybe that’s the New Zealand psyche as well coming out in that we don’t like promoting ourselves and publicly stating our positive or our strengths or attributes. (4)
This notion of privacy will be discussed in greater detail within the context of the public and private binary identified by participants, but it is important to identify the notion of privacy as a pre-existing cultural or national quality thought to uniquely influence communication via social media.

Other comments related to identity focus on what were perceived by interviewees as culturally valued or appropriate ways of interacting socially in Aotearoa New Zealand – face-to-face communication for example. Because reference to this way of interacting is featured so strongly in the interviews, it was analysed as a discreet theme and is reported as such later in this chapter, however it overlaps significantly with what it means to be a social worker, and a New Zealander, and this overlap in themes reinforces the complexity and significance of the concept in this study:

Well it’s our commitment to tangata whenua, the treaty that sits under that and how that fits with kaupapa Māori and again that face to face in terms of working with Māori. That for me has always been an important part of practicing bi-culturally, that you must have that kind of face to face relationship and as a practitioner and experiencing that, I can honestly say that sits well with me, it’s how it has to be really. (4)

This comment captures key factors in determining the identity of the profession in this country: the centrality of indigenous people (tangata whenua), the bicultural approach to practice, and kaupapa Māori (Māori practice) unique to Aotearoa New Zealand as underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) partnership principles. The following comment made by a Māori participant captures the genesis of this identity more fully and guides this social worker in their use of social media:

I always think of myself as just a little person in social work that has a small voice but my convictions, the things that I believe in, it is always with a heart and a purpose – better practice, better practice, better practice – particularly when here in Aotearoa we’re working predominantly with the indigenous folk. When I say that, predominantly the people that are going through care and protection, the hospitals, the prisons, they’re predominantly my people. (11)

The concepts of cultural competence, bi-culturalism and colonisation, and issues related to them, are paramount features of Aotearoa New Zealand social work contributing significantly to its identity and its mandate as a profession. The following comment offers an example of how the identity of the social work profession in this country influences practice, and how choices are made about the place of social media in practice to reflect this identity.

How we set the scene in the training environment is very different than internationally because you’re giving that care and time to building relationships face to face, having the opportunities to really discuss things robustly rather than just presenting information or just
giving people a lecture or them having correspond in a way that’s electronic and not necessarily about building relationships. (2)

**Personal, public, professional and private boundaries**

The boundary between professional and personal identities is a prominent theme generated by the interview data across interviews and produced a great deal of complex data to organise and consider. I have organised comments assembled here by firstly looking at statements that highlight the issue itself, then at statements from interviewees that offer insight into how they manage these boundaries. I have also chosen to differentiate between personal and professional boundaries, and private and public boundaries for, although there is a great deal of overlap, and interviewees often used the terms interchangeably (i.e., personal meaning private and professional meaning public), this was not always the case, considering these separately added some depth and clarity to the findings. This approach also shed further light on the significant survey finding that concern about privacy was the most prominent hindrance to using social media with over 50% of the survey respondents being worried about this.

Views expressed about social work professional identities in the context of social media were described by acknowledging the complexity of the boundaries between identities – personal, private, professional, public and organisational. Interview participants found it difficult to describe these aspects of identity separately because of how significantly they overlapped. For example, participants described the dilemma social media presents regarding private information and its location in the public (therefore professional) place of social media. This participant describes a position where both personal and professional identities are kept private:

> I guess the professional/personal about your values, your morals and your ethics that’s very much part of who you are. And being so clear, as you say, and distinct drawing the line between that and the use of social media is about my own privacy really. (4)

There is also the need to maintain privacy for safety reasons in specific fields of practice, for example, child protection. In the following quote, a complete lack of presence (personal and professional) on social media is about safeguarding personal and professional privacy, and by extension, safety.

> You’re very open to exposure. When you’re working in an environment where you may have had to make decisions around children that aren’t necessarily the decisions that a family would have made, you are far more visible and far more open to being found. And also social media provides an opportunity for people to air their grievances and complaints about individuals, which adds vulnerability for people. (2)
There was equivalent concern about the privacy and vulnerability of service users and how ease of access to information can lead to identification of individuals for whom the importance of privacy is paramount:

There’s issues with confidentiality and privacy, and also ensuring that the information that is given means that the person isn’t identifiable, if you understand what I mean – if on a social media page someone was to say my mum’s in hospital and this is happening and that’s happening. Because social media is a very public forum. (1)

Another scenario illustrating the implications of “leakage” of information between professional personal boundaries is described here:

I’ve certainly heard in New Zealand about young people who are receiving drug and alcohol services have gone online, seen their counsellor has been involved in some heavy drinking episode and have just said no, if that’s the way you are I don’t want to work with you. (7)

Differences between public and private identities are highlighted when comparing an identity “at home” and an identity “at work,” as can be seen in the following comment from a social work educator:

And it also raises the question about the public private boundary, which is a really interesting boundary. For social work educators, it’s been quite interesting in terms of when are you on in terms of raising issues as a conscious critic and disseminating information, and when are you actually off the clock and acting in terms of a private citizenship role. (6)

The public/private quandary plays out in other interesting ways. This participant, in attempting to generate discussion about an important social work practice issue found that social workers were eager to get involved in the debate and had a need to share their experiences, but were unwilling to do this in a public forum:

Trying to use that particular media to raise a question, to get a conversation going, because the forum is there, there was barely any response. So that was interesting for me. But yet, there was lots of response coming privately, and when you look at it many social workers are tied up contractually to MSD and to government or their NGOs, so they can’t speak about those hard issues because if there’s a consequence it can come back on them. You can’t rock the boat or be a rebel or have too much of a political voice. The hard stuff isn’t really on the table to be talked about. (11)

Considering the complexity of professional identity in a social media space, it is hardly surprising that more than half of the survey respondents felt constrained by concern about privacy, and the same
anxiety appears to exist within organisations. Deterring social workers from using social media at work is used to manage organisational risk and highlights how organisations are playing a role in influencing boundaries between personal and private use of social media. Employer bans on use of social media is a barrier explored later in this analysis; however, in other cases, social workers are obliged to navigate complex political, professional and organisational boundaries as demonstrated by this participant who works for an NGO:

There are certain things and certain people who are political people that I have liked on my personal page but I am really mindful around what I choose to like or share or not like, because I don’t want to compromise myself professionally. Which is really interesting. Not that I would like something personally that would not fit with a social work perspective, because I wouldn’t, but it’s more about organisationally where we sit in terms of being really apolitical. (2)

This interviewee continued to discuss this issue, stating a clear “political bent,” and shared the difficulty of managing any public knowledge of this on social media:

Personally, I’m not apolitical at all and I’ve got a very clear bent, so I’m mindful on my Facebook page around how much of that I let myself choose to enter into personally, because I’m aware of how open Facebook can be and how easily people can access your page and what you do. I’ve got really high privacy settings, the highest I think I can but I know I’m not that technologically savvy so I’m sure there’s some way of breaking through all of that so I’m actually mindful of it. (2)

The type of organisation you work for appears to influence the extent to which social media can be used professionally. The previous comment about child protection social work and the view that particular attention is needed in that field to safeguard identity highlights this reality. The following two comments, the first from a social work educator, highlight the potentially stark difference in use of social media between social work fields of practice:

I’m really aware of the fact that my present role or my current role gives me more scope to be out there in the public, whereas when I held other positions particularly in government departments it’s a real no-no to be saying that you work for a particular organisation. (8)

I’ve recently become self-employed and am using social media to a greater extent than in my last CYF [statutory] role where its use is curtailed and discouraged. (survey respondent)

These comments reveal a real distinction between organisational identity and professional identity for social workers, and discussion about this in the context of social media accentuates this reality. The public nature of social media has influenced all participants to think cautiously about how they portray
themselves publicly, and comments made by interviewees about managing this boundary reveal the complexity of this challenge.

And I’ve decided to err on the side of transparency, because I think that in some ways that’s a healthier way of being; rather than assuming I can be two separate people I’m actually trying to live my life in a way that’s congruent. (5)

This participant has decided to disregard boundaries, and further suggests that, ideally, there should be no difference between personal and professional identity, but acknowledges that “it also means it’s harder for us to find private spaces or private social spaces." This offers a more nuanced differentiation between what it means to have a professional online identity, and a private identity, whether that be personal or professional. It also suggests that the need for privacy remains important; however, by achieving the goal of transparency, privacy becomes more elusive.

When negotiating the ethical boundaries of social media use, it is suggested that rather than try to walk the fine line of these boundaries, we should find ways to expand them (Reamer, 2012). This advice is nicely captured in the following comment:

So we have to actually accept a more human side of ourselves as well. I don’t think it’s just saying in our personal lives we need to be more ethical, I’m actually saying also in our professional lives we need to be more forgiving and open, and allow a bit of grey in there. (5)

There is an element of risk identified in striving for congruence between public, professional and personal identities, however. Expanding our boundaries, being more publicly accountable to our values and principles is not easily achieved and there is fear of the outcome should social workers fail to meet professional standards in this regard:

It’s trying to encourage social workers to see that their personal persona as portrayed in their Facebook actually impacts on their professional persona. So there’s a need for some congruity about what they do and how they do it. My pick is that over the next four to five years we’ll see more complaints around use of Facebook and social media. (7)

The debate continues however, signifying the fluidity of the times and the novelty of social media as a place to adequately define who we are. The opinion of this next participant is that the question of achieving congruence in our online identity is increasingly moot:

The government maybe slightly edgy about hiring me to do some things for them, because I’ll be critical of them. I suppose I just accept that’s the case and that’s what I’m doing. I’m not going to try to separate those two identities because to be honest if anyone wanted to really find that out they’d find that out anyway. (9)
Bringing the following two quotes together assists in understanding the stark reality of our social media use, the very public nature of our interactions and the vast unknown audience to which we speak.

And if I think back to things I used to think and believe 15-20 years ago, it’s not what I think and believe now but in the future those comments might come back to haunt me because there’ll be a Facebook thread that I participated in once a million years ago. (5)

I would also tend to use it when I’m recruiting staff. Again, there have been occasions where there’s been somebody you’ve had at the top of the list, short-listing, and you look at their Facebook page and you think well perhaps not. The two sources I would use would tend to be LinkedIn and Facebook. (7)

The above social worker then goes on to offer wisdom about how to realistically manage our humanness and online personae to mitigate these consequences:

Sometimes we make mistakes and we say dumb things or we say things that we regret. Five or 10 years ago we were much more sensitive to criticism whereas these days the exposure we have in the social media world means that we have to be more resilient and more open to criticism, so we have to be able to apologise for mistakes that we make rather than just digging our heels in and defending our positions, because you can be confronted with something you once said that is now no longer true for you. (5)

This statement offers an implicit plea for there to be a degree of leniency on the part of those with power to make significant decisions on our behalf – offering an opportunity to explain and contextualise, and if necessary to apologise for statements published in social media.

4.2.2 The double-edged sword

“If two sides of the same sword are sharp, it cuts both ways” (unknown origin)

There are risks and limitations, let’s say negatives, but there’s also the ability to come together as a huge worldly whānau and share information that helps us get over that particular hurdle or be knowledgeable about what Facebook is truly about; what the good stuff is as well as the stuff that we don’t like, that risk to us, and our families, even our children. (11)

All interviewees were challenged to negotiate the risks and benefits of social media use, and discussion around this challenge, as is evident in the above comment, and the drive for balance is where deeper insight was generated by participants regarding professional social media use. The
“double edged sword” metaphor was used explicitly by some interviewees; however, all referred in some way to the favourable and unfavourable qualities of social media as “spin sides.” It was a noticeable finding that when interviewees identified an advantage or benefit of social media, it was accompanied by a liability, or vice versa. Three sub-themes were apparent in this category: the forgoing of privacy to promote public good, the quantity vs quality dilemma regarding information available on social media and ways in which to manage the dichotomy of social media.

**Forgoing privacy to promote public good**

The theme of identity discussed earlier in this chapter focused on how participants manage the boundary between their public and private selves on social media. This dichotomy also presents itself within the good and the bad of social media – as any public figure would assert, the advantages of increased publicity are accompanied by reduced privacy and all the potential “ugliness” that goes with that:

I don’t want to create a forum where disaffected clients of social work can end up bagging social workers, because I think social workers get bagged enough in the media, so it’s tiptoeing that path between putting out the positive message and not creating an environment that gets into these people having a free for all slag-off of social workers. The spin side of it is potentially it’s got some high value in being able to put positive messages out there about what social workers do. (7)

Further contrasting the advantages and disadvantages of social media for social workers, this participant introduced the value of video use in social media for videoconferencing and learning as opposed to the profoundly invasive potential of video sharing for social workers and service users:

YouTube basically means that anything we do could be filmed any time and placed on the world wide web so what YouTube can mean for social workers is that they’ve got to be sensitive to their interactions because they could be seeing their interactions up on the world wide web. So YouTube raises a whole set of other questions about imagery and people’s interactions and where they end up placed, but it also creates a whole range of issues. (6)

The same dynamic was described in relation to social work practice with clients. Social media presents opportunities for advocacy and availability of information for service users; however, ethical questions arise about how the relationship is managed between social workers and clients:

I think for social workers, if I was in practice I would worry about clients and relationships with clients and what that meant, because social workers are often working with people who are not necessarily voluntarily involved with them and there can be tensions and issues there. So the more service users are online is a good thing, in terms of service users advocacy but there could potentially be some ethical issues around how social workers handle that. (9)
This participant highlights the same dichotomy and presents ideas about how decisions can be made to manage the balance in a way that best suits practice needs:

I think it’s probably two edged, again. It’s allowing contact with people who perhaps it would be more difficult to engage with because of distance and lack of transport and all of those sorts of things. So it’s probably moderating between how much you do with visual media and how much you do in face to face, and how you organise that. (7)

The dilemmas presented in these last two comments are closely related again to the management of professional identities in social media. However, in this context, making use of social media to benefit clients and the risk that entails are presented as “two sides of the same coin.” Thinking of social media in this way suggests social workers are beginning to understand that social media has a number of different functions, and, as highlighted in the last comment, only certain functions of social media lend themselves for use in professional practice.

*Quantity vs quality of information*

Interview participants unanimously appreciated social media as a source of information, however this appreciation was accompanied with degrees of caution about the volume and quality of information. Firstly, participants described the various psychological impacts of processing information available to them via social media:

I think it’s a bit of a double-edged sword. I think in one way it’s really valuable because we have pretty much instant access to news all over the world, so we know what’s happening, we can almost compare it in terms of social issues that might be relevant in other parts of the world that might be relevant and similar to what we experience here. So that’s really good on the plus side. The negative side to that is the fact that we can be constantly bombarded, and if you choose to be it is quite addictive, it’s hard to sometimes switch off. It almost can become quite invasive. (8)

Words such as *invasive* and *addictive* have negative connotations that indicate a lack of control over the power of social media and the enormity of its content. This next comment introduces the emotional impact social media can have, particularly as a social worker:

One of the other things I find is the saturation that can come with it. Because I’m active in the sexual violence sector I follow a lot of feminist threads on Facebook and there are some mornings where I check my Facebook feed and I regret doing it because the news is so bad and it’s a terrible way to wake up, a lot of it is bad news stories. Because it’s still media, it’s still about trying to get people to click through and look at what you’re doing, I do think that there’s a risk there in terms of it’s harder to switch off and we might find that we’re getting saturated or bombarded with more and more news, which is usually bad news as well. (5)
This participant continued with the view that it is not only the vast amount of content found in social media that can be overwhelming, it is also the large array of social media platforms that could be a hindrance for some:

There’s all sorts of options out there for social workers to connect to. You’ve got LinkedIn and you’ve got your newsletters, you’ve got forums online and websites that are more attractive, blogs, there’s so many different options people have to become better at deciding what to use when and in some cases a lot of people I meet are so incredibly social media phobic almost – it’s too overwhelming, it’s impenetrable, they don’t want to go near it. (5)

The omnipresence of social media, its content and the unlimited ways it can be used can also have lifestyle implications, as expressed by this participant:

Well it is a distraction sometimes, and we all know that. There’s a time management issue, but there’s time management issues with all sorts of things. Because it’s new it seems more distracting, I think, than other things. So yeah, people have to manage their time appropriately and when you want to procrastinate it’s a very easy way to lose hours if you’re not careful. That can hinder but for the most part I think that’s by far outweighed by the positive value in terms of current awareness of events, about finding out what people are thinking about new ideas, about sharing what’s happening in the world. These are all hugely important and to lose a couple of hours here and there doesn’t matter. People used to spend hours sitting in front of television. They do that less now. (9)

These comments highlight the quantity of information, the numerous affordances of social media and its ubiquitous and potentially all-consuming nature. The following comments identify another quality of social media – how instantaneous it is, and the implications of this:

When I said a double-edged sword, there’s definitely a lot of pros and negatives to it; I think it’s so instant and also that once you put something out there, it is out there and it’s really hard to retract it, which is why agencies can be afraid to use it. (8)

Social media provides vast repositories of information for consumption, as well as opportunity for anyone to contribute information. These affordances offer another place where the good and bad of social media come together, where the positive aspects of spontaneity and immediacy of information can lead to questions about quality:

The whole thing about the use of information, access to information, sometimes people can write things without actually thinking through, all that kind of instant response then it’s there and it’s documented and recorded. Is that a good thing or not a good thing? I don’t know. (4)
Adding another dimension to the confusing landscape of social media as a source of information, this participant makes that point that access to large amounts of information does not guarantee that *all* important information is available:

We know that various countries are trying to really shut down the net as a whole in particular areas because it’s letting out certain information about what’s going on there that the world can have a conscience about. Even here in New Zealand our news media is very controlled, and so much so that I’ve stopped watching it. I find my news and what’s going on in the world, things that interest me, from other sources. But no matter where you go to access certain information there’ll always be some hindering, some negatives. (11)

**Balancing the sword**
The previous comments have highlighted the challenges associated with information available on social media. The following comments offer thoughts about how these attributes can be balanced, how we can most competently use the double-edged sword. This interviewee advocates for the use of a critical eye, and if we carry forward the wisdom from the last comment about how information on social media is restricted, this eye will be used not only for what we see on social media and what we post for others to see, but also for what we do not see.

As social workers we need to develop better bull$hit detectors so we can read social media news with a critical eye and “think before we share.” We’ve all fallen prey to that I’m sure, but as our professional and personal lives overlap more, this is probably an increasing risk that we might “share” (at best) incorrect information and (at worst) dangerous information. (5)

The following comment was made by a participant after the interviewer reflected on a statement made by them about feeling cautious about sharing information, suggesting this may hinder social media use:

Well it shouldn’t hinder us, because we should be skilled enough to be able to use it appropriately and effectively. I think that that’s not a good reason not to use it. The benefits definitely outweigh – not the disadvantages – the difficulties. So the benefits outweigh the challenges. (1)

This participant goes on to advocate for the use of social media and offers an opinion about the balance of risk and the need for skill to manage it. The last comment in this section comes from a participant equally convinced of the value of social media to social workers, and makes a clear call for education in its use:
Really it comes down a lot to developing education perceiving it as part of the social world, not separate from it, and for social workers to educate themselves so that it becomes familiar. So it moves from the scary unknown to the known. There may still be scary bits about the known, which is valuable to recognise but while it’s still unknown then people are going to feel less confident around engaging. Becoming informed, become aware, and developing a more sophisticated view of social media; it’s not all good and it’s not all bad. (3)

In summary, the two-edged sword theme was a useful “binary” framework within which to discuss the pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages of social media expressed by the participants. Extreme positions are common in the face of novelty, and polarised opinion is a feature of current social media analysis (Fuchs, 2017). Polarity of opinion also leads to a level of indecisiveness and uncertainty which may explain why the survey participants, when asked for their opinions about social media, offered an overwhelmingly neutral response with very little standard deviation.

4.2.3 Face-to-face communication

The concept of kanohi ki te kanohi, a Māori concept literally translated to mean “face to face” was discussed earlier in this chapter as a feature of social work practice, and as a cultural and national value. Participants offered thoughts about how this aspect of Aotearoa New Zealand social work identity may affect use of social media professionally. Face-to-face communication emerged as a significant theme that went beyond identity however, and perhaps because it is such a key aspect of social work identity, this is hardly surprising. The following discussion analyses the findings in terms of how face-to-face communication (or lack of it) is perceived as a factor determining the value of social media as a professional tool, and attitudes about its professional usefulness.

Firstly, regardless of their position on the value of social media to the profession of social work, all participants agreed with the high value attributed to face-to-face interaction in their professional settings and examples were offered of this across several professional activities; in practice settings, in professional networking and in educational forums. Interestingly, this participant raises the importance of face-to-face communication outside of the social media context to emphasise its importance:

In this role at times, having to deal with things when they haven’t gone particularly well, some of my analysis of the situation has been an overuse of not meeting directly with people and communicating with them face to face, so that probably sits in the back for me, as well as it’s my preferred way of communication, so that also sits there for me. (4)

In making this comment, this participant was extending their professional opinion about the value of face-to-face communication to their analysis of the value of social media as a professional tool. Their view is that use of technology detracts from the ability to relate in a way that ensures best practice and, by extension, could lead to dangerous practice. This following participant intrinsically values
face-to-face relationships, but also sees the value of social media in supporting those relationships, particularly those that are distant:

And for me personally, the culture that I identify myself with being Māori, and we are quite relational. So connecting face to face is hugely important but also staying in touch through the likes of Facebook where you can see photos and can hear stories and share stories and share videos. I definitely think we’re more likely to do that here because when we do have whānau and friends and colleagues that do travel to the likes of Australia and the UK and Canada, I think we do stay in contact in that way more so than by telephone or anything like that. I wonder if because we are isolated that that does shape the way that we see social media and the way that we use social media. And I know very few people that don’t use Facebook. (8)

This participant is describing social media as a way of supporting relationships while still acknowledging the essential value of face-to-face connection. This idea is extended by another interviewee in the following comment made while speaking about carrying out an advocacy or social action role:

I’m speculating, who knows but I do think one of the big differences ... all social media, all stuff to do with the internet is never for me about an alternative to face to face, it’s about an addition to it. And it can’t replace it. Maybe it happens more if there are actually more opportunities to meet face to face too. If you and I sat down and had a coffee at an event we were attending, and had a chat about this, there’s maybe more of a chance that we would actually say okay, let's do it. ... (Social media) doesn't have the stickiness of face to face, it doesn't have the same kind of attraction. It’s important, and it’s great just for stuffing around and finding things, but if it comes to really making something happen you do need both. That’s it, you do need both. (9)

Comments made by participants to support a previous discussion about the double-edged sword of social media in social work practice advocated the need to moderate use of technology rather than taking an either/or approach to its use in direct social work practice. The above comment also supports this position, while the following participant takes a more philosophical approach to the use of social media, asserting a position on the worthiness of social media as a social interaction:

It’s also about perceiving it as a valid form of social interaction, and I think that’s something that’s a challenge for a lot of people. A lot of adults particularly, they don’t experience it as valid as face to face. Which is actually a really big issue when you’re looking at the ways that young people view and interact with the online setting. There is a distinct difference there. It’s no less valid or invalid. It has its challenges but being able to see how it can be used, how it is still a social setting, not just this weird technology thing that we don’t understand. I think that’s where some of the bravery comes in, in dealing with those unknowns. (3)
Further to this point is the challenge to professionals that holding fast to the “face-to-face imperative” and not considering alternatives, may lead to less effective social work practice.

And I think for some people they just keep doing what they’re always done so a lot of people are just happy to go to the network meetings and then maybe complain, why aren’t there more people here? Oh, it’s because they’ve already connected with 10 people already via social media that morning, juxtaposed with face to face so I think there’s an element of not realising that there are other ways of doing what they’re already doing. (5)

And finally, this Māori interviewee, in the context of discussing social media and its relationship to face-to-face communication or, kanohi ki te kanohi, strongly stated:

One of the things I can tell you clearly as a Māori woman who is very connected to her own people – my own whanau, their whanau, their cousins and wider whanau, and also whānau from other countries, and Canada particularly, I’ve got connections there – is that the net itself has provided a means of bringing us together. (11)

The binary qualities of social media, the good and bad, to use or not to use, have featured in this analysis so far. Social media as a professional tool tends to lend itself to this way of thinking, and with the help of the participants we have been nudged into a place located somewhere in the middle. By considering the place of identity in social media use, by getting closer to the true nature of the double-edged sword and the value of face-to-face communication, subtleties and nuances have been generated that help us to think more creatively and broadly about the use of social media.

4.2.4 Utility and innovation
The survey offered multi-choice questions about what social media activities social workers engaged in and what activities were of professional value to them; for example, professional development, research, direct practice. Respondents were also given the opportunity to offer qualitative comments about how they use social media, and ideas for potential use, and the interview participants were asked the same types of questions. Both research tools therefore were designed to answer the same research question; therefore the interpretation of this theme is more obviously blended than in the foregoing analysis.

The last set of themes generated from the key informant interview analysis focus pragmatically on what interviewees said about how they use social media, how they observe others using it and how social workers could be using it. As canvassed, inviting key informants onto the research project invites knowledge about social media use by those with expertise, and it is important to capture this new, progressive knowledge. The codes which led to this theme include reference to the various uses of social media (for example, education, networking, information management), therefore the data
essentially contain a “list” of uses by participants along with more refined thoughts about the nature of these uses.

The data are divided into “use categories” below, however, it is noted that many participants described multiple roles and multiple uses of social media from both personal and professional perspectives, leading to a description of quite complex and strategic approaches to social media use. One interviewee for example, described use of Twitter, emailed newsletters, the use of Moodle (an educational social media platform), Mahara (professional development software), personal and professional blogs, LinkedIn, Facebook for both personal and organisational networks, further differentiating between public and closed group domains. Some interviewees described a similar array of platforms and some only the use of one or two, mainly Facebook. To contrast this, one interviewee used the Google search engine as their only form of social media.

**Learning – education and professional development**

Nearly half the survey respondents who use social media for professional purposes reported using it for the purpose of professional development. Roughly the same percentage said they use social media for research purposes, information sharing and professional networking – all arguably professional development activities. The average opinion of survey respondents about the usefulness of social media for these activities was “between useful and very useful.” The survey did not ask explicitly for use of social media in social work education, although comments were offered about this by the respondents and, because some key informants were educators and trainers, thoughts about the value of social media use for this purpose were found in the interview data.

Social media was cited by both interviewees and survey respondents as a good source of information for teaching purposes, as a teaching tool (for example, YouTube), and as a way of communicating with and disseminating information to students. The variety of options available through social media to offer information to learners was acknowledged as a way of satisfying a range of learning styles.

