

**Superhero Stories and Why They Matter:  
The Hero's Journey of SpiderMable on Twitter**

By

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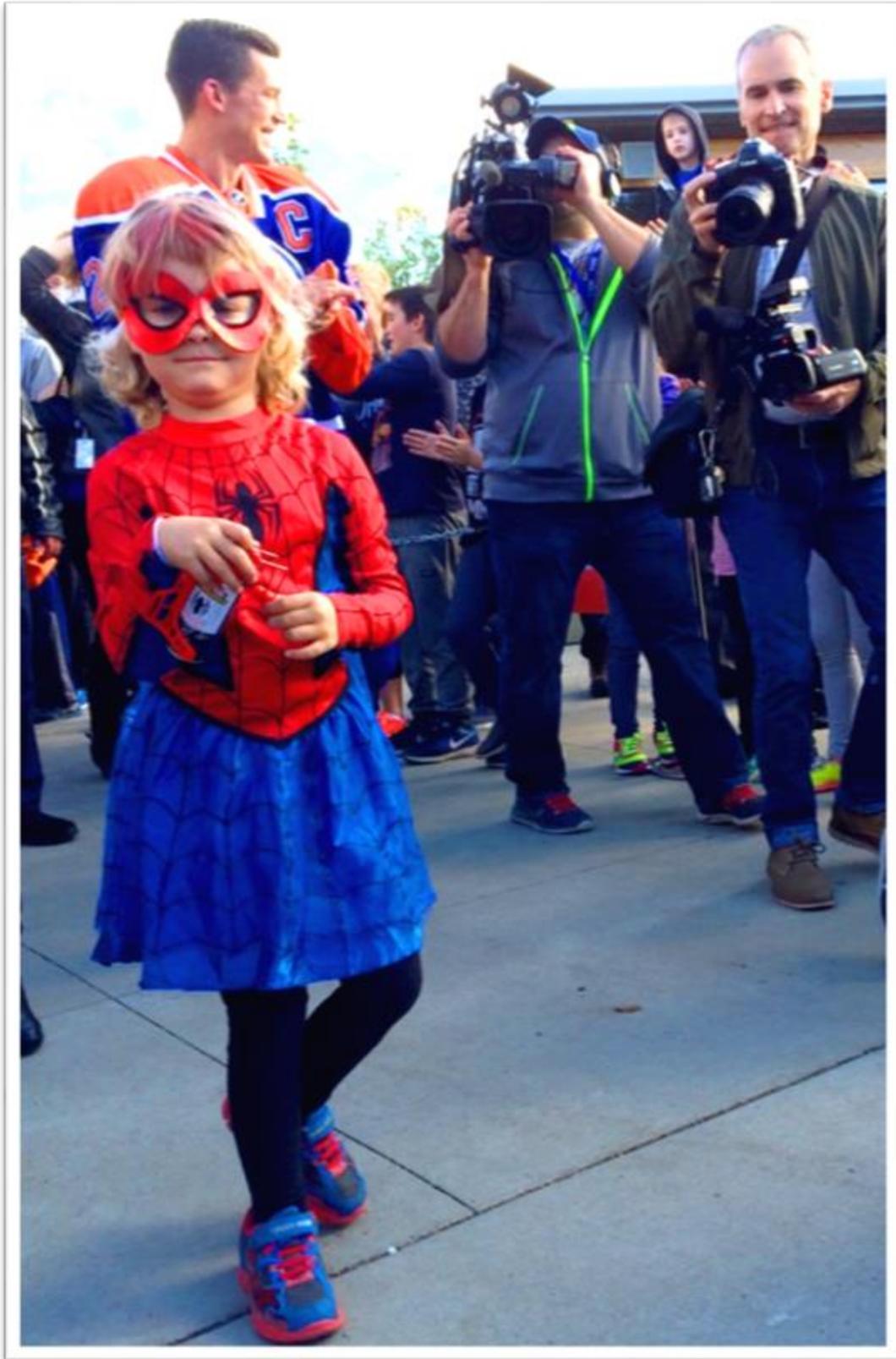
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### **Abstract**