> From a teaching point of view, I think that people learn in a whole heap of different ways and people really appreciate the use of social media and different... I’m just thinking about YouTube and being able to have access to different experiences because of the opportunities that social media and websites and YouTube offer. (2)

As described by one social work educator, the scope of social media use in educational institutions can be extensive: the use of an institutional Twitter account to share events, publications and other achievements, using a teaching platform (Moodle) where discussion forums and links to educational resources are offered, and the use of e-Portfolio software, which is becoming more available in professional settings and is described here:
It enables the students to collect and display different types of information about themselves. It could be things like photos, videos, audio files, links, documents and files. Essentially what it enables them to do is to collate evidence of their competence to be a social worker and we invite them to do this in an ongoing way through the programme. Within there, there are group and social functions as well, so the students are able to set up groups in there for courses, especially when we have workshops. We show them how to use the software and they often set up a group and then start talking to each other a little bit in there. (5)

The social work educator speaking above also said that use of Facebook groups for communication and support is common amongst student groups, and the sophistication of social media affordances described above suggests social work students are potentially exposed to multiple opportunities. The following comment offers some insight into the impact of this on the profession:

Within social work, I see people who just simply don’t use electronic media at all, so the possibility of them ever learning social media is hugely remote. But you see, because I also work with students I see their use of social media and their active involvement in it; that’s part of their life and the way they work, and it’s just a normal part of life for them. So I see the two extremes. (1)

For professional development opportunities, webinars and discussion forums were offered as places to converse with like-minded people, for intellectual stimulation, and sharing of practice ideas. They were also valuable in providing support to learners, beyond the scope of the workshop or course.

What’s been really good about that and what I really like from a social work perspective is that it’s given people support throughout the year with their studies, coz the topic can be quite difficult, and also most students are people working full time with children and families and this is enhancing their role. So they’re already busy, they need a little bit of support and pushing along, and also it’s a good way of communicating across the board with everybody who’s engaged on that page. But also what’s happened is that those pages have been kept up. (2)

The growing use of social media at conferences was offered as an example of how significant value can be added to a professional event, including the ability to access new resources, share new ideas and develop and maintain collegial relationships.

I think for conferences and events it’s massive. At the most recent conference, we now have all the power points … online, audios of some of the speeches are online, it’s just a great way of sharing stuff beyond a simple physical event and making it available much more widely to the community, so from a professional development point of view it’s second to none if it’s used properly. (9)
The use of social media for public education about specific issues or knowledge was also cited as being valuable for social workers. The following two comments refer to the use of social media in the development of te reo Māori (Māori language) and for child abuse education, and both messages refer to how social media has been adapted uniquely to achieve these goals:

One of my senses of social media use and the web in general is that it is an educative opportunity for Māori to engage Māori and the wider community in New Zealand around their culture and to keep Māori culture and forefront. You can even find a handout and you can find waiata and you can find all sorts of things that are on the web that will assist non-Māori becoming more sensitive to Māori culture, or Māori enhancing their cultural development but they're not bashful at all in terms of using social media to do this. (6)

Certainly from raising awareness around child protection and child abuse, I think it’s incredibly significant and I don’t think we would have the reach that we do if we didn’t have social media to assist in that. And I don’t think we would have the engagement either. As a social worker my social work world is about child abuse, it’s negative, people don’t want to talk about it, it’s not great. But using social media it provides a forum that can be engaging and interesting and fun and it isn’t a turn off. So I think it plays a really big role. (2)

**Use in practice**

Use of social media in direct practice with service users is where the issues for social workers and social service organisations are most fraught. Of those survey respondents using social media professionally, only 28% disclosed using it in direct practice and although all survey respondents agreed on average with its potential usefulness in practice, it was with less conviction than for any other professional use of social media. Interviewees and survey respondents offered thoughts about use of social media in practice, and, as apparent throughout this analysis, they grappled with the benefits and harms of social media use with clients, with managing their ethical boundaries and in many cases found themselves prohibited from using social media in direct social work practice.

This section offers some examples of how social workers are using social media with clients, however. One participant who works in a hospital setting for example, uses social media to assist families with information gathering and with making connections with other service users, and has noticed a distinct change in practice with the growing use of email and Facebook.

I always type up the notes and I give family members a copy of the notes. Four years ago when I first started doing this and I would offer to email notes to people, very few family members had an email address. In that 50 to 70 age group they didn’t have email and they would be like no, I don’t have a computer. Now, only four years later, everyone has got an email address. The same age group has got an email address. And when I give them
websites to look up and information like that, they're quite happy to go away and look it up on the computer. (1)

Other comments are made about the responsibility of social workers to meet the needs of service users and to be led by them in terms of the best form of communication with them, especially when considering work with young people. Instant message services or texting, although not seen as public forms of social media (therefore sitting lower on the risk spectrum) are recognised a valuable way, and sometimes the only way of engaging young people.

While I was at the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, it was using an instant messaging service, so it was an email, so not social media in the sense of social networking sites or something that’s visible to many, it was very definitely one to one, but it was still using electronic communication because it was the only way that this young person would engage. They wouldn’t talk on the phone, they wouldn’t come and see anyone, they wouldn’t come out of their room if someone went around to their house. It took a lot of work but that young person did eventually agree to meet with someone in person. (3)

Similarly, participants reported the use of texting in mental health and addictions work to give reminders of appointments, to answer questions, to provide encouragement and motivation, and apps are recommended for therapeutic uses (e.g., relaxation, mindfulness). There is a sense that practitioners are creative and responsive to the needs of their clients within their ethical and organisational confines.

I think the way I’d describe it is that actually we’re having to respond to our wider environment, it’s actually a wider environment than our “client group” and society that’s taking us into the space, to be in a virtual space or be in a normal space and it’s sort of like social work before cell phones. It’s actually not that long ago in fact, cell phones created a whole range of questions when you’re working with younger people who will then message you. As a profession we’ve gone into the cell phone space because that is the communication media of a client group and it’s an instant communication media. (6)

There continue to be barriers, although possibilities are acknowledged, as illustrated by this participant who manages a small NGO women’s service which does not allow the use of Facebook by their social workers:

I think it’s more useful on Facebook because this is what I’ve been hearing from women. I think it’s useful. I have heard comments that if you have Facebook it’s easier to communicate with them because most of them are on Facebook, they communicate with their families around the world. So using Facebook it would benefit them and it’s easy. (10)
A similar comment is made by the following survey participant in describing their work with youth:

I don’t communicate with young people through my Facebook page etc., due to ethical issues. However young people are using Facebook etc. a lot and it would be great if my employer had a page or group that allowed us to make contact through social media without using our own personal Facebook. (survey participant)

Survey participants also offered specific examples of how social media is (or could be) used in direct practice; for example, to connect with youth, to locate missing young people, or to locate birth families or adopted people. Facebook was cited as being used to connect with families, agencies or to locate resources.

A final comment was made about the use of social media in daily practice with service users that sits outside all others, and offers an important perspective on how the harmful dimensions of social media have led to the need for new professional skills and knowledge:

I was thinking too, that social media presents the opportunity for risks that could increase the work that social workers need to do. So if I think about the work that people like NetSafe do, and I can’t think who it is but the sexual exploitation and sexual abuse organisation in Auckland, that social media provides an opportunity for children to be really vulnerable if there is not really good safety and parameters around their use. Therefore you’ve got children who can be vulnerable to people who are taking advantage of them. So I guess in a roundabout way you’ve got social workers in statutory organisations particularly that have got the opportunity to be working with families where that’s been apparent whereas prior to it, it wasn’t such an issue. (2)

Networking and advocacy
Survey questions were posed separately about the two professional activities of networking and advocacy: 17% of respondents who report using social media professionally said they used it for activities related to advocacy, and 55% reported using it for professional networking. It is often difficult to distinguish clearly between professional activities, however; networking can be a form of advocacy and vice versa, and both can be educative or performed in practice with clients. The strength of professional networks influences the capacity to advocate, to engage in online empowerment, social activism, or any other activity that appeals for social justice and equality. This interconnectedness of these professional activities is well illustrated in the following comment:

I definitely have a huge support network, I suppose that support network is established and able to maintain through the likes of social media. Many of the groups that I follow on Twitter and some on Facebook are indigenous groups that are doing a whole range of exciting things
every day. I'm now exposed to different protest movements and I get ideas around how do you actually challenge different issues in creative ways. (8)

Interview participants offered numerous examples of social workers using social media as a tool for networking that led to forms of advocacy and/or activism. Social media was valued by participants as providing opportunity to raise the profile and credibility of the social work profession, to act as a voice for social change and social justice, and to use online professional networks to achieve this.

You’re in it, you’re in a public space, sometimes it’s a more closed space like in Facebook tends to be a smaller or closer community whereas Twitter is like the high street. But it is a public space and so you have that kind of sense of being in public and communicating in public. And yes, trying some things to influence things, to make a difference. Sharing things that you think are important and that people need to know about. (9)

The following comment also reflects a drive to bring important matters to public attention and to do so by using social media to its greatest capacity:

You have to find the ways in which to have that voice. I’m not one for standing on a podium and waving a flag and pulling the bull horn out and stopping having sex with my husband to make a point. There were various ways that they did it back then. There’s various ways that our people are doing it now and all sorts of battles are being fought. My particular question or questions, korero, kaupapa, I’m utilising all the social media that I can, so talking to you is a form of getting my message across. (11)

Professional networking is also used by social workers for professional development; to support those working in isolated communities or in lone social work roles, for maintaining relationships with past colleagues and peers, and to support well-being. Social media has already been discussed as source of information – of knowledge, research or events, however it is the networking affordance of social media that enables the unique access to information referred to in the following comment:

It’s important to network information, even for registration. The information is all there and it’s important I think for the social work profession to know what’s happening not only in New Zealand but outside, globally, what’s happening with human rights, what’s happening with social work perspectives around the world. (10)

This comment refers to the value of networks to share information, a primary function of social media, and leads to discussion of the next theme generated from the interview data about the utility of social media for social workers – about how social workers choose to source, organise and apply this information.
**Information gathering and sharing**

Information gathering, sharing and creating are key functions of social media, and carry risks, as discussed, regarding the quality and quantity of information available. The management of this has led to a new task for social workers who use social media professionally: the procurement, creation and critique of information. In speaking about the advantages of social media the following participant offers insight into the tasks inherent in this:

One is that it gives you a shallow but a really broad overview of current events. So as long as you curate the places where you are seeking your feed from, who you’re following on Facebook or Twitter, it enables you to get a really broad overview of a lot of different areas and also I think it means that you tap into a more pure form of journalism in some cases. (5)

Through the capacity to manage information in this way and to participate in the sharing and creating of knowledge, social media also offers a unique opportunity to social work researchers. For example, social media (in this case, Facebook) is being used transparently to communicate with research participants, to gather data and share results, increasing the participatory nature of research:

What's been really useful, and the feedback that I’m getting from professors and a couple of doctors, is that that is a methodology or a method of being transparent and recording the journey as a successful way of doing it, so that they’re referring to my site as a way for other students to also pick it up and do it. And you are now talking about that as a tool, a valid method, or the possibility of it being a valid method. (11)

When asked about the nature of professional social media activities engaged in, 47% of survey respondents indicated they used social media for “research” purposes. The survey question did not differentiate between various research activities, for example, making use of research studies found on social media, or conducting or participating in research using social media. This question requires further exploration. Tools using social media to conduct surveys for example, are freely available and easy to use and we do not know to what extent social workers are making use of them.

More survey respondents indicated they consume information found in social media (50%), than those who both consume and contribute information (36%). These data support the comments made by interview participants that social media is mostly useful for gathering information about current events or issues, to contact agencies or local advocacy groups for practice support, or to gather information relevant to analysis of current issues. That more respondents do not consume information found in social media could be explained by reservations expressed about the quality of information presented earlier in this analysis.
Internet technology and social media

There’s a lot of secrecy and a lot of technical stuff, and it’s complicated. When you just want to talk to mum in New Zealand and say, “How are you mum? Send me that photo of so and so,” there’s even risk attached to that. So God forbid if you’ve got a political voice. (11)

The technological challenge of social media was another theme generated by the interview data, and the comment above illustrates the important relationship between technical knowledge and risk. This theme offers an opportunity to consider competent use of social media in the context of how the internet works, the numerous platforms upon which social media is used, and the complexity of this as alluded in the above comment. Some agency managers, for example, are aware of the marketing benefits of social media and of the need for a good social media strategy to maximise exposure; they are also aware of the social work role in managing the interface between an agency social media forum and the users of the service and of understanding how to engage with the public and build community forums. What is most evident in this theme of technological complexity is the quantity of unknown factors, and how they are woven together as illustrated in the following two comments:

You can’t do everything in one social media space; you have to think about what’s the purpose of this particular space that I’m in and how am I going to drive that? So you do need to have a strategy in place. And that includes thinking about your audience, the purpose of the group and then how you’re going to build it and what sort of information. And Facebook, because of the algorithms and all that, it chooses what you are presented with for you based on your previous likes and dislikes, so you need someone who understands all those things and you need to have a clear strategy and purpose for what you’re trying to do with that particular social media space. (5)

I think there’s one other challenge that you actually need to be technologically fluid. I think that’s the ongoing challenge, actually understanding how to use the media to start with, the social media, and what it actually does do and being aware of the various settings and the changes of settings and how things can change overnight. I think that’s probably the biggest challenge, the awareness of the implications of the digital age and also your digital device in your hand. We’ve got some real challenges around who owns that digital device and the lack of provision of digital devices by social service agencies when they’re clearly being used for work. (6)

There are also technological challenges in the social work classroom. Educators are aware of the diverse technological ability of students and the need for support in their learning. The social work educator who comments below is a competent user of social media and has full understanding of the benefits of social media in the learning environment, but who faces unique challenges when wanting to use it as a social work educator:
How do I bring that into my own classroom setting? The challenges aren’t around the social media itself, but the technical - how to set those things up when you’re trying to deliver information and set up courses and have a whole lot of other things to do. The majority of students will have a smartphone or access to one, and/or an iPad or a computer. That’s not the case for every single student. So when you want to run a class and have activity using those forums, and you have limited resources and for our institution, we don’t have iPads that are available as a class resource, that’s a barrier. (8)

The experience described above helps to draw a distinction between understanding the role of social media in social work education for example, having the competence to use social media in a professional context, and having the resources and technical knowledge to enable its use, support for which may, or may not, be available from the employing organisation.

**Organisational use of social media**

Questions about organisational use of social media were not included in the survey therefore quantitative data related to this theme were not collected except in relation to organisational or employer bans of social media use by social workers. This issue will be explored more fully below, however the key informants, because of their seniority and level of experience, offered valuable insight into how some social work agencies and managers are currently using social media. Examples they offered included: advertising events; providing forums for discussion; vetting job applicants; seeking or sharing resources and information; providing media analysis or commentary; and networking between organisations. The usefulness of engaging in social media activities at an organisational level is highlighted in the following two comments:

> And I certainly think that, from an organisational perspective, if we are not up to the play and engaged with social media you can lose your space in the market. So social media seems to be a really good way of raising awareness, getting messaging out there, keeping people engaged in the topic and really interested. (2)

> It's incredibly powerful, because that's often the first place that people will try and find us. The Facebook page that we have is bringing people to us, and a lot of the followers – and they're all over the world, quite amazing where they're coming from – are probably more likely to see us as being relevant and useful. I think the value is it provides a bit of a window into the organisation and what it can do. (7)

Not all social service organisations are making use of social media to the extent they could, however; this participant believes organisations could be using social media at a much more sophisticated level:
I think more organisations involved with social work ought to be engaged in it, and I don't just mean have a presence on the web and have a Facebook site. That's fine but I think Twitter is such an interesting and much more dynamic form of social media. It'd be quite nice to see some of the CEOs of some of the big organisations having a presence, maybe having their own blog, tweeting about new events. That would bring other people in to follow them, and they then may be willing to comment. There's a leadership issue here, I feel that quite strongly. (9)

One participant described using social media in their organisation to build communities of like-minded people and to manage the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. This type of work inevitably leads to a new set of tasks associated with a social media presence. The following two comments explore the nature of these tasks:

Probably one of the things that our Facebook page has been used for, and it's tended to not be so current but people have posted things on Facebook around their own personal experiences as a child or their own concerns that they might have. Or just generally asking questions around child abuse and where they can get information or what they should do about particular situations. So we've used it almost like a forum for giving advice, and as a social worker then I have been responsible for supporting people, to give them advice but get the support that they need or point them in the right direction. (2)

I suppose the other challenge then becomes moderating the Facebook page. I just haven't got the time to be doing that on a day to day basis, so I'm reliant on staff to do it. They're pretty good about bringing stuff to my attention and so far we haven't had name and shame things going on but I think there is potential for that to happen. And it also creates a job around just keeping it up to date and vibrant. All of the information I've seen around use of social media, whether it's Facebook or Twitter or those sorts of things, is the need to keep it fresh and posting new stuff. It can become quite a distraction, particularly if you're talking about the younger staff because they really like nosing around on Facebook. (7)

On the other hand, organisational bans of social media use by social workers was a common experience alluded to in almost all interviews, and over a quarter of all survey respondents indicated being affected by this directive as described in the following comment:

Because as much as social work may have a perspective on social media and develop a way of seeing the opportunities and dealing with ethical issues and all those kinds of things, there are still going to be organisational rules and those organisational rules may say no you're not. They may decide on a defensive basis that it is not appropriate to undertake the social work activities of whichever service it is using social media. (3)
The above comment describes the banning of social media as a defensive or risk-averse strategy chosen in preference to the creation of more specific guidelines. Policy around use of social media in social service organisations was called for more than once in this study with a comment about organisations being afraid of social media and the stigma it carries. The following comment is made by the manager of a small social service agency which does not allow use of social media, and which describes itself as lacking protection – as vulnerable and waiting for help:

I think in the future, if there’s maybe a media policy or something to protect us – if we feel safe I think it would be a good idea in the future. Maybe government policy, maybe the social work registration board. Maybe they can actually do something about it. (10)

This call for “someone to do something” is corroborated by two final comments in this section:

I think the biggest challenge at the moment is that we don’t have a professional social media strategy for the profession. We also don’t have agencies coming out, like they’ll use Facebook to advertise different events but they don’t have a Facebook policy on what’s publicised in terms of a full consent on what’s going on there. You assume that when they show pictures of the kids on a holiday program that they’ve got permission to do that and somehow that’s occurred. So it raises a whole range of things, particularly when we get into agencies using social media as a form of their web based presence and then social workers have to contribute to that by taking the picture or selling the success story or having their profile. (6)

There are a lot of organisational service issues that do need to be addressed. One of the things that social workers have been really good at in the past is around advocating for those sorts of changes, and saying this is part of our reality, we need to figure out how to do it and not take the ostrich approach. While social workers are not so familiar with social media then they’re not in a position to do that advocating. (3)

4.2.5 The relevance of social media – a new role for social work
Contributions made by participants to this research project included elements of innovation in thinking about the profession’s relationship with social media and, at times, solutions to its dilemmas. Some of these ideas have been presented in the above analysis – for example, how social media can be used in social work education, in practice with clients, to network and advocate, and how professional boundaries can be managed. These ideas were reinforced with thoughts about the broad relevance of social media to social work, to matters of social justice, empowerment and professional behaviour. To further this discussion and to conclude this analysis, participants also speculated about a burgeoning new role for social workers in managing the place of social media in professional practice.

I think the social aspect of it stands out as a way that social work could argue that social workers need to be involved, at some level. It may not be using social media to do client work
but being familiar with it enough so that when something associated with social media comes up in client work that you have the potential to understand and make sense of what's going on, in a balanced way, not a knee jerk reaction. That was certainly a big part of the clinical discussions that I had. All of the difficulties were blamed on social media, rather than understanding what the social interactions were, how social media facilitated those, what other things might have been going on that may actually have mitigated the problems that are also an aspect of social media. These are things that are being researched about, interactions on social media. I think it's really important for social work to be part of those conversations too. They're part of that research. Actually this is highly relevant to us because it's social. As well as it being about people and their lives, understanding the person and environment so this is a new social setting, it's a new social environment. (3)

Social media platforms enable links between large numbers of people and we have already considered the value of networking to social workers and the role social media plays in this professional function. The following participant reinforces this role, not only for individual social workers, but also for the profession itself:

When you see people making connections internationally that's something that we can do as social workers; we can access people's experience all around the world, it doesn't have to be just New Zealand but we could be doing New Zealand as a start and just finding out more. That's why ANZASW and groups like that need to build large networks online, because then when it comes to things like seeking advice and feedback from the group there's a huge resource there. Especially if you then get people debating it and you get people self-evaluating the accuracy of the information that they're sharing. (5)

The following statement was made in the context of a commentary about the identity of social work, its changing scope of practice away from community development and its reduced role in responding to larger social issues. The participant described social media as a community development tool and linked its use to progressive and entrepreneurial responses to social issues:

We're not even doing it in Christchurch. One of the things which was interesting is the Christchurch quake, you would've thought there would've been some community social work lead initiatives around community development but there wasn't. If you then step back and you look at hey you've got social entrepreneurs like the student army that then do things and they're coming from outside of social work rather than within social work, so what we're tending to lose is that social entrepreneurial response and we've become very institutionalised in terms of how we are operating. (6)

Further to this challenge is the reality that individual social workers, especially those in educational and organisational roles, are faced with significant new expectations around the use of technology
and social media as part of their role. The following advice assists with the management of this issue, but acknowledges the need for new strategies, a reality check, and critical thinking about where social work ends and where social media begins:

I think the other thing that social workers need to keep in mind is not everyone has to be doing social media all the time. In my office I’m the kind of person who looks after it and who follows it so I let my colleagues know if there’s stuff they should know about. I think people will view it as a burden but there are ways of it not being a burden, and I think those strategies should be looked at as well – how to manage it and that sort of thing. (5)

4.2.6 Summary of significant findings

The key informant interview themes and the survey findings were combined in this analysis, thus offering opportunity both for the voices of the 11 key informants to be considered within the larger landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand social work, and for the voices of those surveyed to be explored within the more detailed experiences shared by the key informants.

For example, survey respondents expressed a high level of concern about privacy, ethical and security issues related to social media. Analysis of the key informant data revealed the extent to which social workers’ use of social media is influenced not only by how they ethically manage their personal and professional identities, but also how they guard their various identities for safety reasons. Stories offered by the key informants about the complexity of managing boundaries between their various identities on social media and their fear of ethical, security and privacy breaches, give potential insight into the experience of more than half of the 342 survey respondents who choose not to use social media professionally. They offer some understanding of the generally neutral and/or risk-averse attitudes apparent in survey findings.

The survey findings can also be enhanced by looking at how the key informants expressed identity in the context of cultural values, nationality and geography. The small population of Aotearoa New Zealand for example, is a perceived barrier to social media use because of the difficulty of maintaining anonymity or privacy, both of which are closely held cultural values. The significance of face-to-face communication as both a cultural and professional value is another example of how the key informant findings can be used to explain the reticence of those surveyed. Further reasons include a lack of trust in the integrity of social media, and the information contained on it, expanded on by the key informants to include the overwhelming quantity of information, the immediacy and pervasiveness of it.

Approximately half of the social workers surveyed, however, use social media professionally, and the key informant interview data can also be used to shed light on the reasons for this. The capacity of social media to provide links to the rest of the world was described as a benefit to a country so
geographically isolated from the rest of the world and known for its adventurous spirit beyond its borders. Māori place high value on the concept of *whanaungatanga*, or connectedness with other indigenous people around the world, and social media provides a new way to do this. The key informants offer multiple ways in which social media can be used to enhance and support social work, and it can be assumed that many of those surveyed are already making good use of these activities and tools in their professional lives, especially, as the survey findings reveal, as networkers and advocators.

In contrast to the survey findings, the key informant findings give a greater impression of being open to the possibilities of social media, more solution-focused, or pragmatic about the necessity of adopting social media into social work practice. This impression is partly explained by the obvious reality that the key informants were not a representative sample of social workers, and that some were invited onto the project because of their advanced use of social media and perceived expertise. Those key informants who approached the interview with a more reticent attitude to social media, were perhaps moved to a more nuanced position about it resulting from the opportunity to explore their aversion more deeply in the interview. The exploration of social media as a “double-edged sword” captured the way in which interviewees analysed the pros and cons and in doing so found ways to “balance the sword.”

Social workers in this study advise each other to take a critical approach to social media, to understand it more holistically, to not ignore the impact it has on society and the profession; this position is well-articulated in this final comment:

> You could argue that social media is providing an emerging field for social work practice that we actually are in the midst of trying to come to terms with, but we’re being taken there by society and we’re being taken there by our client group whether we like it or not, and we have to then respond to that and find our way. It reflects a lot of what happens in social work. You have the practice first before you actually get any theory of it and when you’re working out your theory you start to do some research, so social media is a practice that’s in need of a theory and it’s in need of some research in terms of what that contributes – in terms of client outcomes, in terms of forms of social work practice and in terms of its role in society (6).

The key informants who contributed to this study agree that social media use is a relevant professional tool for social workers. Social workers who participated in the survey agree that learning about its use (ethical and potential) should be undertaken by social workers, and that development of this knowledge is important for the profession. The findings from the first phase of this project emphasise the need to develop good strategies and leadership in this regard: “To open up social media as an area where social workers can see themselves legitimately doing social work, being social workers” (3). The second phase of this project, which employs the use of focus groups, further
explores what social workers already know about social media, asks questions about what further knowledge is required, and how this knowledge can be developed.

PHASE TWO FINDINGS

4.3 Focus group findings

The overall aim of this research is to explore how social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand engage professionally with social media; it is interested in their professional opinions, perceptions and knowledge of social media. To this end, as has been described earlier, a survey was conducted, and key informants were interviewed to gather broad and scoping data on questions related to this aim. The data from each method were then paired to enhance the findings of each and to further refine the research questions. Social workers who had participated in the first phase of this project agree they should know more about social media, and that development of this knowledge is important for their profession. Focus group interviews were then chosen as a method to explore more deeply what social work practitioners perceive their knowledge to be about social media, and what their learning or development needs are in relation to this. As such, the focus groups were guided by the following question template:

1. What is your existing knowledge about social work and social media?
2. What knowledge would you like to develop?
3. How would you like to develop this knowledge?
4. What are the implications of this new knowledge for your social work practice?
5. What are the implications of this new knowledge for the social work profession?

The focus groups were working groups, actively deliberating on the research questions, and as such the data were analysed for themes reflecting this activity – that is, what participants were interacting about and how they were interacting. Analysing the data in this way, and naming the themes as “activities” reinforces the intent of this phase, to not only further understand collective social work knowledge in relation to social media, but also how it was, or could be, generated. This approach to thematic analysis captures the advantages of the focus group research method, approximating natural interaction between people, highlighting gaps in knowledge, complexities and contradictions of knowledge, thus offering insight into how discourse is created (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

It was a broad finding across both groups that participants, who volunteered to be members of the focus groups, presented themselves to each other as “non-expert” social media users; although there were clearly different levels of experience in the use of social media, all participants were curious, puzzled and exploratory rather than explanatory in their manner. Given the relative novelty of social media use in the profession in Aotearoa, it was expected that participants might take a theorising
stance, one that seeks to make sense of the phenomenon as naïve users rather than one that looks back from a place of expertise, and this was so in both groups. Participants shared existing knowledge and experience of using social media, and collectively engaged in the task of generating deeper understandings to make sense of it from a professional perspective.

The primary aim of this thematic analysis was to capture what was shared, how it was shared, and how learning and knowledge development occurred, or could occur. Three broad themes were developed in response to this aim. These included: 1. generating professional meaning of social media from personal experience; 2. generating professional meaning of social media as social workers; and 3. locating how to learn about social media. The presentation of themes will occur in this order, and the sub-themes will include both what the participants said, but also observations of how they spoke together about the questions, learned from each other and resolved (or not) the issues they identified.