Stories help us to connect and communicate with each other. Throughout history, the collection of these stories developed into the mythology of a culture and way to share and understand our collective experiences, values, and beliefs. However, there is a knowledge gap in the research examining the relationship of the evolution of the hero archetype in superhero stories, and the impact on how these stories can engage individuals to connect in real life and on social media. Accordingly, my research, which is guided by sociological and sociocultural perspectives, uses an exploratory case study approach to understand “Why did Edmontonians relate to the ‘real-life’ superhero story of SpiderMable on Twitter?” My research uses a text-oriented qualitative methodology combining discourse analysis and content analysis to analyze tweets from Twitter referencing the #SpiderMable hashtag during a 48-hour timeframe when the story of SpiderMable emerged online and in the public sphere. To analyze this data I apply the model of the “Hero’s Journey” also known as a monomyth defined by mythologist Joseph Campbell in 1949 as a single, universal, and timeless story to test if it still applies to the interpretation of superhero stories on social media. I also conducted a qualitative interview with SpiderMable’s mother Lisa to situate my analysis in a direct account and perspective with events during that timeframe. The content is then examined to determine why stories of superheroes can unite individuals. These findings will provide insight into the influence superheroes have on society, and how these stories affect and can inspire behaviours, unity, and participation through social media.

**Keywords:** Superheroes, SpiderMable, Sociological, Sociocultural, Storytelling, Hero Archetype, Twitter, Joseph Campbell, Hero’s Journey, Collective Action.



SpiderMable, September, 28, 2015. Photo copyright and courtesy of: Bekki Hall

## **Chapter 1: Research Investigation**

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Once upon a time...there was a six-year-old girl named Mable who lived in the City of Edmonton, Alberta. She dreamed about being a superhero like her idol Spider-Man while she underwent treatments for acute lymphoblastic leukemia (Tumilty, 2015). Mable first learned about Spider-Man while she was in hospital and he quickly became her favorite superhero because they both shared something in common – they both had radioactive blood (Purdy, 2015). Superhero fiction is a genre of stories that is becoming more popular in society through comics, cartoons, and movies, as stories help us connect and communicate with each other. How are these stories about superheroes influencing us in the real world, and how can they inspire individuals to unite towards a greater cause? On September 28, 2015, Mable's wish came true when the Children's Wish Foundation and supporters from across the city rallied together to help transform Mable into Edmonton's own superhero...SpiderMable (Pruden, 2015). The effect of her hero's journey not only inspired the local community but also resonated throughout social media and news broadcasts around the world and was one of the most trending topics on Twitter during that day. From sociological and sociocultural perspectives, what connected so many individuals on social media to relate and respond to the heroic story of SpiderMable?

### **Purpose of Study**

This research project investigates “Why did Edmontonians relate to the ‘real-life’ superhero story of SpiderMable on Twitter?” Understanding how superhero stories can unite and influence individuals by harnessing the power of social media will add to existing literature and help to advance collective action by demonstrating how these stories can inspire behaviours and unity.

The amazing story of SpiderMable is not the first real-life 'super-heroic' journey to be told through social media. A similar event occurred in San Francisco in 2013 when activities supported by the city and social media conversations about them transformed a five-year-old leukemia patient into Batkid so he could fulfill his dream of being a superhero with Batman for a day (Ramsay & Kornik, 2015). There are many of these kinds of stories told about heroes, but why do people relate to them? According to mythologist Joseph Campbell (1949), it is because the hero's story is a "monomyth" – a single, universal, and timeless story. After analyzing hundreds of stories across time, Campbell developed a model called the "Hero's Journey" in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) that documented the pattern of narrative he argued all hero stories follow.