Focus group comments presented in the proceeding analysis, are labelled using two numbers, the first of which indicates which focus group the comment was made in, and the second which focus group member was the narrator. It is acknowledged, however, that all comments made in a group are a result of collaborative discussion, therefore credit for ideas is attributed to the group as a whole.

4.3.1 Generating professional meaning from personal experience

The participation of social workers in focus groups exploring research questions related to their profession is undoubtedly a professional activity. It was an unexpected finding, therefore, that the focus group participants drew to such a large extent on personal experiences, unrelated to social work practice, to generate professional understandings of social media. Focus group participants theorised about the place of social media in their own lives as family members and citizens to make sense of it as professionals. The analysis of this theme revolves around several sub-themes: the intrusiveness of social media, a range of generational factors, and the dominance of social media in everyday life (see Figure 4.1).

![Figure 4.1. Focus group sub-themes: Generating professional meaning from personal experience.](image-url)
As will become evident in the following analysis, these sub-themes each had professional implications which became apparent because of the way participants made links between personal and professional realities. As a first example, a story was told about the experience of making information about whakapapa, or whānau and family history, available on social media. Initial misgiving about the appropriateness of this forum for such culturally sensitive information was overcome by the powerful outcome of having done so – it gave whānau an opportunity to re-connect and eventually led to a successful claim for whenua (land) based on the information shared. Group members made the connection between this story and how Facebook is now regularly used by statutory social workers to find whānau for children in care. The ethics of social media use in practice will be discussed later in this analysis but it is important to recognise at this point the opportunity offered by this discussion to speculate about the place of personal and cultural experiences in developing examples (or even precedents) of how social media can be used professionally; how decisions about etiquette and rules made in the personal and cultural domain can (and do) inform those made professionally.

**Intrusiveness of social media**

Participants drew on personal experiences of social media in family life, and discussed the strategies developed to manage problems associated with it. The following comment about time management, self-care and managing relationships on social media is an example:

I've got teenage girls who beg me, the oldest one, to please take away my iPad, I need to do my homework, and please take this off me, I need to go to sleep. So she comes up and she wants me to ban her devices because she can't control herself, and she knows she's got other work to do, things she needs to do. And I spend a lot of time saying don't react. Your friend has just posted this on Instagram or whatever, don't react to that. Shut the conversation down, it's an unhealthy conversation. So, the same things that we say as parents to our children about managing their peer relationships in a high school setting are just as valid to us professionally, aren't they? (1/2)

The above participant also makes a point about the intrusiveness of social media and the need to develop discipline on multiple levels around the relationship we have with our devices (for example, smartphones, tablets, laptops), and by extension with social media, to manage what some experience as significant intrusion on daily life. A participant in the alternate group shared a parallel experience, discussing how it felt to be accessible 24/7. “I had to really learn how to turn that off and how to log out of that account and not go in it, or turn off my phone for the whole weekend. But it was actually really hard to do.” (2/4)

This “intrusiveness” of social media offers a parallel opportunity to track how other people communicate with the outside world. One participant, in sharing a discovery that family members track the phone use of their moko (or mokopuna, meaning a younger generation, or descendant),
expressed dismay: "Oh, my poor moko." When asked by another participant, "Why do you say poor moko?" they responded:

Well, I'm not certain about their reasoning. Why they're doing that. To me it doesn't seem like they have trust … I was so scared when they said that … I guess that's a social media protest that I have in a way – what you might need to do is trust. However, I don't know the ins and outs, whether something happened and that's why they do it. It's something I need to check out. (1/4)

This comment led to a concern about the equivalent professional implications of this feature of social media: for example, the tracking of employee emails or the management of social media use by employers thereby removing employees’ privacy and autonomy. The identification of these parallel experiences led to deeper exploration of issues regarding trust, the need to interrogate reasoning for this activity, the value of relationship and its place of power across many social work activities. This includes social workers tracking the safety of young people in care by following their activities on social media, which is the context of the following comment:

But when we’re gathering information and doing risk assessment, we’ll go through as many sources as we can to get the information, so why would we not? Because it would be unethical not to. If you knew there was a way of finding out someone was at risk, why would you not go there? (1/1)

**Generational factors**

An intensity of emotion was evident in both groups when discussing the impact of social media on their children, whether it was excitement about the potential of social media for children’s learning, fear about exposing their vulnerabilities, or a mixture of the two as is obvious here:

You can do anything on YouTube. I was looking at one of my mokopuna, she was doing the hula. She was so beautiful and I went oh baby, who taught you to do the hula? YouTube man! and I was like, oh … (1/5)

For this participant, the wonders of life and simple joy sat alongside a worry about the ubiquitous nature of social media and a disappointment that beauty can emanate from something as universal and seemingly impersonal as the internet. Strong statements were made in rebuttal, however, about the advantages of the internet and social media for children’s learning:

You know it as well as I do, that Māori children were put into classrooms, little square boxes, and made to learn another way than what they’re used to. With social media, it just throws open home schooling, to do all kinds of your own thing with your children. Not being legally bound to send them somewhere to school. I just see lots of opportunities, lots more. (1/4)
This participant refers to their own childhood as that of a “different era,” contrasting it to the experience of their mokopuna in today’s world:

... they’re not restricted and you know for a lot of us Māori children who were restricted in what we learnt, we never learnt about our New Zealand history or who we were as Māori. My mokopuna have access to the world. There is nothing to restrict them from gaining knowledge. Knowledge is powerful. Social media is powerful for the knowledge it can hold. Yeah, there’s a lot of crap out there but there is also power in social media when it comes to knowledge. We’re not restricted around our access to knowledge, and I love the fact that my mokopuna will not be restricted by just the knowledge of the teacher in front of them. (1/5)

Discussion related to social media use across generations was prevalent in both focus groups. Participants made sense of social media by viewing it through the profound experience of childhood – their own, or through the childhoods of mokopuna, children and grandchildren. The reality of this is brought alive by this brief comment: “My mokopuna goes nana, oh … don’t you even know how to do that?” (1/4). The perceived lack of knowledge held by older generations is balanced with comments about the naivety of younger generations, suggesting both a lack of recent historical knowledge, and a startling sense of speed behind the development of social media practice:

I wonder whether this is the thing about this last generation and a half, two generations, has developed so quickly and social media has developed so very, very quickly. I can remember quite clearly my son, who’s 24 now, picking out a record a few years ago out of my record collection and saying “what’s this?” He’d never seen a record and he’s 24. I think the speed at which it’s developed has caused us not to be able to keep up, and I wonder how we can catch up with that, when we’re thinking about codes of ethics and code of conduct, how we manage to keep that in line with the very rapidly expanding social media market. (1/2)

Whether the generation gap alluded to by the focus groups is greater than it has been historically is a question to explore further. The question relevant to this study however, is about how social workers can keep up with such rapid changes so that practice is not compromised by lack of knowledge.

In response to one group member who had just spoken from their perspective as a “twenty-something” about the extent to which social media was part of their lives, another participant said: “I was just thinking about what you said – thank goodness there was no social media when I was growing up” (2/2). This comment can be interpreted as an example of how overwhelming the concept of social media can be for those who did not grow up with it, indicating some relief in this case that older generations did not have to contend with its challenges, and an assumption perhaps that a childhood devoid of social media was somehow preferred.
Antithetical to this however, there was expectation expressed in the group that those who did grow up with social media would be more able to use it personally and professionally than those who did not. This is an important point to consider in this analysis because it offers new questions about the factors and perceptions influencing how social work learning about social media can most usefully occur across generations, including the impact social media has had on those who grew up with it:

It’s a responsiveness thing – it’s interesting to see this generation coming through – younger people – and their need to have answers now and to get a response. That has created a need, a different personality of a generation. (2/4)

Regardless of what the differences are between younger and older generations there is an assumption that differences do exist, and there was strong agreement in both groups that we should find out the nature of these differences:

It’s made me really think I’d really love to sit in a group where young social workers talk about this subject, because they’d have another take on it. (1/2)

This impact of these different generational experiences of social media is worthy of further exploration. For example, how might the perceptions held of various generations about each other impact on intergenerational relationships in professional settings or learning environments?

**Dominance of social media**

Appreciating access to diverse information for children, as expressed in previous comments, was balanced with a genuine concern for youth about their capacity to decipher the vast amounts of information available via social media, to determine its source and truth. There was a fear of the power and authority of information available on social media to guide the behaviour of young people. The following comment highlights the extent of the concern:

You know, sexual activity and things that children get up to at school. It all seems, and this is anecdotal from when speaking to young people, to be driven by what they see on social media, so having anal sex in the bathroom at work, at school, is okay because that's what they see in social media. I think that's actually quite a dramatic negative affect of social media. (1/1)

This concern about the danger of social media was linked to new challenges for social work practice with youth and then extended to the experience of new social workers. The following comment about the role of whānau (family) in creating tikanga (rules) for safe social media practice for youth illustrates again the parallels between personal and professional experiences:
So, if you’re a Māori youth in a bubble surrounded by other Māori youth and whānau, and by a certain way of thinking, then that’s where the tikanga would come through, wouldn’t it, because that’s what you like and that’s the pathway that you follow. But how do these youth or young social workers find that right pathway? (1/2)

The personal/professional interface is a very common theme associated with the use of social media, as it is in the practice of social work, and the reality that social media touches all lives in different ways suggests the overlap between professional and personal experience to be particularly strong; what is occurring on the boundaries between these realms is therefore worthy of deep exploration and inspires new questions. For example, at what point do social workers rely more vigorously on their professional analysis of social media use, and less on their personal experiences, and how does this relate to the traditional use of self in practice?

In summary, it was a significant finding that focus group participants drew on their personal experience of social media to further understand it from a professional perspective. Professional use of social media for social workers is an emerging practice and agreement about parameters and ethics of use is not yet established; this could explain why the groups “defaulted” at times to talking about social media from personal perspectives, seeking anchor points or guidance from whatever experiences they could summon up.

4.3.2 Generating meaning about social media as social workers

In addition to using personal social media experiences to build professional knowledge about social media, the focus groups also applied their professional lens; social work principles, ethics and practice realities were set up against the challenges of social media to find new understandings and resolve dilemmas. This theme incorporates reference to the social work kete, a Māori concept understood by English speakers as a basket or kit which in this context contains knowledge and principles to guide us in our work (Moorfield, 2005), and which will be described in more detail below. This theme also encapsulates social work reluctance to use social media, identifies various aspects of professional discontent with it, and incorporates thinking about how social workers might confront its complexity (see Figure 4.2 below).
By applying their collective social work knowledge, theory and skills, the focus group participants worked together to generate new ideas about social media and its place in their social work practice. They considered their roles as social work activists, and as clinical practitioners, and they recognised the relationship between their professional identity and their use of social media. A link between theory and practice was evident in the discussions, and the analysis of the data in this way shed light on how espoused theory is translated (or not) into social media practice. The following comment summarises this relationship between social work and social media, wherein the participant refers to the *kete*, a traditional Māori symbol of “important stories, principles and practices that can guide us in our mahi and in our lives” (Eruera, 2012, p. 12):

> I think we can rely on our social work knowledge, the methods that we use, the philosophy and the practice, so we can go back to our social work theories and think about working with person-centred approach or think about strengths-based social work and apply that to our social media. Which might mean that we don’t react immediately. It might mean that we treat words with respect and therefore they don’t need the response. We have those tools there in our *kete* already, it’s how we apply them, I guess, into a new way of working, to social media.

The above statement signals a level of confidence in the strength of the profession’s integrity to adapt to the practice challenges of social media. It also suggests implicitly that this is yet to be done. After this statement was made a discussion occurred in this group about the place of critical reflection, the application of ethical and empowerment principles to social media engagement, qualities about which the same participant said, “I suspect there isn’t a great deal of that with many people who use social media. They don’t think before they flick” (1/1). A general agreement by the group about this last
statement suggests that although social workers have the tools to use social media, not all members of the profession are able to consistently use those tools.

A second reference to the “social work kete” is made; however, rather than it being referred to as a source of guidance for social media use, it is suggested instead that social media knowledge needs to be added to it:

So if the definition of social workers are kaitiaki alongside people in the pursuit of wellness and social relationship and purpose, then social media has got to be part of the kete of mastery if we want to maintain a relevant presence. (1/3)

It is likely these two perspectives overlap, however they do independently generate different questions for the profession, the first being whether the social work kete contains the correct tools relevant to social media use, and secondly, whether the profession has enough knowledge of these tools and the skill to apply them critically to its work.

The discussions in both focus groups involved at times the sharing of various professional uses of social media, examples of how it can be applied to their mahi (work or practice), some of which clearly demonstrated new ways of behaving in their practice spaces, highlighting “new” social media skills, (or new application of the same skills):

Using it in my mahi, in practice, social media is just a way that’s going to happen because communication is a lot quicker. I’ve used it to find people in Australia, looking for whānau. When I did use it, and because of the result, I kind of warmed towards social media as when we’re looking for whānau because Child Youth and Family is well known for placing Māori children out of kin care. So really passionate about the use of social media to find extended whānau. That has been useful at work. (1/5)

The example of using social media to search for family members and its usefulness for whānau connectedness has been discussed already in this analysis. Reference to the ease and speed of communication in social work practice is expanded in the following description:

In my previous role I had two Facebook accounts. My work one was solely for clients and that was very busy, I had a lot of people. That was how I interacted with people – that was how I made my appointments, that was how I did my case work. There was a lot that occurred because I covered the whole South Island and I had to figure or find out who were the people who responded to emails, texts and Facebook. The Facebook people started to grow and grow and grow. People always had that turned on and that would be a way I could contact them quite quickly and easily. (2/3)
Discussion around practice innovations however, was typically met with uncertainty about how social workers are guided in their use of social media and what parameters are placed around use. There was confusion for example, about how the code of social work ethics is applied to social media, as was evident in a previous discussion about whether Facebook should be used as a way of monitoring the safety of young people, as is illustrated in the following focus group excerpt:

What about the mixed messages we’re getting about the effects of social media? Like our professional associations has been up here twice and been very clear that it’s not okay to be spying on CYF kids, what they’re doing on the weekend, when you’re on Facebook. (1/2)

I do it all the time. They gave us Facebook so that we could do it. (1/5)

Yeah. So there’s a disconnect between what the keepers of our code of ethics are saying and practice. (1/1)

That’s really dangerous. The risks for our students and our young social workers, and even us who have been around the block for a while, is the ethics of it and how do we keep ourselves safe, because it’s tempting if you’ve got a child who’s at risk and maybe they’re out with someone who’s manipulating them and you need to find them quickly, but your association is saying it’s not okay to go tracking them that way. (1/2)

The descriptions of how social workers are or could be using social media in their work with children, for example, to track the whereabouts of youth in care, or to find whānau and family as carers for children, highlights the importance of teasing out the use of social media across and within fields of social work practice. In this nuanced context it seems that blanket policies or binary beliefs about the use of social media in practice are at the very least unhelpful, and at most, dangerous. This analysis highlights the multiple activities that occur in any practice role, each activity deserving of its own analysis regarding the application of social media.

The confusion about how professional social media use can sit comfortably within the social work kete was exacerbated by a fear of what may have to be taken out of the kete to make room for this new practice tool, suggesting that the use of social media compromises some key social work practice and cultural principles:

I think as well though, that’s kind of making me feel a bit resistant to it because I’m thinking about efficiency taking priority over engagement. Particularly in New Zealand, for Māori, face to face is so important. Whanaungatanga, engagement – we don’t want to lose that, we don’t want to devalue that or see a Facebook message as being efficient so that’s great, but never actually getting off your bum and going and visiting somebody. (2/1)
The concept of *whanaungatanga* used in the comment above refers to relationship or kinship (Moorfield, 2005) and is interpreted in this context as the process of developing relationships (*whakawhanaungatanga*). As mentioned, some participants advocated the need to add more skills to the social work *kete* for the profession to maintain a “relevant presence,” suggesting the *kete* currently falls short of the skills needed to engage effectively with others on social media. As an example of this, the following experience was described by a participant engaging in social media for fundraising purposes:

> It is quite an art, I think, promoting stuff in a way that’s not ego driven, and in a way that’s sensitive and brings people in rather than pushes people away. It’s like sales, or it’s like journalism or something else. I’m doing fundraising at the moment, which I’m using social media for, and that’s really hard. I’m finding it really hard to even know how to pitch stuff, how to word stuff, how to sell myself and what I’m trying to achieve. It’s like this weird sales thing that just doesn’t feel very “social worky” and yet I know it’s totally social work but it feels really awkward. I’m writing a media release, a press release thing at the moment and it’s like oh my god, somebody kill me, this is just painful. It’s a weird, uncomfortable thing. (2/1)

When another participant commented that it sounded like self-promotion, the above speaker responded, “Well, it feels like it is but it’s not. It’s about a cause. But it’s about my involvement with the cause …” Another participant suggested this was like marketing or public relations and the first speaker again responded: “Yeah, but that’s about pushing something down somebody’s throat, that’s not social work.” However, an alternate view was presented by a third speaker reflecting a fundamental question about what constitutes “social work”:

> It’s funny you should say that, because around the TPP, those few social workers that were using the online thing and I know for a fact that some of these trade deals end up in death to some of these people in Mexico and Asia. And I was telling my team, why don’t we just get banners and say TPPA kills. They were going no you can’t say that, it’s just too emotional. But it does. Shove it down their throat. But it’s not very social worky, is it? (2/2)

This conversation reflects a larger ongoing professional tension between macro (i.e., social activism, community development) and micro social work practice (direct work with individuals, whānau and families). Each area of practice demands different and, at times, conflicting ethics and skill-sets that do not exist together easily in the same social work *kete*. The use of social media is evident across all levels of practice, highlighting again the inadequacy of a “one size fits all” social work approach to social media use.

Social work knowledge in Aotearoa New Zealand is based on principles of biculturalism, and participants in both focus groups grappled with how to retain these fundamental principles on social media:
I think that unless you listen to say Radio Moana or something like that, I think social media is quite colonising in itself, and I think that it needs to start looking at other ways of expressing for tangata whenua, however they might do that. But yeah, that’s the one thing that I’m finding really difficult, I think, about social work and social media and where they fit together with us as Māori, as what I see and what I feel. (1/4)

This speaker was then asked by another participant, to clarify her comment: “Is that about whose voice and whose voice is the loudest?” (1/3), and an example was offered in response of a social work leader who, using social media “was able to write and speak about the notions of Te Ao Māori.” This concept refers to the “world of Māori,” and the first speaker reinforced their point about the social work absence of tangata whenua (indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) on social media and went on to say: “It was nice to hear a Māori voice.”

The need to attend to the voices heard on social media platforms, and to the inherent power of the strength of these voices is a key social work task. Taking into account the words of the above participants, and adding the voice below, it would appear the social work kete must be designed to allow for a balanced and critical social work voice to be generated:

So unless you learn to have a critical view on things and you start to look elsewhere and challenge what you’re getting in your feed, which is what you’ve chosen – I like to have Greenpeace stuff coming in, I like to have Red Cross stuff, I like to have that whatever but that’s the voice I’m getting all the time and I never have anything to challenge that voice. (1/2)

The above two comments highlight again the need for social workers to be critical in the social media space, returning to the question of the capacity of social workers to apply the principles and ethics of the profession to this new form of communication and expression, thereby indicating the extent to which the development of these skills is required.

To conclude this section, focus groups also reflected on times when social media should not be engaged with professionally, when it should be actively held “outside” the kete. The following comment relates to amendments to child protection legislation in this country being proposed at the time the focus groups were held, and which had met with significant social work disapproval. It threatened the priority given to placing tamariki and mokopuna (children) with their whānau (family), or hapū/iwi (larger family/tribe). Enthusiasm about social media as a way to fight this threat was tempered by its limitations, cautioning the need for a critical perspective on the place of social media in the broader landscape of social change:

There are multiple social workers fighting for the continuation of hapū, whānau and iwi to care for tamariki and mokopuna in the revised Act. In fact, there are numerous writers and
speakers, but they’re doubtful about how valid it is to create change through the social media when the real power lies in parliament. Or the real power lies back on the marae. Or the real power lies back in schools of social work. They’re suggesting that those spaces may be places of change and evolution, not Facebook or Twitter. (1/3)

Not only were focus group members alert to the dangers of social media, to the fear of being “trolled,” of online bullying, or forgoing privacy, but there was also awareness of the false promise of social media, the danger of believing too completely in its capacity to make a difference:

We can be as powerful and use as many words as we want, but then it’s just caught up in Facebook or in Twitter. Actually, it’s held there. It’s not pushed out so much to talk to the people that need to hear it. So actually, it seems to me to be working beneficially for the powers who are trying not to change or trying to change things that we don’t want to change because this voice, and it’s a big powerful voice, is all held in this bubble called Facebook or Twitter or Instagram or whatever it is; it’s just held there. And nobody, I think, knows how to unleash that power to actually cause action. Because what we’re doing is talking amongst ourselves. We’re talking very powerfully, very beautifully. We’re talking with integrity, we’re very eloquent, but it’s just caught in this bubble and nobody who needs to know about it, the general public don’t know that we’re talking about it necessarily. It sits there very nicely for the powers that be because they know that it’s safely kept locked away in Facebook. (1/1)

In summary, both focus groups considered the various ways in which social workers are, could be, or should not use social media in practice according to existing social work principles and practice knowledge. The following exploration considers findings which highlight the discontent and reluctance felt by participants. The strength of emotion expressed in relation to these feelings offers opportunity to read between the lines, to see more clearly where the gaps and challenges may lie in the profession’s relationship with social media.

**Reluctance and discontent**

It was noticeable in both groups that participants were unhappy with their profession and its current use of social media, whether it be a discontent the profession is not keeping up with the times, or a reluctance to do so given the inherent risks. Group members expressed being worried and angry, and these sentiments increased as the groups progressed in their discussions, signalling a profession impatient with itself:

I do look at the information that is on offer and I look at what is happening out there. And I am worried about the social work media in our discipline. I’m worried about the attack on our discipline that is happening. We all know. There’s not a lot happening around the Vulnerable Children Act, which is going to take out [the] social work name and put in children’s workers. That’s something that we as social workers should be all lobbying to fight against. But I don’t
see it. I don’t see it. I’ve seen the Māori contingent coming. The Māori Women’s Welfare League and that. I don’t see the social work discipline standing together against this act that is just going to take us back a long way… (1/5)

The above comment relates to the lack of social work response to major legislative changes in Aotearoa, and this opinion was reiterated in both groups in relation to its general social justice mandate as is well reflected in this comment:

I think it’s a great tool to rark us up. I think it’s a great tool to organise us. I think it’s a great tool. And not just Facebook. Instagram, Zoom, you name it, Skype. You name it, it’s out there. But it’s under-utilised and I just think we need to do it. I think we just need to get out there and do it. I’m not saying that I came here today to get the answers, but I think it’s well past the time and, like you said, we need to because we’re being left behind. And we live in this world now. We live in the social media world and social workers aren’t using it. (2/2)

In response to this, the vulnerability of the social work profession was discussed and, in the context of this participant’s experience, an even more general concern was raised about the sustainability of the profession should it not rise to current challenges:

I feel like we have to keep up. Social work has to keep up or get left behind, we have to move with the times. I’ve been involved with lots of things where I could see that we were too slow and we missed the boat. It is not a good feeling, when you realise that you are being replaced as a result. And we will be replaced. Social workers will be replaced. (2/3)

It was a feature of both groups that contrasting views were expressed about the value of social media to the profession, and group discussions were frequently focussed on understanding the differences between the views of participants and on managing the dilemmas presented. For example, in contrast to the view expressed above, the following participant focused on the placebo effect of social media activism, suggesting social workers are lulled into believing they have contributed to social change via social media and therefore are not motivated to respond to social issues in other ways:

… when we have posted some really good information up there, maybe some radical information that’s appropriate for a social worker, people click like and think they’ve been social active when actually they’ve just clicked “like.” I think that’s actually reducing and desensitising us to the amount of social activity that we should be doing to respond to the huge amounts of social injustice that are happening in the country at the moment. And worldwide but particularly in this country. (1/1)
The ensuing discussion led to a deeper understanding of the role social media can play (or not) in social protest and, in the second group, a similar discussion was held about the inadequacy of social media for social protest but for very different reasons:

The behaviour of people online seems to be quite crazy at times; there’s this trolling thing, isn’t there, where people actually just set out to cut people down. I would never think twice about going and marching about something I’m passionate about. And yet, I’m reluctant to share something on Facebook about it, because some of my social network, my physically social network, have different political views to me. And I don’t want to damage those relationships. I don’t want to have my life intruded by people giving me grief and abuse, either. At least if you go on a march, you go on a march and then you go home, you’re not going to get people coming banging on your door saying what were you doing? But this goes home with you, doesn’t it? (2/1)

Each of the above two examples illustrate a reluctance by social workers to rely on social media as an effective tool for social work activism, or social protest. The first because of the fear of the seductive power of social media, the second because of the fear of personal backlash. They highlight very different and strong opinions about the inadequacy of social media, and are focus group examples of where collegial exploration of these experiences led to deeper shared understanding of its complexity.

**Confronting complexity (multi-dimensions of social media use)**

The fear and worry of being trolled, of risking valuable relationships because of political views, in addition to feeling frustrated with the extent to which social workers engage in “slacktivism,” all contributed to what became increasingly complex conversations for the participants. The complexity of the social work profession itself was also acknowledged, leading to an understanding that social media cannot be used in a “one size fits all” manner:

If our professional Facebook page was specifically for social workers – staff, students, graduates, colleagues – I would feel much more comfortable. But because it’s a multidisciplinary audience, I know that we don’t all share the same ethics and value[s] and ideals and political … Well, even within social work we don’t share those things, do we? (2/1)

Unpacking the complexity of social media use served to move participants beyond a binary discussion of social media – to use or not to use, the good and the bad, online vs offline activism – into a description of social media use as a multi-dimensional practice. The following summary of a conversation was offered by a participant after hearing the range of ways participants expressed themselves on social media:
And so, I’m hearing you say that there’s no one story for who is Māori and how they’re posting, and who is a social worker and how they’re posting. There are actually multiple stories coming together in sound bites on that feature of say Facebook. (1/3)

Acknowledging the space in between the either/or discourse allowed for more nuanced exploration into how social workers approach their understanding of social media. The following statement alludes to both the individual professional use of social media and the collective use by the social work profession, identifying the challenges of social media and the challenges of the profession drawn together into one place:

I suppose for me, it’s not enough to say that I like face to face. I need to get stronger in my use of social media because I do see it as a way to rally people and bring people together for social justice. But that doesn’t overcome the apathy and the lack of motivation that sits within our profession. We need a new magic trick. (1/2)

This participant appears to be offering a challenge to themselves, suggesting that a preference not to engage in social media has led to a neglect of their professional responsibilities. This participant recognises collective apathy as a separate issue, however, challenging the correlation between the degree to which individual social workers adopt social media, and the degree to which the profession is motivated to pursue social justice issues. Because of the public and ubiquitous nature of social media, an incorrect assumption could easily be made that those social workers not visible on social media are not pursuing social justice.