This research project assesses if the narrative model of the Hero's Journey is still relevant today, and if it applies to the interpretation of superhero stories that people tell one another on social media platforms (user-generated content). The impact of online social media has tremendously increased the speed, scale, and ease of distribution for sharing information with an audience. I analyze public Twitter data by applying Campbell's Hero's Journey model to study why Edmontonians related to the superhero story of SpiderMable. I evaluate the patterns that emerge in social media conversations about SpiderMable to study how using superheroes in storytelling connects people, and what elements of theory are relevant in understanding the Hero's Journey model and impact on individual behaviour to influence collective action. The following sub-questions guided this investigation and study:

**RQ1:** What factors of social media (Twitter) helped SpiderMable's story go viral online and in doing so, connect audiences together?

**RQ2:** Can SpiderMable be defined as a superhero: and if so, how has our understanding of the hero archetype evolved?

**RQ3:** Does the Hero's Journey model apply to superhero stories told on social media?

**RQ4:** How does the Hero's Journey support a shared experience of individuals to unite?

The power of this research in helping us understand how these components function and correlate is that it can support certain elements to potentially be replicated as a template that uses social media and the model of the Hero's Journey to unite individuals together and inspire collective behaviour in a range of contexts.

### **Background**

SpiderMable's story began on September 28, 2015, when the Children's Wish Foundation made a dream come true for Mable to be transformed into a superhero and fight crime with Spider-Man for a day in the City of Edmonton. SpiderMable's adventures were captured in real-time on social media and was also shared across a variety of other media channels such as radio, television, and newspaper. Twitter provided the richest source of real-time commentary from the public. Through analysis of Twitter data, SpiderMable's adventures can be historically tracked and documented in a time-sequential order to study what Edmontonians were thinking through their conversation and dialogue with others in the public as they used the hashtag #SpiderMable to track her adventures. The #SpiderMable hashtag was retweeted from as far as China, Australia, and Brazil (Ramsay, 2015). Over 34,400 tweets were generated on Twitter on September 28 and 29, 2015 referencing #SpiderMable.

### **Origin of SpiderMable**

Mable's mother, Lisa (2017) shared that SpiderMable's adventures started with a song. Mable was diagnosed with leukemia at the age of four, on Friday the 13th, September 2013. She was at the hospital when the Spider-Man theme song came on... "Spider-Man, Spider-Man, does whatever a spider can" (Marvel, 2017). Lisa acknowledged it was an earworm and that led to Mabel requesting videos, cartoons, comic books, and anything you can think of that was related to Spider-Man, because of that song. Lisa (2007) reflected, "We had a child sitting in the hospital for quite some time, at least a month, we had to do something. I learned to knit, and she read and watched Spider-Man. Mable related to Spider-Man because they both shared radioactive blood." As she was going through treatment, the Children's Wish Foundation (Edmonton) met with Mable to find out what her wish would be, and immediately she said it was to meet her hero Spider-Man.

Lisa observed, "SpiderMable was a chemo-induced fantasy-fueled escapist adventure of personal significance and power. It was based on the whole idea of one insignificant individual having power over themselves, and even possibly over others (2017)."

On September 28, 2015, the Children's Wish Foundation made Mable's wish come true as she would go on a heroic journey as the amazing SpiderMable. "The day was a total surprise to every single person involved," shared Lisa (2017). "None of us, absolutely not a single person involved in planning that day had any idea it was going to explode the way it did, we were hoping to just spend a day with Spider-Man and maybe help bring down a villain. None of us had any idea of the power of social media" (Lisa, 2017).

Lisa recalled, "The day started when Mable was having breakfast at 7:00 a.m. and camera crews stopped by and played Mable a video, stating SpiderMable was being called for action by

the Edmonton Police Service to help save local Edmonton Oilers hockey captain Andrew Ferrence who was kidnapped by a mysterious villain. Mable's reaction was a puzzled look... Huh? And that soon turned to 'Heehee, let's go!'" (2017). SpiderMable suited up and first went to City Hall at 9:00 a.m., where she met her hero Spider-Man who joined her on her quest. Together they met Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson who gave her web slingers and proclaimed SpiderMable had full access to be a superhero to save the city and rescue Edmonton Oilers hockey captain Andrew Ferrence from the identified villain known as Mysterio (a Spider-Man villain). At 9:30 a.m., SpiderMable met with the Edmonton Police Service Deputy Chief who briefed her on the case and provided her with a bag full of crime-fighting tools for her journey. At 11:30 a.m., SpiderMable and Spider-Man visited West Edmonton Mall's Waterpark where SpiderMable went zip-lining to save another ally named the Black Cat (a Spider-Man friend). At 1:00 p.m., SpiderMable visited Galaxy Land at West Edmonton Mall and did superhero training on the rope quest challenge. At 1:30 p.m., the villain Mysterio was seen riding on a rollercoaster and dropped clues that SpiderMable had to solve. At 2:00 p.m., SpiderMable was at the Edmonton Valley Zoo to look for more clues and Lucy the Elephant gave her another mystery to solve. At 3:00 p.m., the climax happened as Lisa reminisced, "While at the zoo, SpiderMable found Ferrence's skates, hockey puck, and hockey stick at one of the animal exhibits and then suddenly we heard this song on the megaphone speakers... 'Spider.... Mable.... boom, boom, boom....Spider....Mable....boom, boom, boom....'"(Lisa, 2017). SpiderMable, Spider-Man, and the Black Cat see the villain Mysterio and the captured hockey captain Ferrence tied up in rope. SpiderMable used her web slingers to web Mysterio up and he was taken to the police wagon, while SpiderMable saved Ferrence and the City of Edmonton from danger.

The hero's journey of SpiderMable was a wish that came true for Mable as she got to spend time fighting crime with Spider-Man and be a superhero for a day. Through its telling and retelling across a variety of media, SpiderMable's story has become an epic adventure that continues to inspire and follows the heroic story structure of the Hero's Journey outlined by Joseph Campbell and the final stage of "Return with the Elixir" where "the hero returns home bearing some element of the treasure that has the power to transform the world as the hero has been transformed" (Vogler, 1985, p.6).

### **Preview of Literature**

Superhero stories are becoming more popular through comics, cartoons, and movies. As James Grebey (2016) reported, "According to Comichron, a blog that covers comic book sales figures, June 2016 was the best-selling month for the industry since December of 1997" as "retailers ordered about 8.53 million copies of the Top 300 comics." Despite their long history, the appeal of heroes and superheroes continues to grow. In the next component of my research, I review the literature on this topic to understand the role that storytelling has on people and why it connects individuals together. Joseph Campbell's work was studied to incorporate the use of his model of the Hero's Journey to this case study, and to evaluate how his concept of the "monomyth" functions and translates in a social media environment. Social media was assessed to establish how online social networking functions and what factors may have contributed to SpiderMable's story going viral. Finally, an exploration of theories, and in particular the Hero's Journey, was reviewed to provide a framework for understanding how SpiderMable's story united, inspired and influenced individuals in Edmonton and beyond.

### **Preview of Methodology**

What powers do superhero stories have to connect people together and why? Lisa conveyed that: "Superheroes give people hope" (2017). To understand more of this phenomena and how individuals and the public may view superhero stories, I analyzed public Twitter commentary about SpiderMable's adventures.

This research was guided by sociological and sociocultural perspectives, and used an exploratory case-study approach. A text-oriented qualitative methodology combining discourse analysis and content analysis was used to analyze tweets from Twitter referencing the #SpiderMable hashtag during a 48-hour window when the story of SpiderMable first appeared online and in the public sphere. The content (# of Tweets) was examined to determine why stories of "real-world" superheroes unite individuals by: determining how the archetype of the hero has evolved into a superhero and what the public's definition is based on a superhero's characteristics and qualities; evaluating if Joseph Campbell's model of the Hero's Journey could be applied and is still relevant to an online, social media storytelling case study; analyzing what factors on social media contributed to increasing the reach and exposure to others; and finally, using theory to understand how the framework of the Hero's Journey supports a shared experience among individuals to unite towards a cause or collective action. Together, these findings establish insight into the influence superheroes have on society and how this storytelling based upon Campbell's model of the Hero's Journey on social media can potentially inspire unity and participation.