The analysis to this point has included the ways in which social workers in the focus groups made sense of social media by considering it from both personal and professional perspectives. It has also captured the discontent felt by participants about how their profession engages in social media and the nature of its reluctance to use it. The analysis has attempted to capture the words of participants within these themes that focus on the research question: what do social workers need to know about social media and how would they like to gain this knowledge? The final part of this analysis looks more closely at the second question, gathering what participants offered when prompted to consider the best way forward with this learning.

4.3.3 Discovering ways to learn
How social workers can develop competence or expertise to support professional use of social media was an important research question. In direct response to this, participants offered thoughts about professional, academic, organisational leadership and about “gathering forces” by developing peer support and generating new knowledge. These two themes will be presented as a conclusion to this analysis; however, a decision was also made to observe how the groups progressed in their discussions, to capture how group dynamics contributed to, or detracted from, group learning. This analysis was conducted by searching for polarities of opinion shared in the group, and changes (or
not) in these opinions. It was also conducting by examining the data in terms of what was avoided or not spoken about by the group. This analysis resulted in themes of power and of *whanaungatanga*, or relationship, and the following analysis considers their role in the development of learning strategies about social media for social workers (see Figure 4.3 below).

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 4.3. Focus group sub-themes: Discovering ways to learn.*

**Acknowledging power**

Focus group participants were prompted to engage in reflective conversations that explored their use of, and attitudes towards, professional use of social media. The process was guided by ideas about how reflection in professional group contexts can be used to co-construct new knowledge (Boud, 2010). In the process of doing this, participants learned from each other, and the value of this process was recognised by the participants in their final reflections, the like of which is expressed here:

> Today’s been really interesting for me because I’ve learnt, which is probably some of the reason why I came, and I’m grateful for the time to have been here to hear everybody.
> You’ve given me a new lease on life about where your thinking is about social media. (1/4)

The following comment highlights the experience of another participant who focussed more on how the group reached agreement based on joint professional understandings:

> I just think it’s so cool how we all came in with such diverse starting points but we all agree, I think, on everything that’s come out. That’s the social work component. (2/1)

Focus groups offer opportunity for connections to be made between participants which in turn create “opportunities for solidarity building and political action” (Kamberolis & Dimitriadis, 2013, p. 40). Whether the focus groups succeeded in doing this following their participation in this research is outside the scope of this study, however, changes in attitudes were observed and captured by comparing the opening and closing remarks of participants (Krueger, 2015), examples of which are provided in Figure 4.4 below.
There were also examples of participants who remained more consistent in their opinion about social work use of social media, and whose stance did not obviously change through the course of the discussion as illustrated in Figure 4.5:

**Figure 4.5.** Focus groups: samples of opening and closing remarks indicating no change.
When considering the nature of all final comments across samples it appears that, regardless of the starting point, a consensus was reached about the need for the profession to engage more strongly in social action, and the potential role of social media in this. The question arising from this data is about why some participants shifted and others did not. The influence of dominant participants in focus groups is recognised (Krueger & Casey, 2015); this influence can also be extended to learning environments. Educators and learning facilitators will know this; however, specific to the learning for social workers about social media is the reality that certain values hold power – the “moral” power inherent in the search for social justice and the emotion related to this, as can be seen in the final comments, and the power of social media to make injustices apparent to us, offer a clue as to the potential unique dynamics present in social work groups learning together about social media.

Secondly it is noted that no final comments include other social work activities related to the use of social media, for example, for direct work with clients. One reason for this could be the lack of confidence still present in the group about the ethics of doing this; however, it is also possible that different levels of importance are attributed to the range of social work activities when talking about it in the context of social media. Relational, one-to-one work with clients is consumed by the task of tackling the larger inequities present in society that, as mentioned, social media does a very good job of bringing to our attention. Any future learning strategy may need to be guided by this finding, to maintain equal focus on all aspects of social work practice work in the context of social media, rather only on those which are most obvious, which we are most knowledgeable about, or which generate the most emotion.

In addition to looking at how opinions changed during focus group discussions it is also useful to look at where differences were actively debated. The following two discussions were chosen for their prominence in the discussions based on the intensity with which the exchanges occurred (Krueger & Casey, 2015) and their usefulness in terms of their contribution to the development of learning strategies. Again, it is noted that intensity of discussion generally occurred around the topic of social work activism:

I think when it comes to social activism, social justice, treaty issues, that kind of thing, I would be mindful of my audience and I’d be mindful of the backlash, the potential backlash from people who disagree. Because the mainstream view in New Zealand is still pretty racist, let’s be honest. So I think there’d be quite a backlash if I was vocally pro-Māori rights. (2/1) And as profession, I think we’ve got an obligation to forward that. Going back to what you were saying, going back to the social media aspect, I think that is a prime vehicle to use. Like it would get more people than me standing in the park talking. Because no one would listen to me. (2/2)
I agree. I just don’t want personal backlash. But I agree. And I like it. And I might even share it. But I might not post it. (2/3)

This conversation highlights the different positions taken, however, it is clear here that these participants are not occupying polar positions. Participants appear to agree on the obligation of the profession to pursue equality, but presumably apply different thresholds of personal risk. This exchange suggests that examining the nature of these thresholds, offering opportunity to identify them and critically reflect on them away from peer pressure would be a key task of any facilitated learning about professional use of social media.

A similar exchange occurred in the other group when discussing recent legislative proposals affecting social workers. Again, this excerpt has been chosen because of the intensity or passion behind the comments thereby indicating its importance to this study:

Nobody seems to care about the fact that they’re taking our social work name out of that Act, and they’re taking out whānau, hapū, iwi. I don’t see the discipline fighting. I don’t see it. And so we are under attack. We need to use social media to gather strength around it, otherwise it’s going to come, and it’s going to be a huge indictment on our discipline, on how we manage that. (1/5)

But social media is such a divisive, destructive thing that I doubt if I’d ever post anything on that xxxx feed because of issues of safety, and interpretation. (1/2)

That’s your personal take on it. Me, myself, I’m still an active part of it. Because I believe in it. I believe in it. I joined it because I believe in it. Despite the ups and downs. It’s too important to let it go. You still have to be there to lobby against it, time and time again. You cannot give up. That’s why we’re in this field. We can’t give up because something upset us and we couldn’t change it. But we can still be there as a voice for the rest. (1/5)

That’s my point. I think social media is, at the moment, detracting from this. I think I agree with you that there’s a power there but we need to work out how we can enhance that power to work better for us. Because at the moment I really do think it’s detracting from our voice. (1/1)

This conversation offers a number of points for interpretation – however, for the purpose of this discussion it firstly reiterates the point made in the previous exchange about safety thresholds. It further highlights the variation of opinion that can occur between social workers about how to respond to injustice. It makes assumptions about “why we’re in this field,” or who we should be as social workers, the motivations for which will impact on decisions about social media use in practice. This highlights again the complexity of social media use and the need for practitioners to have space to consider their unique identity as a social worker, and how this influences decisions about using social
media professionally. Social media has a loud voice, the power of which may overwhelm decision making about its use in social work practice, applying moral pressure on social workers to "do the right thing."

**Whanaungatanga and social media relationships**

The focus groups were offered the opportunity to begin their work together by using processes of *whakawhanaungatanga*, a customary practice by which relational ties are formally acknowledged, and new relationships are forged. This process enacts the Māori principle of *whanaungatanga* which recognises the value of connections between family and non-kin colleagues, and the centrality of relationship (O’Carroll, 2013b). In the case of these groups, the nature of existing relationships was acknowledged; and it was discovered that most of the focus group participants knew each other, or of each other. For some this included relationships on social media.

One way of scrutinising qualitative data in thematic analysis is to consider what participants appear to be actively avoiding in their exchanges with each other, or deliberately not speaking of (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Applying this analysis to how the focus groups engaged in *whakawhanaungatanga* for example, it was possible to observe group members actively managing the boundary between their online and offline worlds. They established group agreement about what would and would not be spoken of related to past events, including those that occurred on social media. This behaviour highlights the complexity of professional relationships not only on social media, but also where online and offline networks intersect with each other, as they did in these focus groups. The focus groups paid attention to this boundary by promoting transparency about how exchanges held in an online space for example, would be spoken of, or not, in a face-to-face setting. This was established via the process of *whakawhanaungatanga*.

Another example of how online and face-to-face relationships intersect was presented by a participant who discussed the reality of having a social media presence (for example, their scholarly work available on the internet):

> It’s really humbling but it’s also very hard that people think they know me before they meet me. That’s the hardest part. (1/4)

This very general comment could be interpreted in many ways, however, it is possible this participant is not satisfied that social media offers adequate opportunity for the development of relational ties. It suggests a variation of perception about the degree to which access to information about other people on the internet warrants a "relationship," and how much we can get to know someone in the absence of a face-to-face encounter. The following exchange offers further insight into the difference between our perceptions of people on social media and perceptions based on other types of interaction, and of how social media and other worlds can uniquely intersect. It is another example of conducting analysis by considering what is not spoken of in a group – the “elephant in the room.”
This conversation began when one participant commented on being surprised by opinions expressed on social media held by friends and colleagues: “I’ve seen some things that people I know have put up on social media and I go really, is that what you think? Oooh” (2/4). In response, in apparent humour, another participant in the group pretended to apologise for the “mock” social media indiscretion, and although there was laughter, there was also discomfort. This small, intimate exchange between two people, signified a vulnerability associated with how virtual worlds and real worlds intersect – how something said between people on social media, can at times, perhaps uncomfortably, come to light in a public, face-to-face setting. This brief conversation also highlighted how significantly group dynamics can be affected by the reality that some group members have parallel relationships on social media, and that other group members are excluded from these relationships.

Another reference to a previous online exchange followed a statement by one participant about how difficult it is at times to post something on social media: “It’s funny. I see your posts coming through and I can almost feel the tension – I think, how long did it take you to write that post?” (2/2). As with the above comment, there was an element of discomfort in this exchange, as though something private, previously unspoken, had been exposed – even though they were talking about the very public forum of social media.

The principle of whanaungatanga described earlier is also relevant to the social work/social media learning landscape. This piece of analysis reinforces the need to acknowledge the presence of online and offline professional relationships, and to support the connection and acknowledgement of these relationships prior to beginning any new group educational or learning venture. It suggests future opportunity in developing greater understanding of how cultural principles such as whanaungatanga are applied to social media relationships and how this knowledge might benefit the continuing development of bicultural and kaupapa Māori social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Gathering forces – developing peer support and generating data**

In addition to gaining insight into learning considerations and strategies by analysing the behaviour of the group and exchanges between participants, the groups also generated ideas about how social workers could best learn more about social media use. One of these ideas was to advocate for an extension of the focus group – to develop peer support and mentoring opportunities as described in the following exchange:

It would be really cool, eh, to have peer supervision on use of social media. Have a support network of people to be able to pick the brains of – how are you using it, have you tried this, did it work? That would be great. (2/1)
It’s getting your like-minded people together, isn’t it? (2/3)

Yeah, and you feel safe. (2/2)

And it creates a sense of permission, as well, to make mistakes and to see it as a work in progress. Rather than just being this lone voice out in the wilderness, waiting for something bad to happen, you’ve actually got a little support group. (2/1)

This group not only advocated the benefits of support but also the opportunity to learn new ways of using social media and be more courageous and experimental than they could be as “lone voices.” This led to a determination, as already discussed above, to forge ahead:

We’ve got to give it a go. Just got to do it. Because I feel like I’ve been tiptoeing around the edge and doing a bit of it, kind of, but I think we’ve just got to take the plunge and roll with mistakes but actually create some data to then create rules from. (2/1)

Another way of describing the need to create data for future analysis, to gather knowledge, to share it and use it to move forward as a profession, is offered here:

So, I’m thinking for me this is part of the concept of building words to colour in pathways that may make sense for other practitioners who want to look at the nature of social media and social work and their own integrity in that. (1/3)

The metaphor used by this participant, “building words to colour in pathways,” suggests a profession constructing a new way forward using its own resources. This idea of adding new knowledge to the social work kete has been explored already; however, it is important to also capture this way of thinking as a potential learning strategy. It is instructive to note that the above comment was prefaced by this statement: “I think we can never afford to give power away to a larger entity. It always sits with us” (1/3). This promotes confidence in the idea that knowledge about social media use can be generated by social workers themselves, and that leadership in this regard can come from within the profession:

There are leaders and followers. You need enough leaders to start making good examples and then people who are more resistant will follow on eventually because things will evolve. .... anyone can be a leader. It’s just about taking the risk. (2/5)

And finally, it is an essential aspect of adult education to acknowledge and name the experiences and wisdom brought to the learning table. The very act of doing this consolidates what is already known:
Listening to everybody, I thought I was very limited around social media but that I was able to share what I do, my view, and then I’ve realised I do know a bit more than I imagined I did. (1/5)

**Seeking leadership**

Regardless of the confidence expressed by focus group members about the capacity of social workers to generate their own knowledge about social media, there remained a demand for leadership, a curiosity about who is in charge. The comment below refers again to the concept of tikanga (custom or correct practice) and tika (acting in the right way) and is seeking someone to act as kaitiaki, or guardian of this practice:

So what is the tikanga, what is the tika about social media? Who enforces that? It comes from the home and the norms within the home or the norms within the school of social work or within what’s modelled through ANZASW rightly or wrongly, or SWRB. Who’s the kaitiaki of social media? (1/2)

It is natural for leadership to be sought when there is uncertainty or diversity of opinion in a community, and it is clear from the literature that the use of social media by social workers is a new challenge, and leadership in terms of ethics and professional guidelines has only just emerged in the last few years (and only in the last few months in Aotearoa). Focus group participants agree with the need for leadership to guide their learning however there was some debate about who should do the leading – professional bodies, organisations, academia or social work practitioners. The following discussion sequence highlights the nature of the debate:

Do you think academia has a role to play in promoting the use of how we use social media? It’s like if Dr so and so was to say social media is a great way to go, it almost legitimises it. (2/2)

We need a reference point to show us – this is how social workers use it. (2/5)

Yeah, it is because the Dr said so. (2/2)

It’s the evidence base, isn’t it? We’re evidence based practitioners, so we want an evidence base for this [raised voice, bangs on table]. (2/1)

Because the registration board can write a policy, but it really needs to come from our leaders, our thought leaders. (2/2)

The pressure on academia to provide leadership in preparing social workers for social media use is reiterated in the following comment:
I sit in a place of practice, I’m still in practice. I guess for social work educators it’s really difficult because you’re the one that’s teaching the new social workers, so the responsibility for you is huge. As a practitioner, I don’t have as much responsibility as you do, because you’re setting these new social workers out on a journey. (1/5)

The confusion within practice as to who social workers can draw leadership from when faced with tension between their organisation, their professional body and/or supervisors, and their own professional practice opinions. The following narrative about the use of social media to communicate with clients captures this complexity:

… there were four of us who were covering the whole of New Zealand and one of the others was a very reluctant Facebook user and in fact they managed to stall, it was probably three or four years that they didn’t do it, they just refused to do it until compelled by the organisation. We decided if we were all doing it, we should all do it. They went to their supervisor who was a social worker who said that it was unprofessional and breaching boundaries and ethics of social work, so they brought that back to the organisation and said my supervisor says I shouldn’t be doing this, which they were happy with because that supported their perspective. (2/3)

The following comment could be interpreted as an example of how leadership is emerging in Aotearoa with respect to social media use. The Tangata Whenua Voices in Social Work referred to below is a respected national collective of Māori social workers, and the word wero is translated to mean “challenge”:

And there was a powerful wero that was put forward by the Tangata Whenua Voices in Social Work … saying come and talk with us. Don’t use Facebook and social media to air our dirty washing. Come and sit with us and together you will find there’s a force that’s working forward, but don’t do our washing in public. That was the direction. (1/3)

This comment draws together findings about the capacity of social workers to apply both their personal and professional knowledge to inform practice with social media, thereby providing a unique response based on cultural and professional qualities, and the need for there to be professional, organisational and academic leadership in the profession. This final comment adds another dimension to the analysis, and reflects the humility and aroha shared by all participants in exploring the research questions:

I believe truly that hope is still alive, it’s just that we’ve got multiple ways of finding a way forward with it, even in coming together and having this conversation, I feel a sense that we
are still hopeful, that we are handing something valuable on to our tamariki and mokopuna.

4.3.4 Summary of focus group findings

Focus groups were held in the second phase of this inquiry, and it was the intention of this phase for knowledge offered by its participants to build sequentially on what was gathered previously via the survey and the individual key informants. The questions asked of the groups were intended to explore more deeply the findings of the first phase: the opinion that social workers should know more about social media. Conversations were therefore focused on existing knowledge, gaps in knowledge, and ways to acquire new knowledge. Focus groups are particularly suited to exploring these questions, as they have the capacity to, not only provide answers to these questions, but also provide data on how the group interacts while sharing their knowledge, on how new meaning and ideas are constructed jointly.

Focus group participants notably drew on their shared personal experiences and knowledge to inform their understandings of professional use of social media. Themes within this included the level of intrusiveness of social media in people’s lives and the role trust plays in the management of this, of generational factors related to social media use, and the dominance of social media in everyday life. Participants also applied social work ethics and practice principles, or their social work kete, to social media use, and discussion about the presence (or not) of social workers in social media considered the definition of social work, its scope of practice and the boundary between social work and non-social work activities.

The metaphor of the social work kete was used to differentiate between how existing knowledge could be used to guide social media in practice, what further knowledge is required, and places where social media does not have a place in practice. Key questions were examined, for example, what constitutes professional online behaviour, the space between personal/professional boundaries, using social media to communicate with clients, the tension between the micro and macro aspects of social work practice, the importance of face-to-face contact, and the fear of social work as a profession being “left behind.” The cultural concept of whakawhanaungatanga was also explored as a way of deepening understanding of social media relationships, and tikanga as a way of deepening thinking about how we guide our behaviour on social media.

There were gaps highlighted by participants in their knowledge and use of social media. These gaps also became apparent as the group members spoke with each other about their challenges. For example, the uncertainty about ethical use of social media with clients, a fear that no one seems to know the rules, concern about the respect for knowledge and lack of confidence that social media provides opportunity for clear expression of self, or exposes new and conflicted dimensions of self.
The reality that social media can be divisive and destructive was recognised – that it can minimise the impact of activism, that at times it is better not to engage.

Participants explored ways for social workers to gain professional competence and knowledge about social media. This included a call for professional, organisational and academic leadership, including the need for social work education to update learning outcomes related to social media. The focus group process was acknowledged as a good example of peer mentoring or supervision that could be applied to learning about social media, and observations of focus group behaviours offered guidance as to how groups could be structured or facilitated for best support and learning. And finally, the role of data collection was highlighted – the need for continuing research into the actual use of social media by social workers to create data through which new knowledge and guidance can be generated.

PHASE THREE FINDINGS: Meta-themes

4.4 Summary of all findings

As described in the Methodology Chapter, the findings of Phase One of this project, (the key informant interviews and the survey) and the findings of Phase Two (focus groups) are “joined” in the final Phase Three of this research with the hope that the findings from each phase of the study are enhanced by the other (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Analysis of the key informant interview data for example, led to the creation of five main themes: identity, double edged sword, face to face, utility and social work relevance (Figure 3.4, Chapter 3); thematic analysis of the focus groups led to three key themes: personal use of social media, professional use of social media, and learning about social media (Figure 3.5, Chapter 3). By placing these themes (and sub-themes) alongside each other, it was possible to examine their relationship with each other, to observe their commonalities and differences, to consider their relevance to the research questions and importance to the participants. This iterative process, illustrated in Table 4.15 below, led to the development of the following meta-themes: identity, knowledge, learning and leadership which, in turn, provides a framework to guide the final discussion to follow (Chapter 5).
Table 4.15 (above) illustrates the themes developed in each phase of the research and how they were drawn together as common themes, or meta-themes, based on their prominence and significance to the research questions. The table shows how the themes of identity and knowledge interrelate with each other, as will be discussed in the next section, and how both knowledge (for example, about how to use social media in practice) and aspects of identity (for example, professional boundaries), were brought together to constitute learning “content,” or what participants felt they would benefit from learning more about. Leadership was perceived to play an important role in inspiring the profession to embrace this learning and move forward in its development of social media use. The survey data served to emphasise the importance of themes related to identity (ethics), learning and leadership. As a summary to this chapter, each meta-theme is presented with a brief description of its importance to this project.

4.4.1 Identity
Identity as a multi-faceted concept was thematically important across all findings. The first phase of this research (survey and key informant interviews) highlights the multiple identities held by social workers – their individual, professional and collective social work identities. The findings suggest that the use of social media by social workers is influenced by how they define their identity, and how they manage its complexity – its ethical dilemmas and blurred boundaries. The survey findings quantify this theme, reinforcing its importance to the study. For example, the concern most expressed by
survey respondents about social media is related to the many risks associated with transgressing professional boundaries and loss of privacy.

In the second phase, the focus group data confirms and deepens the understanding of identity in relation to social media use. It expands on how social workers move between identities, and how they rely on a sense of who they are personally and professionally to inform their opinions about, and guide their professional behaviour on social media. The face-to-face theme drawn from the key informant data was also addressed by the focus groups, emphasising the importance of this relational quality to the identity of the profession, and the need to further understand it in the context of social media.

The focus group discussions centred on the need for the profession to develop competence in managing its professional identity on social media, citing a fear of being “left behind.” Key informants offered similar views about the reticence of social work to embrace social media, and curiosity about the reasons for this. The intensity of this focus suggests again the importance of professional identity as a key concept arising in this project.

4.4.2 Knowledge
Key informant participants describe multiple uses of social media, leading to the theme of utility: how social media is used (for example, for networking and gathering of information), and the challenges associated with this use (for example, the need for support in managing the complexity of technology). Key informants also contributed ideas about potential uses of social media, and reinforced these ideas by establishing their relevance to the profession; they posed challenges to themselves and their colleagues about future possibilities of social media use in a range of practice contexts.

The focus groups shared their current knowledge of social media and in doing so, as with the key informant interviews, contributed to a list of things they either already knew about, and/or wanted to know more about. This included technical knowledge, ethical knowledge, critical skills, interpersonal skills, and skills necessary for macro social work practice and social action. The focus group findings also contribute to knowledge about the place of power, and of whanaungatanga, or connectedness, in social media communication. Findings generated across both phases of the project combine to provide a broad sense of what social workers know about social media, how they are using it, and the perceived barriers. They also show social workers developing links between what they do as professionals, and how social media can be used to support these activities.

4.4.3 Learning
The specific aim of the focus groups was to generate data related to social work learning about social media. This theme built on findings from the first phase which established the importance of this
learning for social workers. The intent of the second phase, therefore, was to discover more about what social workers wanted to know and how they envision the development of this new knowledge.

Focus groups were asked to talk about their current knowledge of social media, and this question drew responses related to how they used social media, and for their attitudes and opinions about its usefulness. As above, the answers provided by the groups built on findings from Phase One of the project about social work knowledge (or lack of knowledge) about social media. Joined together the findings provide an outline of what a social media “learning package” might consist of. However, focus group data were also analysed for how participants actively built on and developed knowledge within the group process. The findings of this analysis established a relationship between the nature of their interactive discussions and the activity of learning. This was especially prominent when participants grappled with dilemmas arising from social media use: the pros and cons, the good and bad, the risks and benefits. The group participants challenged each other around these polarities, prompted each other to find solutions to the problems identified, and generally advocated for a more critical and nuanced approach to social media use.

In the same way, key informants shared views about how to manage the challenges presented by the double-edged sword of social media, offering views that social media is neither good nor bad, has benefits and challenges and can be used in a variety of ways alongside practice. The strength of this theme and how the key informants addressed the issues within it reinforces the importance of learning about the complexities of social media and enhances the focus group findings about what and how to learn.

4.4.4 Leadership

Key informants were invited to participate in this project as leaders, either as professional social media users, and/or as social work practice leaders, and the findings from these interviews offer significant wisdom, both from those who are competent social media users, and those who have the capacity to think clearly from a practice perspective about its implications. The findings from the key informant interviews therefore, in themselves, offer leadership, and the survey data assist with deciding where leadership is most needed. Lack of leadership was identified by the focus groups as a key barrier to social media use, and a clear call was made in these forums for organisational, professional and academic guidance. Analysing the findings from this project under a leadership “banner” therefore offers opportunity for some direct questions posed by participants in this study to be answered, and strategies for moving forward to be offered.

4.4.5 Summary: Moving forward

It is assumed the nature of findings from each stage of this inquiry were influenced by the sequential gathering of data and the inevitable passing of time. As noted in the literature review, the social work academic writing about social work use of social media expanded significantly over the time this
thesis was written (2013-2018); it is likely that social media awareness of social workers developed along this same trajectory. How social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand were thinking about and using social media in 2013 when the survey was run, is likely to have changed significantly by 2017, when the focus groups were held. Passage of time is a reality of research, and looking back on what was shared by participants in this study offers opportunity to imagine the future. The next chapter explores each of these meta-themes in greater depth. It looks at the identity of the profession and its role in determining the behaviour and attitudes towards social media, and at the role of social work knowledge in guiding professional social media practice. A critical exploration of these themes offers a framework within which to view this new communicative space, and to think about how social workers may engage in it moving forward.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction and scope of discussion
The framework for this discussion was developed by determining joint or meta-themes from the analysis of all data collected in this project, the process for which is introduced in the Methodology Chapter, and illustrated as a summary to the Findings Chapter (Table 4.15). These broad, interrelated themes comprise those of social work knowledge, identity and learning, all of which are then considered in the spirit of leadership and moving forward (Figure 5.1). This discussion aims to capture how the participants made sense of their experiences with social media, how their ideas can be applied to or expanded by the literature, how their questions may be further explored in future research, and where their shared wisdom leads us in terms of future action.

![Figure 5.1. Meta-themes for discussion: social workers and social media.](image)

The intent of this thesis is to inform the developing relationship between social media and social work practice, and to do so by taking a pragmatic approach to research, one which understands research as an "holistic endeavour" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005, p. 383). It was argued earlier in this thesis that social work also conceptualises itself holistically, underpinned as it is by an eclectic array of theories and knowledge as formally defined by the profession (IFSW, 2014). Hypothetically, therefore, the field is open in terms of how social workers choose to make sense of phenomena relevant to their profession. This offers a broad range of opportunity, but also elicits a challenge from those methodologists critical of a pragmatic, “anything goes” approach (Giddings & Grant, 2006). This was also the challenge of determining the scope for this final discussion: how to meaningfully make sense of a broad range of exploratory data by choosing from an even broader range of analytic possibilities.

A range of theoretical and analytical approaches to the relationship between social media and social work are evident in the literature. As discussed in the literature review, sociological constructions of the network society, actor network theory and concepts of sociality and social presence have been
applied by social work theorists to social media (Baker et al., 2014; Ballantyne, 2015; LaMendola, 2010; McKendrick, 2014). Social media has been considered from both a critical perspective (Boddy & Dominelli, 2016) and a psychoanalytic perspective (Turner, 2016). There is also a range of published writing about social work with embedded reference to the influence of social media and other aspects of the technological age on the profession. For example, in the introduction to her book about a critical approach to social work, Fook (2012) refers to the technological context of practice, to the changes in information and communication technologies which have “revolutionised the contexts in which professionals operate” (p. 24). Joanne Warner, in her book about the emotional politics of social work and child protection (2015), describes the use of social media as “a means of bringing the unmediated realities of social work practice into the public domain” (pp. 166-167).

The literature review also includes a brief description of how the concept of social media has inspired the application of an array of interpretive frameworks. There are offerings, for example, of critical understandings of social media as political and collaborative spaces, within which practice is challenged by issues of equality, social justice and democracy (boyd, 2011; Dean, 2010; Fuchs, 2017; Jenkins et al., 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Papacharissi, 2011; Standage, 2013). Further political analysis of social media asks questions about whether the internet or social media are adequate political spaces, or realms, and asks what conditions need to exist for the spaces to be effective sites of political action (Smith, 2017; Ward, 2017).

The theoretical exploration of social media for social work is, however, very much in its infancy. Bourdieu’s field theory is suited to an analysis of professional identity, or “social capital” in relation to social media use (Julien, 2015); Habermas’ theory of communicative action and the concept of the public sphere (Fuchs, 2017), and Foucault’s concept of discourse and techniques of knowledge and power, both provide theoretical constructs which are potentially relevant and which have strongly influenced other areas of social work analysis (Gray & Webb, 2013b). Wenger’s ideas about community of practice (2000) enable a deeper understanding of the collaboration, networking and learning potential of social media (Wenger, 2000). The purpose of outlining a sample of these possibilities is not for it to be exhaustive, but to illustrate how broad and new this field of study is and to highlight the potential for analytical inquiry. This list of possibilities does not yet include those theories and models important to social work, for example cognitive behavioural theory, humanism, feminism, ecological systems, indigenous and decolonisation theories (Payne, 2014).

A decision was made to assume a broadly critical approach to the following discussion. It is argued that a critical perspective is relevant to the issues raised by the participants; for example, those of knowledge, identity, power and dichotomy (Payne, 2014). More specifically, the discussion will rely on the concept of critical social work, which is understood as “encompassing a range of eclectic perspectives that invoke the aura of critical theory,” and which is “largely impressionistic, with the uses of the term ‘critical’ being casual and loose” (Gray & Webb, 2013b, p. 101). This discussion therefore, is guided and pragmatically bounded by the “aura” of critical theory, and the term “critical”
will be used “casually and loosely” to further understand, when necessary, the experiences shared by participants in this study, or to shed light on their curiosities and questions (Gray & Webb, 2013b).

The value of critical social work for this study is that its range of interest encompasses “an appeal to progressive liberal democratic ideals and an emphasis on certain humanistic social work values” (Gray & Webb, 2013b, p. 101). Critical social work assists in making sense of the findings of this research – its interests reflect those expressed by participants, both in how social media is placed in the larger project of social justice, and how it “acts itself out” in the daily social work practice arena. Critical social work offers strategies into how reflection in action, or reflective practice informed by critical perspectives, can generate new thinking about best practice and can draw together the apparently dichotomous worlds of daily practice and the promotion of social justice.

Critical theory applied to social work promotes justice through transformational change, locating individual experience within broader societal structures, and challenging oppression by way of progressive social policy and social work practice (Gray & Webb, 2013a). The structural and critical approaches to social work practice are aligned with an analysis of contemporary social movements which are often associated closely with the advent and application of social media; for example, the Arab Spring and Occupy Movements, and the more recent uprising in Spain (Fuchs, 2017).

It is also argued that critical theory embraces the tradition of pragmatism which underpins the methodological approach to this thesis. Pragmatism “emphasises the importance of continuous experimentation to bring about better social forms” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 15); it advocates a flexible pursuit of knowledge and of socially just outcomes (which is argued above) to be a central tenet of critical theory.

A critical orientation has consistently informed this thesis. It is reflected in the process and underlying philosophy of critical reflection referred to in the introduction to this thesis: the relationship between critical ways of thinking and reflective practice which “focuses on uncovering power dynamics and detecting the creation and maintenance of hegemony” (Brookfield, 2009, p. 296). The concept of critical reflection also generated the focus group questions which were designed to guide participants through a critical thinking process. And finally, with the hope of expanding my thinking throughout each phase of this research project, and continuously fore-grounding issues of power, a critical lens was intentionally applied to my research journaling.

5.1.1 The interrelationship between knowledge and identity

The social work profession is defined by the knowledge that inspires its practice; “this schema of ‘knowing’ furnishes social work with a constitutive ‘identity claim’” (Hyslop, 2018, p. 21). At the same time, social work practice, offered in the context of its core principles and various environments, serves to inspire and distil new practice knowledge (Hyslop, 2013). There is a strong and fluid interrelationship therefore between social work knowledge and identity. Consequently, it is not
surprising that themes arising from this project reflect how participants alternated between a focus on who social workers are on social media (identity) and what social workers do or know about social media (knowledge). Although these themes are integrally linked and considered by most critical theorists to be inseparable (Payne, 2014), it is hoped that approaching them discretely, as prompted by how the data were thematically arranged, will help to provide greater clarity about the relationship between the two in the context of social media.

5.2 Social work identity and social media

In drawing links between social media and social work, one interview participant stated simply: “Social media is highly relevant to us because it's social” (interview participant #3). This participant went on to describe social media as being “about people and their lives” and an understanding of social media as a “new social setting, a new social environment.” A similar sentiment is found in the literature: “What links the social in social work to the social in social media is precisely that – the social” (Turner, 2016, p. 325). Sociologist Christian Fuchs (2017) suggests that “all media are social because they are part of society and aspects of society are present in the technological artefacts we use” (p. 4). These statements reflect a general, yet meaningful, attempt to determine the relevance of social media to social work, to consider the place of social media in relation to the core identity of social work as a profession which emphasises “the social side of human existence, the influence of the social context in the lives of individuals” (Fook, 2012, p. 4).

A strong rationale was established in the review of literature for social workers to embrace the transformational potential of social media at all levels of practice (Bullock and Colvin, 2015; Edwards and Hoefer, 2010; Giffords, 2009; Perron et al., 2010; Reamer, 2013a; Schembri, 2008; Taylor, 2017; Wolf & Goldkind, 2016). Although most participants in this current research are not opposed in principle to professional use of social media, their confidence and level of use does not match the enthusiasm emanating from the literature. Less than half of the survey participants used social media professionally, and on average these users considered it to be only somewhat important to the social work profession. These results suggest a gap between theory and practice (or between academia and practice); this discussion begins with the theme of identity as one way of exploring the nature of this gap with the intent of building insight into the complexity of the space between.

A key finding of this study is that participants drew on their professional identities to make sense of social media, and to make decisions about how to engage with it. This involved grappling with the definition of social work and what it means to be a social worker in today’s world; developing an account of responsibilities, principles and mandates. Participants also struggled with aspects of social media use as a seeming anathema to their social work identity; one participant, for example, expressed that to make a strong point on social media about social injustice, you need to “shove it down their throat,” – behaviour then described as “not very social worky” (focus group 2/2).

The centrality of identity as a theme in this research demands some exploration of the contemporary
social work landscape and the general identity challenges faced by social workers today. The process of contextualizing the experience of the participants aims to clarify the relationship between social media and the social work profession; to identify in what way, and to what extent, the participants’ experience of social media interact with their experience of being social workers. More specifically, the following discussion sheds light on the question of how the personal experience of being a social worker in Aotearoa New Zealand relates to the public realities of the profession, realities which are made more obvious perhaps through our discussions of how social media is or could be approached professionally.

5.2.1 Contemporary social work identity: The profession of social work
Social media requires us to establish an identity, to consider how we wish the public to perceive us. This is relevant not only to individual identity but also to organisational and professional identity (Young, 2013). Online personae are an important “currency” in today’s world (Harbeck-Voshel & Wesala, 2015), and this can be extended to include the identity of a profession, its “desirability” measured by the extent to which a profession has a collective “esteem” and is publicly visible for its contributions to the social good (Beddoe, 2013, p. 57).

A series of Aotearoa New Zealand studies about the identity and public perception of social workers in this country (Staniforth, Deane, & Beddoe, 2016) found that social workers overwhelmingly associate a negative stigma with their profession and believe a more positive portrayal in the media would go some way to rectify this. A subsequent Aotearoa New Zealand study gathered similar results, with the narratives of participants highlighting a sense of shame and professional insignificance (Hobbs & Evans, 2017). Given social media has the potential to provide a significant public audience, it is possible to speculate about a link between these perceptions and the frustration expressed by the participants in this project about the lack of social media engagement by their profession. Focus group discussions led to a collective opinion that “social work has to keep up or get left behind,” an opinion which positions social media as an opportunity for the profession to redeem itself publicly, to counter this unattractive stigma, to convince itself and the public of its worth. As one key informant expressed:

I don’t see social media and the internet as just about engaging in this bland kind of globalised American culture. It’s not that. There’s a bit of that about it but it’s also a place where you can assert your own identity and that includes your own national identity, as a nation. So because it’s a public space there’s a space where people from New Zealand and New Zealand social workers can assert who and what they are, and should be, I think. But they’re not, they’re not doing it. (9)

Social work has long been challenged in its assertion of a clear professional identity, however, and this matter is substantially analysed by social work scholars in Stephen Webb’s new edited volume Professional Identity in Social Work (2017). Historically defined by principles of Christianity and the
welfare state, and more recently by neoliberal public management/governance principles, the social work professional identity is hence “riven with contradictory pressures” (Dent, 2017, p. 30). Social workers are tasked with being both relational and technical, with finding ways of “standing in the client’s shoes … objectively” (Hardesty, 2017, p. 111). In addition, the broad range of fields of practice, each with their own knowledge and organisational jurisdictions highlight the further “identity work” required of social workers (Wiles, 2017). This complexity of multiple identities was reflected by the social workers participating in this study. It is argued here that social media does not easily provide for the expression of this complexity, and its static nature does not allow for the expression of a professional social work identity that is fluid, contestable and constantly being constructed (Webb, 2017a).

**5.2.2 Contemporary social work identity: Social workers and social action**

Participants in this project were curious about the social action mandate of their profession and the role of social media in this. At times they expressed frustration with the social work profession in Aotearoa New Zealand, with their colleagues and with themselves for not participating more fully in social media, suggesting this inaction indicated a lack of commitment to the core principles of their profession. This assumption will be explored later in this discussion, however, social work has long been criticised for its lack of focus on social justice and social change mandates, for becoming an increasingly individualised and therapeutically focussed profession, dominated by managerialism (O’Brien, 2011). This reality is primarily a response to the forces of neoliberalism and global economic crises (Gray & Webb, 2013a; Hyslop, 2018), leading to profession conceptualised as “hovering in uncomfortable places, caught between aspirations to contribute to social justice and bureaucratic constraints” (Beddoe, 2013, p. 49). This dilemma has been described from a Bourdieusian perspective as positioning social workers between two “masters” – that of the market and that of the profession. “Given this tension, individual workers are, therefore, confronted with a choice as to which ‘master’ to follow” (Garrett, 2013, p. 43).

Important research conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand (O’Brien, 2011), examined how social workers in this country applied a social justice lens to their work. It was found that, although social workers strived for social justice in their daily practice with families, there was a far more tentative link between their daily observations of social injustice and their response to it at political or policy levels. The study raised questions about how to:

…encourage, build and sustain the social justice commitment of individual practitioners and, equally, if not more importantly, how to develop action by the profession and others to bring about change in those economic, cultural and social structures in ways which enhance and advance social justice… (O’Brien, 2011, p. 186)

In the present neoliberal environment however, it is argued there is little room for political activity, on social media or otherwise. The power of neoliberalism and global capitalism has captured mainstream
social workers, who are too overworked and caught up in the bureaucratically prescribed tasks of social work which are “largely about maintenance, fixing and engineering and not social change” (Gray & Webb, 2013a, p. 14). Employer demands, and government or NGO contractual obligations, lead to what one key informant participant described as a profession that “can’t rock the boat or be rebels or have too much of a political voice. The hard stuff isn’t really on the table to be talked about” (11).

The foregoing analysis may go some way to explain the curiosities and frustrations expressed by participants in this project about their profession, suggesting that perceived low social action profiles on social media can be explained in part by the impact of larger issues on the profession. The extent to which this is the case is an important question for further exploration. As observed by one focus group participant who, although challenged themselves to become more active on social media, acknowledged this action “doesn’t overcome the apathy and the lack of motivation that sits within our profession” (1/2). As the following discussion unfolds, the issues facing the social work profession and the possible implications these have for social media use are teased out.

The impact of neoliberalism and globalisation on social work has led to a call for a renewed political vision from within the profession (Gray & Webb, 2013a), and a suggestion that, without political resistance, there could be an unravelling of the emancipatory project of social work (Hyslop, 2018). This challenge leads to the question about the role of social media in this process of resistance, calling to mind the words of the participant above who was searching for a political space on social media to talk about the “hard stuff,” to “rock the boat” or “be a rebel.”

A case has also been made for renewed leadership and shared responsibility in responding to the political challenges which confront the social work profession. The work of social change “cannot sit solely with individual social workers, conflicted as they often are by the demands of their employer and by the imperatives of responding to and engaging with immediately presenting and pressing user needs” (O’Brien, 2011, p. 186). This wisdom could be extended to social workers’ use of social media, mirroring the call made by participants for leadership and guidance regarding social media use as a way forward.

The profession of social work is not alone in its pursuit of social justice and accountability to matters of equality. The responsibility to manage power and social justice issues is a brief embraced by many professions and citizens, and it has been argued that, with a collaboration of this energy, change is made *more* possible through the capacity of social media:

> Only macro-resistance can counter macro-corruption. It is time to create, at the center of our media system, a networked core of groups that cares about responsible communication for democratic community. We need to *connect* across many boundaries. Journalists, scientists,
librarians, data workers, community advocates and others need to join in macro-resistance to fakery, harassment, ideology, and manipulation. (Ward, 2017, para 2)

And finally, it would be wise to venture into further analysis of social movement activity on social media to more fully understand the current (and perhaps future) social work experience. For example, according to British economic correspondent Paul Mason (2016), modern struggles can “bubble away” online for a long time, with no evidence of unrest, and can suddenly, without warning, erupt. According to Mason, in his book about the post-capitalist world, the internet is good at “incubating protest.” What this means in terms of the visibility of social workers in the social media space requires further exploration. As argued previously in this thesis, lack of obvious online presence does not mean social workers are not publicly and actively pursuing social justice. Neither does an active online presence equate to an effective pursuit of social justice, a point highlighted by the focus group concern about “slacktivism.”

5.2.3 Multiple and blurred social work identities on social media
In addition to exploring social media use within the professional identity of social work and the current landscape of social work practice, the themes generated in this study also capture how participants described their individual professional identities in the context of social media. Composed of unique national, cultural, personal, organisational and political characteristics, participants discussed inherent tensions between their various identities. Such differences and tensions were, it seems, made more obvious to them in the social media spotlight, especially when captured as a social media “snapshot,” rather than in a way that reflects the dynamic reality of identity, and one which features “several, possibly overlapping, identities coexisting and competing for dominance” (Dent, 2017, p. 31).

The key informant interview analysis highlights the complexity of negotiating the public/private, and personal/professional boundaries, and the survey analysis found that significant barriers to social media use were related to the fear of crossing these boundaries and being uncertain about how to manage ensuing ethical issues. To fully appreciate the additional challenges presented by social media to this already complex practice issue, it is useful to consider how uniquely social media serves to further blur and confuse these boundaries as clearly explicated by Fuchs:

The emergence of “social media” is embedded into the trend that boundaries between the dualities of modernity have become somewhat liquid and blurred: we find situations where the distinctions between play and labour, leisure time and work time, consumption and production, private and public life, the home and the office have become more porous. (Fuchs, 2017, p. 75)

A full analysis of how social media clouds distinctions between boundaries is beyond the scope of this discussion, however, the practice implications of increasingly porous professional boundaries is significant, leading to new ethical questions discussed in more detail below. It is argued that society is in a state of flux or transition regarding our binary conceptions of public and private (boyd, 2011),
signifying an opportune time for social workers to be critically engaged in conversations about matters of central importance to professional practice. The participants in this research project readily grappled with difficult questions about their personal and professional identities on social media and the associated risks. They called for guidance, signifying the reality that professional use of social media for social workers is an emerging practice, and that agreement about parameters and ethics of use is not yet established. The focus groups for example, “defaulted” at times to talking about social media from personal perspectives, seeking anchor points or guidance from whatever experience they could summon up.

This blurring of boundaries may go some way to explain findings from the focus group data that social workers relied significantly on their personal understanding of social media, to make sense of it professionally. Additional insight can be added here from the key informant interview analysis, where some participants determined transparency, and merging of professional and personal boundaries as a preferred, pragmatic way of being: “I’m not going to try to separate those two identities because to be honest if anyone wanted to really find that out they’d find that out anyway” (9). This statement reflects a critical stance in relation to social media identity, acknowledging that “people may have a number of different identities at any one time because all of us operate in several different contexts even over the course of a day” (Fook, 2012, p. 87).

While maintaining focus on the reciprocal relationship between knowledge and identity, on how knowledge claims serve to legitimise professional identity (Webb, 2017b), and acknowledging the inseparability and fluidity of the two concepts, the following discussion considers the intersection at which social work knowledge meets social media, and how social workers manage the muddy waters that occur when the principles of social work practice meets the reality of practice in a social media world.

5.3 Social work knowledge: The social work kete
This research project questioned how social workers in Aotearoa use social media. In response, multiple applications of social media to social work practice were shared (including potential applications), and a “list” of its uses or potential uses became evident while listening to the participants in this project. For example, the key informants spoke about social media being used to gather information, to network and collaborate, for advocacy, for professional support, research and development, to communicate with clients and provide social work interventions. These data, largely supported by the literature, were collected under a theme labelled “utility,” and further questions were asked: “What does this theme mean?” ‘What are the assumptions underpinning it?’ ‘What are the implications of this theme?’ ‘What conditions are likely to have given rise to it?’ ‘Why do people talk about this thing in this particular way (as opposed to other ways)?’” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 94).

This further interrogation resulted in a move away from a finite list of uses social workers can make of social media, to a focus on the possibility of multiple and infinite applications. The more the
participants began to explore how social media could be, or is employed in practice, the more creative they became about its possibilities. This creative thinking occurred across the key informant interviews, and was then further evident in the focus groups. Here participants built on each other’s ideas, and applied their existing social work knowledge and personal experiences to professional social media use. It became apparent that, given the conditions necessary to inspire creative thinking and reflection, social workers actively drew on their own resources and professional selves to envisage a unique social media practice.

The theme labelled “social work kete” was inspired by the analysis of the creative work done by members of the focus groups. Kete is a Māori word used widely in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. Translated for English speakers, it means “basket” or “kit,” is traditionally flax woven, and symbolises a vessel containing knowledge, principles and practices to guide us in our lives and in our work (Ererua, 2012). Intrinsic to the concept of kete or nga kete wananga (baskets of learning) is the importance of identity and collective well-being (Jahnke & Taiapa, 2007).

The social work kete represents the toolkit of the profession and is a metaphor commonly used by social workers in this country to describe that which informs practice and reflects professional identity. Focus group participants explored their social work kete to make sense of social media and its place in their practice. For example, the kete was described as a source of professional wisdom to guide ethical and competent social media use. It was also described as needing replenishment, lacking the technical and critical skills required in this digital age. Participants expressed fear about “shiny” new social media tools invading the kete, displacing core interpersonal skills so important to the profession.

The following discussion will extend the use of this metaphor by considering four sub-themes that can be grouped within the social work kete concept: technical skills, critical skills, interpersonal skills and ethical skills. The notion of a kete extends and enriches our understanding of how social workers use social media, specifically in relation to the way in which our sense of who we are is interwoven with knowledge.

5.3.1 Technical skill – technological and informational literacy
Social media intersects with many aspects of social work practice and does so in profoundly different ways; this reality opens the door to a vast number of questions needing answers and risks a broad, sweeping approach to any discussion about social media within social work practice. This is a challenge for this thesis, but is more importantly a challenge for the profession. This complexity was clearly identified by the key informants, one of whom articulated the reality of multiple social media spaces, of the need for a clear strategy and purpose for social media use (5). Another considered the challenge to be generating both “an awareness of the digital age and the digital device in your hand” (6). This participant further highlighted a challenge faced by social service agencies in terms of who “owns” the digital device, and therefore who is accountable for how it is used. Each of these pieces of
learning are directed at different aspects of social media – the digital age, the economics of social media, accountabilities, and electronic workings of technology. The following quote strongly reinforces the complexity and diversity of points at which social media intersects with practice:

The number and variety of practice areas, multiplied exponentially by available technologies, create a limitless universe of potential subject areas. Would an effective technology curriculum address the ethical use of ICTs in therapy? Data interpretation and management? How technology use overlaps with poverty and the effects of the digital divide? How to write an app, and the effects of technology on family dynamics? The potentials of virtual reality and implications of telehealth? (Wolf & Goldkind, 2016, p. 5)

The more experienced social media users who participated in this study identified some of these complexities; the use of privacy settings for example, of establishing multiple identities and applying these across numerous platforms or fields. One of many examples of skills needed to engage in social media is that of “continuous multilogue communication” (Megele, 2014b) which refers to how numerous people can communicate with each other at the same time without taking turns in conversation, thus producing multiple strands of simultaneous conversation. This is a novel and, for some, a curious way of communicating, and a recent study found a correlation between social work knowledge of the various affordances of social media, and perceptions about their potential, implying that “social workers may need a conceptual framework informing them to ground the right tools to the right tasks” (Chan & Holosko 2016, p. 692).

The findings from this study, that social workers should know more about social media, align with the literature – that social workers ignore social media at their professional peril. In addition, service users increasingly expect social workers to have social media competence (Simpson, 2016). Skill and knowledge associated with social media therefore must “become part of the kete of mastery” as one focus group participant described it. The discussion included not only new technical skills, (for example, how to post a message or send an email) but also an understanding of the structural workings of social media. Digital media scholar Alfred Hermida (2014) describes the challenge posed by social media to all citizens, both as a tool, with its accompanying technicalities, and as a service provided by multinational, profit-making companies:

Social media is actually quite complicated, even though it is seductive in its simplicity of use. The companies behind these technologies try to make it as easy as possible for us to share our passions and desires. These simple tools blur the line between the public and private and between the personal and professional. We are not used to living our lives out loud on the social media stage. To take control, we need to understand this creature we call social media. We need to master it so that we are using the machine rather than have the machine use us (Hermida, 2014, para. 14).
Another theme related to technical social media skills arising from this project is that of informational literacy. The volume of information available on social media, and a lack of trust regarding its source or veracity presented a significant barrier to participants in this project, in accessing the potential of social media for the purposes of research and professional development. The infinity of information and opinion available to the public, and the power associated with this is overwhelming:

All of this is happening in an apparent era of science, of easily accessible information, of massive collections of data, and hundreds of universities and centers for factual, reasonable discourse. We inhabit a virtual world of wall-to-wall opinion; a democracy seemingly without facts. Firm belief in facts coexists with utter certainty of opinion. Information is power. But misinformation is also power. (Ward, 2017, para 1)

There are numerous risks and uncertainties associated with the limitless range of information and opinion available to us daily as citizens and as professionals. The key informant interview analysis highlighted the reality of being bombarded or saturated with information, of finding it addictive and invasive, being overwhelmed by the emotional content of social media. These findings were upheld by the focus group data, where the intrusiveness and dominance of social media was a major component of the personal experiences of social media use described.

The risks of “informational overkill” are equal, however, to the risk of what has been coined the “echo chamber” of social media (Hermida et al., 2012). This phrase refers to an over-reliance on a homogeneous source of information; a dynamic described well by one of the focus group members when they expressed the ineffectiveness of “all talking very nicely to ourselves” on social media. This frustration expressed by the focus group was that this feature of social media prevented important messages about social inequity for example, from being widely and effectively disseminated beyond an exclusive group of users.

To master social media, to weave a “kete of mastery” suggests taking control of, and developing competence in, the world of social media. As established, this is a growing expectation of social workers. Being technologically literate for example, “enables social workers to harness tools on behalf of clients and communities as well as to analyse and critique technology’s disruption of the interface between the individual and the environment” (Wolf & Goldkind, 2016, p. 9). A social work kete to support such practice therefore would be more than a container of potential social work tools; it would also need to be woven by social workers who have a robust understanding of the impact of social media on society, on democracy and social justice – precisely what is expected of social workers as critical and reflective practitioners.

5.3.2 Critical skills
It is argued here that social workers must know not only how to employ the technical tools of social media, but also have some understanding of the relationship between these tools, the structure of
social media and the impact it has on society. Sociologist Christian Fuchs (2017) cites concepts of “power, ideology [hegemony], capitalism, democracy, participation, labour, control, surveillance” (p. 60) as fundamentally important to a critical analysis of social media. He further suggests that the more common social critique of social media focuses on its espoused transformative qualities, without asking questions about the materialistic and capitalistic realities, and the economic and political power imbalance inherent in social media (Fuchs, 2017). Critique of the capitalist economic models of social media relates to the reality of “social media being largely in the hands of private companies who are beholden to advertisers and shareholders rather than users” (Standage, 2013, p. 249).

To manage the risk of exploitation it is necessary to explore other decentralised, cooperative social media platforms. Again, this is a large area of study outside the scope of this thesis; however, it presents a further example of how social work could critically explore use of social media congruent with its principles, about broad democratic structures of social media development and how this thinking can be included in the social work kete. Some participants in this study were skeptical of the colonising effect of social media on indigenous people, and wanted, for example, to be “looking at other ways of expressing for tangata whenua” (1/4). Knowledge about how to progress such intentions by, for instance, developing and using alternative social media platforms, would be a valuable source of empowerment, and would satisfy the need for congruence between the identity of the profession, and the knowledge required to stay true to this identity.

There is a clear polarity of opinion about social media (Fuchs, 2017); a tendency toward “digital dualism” – a position that social media is either good or bad (Jurgenson, 2011). Economist Klaus Schwab, author of The Fourth Industrial Revolution asserts that “technology is not an exogenous force over which we have no control. We are not constrained by a binary choice between “accept and live with it” and “reject and live without it” (Schwab, 2016 p. 4). This polarity was evident at times in this study – survey participants either used or did not use social media professionally, it was either inside or outside the social work kete. Extreme positions were at times described about embracing or avoiding social media, or as being expert or incompetent users of social media. As one key informant expressed:

I see people who just simply don’t use electronic media at all, so the possibility of them ever learning social media is hugely remote … I also work with students I see their use of social media and their active involvement in it; that’s part of their life and the way they work, and it’s just a normal part of life for them. So I see the two extremes. (1)

Similar metaphors of dabblers, omnivores, samplers, devotees have been applied in the literature in describing social media users (Hargittai & Hseih, 2011). Social media provokes this type of dichotomous thinking – the pros vs cons of social media, truth vs opinion, personal vs public, reality vs fantasy (boyd, 2011; Turner, 2016). Dichotomous thinking “implies that most phenomena fit into ‘binary’ and ‘oppositional’ categories, in which one item of the binary is devalued in relation to the
other, and mutually exclusive as well” (Fook, 2012, p. 85). This positioning was evident in the double-edged sword theme arising from the key informant interviews where participants described balancing numerous dichotomies such as the forgoing of privacy to promote public good and the quantity vs quality dilemma of information available on social media.