### Summary

Using a text-oriented qualitative methodology that combines discourse analysis and content analysis to analyze tweets from Twitter referencing the #SpiderMable hashtag during a 48-hour timeframe, the results from this analysis are evaluated to answer the question “Why did Edmontonians relate to the ‘real-life’ superhero story of SpiderMable on Twitter?” There is a knowledge gap in research explaining the relationship of the evolution of the hero archetype in superhero stories, and the impact on how these stories can engage individuals to connect. This analysis presents recommendations on how this research can be further expanded to use superhero stories and the model of the Hero’s Journey as a mechanism to inspire behaviours and collective action. Throughout history, the collection of stories about heroes forms part of the mythology of a culture, and a way to share and understand society’s collective experiences, values, and beliefs and as Campbell summarized:

*“Wherever the hero may wander, whatever he may do, he is ever in the presence of his own essence — for he has the perfected eye to see. There is no separateness. Thus, just as the way of social participation may lead in the end to a realization of the All in the individual, so that of exile brings the hero to the Self in all”* (Campbell, 1949, p.333).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

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What was it that attracted people in Edmonton and around the world to share and engage in the real-life story of a little girl who became the superhero known as SpiderMable? On September 28, 2015, SpiderMable's epic adventure was shared on Twitter and was the most popular trending topic across Canada (Ramsay, 2015). Edmontonians, celebrities, elected officials, and even the Prime Minister of Canada shared tweets of support. The #SpiderMable hashtag was retweeted from as far as China, Australia, and Brazil (Ramsay, 2015). The origin of SpiderMable, when compared and explored in the context of broader literature on superheroes and hero archetypes may help explain how a superhero story can impact society.

### Overview

The basis for my research began with the question: "Why did Edmontonians relate to the 'real-life' superhero story of SpiderMable on Twitter?" As superhero stories become more popular through comics, cartoons, and movies in society, the purpose of my study is to illustrate the connection of Campbell's model of the Hero's Journey, and how this storytelling structure unites individuals on social media. Understanding this relationship will add to existing literature on how the hero archetype has evolved on social media and why superhero stories can inspire behaviour and unity. The following questions guided my investigation of the existing literature:

**RQ1:** Why are superheroes popular in culture/society?

**RQ2:** How do theoretical models used to understand storytelling (Hero's Journey) help us learn about ways that heroic stories connect and impact individuals/people?

**RQ3:** What factors make social media content go viral?

**RQ4:** What influences individuals and society towards engaging in collective action?

### **Search Strategy**

My literature research process started with a broad spectrum of content and then narrowed the information to more specific and targeted topics. A strategic literature search protocol was developed to manage and coordinate my tactics to ensure my research was consistently aligned with my objective and to avoid scope creep. After refining my research question and referencing additional background on the SpiderMable story through newsfeeds, websites, newspaper and media channels, I conducted a broad scan of the literature using the University of Alberta's online library network and databases. My preliminary library search used Boolean logic and keyword searches related to superheroes, culture, social influence, and storytelling, to generate a thorough collection of sources on the different perspectives associated with my project. I analyzed the abstracts in the articles that appeared to identify common keywords and themes and kept track of these in a Google Spreadsheet. I reviewed the article's references to identify associated authors or additional content. This led to more relevant searches on the University of Alberta online databases (primarily JSTOR, PsycINFO, and SageJournals Online). This process enabled a thorough and wide range of viewpoints from different researchers to build and support my argument. Expanding my research perspective in the initial process ensured that I could capture elements that may have not been studied before, or shed illumination and understanding about connections on a broader level.