It was evident in this study that, although at times, extreme polar positions about social media were expressed, the process of the focus groups and the wisdom of the key informants led to thinking resonant of critical theory – critical ideas that “suggest that we can change and be contradictory and multiple – many things at once” (Payne, 2014, p. 344). It is argued, therefore, that the social work toolkit continues to embrace critical reflection as a practice skill, a skill that draws on a “mix of theoretical and practice knowledge that generates progressive emancipatory and transformative practice” (Gray & Webb, 2013a, p. 15), and which promotes reflection on dichotomous thinking. The reflective model of “action-reflection-action” (Fook, 2012) for example, offers reflexive methods, or a space to engage with others on the reflective aspects of action, with the purpose of constructing professional narratives more suited to the information age – a reconceptualisation of social work practice in the context of social media that goes beyond an “either or” mentality (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017). As one focus group participant said: “We have those tools there in our kete already, it’s how we apply them, I guess, into a new way of working, to social media” (1/1).

5.3.3 Interpersonal skill – the demise of face to face?
A key theme developed in the key informant interviews, and which was built on and acknowledged in the focus groups as a key social work and cultural value, was that of face-to-face communication. This theme encompasses concern expressed by participants that internet technology and use of social media threatens this valued way of relating. Related concepts described in Aotearoa New Zealand by Māori are those of kanohi ki te kanohi (translated literally to mean face to face, and whakawhanaungatanga, which is interpreted as the forging and maintaining of relationships. This latter concept highlights the centrality for Māori of connectedness and the value of relational ties reinforced by the physicality of kanohi ki te kanohi (O’Carroll, 2013). In Aotearoa the social work concept of face-to-face communication is often merged with that of kanohi ki te kanohi, and this was the case with the participants in this study.

Face-to-face communication was identified by participants as forming an important cultural identity, as well as a value contributing significantly to the identity of the social work profession. A practice leader who contributed to this research as a key informant for example, cited the absence of face-to-face work engagement with families as a key factor leading to “dangerous practice.” The relationship-based, person-centred focus of social work is acknowledged in the literature as requiring sustained attention in the context of social media (Steyaert & Gould, 2009; Turner 2016). Participants, as is the literature, were concerned that the presence of social media would result in the face-to-face relational aspects of the profession being consigned to a dark corner of the kete to make room for the ease and popularity of communication via social networking sites:
I think as well though, that’s kind of making me feel a bit resistant to it because I’m thinking about efficiency taking priority over engagement. Particularly in New Zealand, for Māori, face to face is so important. Whanaungatanga, engagement – we don’t want to lose that, we don’t want to devalue that or see a Facebook message as being efficient so that’s great, but never actually getting off your bum and going and visiting somebody. (2/1)

“Use of self” is a fundamental relationship-based social work skill which relies on the concept of self-awareness and its impact on relationships. It is informed by communication theories which emphasise non-verbal and verbal interaction, and other theories that focus on identity (Trevithick, 2017). In Aotearoa New Zealand this social work quality is amplified by influential Māori models of practice, for example, Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1994) and Pōwhiri Poutama (Drury, 2007) which focus strongly on interpersonal engagement and relationship principles in professional practice.

Participants in this study recommend the need for sustained thinking into how these important relational values translate when using online communication. As is highlighted when analysing computer-mediated communication on social media “… there is no tension or mismatch between what one says and what another hears, between what one says and what one means, or between what one says and why one says it” (Dean, 2010, p. 16). How can social workers maximise their use of self when using internet technology in the face of this challenge? How is emotion relayed and understood in this medium, how is empathy conveyed and genuineness communicated, and how do we attend to cross-cultural aspects of communication using social media? How does a critical awareness of our identity influence how we operate in our online practice? (Fook, 2012).

Despite these thorny questions, confidence is emerging in the literature that the ethical communication essential to relationship-based social work practice can be achieved using online social networking (Turner, 2016). It is recommended that “an expanded notion of presence for the profession means blending face-to-face encounters with those that are not. It means accepting the premise that social presence is embodied but not contained by physicality” (LaMendola, 2010, p. 117). Social presence is understood as occurring in three ways: a projected presence as one might find on a social media profile prior to meeting, a social interaction, for example in a phone call or social media chat, and a co-presence, one which allows for an emotional connection (LaMendola, 2010; Simpson, 2017).

A further consideration for social workers in this context is that social media has perhaps reinforced the importance of relationship, being more attentive to what goes on behind closed doors, understanding that the blurred boundaries between the “public and private” leads to the need for more attention to accountability. As one key informant explained: “What YouTube can mean for social workers is that they’ve got to be sensitive to their interactions because they could be seeing their interactions up on the world wide web” (key informant 6). This exposure is a feature of what has been
coined the surveillance society, a world where social workers can be tagged or associated publicly with a range of people or issues, and judged accordingly, creating risk both for professionals and service users (Ryan & Garrett, 2017).

5.3.4 Social media – macro skills
This chapter began with a discussion about the impact of neoliberalism on the social change project of social work, arguing the need for political resistance, leadership and collaboration to promote engagement in social change activities. It is suggested in the literature that social workers should be using social media as a tool to do this (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010; Giffords, 2009). Participants who wished to politically confront the existing social order as social workers, however, were puzzled about the role of social media in this endeavour. On the one hand, enthusiasm existed about the potential of social media as a tool for social workers, particularly in relation to social action and reform. On the other, there was lack of confidence in social media as an effective or worthwhile social change tool.

One focus group participant for example, described being happy to go to a march or be politically active at a rally or on a picket line, but felt significant reluctance about engaging in online activism. The focus group discussed this shared concern as one arising from fear of being “trolled” or of not wanting political views to be shared with their broader social media community. These are valid concerns related to professional safety; as vividly described by media ethicist Stephen Ward: “The internet we once praised for its ‘democratization’ of media and for making possible ‘we the public’ is now a raucous, often dangerous global sphere of trolls, hackers, racists, fanatics, conspiracy theorists, and robotic manipulation of social media by governments” (2017, para 1).

There were also concerns about the keeping of professional/personal boundaries, which is discussed in more detail later, however further understanding of reluctance to engage in online political activism may also lie in how online spaces are defined and determined as political spaces – or as public places where social workers can go to be “political.” Social media is a public space however conditions do not intrinsically exist for it to be a political space. As described by Smith (2017) in his book about politicizing digital space, an adequate political realm must have three “layers” – a space, rules, and the activity of people:

A space with no people cannot be political, just as people with no place to act politically will not be able to sustain their activity. At the same time, frameworks of rules are required to keep politics bounded and ensure equality and freedom are maintained. (Smith, 2017, p. 41)

Social workers engaging in social media spaces that are not explicitly bounded as political spaces, and as suggested above, by rules to ensure online safety, will likely feel dissatisfied with social media as an effective social change tool, and feel they are fighting a lonely battle. It is suggested therefore that social workers develop a more sophisticated understanding of social media from a political perspective. A case is made for there to be a renewal of knowledge development for macro social work practice (Mattocks, 2018) and the findings from this research assert the need to incorporate new
ways of communication and acting on the public stage to this end. This includes skills required to effectively network, collaborate and be politically active using social media. A more sustained focus on the development of these skills generally may also go some way to respond to the call for a "new politics for social work" (Gray & Webb, 2013a), as was discussed in the introduction to this chapter.

5.3.5 Ethical skills and professional conduct

Most social workers today are "digital citizens," with common experiences of the digital world, and as such are accountable for how they behave in this world. This is the responsibility of all people using social media – it is argued the “get out jail pass” cannot be played by anyone when it comes to ethical behaviour on social media (Ward, 2017, para 7). Ethical issues and matters of professional conduct were raised in all phases of this project as areas in need of a critical eye and urgent resolution. For example, the reason most cited in the survey for not using social media was concern about breaching professional ethics. Key informants urged their colleagues to use social media, but recognised limitations due to lack of leadership in the ethical space. Focus groups likewise reflected feelings of uncertainty and wondered about where to seek ethical guidance.

So what is the tikanga, what is the tika about social media? Who enforces that? It comes from the home and the norms within the home or the norms within the school of social work or within what's modelled through ANZASW rightly or wrongly, or SWRB. Who’s the kaitiaki of social media? (focus group 1)

Tikanga refers to Māori cultural protocols of correct behaviour, tika to what is right or just, and kaitiaki to the guardian or custodian of these sets of values and principles. Use of these cultural concepts serves to more clearly articulate the complexity of the ethical challenges facing social workers – what are the rules, how do we enact these rules, and who guides and guards our conduct in this regard? The social work literature reviewed for this project also reflects the complexity of this challenge, and evidences a change of thinking over time about the profession's approach to social media ethics and conduct. Social work scholars no longer counsel avoidance of social media as an ethical strategy, nor do they fully accept principles in existing codes of conduct as sufficient to manage professional behaviour in the novel, unknown world of social media. There is some understanding now of the need for sustained critical thought about the unique and unforeseen ethical implications for social workers in what continues to be a fraught, unresolved, and often surprising, space.

One of the tasks of developing social work ethics in relation to social media use is to manage the boundary between private and public realms, and personal and professional realms. It has become apparent that new rules and new understandings of relationship are evident within social media engagements –however, they are still undetermined, unwritten, and rather than guided by rules are “learned by osmosis through the engagement with others” (Thakray, 2014, p. 13). Consequently, as observed by Turner (2016), “appropriate conduct’ becomes difficult to define and is often only judged
retrospectively when a transgression has occurred rather than in a manner which guides social workers and builds confidence in their use of digital spaces” (p. 315).

One implication of seeking guidance from existing ethical principles in new, unknown spaces is the inability to fully understand just how they will apply; there is an obvious need therefore to rely on the outcome of experiences in social media as they unfold, to research and analyse the outcomes as this focus group participant describes in the context of a discussion about moving forward in their professional media use:

We’ve got to give it a go. Just got to do it. Because I feel like I’ve been tiptoeing around the edge and doing a bit of it kind of, but I think we’ve just got to take the plunge and roll with mistakes but actually create some data to then create rules from.

It is unacceptable, however, to rely on the vulnerability of social workers for these data, to await the transgressions inevitable in neoliberal, risk averse, “unguarded” practice environments. For this reason, work is required on various fronts; research which provides evidence of the effectiveness of online tools for social work practice therefore providing social workers with an ethical justification for using it (Chan, 2016; Reamer, 2017), and support in the development of competence to ensure anonymity, privacy and confidentiality when using online systems. Until this is established, social workers will either use it badly or, not use it at all. As one focus group participant expressed in the context of the discussion about ethical challenges: “Why would you use it [social media] if you risk being slapped with an ethical breach?” The fear of behaving unprofessionally strikes at the heart of social work identity, and accusation of such behaviour is a “powerful shaming device” (Webb, 2017a, p. 8).

It may also be the case that collaboration within the profession on the “experimentation” with professional social media use would be usefully undertaken by those not so bound by organisational risk-averse policies. It was observed in the key informant interview data for example, that participants who had the experience of moving from a statutory role to a self-employed or academic role, described the relative freedom in their use of social media as social workers. This suggests that certain social workers would be better placed to “take the plunge and roll with the mistakes” providing the leadership and “grassroots data” generally called for by participants in this study.

There are also questions being asked in the literature about whether the advent of social media signals a need to move away from our traditional deductive, principle-based approach to social work ethics towards a virtue-based approach (Chan & Holosko, 2016). Participants in this study explored their cultural, professional and personal values, beliefs and morals in relation to social media use, an approach more aligned with the multi-platformed, subjective, fast-moving social media environments (Chan & Holosko, 2016).
Social work ethicist Sarah Banks (2016) makes a similar distinction, between what she terms text book ethics and everyday ethics. Everyday ethics, where ethics are embedded in practice, is contrasted with text-book ethics, where ethical practice is based on normative decision-making frameworks. She argues the former “encourages greater reflexivity and a move beyond simple models of ethics as individual decision-making or external regulation” (p. 46). This approach to ethical practice aligns with findings of this study, where focus group participants exercised their ethical thinking in a way that considers “a broader social, political and cultural context and sees responsibility in a wider, more relational sense, beyond the isolated individual decision-maker” (Banks, 2016, p. 36).

Contrasting the principles-based and virtues-based approaches to ethical thinking about social media contributes to an understanding of the tension apparent in discussions about specific ethical issues that arose in the key informant interviews, and in the focus groups. For example, the issue of tracking young people in care using Facebook is one that attracts significant debate (Ryan & Garrett, 2017; Sage, Wells, Sage, & Devlin, 2017; Simpson, 2017). Reflecting this dilemma, one focus group queried the “disconnect between what the keepers of our code of ethics are saying, and practice” (focus group 1). The ensuing discussion invited a range of ethical approaches from participants, leading to different ethical conclusions, one which endorsed the moral right to privacy, and another which reflected the bureaucratic responsibility to assess risk at all costs:

But when we’re gathering information and doing risk assessment, we’ll go through as many sources as we can to get the information, so why would we not? Because it would be unethical not to. If you knew there was a way of finding out someone was at risk, why would you not go there? (1/1)

This conflict is one familiar to child protection social workers; however, the aggressive presence of social media in society introduces new, unprecedented methods of assessing risk. In the absence of guidance or leadership about use of technology, social workers may perceive, as does the participant above, no choice but to employ them in everyday practice. The power inherent in this is tangible and arguably reinforces the suitability of “ethics work” as proposed by Banks (2016) which “re-asserts the role of professional social workers as active moral agents in a political context of challengeable framings, norms, rules and policies about social justice, social responsibility and societal compassion” (p. 46).

This discussion has so far considered the relationship between social work identity and knowledge, and the social work kete has been used as a metaphor to illustrate the range of skills applicable to social media use introduced by participants in this study, and further explored by the social work literature. These include the technical skills required to understand and use social media, the critical skills of reflecting on and analysing the social impacts of social media, the changing interpersonal and relational skills required to develop effective relationships using social media, and application of unique ethical skills. The literature contains examples of social media use for assessment and
intervention, for example, use of apps to monitor well-being, online counselling; however, participants in this study did not refer to this aspect of social media use for social workers. Those surveyed were less likely to use social media in direct work with social service users than for any other professional purpose. This is an interesting contrast with the literature and worthy of future exploration.

The social work kete and the unique way in which it is woven, symbolises the social work identity, offering opportunity to consider a sense of the professional self and how this is linked to the contemporary social work profession with its local influences, current debates, political challenges and belief in change. It is suggested that to establish a dynamic way forward for the social work profession in the new technological age, it will be necessary to pay attention to the integrity of its kete, as well as to what it contains, and accompany this with an acute understanding of the relationship between the two. This last section considers how this way of perceiving the complexity of the profession can support thinking about what social workers already know about professional use of social media, what they feel they need to know, and how this new knowledge and identity can be (or is being) developed.

5.4 Learning: Professional development and education
Braun and Clarke (2006) stress the value of considering all themes generated in a study and analysing them collectively to generate deeper meaning. In the case of this study, thoughts about social work identity and knowledge as discussed earlier have gone some way to inform thinking about how the profession can constructively progress its relationship with social media: what knowledge is relevant, how our identity as a profession and as individual social workers impacts on our use of social media, and what this all means in terms of how guidance and support may be offered to social workers and students. This final section of the discussion will consolidate thinking generated by this project into some structured ideas for moving forward, including strategies for professional development, social work education and leadership in social media use.

5.4.1 Professional development
The data from the survey confirm that social workers want to know more about professional social media use, and they agree this knowledge is important for the profession. As has been established, there is little argument against this position in the literature. The key informants offered ideas about areas in need of professional development based on their expertise, and the focus groups worked together to think specifically about what social workers need to learn, and how they could best learn it. The following discussion will summarise the knowledge considered necessary as already rationalised above, however, will focus more deliberately on how this knowledge can be best generated, refined and shared.

In the above discussion about knowledge and social media use, the metaphor of the social work kete, or basket of knowledge was drawn on to develop thinking about what social workers require to competently use social media as professionals. This was divided into four sub-themes: technical skills, or technological literacy, critical thinking skills, interpersonal and macro skills, and ethical skills.
These areas of knowledge transfer directly into areas of need in relation to teaching and learning, effectively providing a list of suggested learning outcomes.

Findings from this study also inform ways in which these outcomes might be best achieved. For example, the centrality of identity as an overall theme suggests learners would benefit from space to reflect on the impact of their cultural, professional and personal identities on social media practice. Activities that promote reflection on self-perceptions of technological competence (virgin, promiscuous) and opinion about the usefulness of social media would offer context within which social workers could develop new thinking about social media in their practice. It is crucial social workers, and students of social work have the opportunity to reflect and theorise about social media, to understand its implications for society. “Even if we realise that our problems are reflections of structural considerations that we can do little about individually, knowing that we are not the cause is crucial to our well-being” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 5).

A framework for supporting and developing professional identity is offered by the “communities of practice” approach to learning conceptualised by Wenger (2000). Communities of practice are theorised as spaces in which professionals come together to share practice stories, to learn from each other and to develop their practice and identities as practitioners. This concept is aligned with the focus group discussion about peer supervision which participants envisioned as a way of developing knowledge, of having “a network of people to be able to pick the brains of,” and “to create permission to make mistakes” (focus group 2). Communities of practice, and variations of them, are used commonly as professional development forums, and an extension of this concept is that of virtual communities of practice, already established by social workers globally to develop knowledge, share experiences and learn collaboratively (Taylor, 2014). These virtual, online communities offer opportunity for participants to use social media tools as a way of actively and critically learning about them.

In addition to generating a list of areas for development and emphasising the centrality of social work identity in the creation of new knowledge and skills, it is important to acknowledge barriers to social media use as identified by social workers in the study, and by the literature, to address these barriers, and, if appropriate, develop strategies to manage them. For example, lack of empirical evidence of the relevance of social media to the daily lives of social workers and their clients is a significant barrier to which this thesis makes some contribution. This lack of available knowledge limits the ability and willingness of social workers to engage with it (Chan, 2016; Reamer, 2017).

There are other considerable barriers to social media use which impact on the provision of professional development opportunities, including financial and accessibility issues (Berzin et al., 2015; Thakray, 2014). Organisational barriers were identified by participants in this study, including the formal banning of social media use by social workers and/or restrained use of social media based on risk-averse social media policies, and this reality is reiterated in the literature (Giffords, 2009; Hill &
Participants in this research also described being unable to access appropriate spaces and software to communicate ethically with clients, for example to arrange meetings via Skype. To maximise the effectiveness of future learning about social media, attention to the extent and nature of these barriers will be essential (Simpson, 2017).

Alongside the need for research, however, is the understanding generated in this study that social workers rely significantly on their personal experiences, their practice principles, cultural and ethical principles, to analyse and make decisions about the place of social media in their professional roles. As such, social work expertise in social media use is to varying degrees already established, ready to be captured and built on in professional development forums, communities of practice, or in collaborative research projects. As was suggested in the focus group discussions, the learning generated from sharing practice ideas in the focus group was valuable, creative ideas were generated specific to the social work profession, and participants agreed that continued peer support and collaboration would be a useful way forward. This ambition is a hearty one, however it cannot be carried out with eyes closed to the larger landscape of social work practice:

On the one hand, practitioners are thought to have lively agency in forming their own identity, on the other hand, it is argued that professional identity is interiorized and structured for practitioners by wider contexts, such as the workplace, professional associations and government austerity measures. (Webb, 2017b, p. 236)

5.4.2 Social work education
It is reasonable to expect that the education needs of new social workers about social media would assume a similar character and trajectory as the development of practising social workers. The types of knowledge, skill, and analytic approaches established in this study as relevant to learning about social media would apply to both students and practitioners. However, investigation is needed into the needs of these two diverse groups of professional learners with respect to social media. For example, views were frequently expressed in this study about the correlation between generational differences in social media use, and competence. Assumptions about how younger generations know more about social media (how participants relied on their mokopuna or children for example, to learn how to use their smartphones), can lead to false assumptions that younger social work students have an inbuilt capacity to use social media well professionally. It could be that younger students, with ingrained social media habits will require learning support in reconfiguring their social media use, while experienced practitioners will require support in applying already established professional identities to a new communication environment. This also raises questions about older students with no prior social media experience, and the nature of their learning needs both as students and new practitioners. These are all good questions for future research.

There is agreement in the literature that social media and an understanding of technology should be incorporated into social work education; participants in this study viewed social work educators as
important leaders for the profession in this regard and recognised social work academics as members of the profession most visible on social media. The literature review highlighted how research about social media and social work education has emerged over the last decade, offering ideas about digital pedagogy and curriculum content, and illustrating how social media as a learning tool is increasingly embedded into social work education programmes (Curington & Hitchcock, 2017; Kellsey & Taylor, 2017; Megele, 2014a). This reality was also experienced by participants in this project. One key informant interviewee, for example, a social work educator, described using multiple platforms in their work, including the online learning platform Moodle, e-portfolio software to store student work and to engage in group discussion, an institutionally developed social media platform, and a Twitter account.

Alongside this new face of tertiary study is the need for educators to develop skills in using technology and social media in their daily teaching practice; to develop e-competence as educators (McAuliffe, 2017). A social work educator who participated in this study as a key informant expressed doubt about their capacity to bring social media into the classroom setting. “The challenges aren't around the social media itself, but the technical how to set those things up when you're trying to deliver information and set up courses and have a whole lot of other things to do.” This raises the question not only of how social media is taught in the classroom to support student learning, but how tertiary educators are supported to facilitate this learning (Sitter & Curnew, 2016).

Questions must also be asked about the suitability of the overall institutional structure within which social work education occurs. Social work schools are typically ensconced in tertiary institutions replete with neoliberal values, associated managerial practices and institutional complexities. Social work education pedagogies most suited to learning about the digital age (for example inquiry-based or blended learning), are difficult to deliver in most schools of social work which typically use a tutor-led framework of delivery (Ballantyne, Wong et al., 2017). This difficulty can be described as a “predictable consequence of trying to do something highly complex (help adults learn) within a system that is organised according to bureaucratic rationality and modes of factory production” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 6). Given expectations of the profession that social work educators will lead the profession forward in its use of social media, this is an important issue for critical attention.

It is recommended that for educational programmes to best reflect the unique needs of social work, social workers must contribute to their design (López Peláez et al., 2017), and in doing so remain connected to practice colleagues to ensure the programmes are aligned with daily work occurring in social service agencies (Rafferty & Waldman, 2006). The focus groups in this study recognised the disconnect between what is anecdotally occurring in practice (for example, use of Facebook to locate clients), and what is being taught in classrooms, emphasising the importance again of supporting the relationship between research, practice and social work education.
5.4.3 Integrating knowledge about social media into social work learning

The social work literature and participants in this study overwhelmingly agree that social work education should include learning about professional use of social media. It has been established in this thesis that tertiary learning about social media can, and is occurring in multiple ways – by using social media as social work students, by learning about social media and its impact on society, and by adopting pedagogy that is aligned with the spirit of technology and social media; for example, that which features collaborative learning principles, applies methods of managing a range of informational content and prioritises effective communication skills (Kellsey & Taylor, 2017). There is little confidence in the literature, however, that digital professionalism has progressed sufficiently in social work education (Taylor, 2017); participants in this research agree, and offer some ideas about how social work education could more effectively prepare social work students for practice.

By way of beginning to capture and organise what has been learned so far in this study, from both the research findings and themes in the social work education literature, a framework is proposed below for the integration of social media learning into social work education. Based on wisdom generated in this study about the extent to which social media has become enmeshed in our everyday lives (boyd, 2014; Fuchs, 2017), the multiple points at which social media intersects with social work practice (Berzin et al., 2015; Reamer, 2017; Wolf & Goldkind, 2016), it is argued that social media learning be integrated into all aspects of social work education, rather than be offered as a segregated or discrete area of study (Watling & Rogers, 2012; Zorn & Seelmeyer, 2017).

Table 5.1
Social Work Curriculum with Integration of Social Media Learning

| professional practice | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| • social work identity  |
| • social media ethics and policies |
| • research & curation of information using social media |
| • networking & interprofessional practice using social media |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SW principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• social justice, human rights, power and social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• diversity and social media (culture and lifespan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• collective responsibility, social action and social media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>practice skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• communication using social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• assessment and intervention using social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• generic technological (ICT) and social media skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• critical reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>theory, frameworks &amp; knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• critical social work analysis of social media &amp; the digital age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• conceptual knowledge of social media and its functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• application/generation of indigenous knowledge to social media in society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above framework was constructed in the first instance by consulting the New Zealand Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) programme recognition standards to establish the four basic areas of the curriculum included in this framework (Standard 2) (SWRB, 2017). The international definition of social work was also consulted and led to inclusion of the main principles and areas of knowledge foundational to social work (IFSW, 2014). Te Tiriti ō Waitangi principles promoted focus on notions of bicultural practice using social media, the impact of social media on Māori and how social work can respond to this. This deductive exercise generated a map into which areas of social media learning raised in the literature, and by the participants in this research project, were then incorporated.

Social media has imposed a significant task on the profession of social work; that is to “launch a conceptual re-evaluation of how the essential values of social work operate in a world where individuals and their environments have been reshaped by the live presence of technology” (Wolf & Goldkind, 2014, p. 3). The four curriculum areas in the above framework, which largely represents the existing social work education curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand, appear to provide reasonable scope for this re-evaluation; that is, learning about social media can be incorporated into already existing social work practice values, principles and theoretical frameworks. Critically reflective practice will continue into the new information or digital revolution, social work will continue to evaluate the social justice implications of changes in society. There is clearly a new set of skills to learn related to the idiosyncrasies of social media and of technology, however it could be argued this is not an historically new challenge for social work.

The framework is very much limited by the unknown, however. It is argued that in a world infused with the transformative, turbulent effects of internet technology and social media, and characterised by “the rapidity of innovation, adoption, adaptation, and obsolescence” (Dean, 2010, p. 1), a much stronger social work kete is required, one which is woven by social workers with a keen critical eye, a strong sense of professional identity, and equipped with a full set of technical, interpersonal and ethical skills related to social media use. In a world where “[t]he object of one’s theoretical focus and critical ire quickly changes or even vanishes” (Dean, 2010, p. 1), this need for social work education to support the development of a sustained critical lens is more crucial than ever before.

And finally, it is suggested that how social media is addressed in social work education be more supported by sustained inquiry and examination by both students and educators. It is crucial that research is carried out in relation to how technology is being applied in social work education, and how successful it is in its achieving its aims (Wretman & Macy, 2017). Related to this is scrutiny of how social media policies are developed for social work students and how useful they are in the facilitation of learning (Karpman & Drisco, 2016).
5.5 Leadership and ways forward

The concept of leadership has been referred to frequently throughout this discussion. Questions were asked by participants about who sets the terms of ethical conduct, who shows leadership in best social media practice, who is responsible for generating and disseminating knowledge about how to communicate and intervene as social workers in the new technological age. These questions are made more urgent when located within the intensely and increasingly subjective world of social media, a place characterised by “a new setting of complete openness and freedom – no authority tells the subject what to do, what to desire, how to structure its choices” (Dean, 2010, p. 7). That social workers in this study expressed vulnerability, and a need for concrete direction is perhaps also explained by how this new sense of “freedom” is bounded by neoliberal capitalism. Leadership from a critical perspective would support the profession in perceiving and challenging this dominant ideology (Brookfield, 2005).

A social work educator who participated in this research as a key informant advocated for social work professional associations to take leadership by using social media to connect with global social work networks, to generate debate and curate information. In doing so, social workers would be supported to be more engaged in the wider issues relevant to the profession, and by extension have increased collective opportunity to be involved in social change activities. Regardless of the role of social media in this pursuit, professional associations have previously been called upon in this capacity: “A significant component of engaging with the wider issues requires professional associations and other related bodies to take a leadership role and develop mechanisms and processes to link with and draw on the daily experiences of practitioners” (O’Brien, 2011, p. 186).

It is appropriate to apply this wisdom to the professional use of social media. It was argued earlier in this discussion that, in the current neoliberal political climate, social workers are fundamentally challenged to participate politically and a question was posed about whether low visibility of social workers on social media was related to this challenge, or to barriers associated with social media use. It is likely a combination of the two – the complexity of social media in society has perhaps added another dimension to the challenges inherent in reconciling or “unifying” the pressure of daily practice with social justice principles (Keenan et al., 2017).

For this reason, it is argued further that social workers require leadership and support in this regard. Local and global professional associations can achieve this by developing positive models of social media use, building on the capacity of social media to link the daily experiences of social workers with broader social realities, to connect with global networks, debates and knowledge. There are increasing global networks being developed on Twitter and other social media platforms, and examples of how social media is used to do this are documented in this thesis. A clear example of the power of social media to forge professional connection is an edited book about social media, written by social workers in the UK whose relationships with each other were developed solely on social media (Turner, 2016; Westwood, 2014).
Participants in this current research call for leadership generally, and in particular view social work educators as those best positioned to model appropriate use of professional social media. Although there are barriers to this, as discussed above, it is clear from this study that educators are coming forward with research about creative teaching practices using social media and beginning to incorporate social media learning to support the professionalisation of social workers in this regard (Taylor, 2017). It is also conjectured from this study, that leadership is generated from within practice. A finding from this project is the extent to which social workers are drawing on practice wisdom and personal experiences of social media to expand their social work kete.

5.6 Summary

This study queries the relationship between two entities: social work and social media, both of which are areas of practice and study with their own bodies of knowledge and range of interpretive frameworks. It has been the task of this thesis to articulate the relationship between these two fields of study, forcing questions about the extent to which the new practice of social media requires us to look outside traditional boundaries of the social work paradigm to make the best sense of it for social workers. This has been carried out in the spirit of pragmatism, which "holds that all theory, indeed all practice, is provisional and open to reformulation (Brookfield, 2005, p. 34).

This discussion ponders the identity of social work; where the profession is currently situated in its eclectic but principled theoretical paradigm, and how social media is challenging the terrain in this regard. The primary importance of the relationship between how social work is conceptualised and how social media is perceived as relevant to the profession became clear as the findings from this project were set against the literature. It was also clear from themes arising in this discussion, how significantly the political and organisational challenges of social work relate to the profession’s apparent reluctance to engage politically on matters related to social work, and a question was posed about how this may be related to equivalent reluctance to use social media to carry out this activity. Considerable apprehension was expressed in this project about whether social media signals the demise of the closely valued humanistic and relational aspect of social work practice, with participants querying how social workers could possibly use technology to relay genuineness, empathy, and attend to matters of authenticity and diversity. Significant concerns were raised about the rules of social media use and the professional risks associated with its use.

Questions were also asked in this discussion about the extent to which social media can play a role in “resurrecting” the social justice mission of social work. It was referenced earlier in this discussion that a renewed politics for social work would focus on “grappling with ideas about what a ‘just society’ might look like and how injustice manifests itself in everyday relationships and institutional structures” (Gray & Webb, 2013a, p. 8). A key question is whether social media can be used to develop this mandate, and by doing so play a role in unifying the historically recognised dual mandates of social work.
Social media is lauded as a democratic space for all citizens, a place where the voice of injustice can be louder and made stronger by joining a multitude of other voices. This is an important, exciting promise for the social work profession and the people it serves. It is fair to say that the participants in this research, together with those who have contributed to the literature on this topic share a certain optimism about the potential of social media in this regard. This project has explored the actual social work experience of using social media in a small corner of the Western world, and as a result, participants who shared their experience have offered a new, but familiar challenge to the profession: to keep a firm, critical eye on the injustices that manifest themselves in the inherent structures and everyday use of social media.
Chapter 6: Conclusions

This thesis began with a question about function. In retrospect, I was interested superficially in how social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand use social media, why they use it and what they thought of it. In fact, because of wisdom brought to this study by the research participants, this project grew into one about the identity of social workers in this country, their ways of knowing, what they consider to be their task, their tensions and contradictions, their political landscape of practice and how social media contributes to this landscape. Exploring the place of social media in the professional lives of social workers led to an understanding of social media as a new public stage on which the profession could “perform,” a place to see more clearly and critically perhaps, who is acting, what is being performed, and who is in charge of the theatre.

To conclude is to decide about what is important, and to dream about what next. The conclusion to this thesis therefore is structured around what I found to be important about the relationship between social work and social media, namely how technology and social media have the effect of collapsing time, of blurring boundaries in our relationships, of “hiding” the voices behind knowledge and the power inherent in those voices. These concepts are all relevant to this project, and impose limitations on its findings: the passing of time, the subjectivity of my voice, the challenge of representing the voices of others, the missing voices, the struggle of both harnessing and embracing the vast volume of knowledge, and managing the power associated with it all. Taken together, this chapter offers some key ideas for the future: these are outlined in the following discussion and collected at the end of this thesis.

6.1 Time
Critical media theorist Jodi Dean published a book about blogging in 2010, and prefaced it by acknowledging the paradox of reading about the internet in a book. Capturing the nuances and particularities of a virtual place where things happen immediately and change almost instantly was, in her view, at odds with the nature of a book, the physicality of which is stuck in time. Although Dean argues for the necessity of slowing time down, of the importance of retrospective reflection, she believes there remains a limitation to reading about social media in books. These perceptions are germane to this thesis. How relevant is the data I gathered in 2014 to what is happening now? How can I make sense of something that has changed so much? What form might my questions take if I were starting from now? And how might I prefer to explore them? I take heart, however, from the words of the author Hilary Mantel, shared in one of her recent Reith lectures:

> Intention evolves as a result of capacity. You don’t know what you’re doing, till you try to do it. As capacity increases, so does ambition. But when it comes to getting the words on the page, you can only work breath by breath, line by line. (Mantel, 2017, p. 7)
So, slowing down, breath by breath, I learned from the participants in this research much more about social work in Aotearoa than I expected to, and much less about social media. In fact, as I mention at the outset, the mechanics of social media as a tool, as a way of communicating and finding out about the world became less important than the more abstract understanding of the role of social media in turning the profession back on itself. Participants in this study considered themselves in the broad daylight of social media, and this wise focus led me away from the novelty of this new, flashy way of communicating with the world, towards the social workers themselves; the actors, their dialogue and performance. It can be said that social media, as the project progressed, “dissolved” into the realities of my profession, highlighting a finding that the “keepers” of social media, the developers and owners of this new technology, were not the ones to provide answers to the questions it had thrown at us; social workers would be the ones to do that. I learned therefore that the passing of time was an advantage, as well as a limitation to this thesis.

There is a problem inherent in the process I experienced, however, and is likely experienced by others. The more invisible social media becomes, the less likely we are to be aware of the real impact it has on our lives. The more we become inducted into its use, bedazzled by what it can do, the harder it becomes to see clearly where it can and does go wrong – where it becomes exploitative, dangerous and dark (Bartlett, 2014; Csiernik, Furze, Dromgole, & Rishchynski, 2006). The passing of time and the flurry of change within this confuses and leads us away from carefully and critically interrogating the relationship between the structures of society (as reflected, for example, in social media) and how we experience the world. This is the continuing challenge for social workers and the immediacy of social media has added more complexity to that challenge.

The issue of time creates questions about how we can “keep up” as a profession, and there are frequent references to this by the research participants and my research colleagues, usually shrouded in concern about the profession becoming redundant and out of touch with the modern world. It was my hope, somewhat arrogantly perhaps, that by conducting this research I would join others in leading the profession “out of the dark ages.” The research participants joined me in this mission; education, professional development, attention to our practice kete and leadership were all proposed as ways to manage these concerns. These are good ideas in response to some very real ethical, competence and social justice issues offered by a passionate and proud group of professionals. In hindsight, we may have been collectively captured by a sense of urgency, a moral panic. Nevertheless, because of how quickly social media is changing the world, how difficult it is to keep track of the changes, and to predict their consequences, we can only slow down so much. There is significant challenge in providing a response that is both urgent and thoughtfully critical.

Beginning from now, and knowing the nature of this challenge, another question arises about the methodology adopted for this project, and how well it was suited to answering the questions put to it. And if urgency and criticality are required, what method would be most suited to future questions about the relationship between social work and social media? Technology has developed to such an
extent that all manner of data collection and analysis are possible, and this project made use of only some of these tools. Internet survey technology, reference and data management software added to the efficiency and ease with which this research was conducted. But the same wisdom applies as does to social work use of social media. Competency and ethical standards cannot be achieved without knowledge of the technology being applied. Significant, time-consuming consultation and learning are required, and a critical eye on the impact tools have on the outcome. The challenge of this led me “back” time and again to coloured pencils and large sheets of paper.

Mixed methods research was well suited to the broad exploratory nature of this project. It enabled the voices of 342 social workers to be shared and for that collective voice to be better understood both by a scattering of social work experts and leaders, and through the thoughtful, collaborative work of two groups of practice colleagues. However, as already discussed, the research did take a long time relative to the fast-moving pace of social media. Multiple creative research possibilities exist that have the potential of “speeding up” data collection, the capture of real-time data, for example, the immediate analysis of which can immediately answer important research questions. Social media can be used as a platform for action and participatory research approaches, again providing immediate, experiential, real-time data for analysis. As said at the beginning of the thesis, this field of study is “wide open,” and it remains so. As with all research inquiries, however, it is equally open to a variety of exciting and creative methodological approaches. It is possible to take advantage of the speed with which social media and the internet allow us to collect data, and share findings, and to balance this with approaches which allow for a sophisticated and rigorous analysis which will inevitably be more time consuming.

6.2 My voice and the voices of others

The development of this study began in 2013 and since this time, along with many others, my professional use of social media developed. The public and interactive nature of social media means it is impossible to know just how much influence my use (or non-use) of social media, and my involvement in research about it, has had on the use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa, or on the findings of this study. This research therefore, cannot claim to be “neutral.”

A crucial fact of contemporary life is that more than persisting as an environment we might try to know and understand, the world is also a dynamic effect of our interventions into it – and we know this. Hence, we know we impact the world, but we don’t know exactly how. (Dean, 2010, pp. 10-11)

Aotearoa New Zealand has a relatively small social work community and there is a subgroup of this community that participates in professional social media activities. I am a member of this community, and I acknowledge in the introduction to this thesis the paradox of being both an insider and outsider researcher – of being both a member of the group being studied, and the studier of that group. Rather than interpret these positions as dichotomous however, it is more useful to consider implications of
relationship between the two, or the costs and benefits of the “space between” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This position acknowledges, as quoted above, an inevitable impact on the world, and the following reflections on the interactions between my voice and the voices of others is intended to explore this “space” – to get closer to how this impact has informed this study.

It is a challenge to interpret the voices of others in research, and to establish a position on how to do this ethically and reflexively. In the introduction to this thesis I alluded to how I grappled with finding a useful way of listening to the voices of the participants, particularly the voices of Māori. I expressed a hope that I could authentically and most usefully represent the views of all participants by applying principles of critical reflection. It was my intention that by attending to who I was as the listener, as a genuine learner (Crawford, 2016; Jahnke & Taiapa, 2007), the space between myself and others would be “decluttered” of assumptions and expectations.

An unanticipated challenge related to this process of understanding was how to approach the interpretation of Māori kūpu (words) used by participants (including non-Māori participants) to describe their experience with social media. The ideas represented by the word kete for example, and the concept of kanohi ki te kanohi became important to the findings of this research. As a non-speaker of te reo Māori (Māori language), I was required to find a way to interpret the meaning of these words and terms so as not to trivialise them, or interpret them in a manner beyond my right or ability to do so. I consulted Māori literature, social work colleagues connected to the language, and the history of its use (whakapapa) to enhance my knowledge. However, given my cultural position, what I offer as findings in this project are infused with a Eurocentric perspective, and this reality leaves significant scope for future bicultural and kaupapa Māori research into many aspects of the use of social media in social work.

A focus on cultural concepts introduced by the participants in this project provides a point of reflection on the ethical use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. As with research, social media is a repository for knowledge; it is a place where knowledge is both communicated, stored and interpreted. Participants in this research expressed concern about how social workers conduct themselves ethically on social media, how they communicate and respect what is communicated to them. One focus group for example, conversed about the need for care in how we relate to the words of others on social media, how we must deliberately retain our obligations to those we speak with in the same way we do when meeting face to face. They expressed a wish to “keep those [obligations] alive in the way we type words out, or post, or like, because whatever we say we’re held accountable ….” (focus group 1). There is scope identified here for further thinking about how ethical wisdom and principles contained in this growing qualitative research space could be aligned with the how professional communication on social media is carried out.

179
In addition to attending to how voices were heard during the process of this research, it is important to acknowledge those social workers who were not heard. This project was conducted using internet technology, the questionnaire was distributed and completed by people using the internet, social media was used at times to find participants. This approach therefore had the potential to marginalise the experience of those who do not engage in social media. This presents a further limitation to this research that, when considered in the context of the findings, suggests scope for future research. For example, more than 50% of social workers who responded to the survey declared they did not use social media professionally, yet the social work literature predominantly endorses and is enthusiastic about professional social media use. It would be wise to pay attention to the participants in this research who expressed concern, dismay, fear about social media, and to accept that these experiences of social media are common, especially when considering the lack of support in the literature and generally, for how social workers can use social media competitently and ethically.

This research did not explore the voices of people who use social work services. Although this exploration was not an explicit aim of this research, reference was made by participants to the people they work alongside in practice; for example, to rangatahi (youth) and mokopuna (children). Social workers in this study acknowledged not only their wish to be client-led, but the reality that they are being client-led in the use of social media. In her significant study about the “emotional politics” of child protection social work in the UK, Joanne Warner (2015) cites the diversification of media as representing a “major source of potential empowerment for service users – not just independently, but also in alliance with social workers” (Warner, 2015, p. 167). It is imperative we conduct research into how social workers are, or could be, empowering service users to be social media activists, to secure basic human rights and to represent their needs at a policy level.

6.3 Knowledge and power

Influential philosopher Slavoj Žižek offers perspectives on many aspects of contemporary life including the reality of networked communications; the unique communicative qualities of the internet, and the new media of everyday life. He uses the phrase “informational anorexia” to describe how the “feast” of information available to us leaves us unable to consume it, leaves us afraid of its potential, of its unlimited possibilities. Paradoxically, the unending availability of facts and opinion on the internet strips it of its potential to satisfy our curiosities, to see the difference between right and wrong, between truth and opinion (Dean, 2006, 2010).

This reality also influenced the writing of this thesis. My research journal recorded the experience of being captured by the “depth” and power of the internet, the limitless ways of making sense of the information available to me, how I could get quickly lost in the many ideas so easily available at my fingertips. Not only was use of social media part of my everyday existence, I was alert to ideas and conversations about social media in other media spaces (for example, the radio, books, movies) and was interested in how others made sense of it – philosophers, journalists, politicians, historians, poets. At the outset I experienced the challenge of determining when to stop learning about social
media, how to pragmatically draw a line, say “enough.” This was a reality shared with the research participants who identified “distraction” and time consumption as barriers to their professional use of it and highlighted the value of new professional skills related to digital literacy, the curation of knowledge and strategies to control, not only how much of the outside world intrudes on our personal world, but how we manage this interface critically.

Although I felt overwhelmed and at times defeated by the amount of information contained in the cyberspace I was also excited by its potential and was aware of an emerging personal assumption that those who do not use social media could never be fully informed. This led to a realisation that I was being captured by the power of social media, seduced into thinking that to be modern and current one must engage tirelessly with the internet and social media. The pressure of this was increased by my position as a researcher of social media, with a further assumption that I should know even more than my peers about it. This reflection was successful in uncovering a concern with the relationship between knowledge and power and the implications of this for me as a researcher. It is possible for example, that I became so immersed in social media as a topic, so captured by its power, I minimised voices and knowledge in the findings that deserved more attention. It is clear to me however, that this reflection also led to an awareness of how I was privileging social media over social work, and this led to a deliberate decision early in the piece to describe this project as a social work thesis about social media, rather than a social media thesis about social work. This is a lesson for myself, but also for my profession, which has historically struggled with its place on the professional and social hierarchy: that, in its desperate search for legitimacy, social work is in danger of being colonised, as one participant said, by the dominant Western discourses associated with social media.

It is also possible that as a researcher of social media I was perceived by some as an expert in it, with expectations that I would demonstrate competent, prolific use of social media, and be a proponent of its use for social workers. This perception may have been reinforced by a feeling amongst social workers, as expressed in this study, that the profession lacks expertise, and that by conducting research about it I was suited to filling this gap. It is possible these were my own assumptions imposed on others, however, as a result of this thinking, I was deliberately neutral in my communications with participants in this regard, and deliberately moderate in my social media use.

Although, how my behaviour changes after writing this thesis is yet to be seen, it is important to acknowledge that a more informed stance on social media, or increased knowledge about it, does not logically equate to an increased, more visible, use of it. Reflection on this point led to a conclusion that the profession would benefit from the development of a useful measure of effective social media use. Measuring our use of social media based on its value in achieving our professional aims, for example would offer useful points of analysis for future practice.
6.4 The future

This project inspires exciting new ideas for future research, not the least of which is a curiosity about how social workers are engaging with social media now. This is significant given how quickly the social media landscape has changed since this project began in 2013. It would be valuable to know how social workers approach social media from cultural, ethnic, and other diverse perspectives, and from across various practice fields in Aotearoa New Zealand. This research challenges the profession to develop more knowledge of the growing good and bad of social media, and to find ways to balance the urgent need for this information with a reflective and critical approach.

The social work literature about social media has developed significantly over the last decade, and this growth has accelerated during the period of writing this thesis. However, there are still significant gaps in understanding about the lived reality of social workers and their use of social media. There are good arguments made in the literature that social workers should be using social media, ethical guidelines are becoming more robust, social work education is increasingly incorporating social media into its curriculum, and there is a growing critique in the literature about the power of the internet, its colonising effect, and its implications for equality and democracy. Yet there is little knowledge captured in the literature about how successfully social workers are applying this knowledge and guidance, how they are critically reflecting on their social media use, or on what criteria they are applying to their decisions about social media use. In short, there is limited “bottom-up” experience being shared by social workers who are (or are not) making professional use of social media, and this has ethical implications for the profession.

The need for research is not new to social work of course; there is equivalent urgency for research in all areas of practice, and it would perhaps be inappropriate for the novelty of social media to “colonise” the research agenda. Rather than carrying out discrete social media research, it could be carried out in the context of other studies. Given its ubiquity and the many places it intersects with daily life, it is possible to imagine questions about social media being relevant across multiple practice fields and social issues. Approaching social media in this way may capture more accurately its complex role in society and its entanglement with capitalism and neoliberalism. Also, wisdom can be found in the research and theoretical advances of other professions; social work would do well to collaborate across all possible disciplines and cultures, and develop global alliances in this regard.

Social media is an uncertain and obscure place; like all human constructions it is rife with contradictions and constraints. Despite its vast repository of fact, it does not (and should not) offer social workers the confidence of “evidence-based” answers. Despite its reliance on technology, it is human and social space. Its power is expressed and exercised in different ways depending on the context, thus requiring ethical rigour and a constantly reflective social conscience. To the participants of this study who asked hard questions of themselves and of each other, who at times expressed impatience and dismay with their profession but forged ahead with new ways of thinking, I say you show good conscience, aroha and tenacity in the face of significant challenge and opportunity.
Participants introduced to this project important cultural concepts – the social work *ketē* for example, *whakawhanaungatanga, kanohi ki te kanohi*. These concepts are spiritually and culturally sacred, yet they also have practical and relational value in the everyday lives of the people of Aotearoa. They are also symbolic of the core relationship between language and the expression of culture. Jan Fook (2012) argues the value of critical reflection to be its capacity to provide a framework within which practitioners can explore the meaning of everyday experiences, and create new meanings for changing contexts. “In remaking this meaning, people are effectively remaking and reaffirming fundamental guiding values which form the bedrock of practice” (Fook, 2012, p. 179). I have argued in this thesis that the contribution of participants to this research has been precisely that.

This thesis began with an intention to be critically reflective as a researcher; to demand of myself an honest evaluation of my personal assumptions, to open my eyes to where power lies, and to locate myself and my influence on the processes of the research (Brookfield, 2005; Fook, 2012). There was a vague sense that, by achieving this lofty vision, the final work would somehow be enhanced and that I would find, in the end, some way to articulate the outcome of this approach. Instead, this way of thinking has systematically led me back to the beginning, to look at the research questions again with new eyes, and to wonder what a new starting point might be. If social media is simply a place where we communicate as people, then new questions for social workers will be about how we sustain our focus on who we are as professionals, as members of society and as cultural beings, and how we wisely and competently make this known to others.
Appendix 1: Phase 1 ethics approval

Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Research Integrity Unit

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

18-Dec-2013

MEMORANDUM TO:
Assoc Prof Elizabeth Beddoe
Counselling, HumServ & SocWrk

Re: Application for Ethics Approval (Our Ref. 010883)

The Committee considered your application for ethics approval for your project entitled The professional use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Ethics approval was given for a period of three years.

The expiry date for this approval is 18-Dec-2016.

If the project changes significantly, you are required to submit a new application to UAHPEC for further consideration.

In order that an up-to-date record can be maintained, you are requested to notify UAHPEC once your project is completed.

The Chair and the members of UAHPEC would be happy to discuss general matters relating to ethics approvals if you wish to do so. Contact should be made through the UAHPEC Ethics Administrators at humanethics@auckland.ac.nz in the first instance.

All communication with the UAHPEC regarding this application should include this reference number: 010883.

(This is a computer generated letter. No signature required.)

UAHPEC Administrators
University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee
c.c. Head of Department / School, Counselling, HumServ & SocWrk
Mr Ian Hyslop
Ms Deborah Stanfield

Additional information:
1. Do not forget to fill in the 'approval wording' on the Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms, giving the dates of approval and the reference number, before you send them out to your participants.

2. Should you need to make any changes to the project, write to the UAHPEC Administrators by email (humanethics@auckland.ac.nz) giving full details of the proposed changes including revised documentation.

3. At the end of three years, or if the project is completed before the expiry, please advise UAHPEC of its completion.

4. Should you require an extension, write to UAHPEC by email before the expiry date, giving full details along with revised documentation. An extension can be granted for up to three years, after which a new application must be submitted.

5. If you have obtained funding other than from UniServices, send a copy of this approval letter to the Manager - Funding Processes, UoA Research Office. For UniServices contracts, send a copy of the approval letter to the Contract Manager, UniServices.

6. Please note that UAHPEC may from time to time conduct audits of approved projects to ensure that the research has been carried out according to the approval that was given.
Appendix 2: Letter to ANZASW re use of membership for survey

ANZASW National Office
Unit C, 375 Main South Road, Hornby
DX Box WX33484, Christchurch

Attention: Lucy Sandford-Reed, Chief Executive Officer

I am a student enrolled in the Master of Social Work program, School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work, Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, and as part of the academic requirements am completing a research thesis. This letter respectfully requests your permission for information about my research project to be distributed to the ANZASW (whole) membership database and for members to be invited to take part in a survey related to this project. I have attached the following:

- A copy of the Ethics Approval for the research project
- A copy of the email that I would like to send to members inviting them to take part in the survey.
- As this is an anonymous questionnaire I have not included the participant informed consent form. There will be no coding or identifying information from which the researcher, or anyone else, can identify who has completed it. The act of completing this anonymous questionnaire implies consent.

Thank you kindly for considering this request. Please contact me if you require further information.

Regards

Deb Stanfield, MANZASW
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deb Stanfield</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street Auckland 1050 New Zealand</td>
<td>+64 09 623 8899 ext.</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dsta897@auckland.ac.nz">dsta897@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor Liz Beddoe</td>
<td></td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street Auckland 1050 New Zealand</td>
<td>+64 09 623 8899 ext. 48559</td>
<td><a href="mailto:e.beddoe@auckland.ac.nz">e.beddoe@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Hyslop</td>
<td></td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street Auckland 1050 New Zealand</td>
<td>+64 09 623 8899 ext. 46439</td>
<td><a href="mailto:i.hyslop@auckland.ac.nz">i.hyslop@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil Harington</td>
<td>(Head of School)</td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street Auckland 1050 New Zealand</td>
<td>+64 09 623 8899 ext. 48562</td>
<td><a href="mailto:p.harington@auckland.ac.nz">p.harington@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chair contact details:** —For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn.87830/83761. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 18 December 2013 for (3) years, Reference Number 010883
Appendix 3: Social workers and social media survey template

Social workers and social media survey
In 2004, Web 2.0 was introduced, offering the public a new kind of relationship with the World Wide Web. Prior to this time we were able to consume large amounts of information contained on the internet. After 2004 however the general public was able to create material, leading to the concept of an online “participatory culture.” (this also includes activities such as posting responses, rating, sharing and commenting etc, referred to as social functionality). Social media has become the internet tool by which these kinds of interactions can take place, and include such applications as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Blogs. This survey seeks to gather information about the behaviour and the attitudes of New Zealand social workers and their professional use of social media. We already know that New Zealanders are very high users of social media for personal reasons, but we have little idea how we as social workers are using it in Aotearoa.

Goal of survey: “to provide a snapshot of the behaviour and attitudes of New Zealand social workers in relation to their professional use of social media.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you use social media for professional social work reasons? (Behaviour question)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How frequently do you use social media for professional social work reasons?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less frequently than once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Why do you use social media for professional social work reasons? (multi-choice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client communication/ intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (specify with text box)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How important is social media to your professional social work life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither important nor unimportant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat unimportant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unimportant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What prevents you (if anything) from using social media for professional social work reasons more than you currently use it? (multi-choice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries about privacy risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries about security risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of access to the internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries about reputational risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What prevents you from using social media for professional social work reasons? (multi-choice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I never thought about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries about privacy risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of access to the internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries about reputational risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge of how social media works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries about security risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer directives not to use social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of employer guidance regarding use of social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not aware of how social media can be used by social workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (specify with text box)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How satisfied are you with your use of social media for professional social work reasons?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How interested are you in using social media for professional social work reasons?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither interested nor disinterested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disinterested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very disinterested</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lack of knowledge of how social media works
Employer directives not to use social media
Lack of employer guidance regarding use of social media
Ethical issues
NA – nothing prevents me
Other (specify with text box)

5. **Which social media activity do you engage in more as a social worker?**
   - Sending/Sharing
   - Receiving/Viewing
   - Engage in both equally

6. **How satisfied are you with your use of social media for professional social work reasons?**
   - Very satisfied
   - Somewhat satisfied
   - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
   - Somewhat dissatisfied
   - Very dissatisfied

**Questions for both YES and No respondents:**

**Attitude questions** (what social workers think is desirable):

Please indicate how strongly you agree (seeking intensity of attitude) with the following statements (likert scale, 1-5 including don’t know):

1. Social workers should use social media as a professional development tool.
2. Social workers should use social media for networking purposes.
3. Social workers should use social media for advocacy purposes.
4. Social workers should use social media for sharing/receiving professional information.
5. Social workers should use social media for service delivery to clients.
6. Social workers should be offered training on how to use social media safely.
7. Social workers should be offered training on the potential professional uses of social media
8. Competent use of social media is important to the social work profession.