The next phase involved organizing the data. I grouped common terms together to generate five key themes in the literature: 1. Comics and superheroes (superheroes, cultural studies, comic books, and participation). 2. Storytelling (mythology, heroes, and archetypes). 3. Social influence (culture, collective agency, individuality, identity, pop culture, socio-cultural community, and social constructivism) 4. Engagement (cultural significance, participation, and

social skills). 5. SpiderMable (SpiderMable and BatKid). Through feedback from my cohort and instructor, I added two additional fields: “Social media” (to study how Twitter was a factor in the distribution and sharing of SpiderMable’s story), and “Symbolic interactionism” (to use as a potential theoretical framework to study the event).

### **Eligibility Criteria**

The entire literature search process was conducted only in English and does not contain content in other languages. The majority of the sources were required to be peer-reviewed and academic articles or journals. On Google Scholar, I filtered sources by the amount of citations an article had and credibility of the author. The majority of literature is published after 1980, and were chosen for well-developed arguments that supported my research themes. There were no restrictions on the use of theoretical framework or methodology used, and my literature included both qualitative and quantitative research.

### **Data Management**

A total of 75 sources/studies were initially identified as pertinent for this literature review. The studies were compiled into an annotated bibliography where they were grouped into logical clusters, and included descriptive and evaluative statements that summarized and highlighted key points in the articles. Additional background notes on the author, source, publication information, research findings, theory, key themes, and abstract were included in a Google spreadsheet matrix. The reference manager program Mendeley (online program) was used to archive and organize the data from the online databases. A backup copy of the 75 studies was saved as .pdf copies on an external hard drive.

### **Synthesis of research findings and themes**

My inductive analysis of this literature resulted in the emergence of five key themes that form the structure of this literature review: 1. Superheroes and comics; 2. Storytelling and the Hero's Journey; 3. Social influence and engagement; 4. Social media and networking; and 5. Culture and theory.

First, this review provides a background on the history of comics and the introduction of the superhero. It explains the concept of the superhero, from inception to current society. Second, the review focuses on the element of myth and storytelling and how this is a primary factor in the development of the superhero. Third, the review demonstrates how the relationship of superheroes and storytelling impacts the social influence and engagement of individuals and society. Fourth, the review establishes how social media and networking can enhance the sharing of the superhero story with others through the use of technology and online platforms. Finally, the review unites each of these themes together through the application of theory to illustrate how it transforms culture. This structure provides a roadmap to analyze each theme in a systemic order to construct the superhero story of SpiderMable and how it inspired engagement by connecting people from across society on social media and impacted culture.

## **2a. Superheroes and comics**

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### **History of Superheroes**

What is a superhero? According to Stan Lee, co-creator of Marvel characters such as Spider-Man, Iron Man, and X-Men: "A superhero is a person who does heroic deeds and has the ability to do them in a way a normal person couldn't" (cited in Rosenberg & Coogan, 2013, p.115). Superhero stories are becoming increasingly more popular in society. People resonate with the themes in stories and identify or aspire to be like them because superheroes are both

models for us, and modeled after us (Rosenberg, 2010). Comic book superheroes are a popular topic of cultural representation because they provide a means for individuals to build connections to relate with others (Carney, Dunbar, Machin, David-Barrett, & Junior, 2014). Carney et al. argue superhero stories are a cultural device to bridge the cognitive gap between human intuitions about the social world and the actual world (2014, p.212).

Scholars claim superheroes have evolved to become part of the mythos of society; that is, comics are a modern form of mythology (Przywalny, 2014). Przywalny (2014) explains comics do not just reference old myths; they are creating new myths along with other cultural works. The stories in comic books act like a mirror, and provide a lens to observe moments in history and identify patterns in behaviours. Events such as 9/11 were used in comic stories to explore broader themes about national securities or civil liberties (Przywalny, 2014). Darowski (2007) states: "Characters like Batman still have a cultural resonance for over 70 years because as a popular cultural symbol, he's shown remarkable malleability to reflect the attitudes of his contemporary culture" (p.5). Through mythic narrative, superheroes inspire virtues for others to follow and emulate.