**Behaviour Question:** Do you use social media for personal reasons? (yes/no)

**Attribute questions:** (gender, length of time as a social worker, age, ethnicity)
Appendix 4: Survey email invitation to participants

Email template to ANZASW members inviting them to participate in survey

Dear ANZASW member,
I am a student enrolled in the Master of Social Work program, School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work, Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, and as part of the academic requirements am completing a research thesis. I have an established interest in the relationship between the professions of social work and journalism, and what they can offer each other in the pursuit of their professional goals. This has led me to an interest in the potential of social media, or social networking, and how New Zealand social workers approach the use of social media for professional reasons, for example, to network, for professional development or support, or to highlight or stay in touch with social issues. There is very little information available in New Zealand that answers these questions and with the rising use of social media globally and in this country, knowledge of how New Zealand social workers currently use social media will offer a platform from which the use of internet interactive forums by social workers can be further explored.

Project Procedures

This brief survey seeks very general information from you about your behaviour and attitudes towards social media for professional purposes. It should take you about 5 minutes to complete online and consists only of scales and multiple choice questions. The information you offer will be put beside other data that is being collected for this project. This includes an analysis of approximately 20 – 30 quality professional social work blogs internationally, and a small number interviews with New Zealand social workers from a variety of leadership roles in the profession. Results from the study will be provided via a summary on the ANZASW website.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

All standard precautions have been taken with respect to the data collected online. This is an anonymous questionnaire, it has no coding or identifying information from which the researcher, or anyone else, can identify who has completed it, and the act of completing this anonymous questionnaire implies consent. The researcher does not have
access to the personal details of individual participants. Data will be stored in encrypted computer files for 6 years at which time it will be destroyed according to university policy, and results from the research will be made available to the participants via ANZASW.

**Here is the link to the survey:**

Please contact me or my supervisors (details below) if you have any questions or would like further information:

Thank you for your participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Deb Stanfield       | The University of Auckland  
                      Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street  
                      Auckland 1050 New Zealand  
                      Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext.  
                      Email: dsta897@aucklanduni.ac.nz |
| Associate Professor Liz Beddoe | The University of Auckland  
                      Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street  
                      Auckland 1050 New Zealand  
                      Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext. 48559  
                      Email: e.beddoe@auckland.ac.nz |
| Ian Hyslop          | The University of Auckland  
                      Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street  
                      Auckland 1050 New Zealand  
                      Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext. 46439  
                      Email: i.hyslop@auckland.ac.nz |
| Phil Harington      | The University of Auckland  
                      Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street  
                      Auckland 1050 New Zealand  
                      Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext. 48562  
                      Email: p.harington@auckland.ac.nz |

**Chair contact details:** —For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn.87830/83761. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz.

---

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE**

**ON 18 December 2013 for (3) years, Reference Number 010883**
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET
(Survey)

Project Title: The professional use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand
Name of researcher: Deb Stanfield
Researcher introduction
I am a student enrolled in the Master of Social Work program, School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work, Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, and as part of the academic requirements am completing a research thesis. I have an established interest in the relationship between the professions of social work and journalism, and what they can offer each other in the pursuit of their professional goals. This has led me to an interest in the potential of social media, or social networking, and how New Zealand social workers approach the use of social media for professional reasons, for example, to network, for professional development or support, or to highlight or stay in touch with social issues. There is very little information available in New Zealand that answers these questions and with the rising use of social media globally and in this country, knowledge of how New Zealand social workers currently use social media will offer a platform from which the use of internet interactive forums by social workers can be further explored.

Project Procedures
This brief survey seeks very general information from you about your behaviour and attitudes towards social media for professional purposes. It should take you about 10 minutes to complete online and consists only of scales and multiple choice questions. The information you offer will be put beside other data that is being collected for this project. This includes an analysis of approximately 20 – 30 quality professional social work blogs internationally, and a small number interviews with New Zealand social...
workers from a variety of leadership roles in the profession. Results from the study will be provided via a summary on the ANZASW website.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality**

All standard precautions have been taken with respect to the data collected online. This is an anonymous questionnaire, it has no coding or identifying information from which the researcher, or anyone else, can identify who has completed it, and act of completing this anonymous questionnaire implies consent. The researcher does not have access to the personal details of individual participants. Data will be stored in encrypted computer files for 6 years at which time it will be destroyed according to university policy, and results from the research will be made available to the participants via ANZASW.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deb Stanfield</th>
<th>Associate Professor Liz Beddoe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street</td>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland 1050 New Zealand</td>
<td>Auckland 1050 New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext.</td>
<td>Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext. 48559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:dsta897@auckland.ac.nz">dsta897@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:e.beddoe@auckland.ac.nz">e.beddoe@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ian Hyslop</th>
<th>Phil Harington (Head of School)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street</td>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland 1050 New Zealand</td>
<td>Auckland 1050 New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext. 46439</td>
<td>Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext. 48562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:i.hyslop@auckland.ac.nz">i.hyslop@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:p.harington@auckland.ac.nz">p.harington@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chair contact details:** —For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn.87830/83761. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 18 December 2013 for (3) years, Reference Number 010883
Appendix 6: Key informant interview schedule

Project Title: The professional use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand
Name of researcher: Deb Stanfield

Key informant semi structured interview schedule
The purpose of this interview is to gather your views and opinions about how you and other social workers in New Zealand use social media for professional purposes. The following questions will guide the interview and there may be additional questions to explore your answers in greater depth.

1. Please describe your professional use of social media as a social worker in New Zealand.
2. Please describe the value of social media to you in your current role. For example, to what extent does it support you/hinder you in carrying out your role as a social worker?
3. What are the main challenges faced by you in your professional use of social media? Benefits? Risks?
4. What is your opinion about the importance of social media to the New Zealand social work profession?
5. Please describe your experience/observation of how New Zealand social workers are currently using (or not using) social media? Do you have opinion about, or explanation for this?
6. Do you think NZ social workers should change the way they engage with social media? If so, what do you suggest?
7. What do you consider to be the unique characteristics of the NZ social work profession that might influence how it engages, or could engage with social media? (it may be useful to put this into an international “comparative” context).
8. Do you have further views or comments about how you or other social workers in New Zealand use/don’t use/could use social media?

Thank you
Appendix 7: Transcriber confidentiality agreement

TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Project Title: The professional use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand
Researcher: Deb Stanfield
Supervisor: Liz Beddoe
Transcriber:
I agree to transcribe the audiotapes for the above research project. I understand that the information contained within them is confidential and must not be disclosed to, or discussed with, anyone other than the researcher and her supervisor(s).

Name: _____________________________
Signature: __________________________
Date: ______________________________
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(Key Informants)

Project Title: The professional use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand

Name of researcher: Deb Stanfield

Researcher introduction

I am a student enrolled in the Masters of Social Work program, School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work, Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, and as part of the academic requirements am completing a research thesis. I have an established interest in the relationship between the professions of social work and journalism, and what they can offer each other in the pursuit of their professional goals. This has led me to an interest in the potential of social media, or social networking, and how New Zealand social workers approach the use of social media for professional reasons, for example, to network, for professional development or support, or to highlight or stay in touch with social issues. There is very little information available in New Zealand that answers these questions and with the rising use of social media globally and in this country, knowledge of how New Zealand social workers currently use social media will offer a platform from which the use of internet interactive forums (social media) by social workers can be further explored.

Project Procedures

I invite you, as one of approximately ten social work professional leaders in New Zealand to participate in an individual semi-structured interview to explore your views and opinions about the importance of social media to social work in New Zealand. Questions will focus on how social media is used, on the unique nature of NZ social work and how this is/may be reflected in its approach to social media.
This second phase of the study will be building on data collected in the first phase which includes a content analysis of approximately 20 – 30 quality professional social work blogs internationally, and a broad, quantitative survey of New Zealand social workers about their participation in social media.

We have also selected you as a (social work academic/ manager/ practitioner) so that a range of social work roles can be represented in the study, and because you have been identified as someone who has some involvement or competence in the use of social media. The interview will take approximately one hour to complete. I will conduct the interview at a time and place that is convenient to you. The interview will be recorded by a digital voice recorder. You may request, however, that the record be turned off at any time. You can also refuse to answer a question or ask to terminate the interview at any time. A copy of the interview schedule is attached.

What happens after the interview?

The recorded information will be transcribed by me and/or a transcriber and you will receive a copy of the transcript if you indicate this on your Consent Form. If a transcriber is used they will sign a confidentiality agreement stating that the information contained within the transcription is confidential and must not be disclosed to, or discussed with, anyone other than the researcher and his/her supervisor(s).

You can make changes or withdraw any information provided if you wish to and return your transcript with correction or additions to the interviewer up until 30 November 2014. At the completion of the research, you will receive one page summary of the major findings if you wish to. The results of the project may be published later. Your name will not be identified throughout the production of the thesis report and later publication.

Is there any risk or benefit?

It is anticipated that there are no risks associated with participating in this study. Although this research will not benefit you personally and directly, the findings will add to the knowledge about social workers’ participation in social media. Your name will remain private at all times during the research and after completion of the research however as the research involves interviews with small numbers of participants who are well known members of the professional community confidentiality cannot be completely guaranteed. All research data will be safely stored by the main supervisor in a secure place at the University of Auckland and will be destroyed after six years.

Participant Consent

You will be asked to sign a consent form which will contain the following information and consent options. You will be offered the right to withdraw from participating in the
research at any time and the right to withdraw your data from the research up to 30 November 2014 when the data analysis will begin. You will be offered the option of having the interview recorded, and options regarding the storage of the recordings and/or transcriptions. As mentioned above, the research involves interviews with small numbers of individuals and well-known members of the community therefore confidentiality with respect to your identity cannot be guaranteed, and this will be made clear to you in the consent form.

Contact details for the researcher, supervisor and Head of Department.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deb Stanfield</th>
<th>Associate Professor Liz Beddoe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street</td>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland 1050 New Zealand</td>
<td>Auckland 1050 New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext.</td>
<td>Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext. 48559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:dsta897@aucklanduni.ac.nz">dsta897@aucklanduni.ac.nz</a></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:e.beddoe@auckland.ac.nz">e.beddoe@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ian Hyslop</th>
<th>Phil Harington (Head of School)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street</td>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland 1050 New Zealand</td>
<td>Auckland 1050 New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext. 46439</td>
<td>Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext. 48562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:i.hyslop@auckland.ac.nz">i.hyslop@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:p.harington@auckland.ac.nz">p.harington@auckland.ac.nz</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chair contact details: —For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn.87830/83761. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 18 December 2013 for (3) years, Reference Number 010883
Appendix 9: Key informant interviews Consent Form

Consent Form for Participants
(Key Informants)

This consent form will be held in a secure cabinet at the University of Auckland for six years.

Project title: The professional use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand

Name of Researcher: Deb Stanfield

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been asked to participate. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

☐ I agree to take part in this research.

☐ I understand that this interview will take approximately one hour and that I am free to withdraw participation at any time, and to withdraw any data traceable to me up to 30 November 2014.

☐ I agree / do not agree to be digitally audio-recorded. Even if you agree to being recorded, you may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time.

☐ I understand that the recording will be transcribed by the researcher and/or a transcriber and the data will be stored in a format accessible only by the researcher and her supervisors and kept for 6 years.

☐ I understand that the transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement stating that the information contained within the transcription is confidential and must not be disclosed to, or discussed with, anyone other than the researcher and his/her supervisor(s).

☐ I understand that I can have a copy of the transcript emailed to me and will have two weeks to make any changes to the transcript.

☐ I understand that data will be kept for 6 years, after which they will be destroyed.

☐ I understand that as this research involves interviews with small numbers of individuals who are well-known members of the community confidentiality with respect to my identity cannot be guaranteed.

☐ I agree to the use of direct quotes from this interview to be used in this final project document, although they will be presented anonymously I understand that there may be some identifying information contained in them and that complete anonymity will not be possible

- I understand that my Consent Form will be stored separately from other data collected
• I wish /do not wish to receive the summary of the findings – address to send this summary to the email address…………………………………………………………………………………..
Postal address…………………………………………………………………………………………

Participants’
Name……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………
Signature………………………………………………………Date………………………………

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 18 December 2013, Reference Number 2013/ 010883
Appendix 10: Relationship between research questions and data by method used as a guide for mixing of phase one data (variation of Creswell, 2014, p. 162)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey data</th>
<th>Interview data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are New Zealand social workers participating professionally in social media?</td>
<td>Do you use social media for professional reasons? (46.5% yes, 53.5% no)</td>
<td><strong>Utility Theme:</strong> Professional development Networking and advocacy Client and organisational work Source of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency:</strong></td>
<td>on average respondents used social media between once a week and a few times a week</td>
<td><strong>Preventive/limiting factors:</strong> Concern about privacy dominates the response to this question, indicating that over half of the social workers responding to this survey were constrained by this perceived or real risk, Time also a significant limiting factor No significant age factor Employer bans: non-users were more likely to be affected by lack of employer guidance (30%) than users (14.6%), and non-users were more likely to be advised by their employers not to use social media (30%) than those who use it (22.9%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reasons:</strong> half of the users of social media said they use it for professional development, less than half for research, information sharing and professional development. Client and advocacy work under 30% Utility Theme:</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Double edged sword theme:</strong> the binary nature of the answers and positions seen in the survey data. <strong>Face to face theme:</strong> managing tensions of communication <strong>Identity theme:</strong> managing public/private identity <strong>Utility theme:</strong> ideas put forward by participants about how social media is used by them and others. Include technology challenges (not on survey) and employer bans (on survey).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do New Zealand social workers perceive to be the professional benefits and challenges of social media?</td>
<td><strong>Usefulness of various activities:</strong> Opinion that social media was at least more than useful for all professional activities listed in the survey, professional development, research and networking were all assessed generally to be of equal value, except for direct client work or service delivery for which there was less value attributed. <strong>Preventive/limiting factors:</strong> Concern about privacy dominates the response to this question, indicating that over half of the social workers responding to this survey were constrained by this perceived or real risk, Time also a significant limiting factor No significant age factor Employer bans: non-users were more likely to be affected by lack of employer guidance (30%) than users (14.6%), and non-users were more likely to be advised by their employers not to use social media (30%) than those who use it (22.9%).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the opinion of New Zealand social workers about the value of social media to</td>
<td><strong>Opinions and attitudes:</strong> Social workers should be competent, make professional use of, be offered training in safety and potential, and Competent use of social media is</td>
<td><strong>Relevance and challenges:</strong> Challenges from the interviewees about all the potential and reasons for using, and innovations presented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the profession?</td>
<td>Important to the social work profession. All agreed with these statements, stronger agreement was related to training about safety and potential for use. <strong>Importance:</strong> Social workers who use social media on average considered social media as being somewhat important to their role as a professional social worker. <strong>Interest</strong> Non-users of social media for professional reasons were neither interested nor disinterested in using it professionally. This neutral stance offers some insight into the desire of non-social media users to become engaged, however it is also useful to consider the cumulative percentage figures to further understand the responses. Approximately one third of respondents are actively disinterested (33.2%), and almost half of the respondents (46.3%) are actively interested, and approximately 20% take a neutral stance in this regard, indicating a level of indifference and/or cautious openness.</td>
<td>Relationship between reticence of survey participants with enthusiasm of key informants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the perceptions of social workers about their knowledge of social media?</td>
<td>Data from the question: What are the barriers to using social media? (option: lack of knowledge) 21% of non-users cite lack of knowledge for not using social media. For users this number is 27%.</td>
<td><strong>Identity theme:</strong> Individual identity Social work identity Opinion of key informants about the general knowledge level of social workers about social media. <strong>Further knowledge: Focus Groups</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the desires of New Zealand social workers regarding the development of their knowledge and skills related to social media, and (if relevant) how would their learning be best facilitated?</td>
<td><strong>Satisfaction:</strong> Survey participants who use social media professionally were less than somewhat satisfied with their use. This result indicates that a significant number of social workers found their use of social media wanting in some way which may or may not indicate an interest in changing how they use social media. Information about desire to change use of social media was not gathered directly by the survey. <strong>Training:</strong> Nearly 50% of users strongly agreed that social workers should</td>
<td><strong>Relevance and challenges:</strong> Opinions about developing skills of profession collectively. <strong>Further knowledge: Focus Groups</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
be trained in the potential of social media for the profession, compared to 28% of non-users however the cumulative percentage of non-users who show a level of agreement (between strongly agree and agree) is 87%, while the equivalent level of agreement within users is 93%.

Participants more than agreed with the importance of training about the safety of social media, and its potential for use.
MEMORANDUM TO:

Assoc Prof Elizabeth Beddoe
Counselling, HumServ & SocWrk

Re: Application for Ethics Approval (Our Ref. 017069): Approved

The Committee considered your application for ethics approval for your project entitled *The professional use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand.*

We are pleased to inform you that ethics approval is granted for a period of three years.

The expiry date for this approval is 27-May-2019.

If the project changes significantly, you are required to submit a new application to UAHPEC for further consideration.

If you have obtained funding other than from UniServices, send a copy of this approval letter to the Research Office, at ro-awards@auckland.ac.nz. For UniServices contracts, send a copy of the approval letter to the Contract Manager, UniServices.

In order that an up-to-date record can be maintained, you are requested to notify UAHPEC once your project is completed.

The Chair and the members of UAHPEC would be happy to discuss general matters relating to ethics approvals. If you wish to do so, please contact the UAHPEC Ethics Administrators at rp-ethics@auckland.ac.nz in the first instance.

Please quote reference number: **017069** on all communication with the UAHPEC regarding this application.

(This is a computer generated letter. No signature required.)

UAHPEC Administrators
University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee

c.c. Head of Department / School, Counselling, HumServ & SocWrk
Ms Deborah Stanfield
Dr Ian Hyslop

Additional information:
1. Do not forget to fill in the ‘approval wording’ on the Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms, giving the dates of approval and the reference number, before you send them out to your participants.

2. Should you need to make any changes to the project, please complete the online proposed changes and include any revised documentation.

3. At the end of three years, or if the project is completed before the expiry, please advise UAHPEC of its completion.

4. Should you require an extension, please complete the online Amendment Request form associated with this approval number giving full details along with revised documentation. An extension can be granted for up to three years; after which a new application must be submitted.

5. Please note that UAHPEC may from time to time conduct audits of approved projects to ensure that the research has been carried out according to the approval that was given.
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(Focus Group Participants)

Project Title: The professional use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand

Name of researcher: Deb Stanfield

Researcher introduction

I am a PhD candidate in the School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Auckland, and as part of the academic requirements am completing a research thesis. I have an established interest in social media and how New Zealand social workers approach the use of social media for professional reasons, for example, to network, for professional development or support, or to highlight or stay in touch with social issues. There is little information available in New Zealand that answers these questions and with the rising use of social media globally and in this country, I believe that knowledge of how New Zealand social workers currently use social media will offer a platform from which the use of social media by social workers can be further explored.

I have already completed some work related to this question as part of my PhD research. I ran a survey of ANZASW members in 2014, and conducted some interviews with New Zealand social workers who had expertise in the social media use in social work, or who held leadership positions in the profession. I was interested in how social workers use social media and in their opinions about the place of social media in their professional lives. Much of the preliminary information offered by these participants led to findings that social workers are interested in learning more about social media and that they believe more knowledge about social media use is important for the profession.
This information has made me more curious about what social workers would like to know, and how they think would be the best way to gain this knowledge. These questions are ones I think would be valuable to pose to a focus group.

**Project Procedures**

I am inviting you to attend a focus group that will be planned for a time and place suitable to all participants. This group will have a minimum of 4 participants and a maximum of 8. The focus group session will take no longer than 2 hours of your time, will be facilitated by me, the researcher, and will be voice recorded using a digital recording device. My role will be to pose the questions, to support dialogue and to assist the group to maintain focus on the question. I will be responsible for ensuring a safe, non-discriminatory and enjoyable experience for participants. Participants will be consulted about how they would like to open and close the group and appropriate cultural protocol will be attended to as negotiated.

The group discussion will be focused on these questions:

6. What is your existing knowledge about social work and social media?
7. What knowledge would you like to develop?
8. How would you like to develop this knowledge?
9. What are the implications of this new knowledge for your social work practice?
10. What are the implication of this new knowledge for the social work profession?

**What happens after the focus group?**

The recorded information will be transcribed by me and/or a transcriber. If a transcriber is used they will sign a confidentiality agreement stating that the information contained within the transcription is confidential and must not be disclosed to, or discussed with, anyone other than the researcher and her supervisors.

At the completion of the research, you will receive one-page summary of the major findings if you wish to. The results of the project may be published later. Your name will not be identified throughout the production of the thesis report or later publication.

**Is there any risk or benefit?**

It is anticipated that there are no risks associated with participating in this study. Although this research will not benefit you personally and directly, the findings will add to the knowledge about social workers’ participation in social media. Your name will remain private at all times during the research and after completion of the research however as the research involves interviews with small numbers of participants who are members of a small professional community confidentiality cannot be completely guaranteed. All research data will be safely stored by the main supervisor in a secure place and in a format.
accessible only by the researcher and her main supervisor at the University of Auckland and will be destroyed after six years.

**Participant Consent**

You will be asked to sign a consent form which will contain the following information and consent options. You will be offered the right to withdraw from the focus group meeting or discussion at any time, and you have the right to refuse to answer any questions without giving a reason. However, because of the interactive nature of the focus group, the recording device cannot be turned off during the discussion and, if you withdraw from the research, information you have contributed up to that point cannot be withdrawn. Doing this risks compromising the data offered by other focus group members who do not wish to withdraw from the research. For the same reason it will not be possible for you to review the recordings or the transcripts of those recordings. Every attempt will be made by the researcher to maintain confidentiality of the participants in the focus group, however because of the nature of focus groups it is not possible for the researcher to guarantee confidentiality. You will be asked to make a non-disclosure statement on the Consent Form that asks you to maintain the confidentiality of information that you are party to during the focus group session. As the research involves focus groups with small numbers of individuals and well-known members of the community, confidentiality with respect to your identity cannot be guaranteed, and this will be made clear to you in the consent form.

**Contact details for the researcher, supervisor and Head of Department.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>The University of Auckland</th>
<th>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street</th>
<th>Auckland 1050  New Zealand</th>
<th>Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext.</th>
<th>Email:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deb Stanfield</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:dsta897@aucklanduni.ac.nz">dsta897@aucklanduni.ac.nz</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor Liz Beddoe</td>
<td></td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street</td>
<td>Auckland 1050  New Zealand</td>
<td>Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext. 48559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Hyslop</td>
<td></td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street</td>
<td>Auckland 1050  New Zealand</td>
<td>Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext. 46439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christa Fouche (Head of School)</td>
<td></td>
<td>The University of Auckland</td>
<td>Private Bag 92601 Symonds Street</td>
<td>Auckland 1050  New Zealand</td>
<td>Tel: +64 09 623 8899 ext. 48648</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chair contact details:** —For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University
of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 27 May 2016 for (3) years, Reference Number 017069
Appendix 13: Focus group Consent Form

Consent Form for Participants
(Focus Group)

This consent form will be held in a secure cabinet at the University of Auckland for six years.

Project title: The professional use of social media by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand

Name of Researcher: Deb Stanfield

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been asked to participate. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

☐ I agree to take part in this research.

☐ I understand that the focus group will take approximately two hours and that I am free to withdraw from the focus group meeting prior to the end of the focus group session, or refuse to answer a question without giving a reason.

☐ I understand that the focus group will be digitally audio-recorded however I will not be able to withdraw any data contributed by me as the information belonging to other focus group members will be on the same recording.

☐ I understand that the recording will be transcribed by the researcher and/or a transcriber and the data will be stored in a format accessible only by the researcher and her supervisors and kept for 6 years, after which it will be destroyed.

☐ I understand that the transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement stating that the information contained within the transcription is confidential and must not be disclosed to, or discussed with, anyone other than the researcher and her supervisor(s).

☐ I understand that as this research involves interviews with small numbers of individuals who are members of a small professional community, and because of the interactive nature of focus groups, confidentiality with respect to my identity cannot be guaranteed.

☐ I agree I agree to maintain confidentiality of information that I am party to during the focus group session.

☐ I agree to the use of direct quotes from this focus group to be used in this final project document, although they will be presented anonymously I understand that there may be some identifying information contained in them and that complete anonymity will not be possible.
I understand that my Consent Form will be stored separately from other data collected.

I wish /do not wish to receive the summary of the findings – address to send this summary to the email address or this postal address ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Participant’s Name…………………………………………………………………………………………………………
Signature………………………………………………Date………………………………………………………

**Chair contact details:** —For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz).

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 27 May 2016 for (3) years, Reference Number 017069**
Appendix 14: Email invitation to participate in focus groups

Email invitation to participate in research
(Focus Group Participants)

Email to: Branch members (2 branches) of Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW)
Subject: Social work and social media research invitation

Email body:
Kia ora koutou,

My name is Deb Stanfield; I am a member of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), a registered social worker, supervisor, and a social work educator at Wintec, in Hamilton. I am currently undertaking research that explores how social workers in this country use social media professionally. I ran a survey via ANZASW in 2014 asking you (the membership) questions about your professional use of, and attitude towards social media. This survey received a very high response rate – many thanks to all who participated! The preliminary results are very interesting:

When asked whether or not members used social media for professional reasons, 47% of you said yes, and 53% said no. In addition, analysis of your answers led to some general findings that social workers in Aotearoa are interested in learning more about social media and that you believe more knowledge about social media use is important for the profession.

Considering what you told me in the survey, together with data generated from some key informant interviews conducted alongside the survey, I am now curious about what social workers feel they should about social media, and how they would like to gain this knowledge. I feel strongly that the social work voice should guide our profession in the development of this knowledge and I believe the best way to find answers to these questions is by consulting small social work focus groups. I propose to facilitate these groups as a continuation of my research, and I invite you participate in one.
This research is being conducted in my capacity as a PhD student at The University of Auckland School of Education and Social Work, and I have attached the Participant Information Sheet that contains further information about the project. I warmly invite you to contact me if you are interested in participating in a focus group. I am happy to answer any further questions, and can be contacted by email:

deb.stanfield@wintec.ac.nz

Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Ngā mihi

Deb Stanfield,
PhD Candidate,
University of Auckland,
School of Education and Social Work
References