### **Impact of Superheroes on Public Culture**

Superheroes affect culture. They are redefining identity, culture, and conversations by creating new "communities of dreamers" (Carstarphen & Carr, 2012). Superheroes can serve as mascots to symbolize a group's objectives helping individuals identify with one another (Frimer, 2016). These new communities of dreamers are an identity construction where individuals can project themselves into shared experiences of the imagined lives of superheroes (Carstarphen & Carr, 2012). Superheroes are timeless and can adapt and change. Comic book characters remain relevant because they have evolved across the decades for new generations (Darowski, 2006).

Some characters have become universal symbols. Besides Mickey Mouse, Superman is the first fictional character to be so successfully promoted as a universal icon, familiar all around the world, and recreated for generation after generation (Darowski, 2006). Individuals relate to superhero stories because the stories are an extension and reflection of their self and society: "Heroes are simply ourselves projected outwardly, their stories are our stories" (Indick, 2004).

Why has the appeal of superheroes maintained, and even increased, over time? Their stories help connect people. Captain America exemplifies what the United States is and stands for as a country as Pietz (2013) observes, "As he changes, America changes" (p.41). The Incredible Hulk, Fantastic Four, and Amazing Spider-Man were stories youth could relate to because as Genter (2007) argued, along with their powers, the character storylines were written "as real, living, breathing, people, whose personal relationships would be of interest to others" (Excelsior, p.114). Rubin (2012) affirms "superheroes embody the best in us and also our dark side, for they are metaphors for reconciling parts of our identity and reflections of societal values" (p.410).

### **Potential Benefits of Superheroes**

Superhero stories have power. Rubin's research (2012) analyzes how psychotherapists can use comics and superheroes to help individuals with difficult psychological issues reflect and deal with their own struggles. The superhero medium has mass appeal and can be used to teach children about values. Harrison (1981) argues, "the cartoon superhero could be used more effectively in education, research, health, cognitive development, the stimulation of creativity, and for better interpersonal communications" (Mitchell & George, 1996, p.92). Superhero stories foster critical thinking about making ethical choices because they "try to do good" (Mitchell & George, 1996).

The public health sectors can benefit using superhero stories as a role model to communicate to children about public health issues (Brown, Nasiruddin, Cabral, & Soohoo, 2015). “Superheroes have the power to impact the real world as their power lies in influencing the minds of children to be the heroes they idolize” (Brown et al., 2015, p.2). Instead of fighting aliens or monsters, children would battle diseases such as malaria or find a vaccine to a disease, because children embody the values and actions to become champions for global health and heroes of future generations (Brown et al., 2015). Superhero characters can be used as a strategy for empowering vulnerable children such as building the resilience of pediatric cancer patients at the Brazil Cancer Center (Fradkin, Weschenfelder, & Yunes, 2016). Fradkin et al. (2016) describe their approach of how relating superhero stories to cancer patients inspire the children, such as using chemo drips and labeling them “Super-formula”. They argue if children can believe they are like superheroes, they have powers on which they can draw on; they can battle their illnesses (Fradkin, 2016, p. 409). Their study demonstrates a narrative very similar to SpiderMable: she shared how she was inspired by Spider-Man because they both shared radioactive blood, and this belief helped get her through the unpleasant effects of chemotherapy.

### **Real-Life Heroes**

Growing up, many children want to emulate their heroes. A growing trend is a subculture of Real Life Superhero (RLSH). RLSH is an increasing global community of individuals who are adopting a superhero motif and are motivated by prosocial goals (White, Szabo, Tiliopoulos, Rhodes, Spurrier, & Griffiths, 2016). Online surveys and qualitative analysis by White et al. (2016) reveal how members of these groups view themselves and other members, and concluded, “Membership and identity within the community was strongly tied to the activities and focus of each member, predominantly community and crime prevention orientated” (p.178). A similar

exploratory study by Fishwick and Mak (2015) involved 13 in-depth interviews to investigate the merging of the fictional comic book world and real-life experience of RLSH participants. Their research focused on examining the motivations, actions, and experiences of RLSH individuals and how it could be a catalyst to engage altruistic activities and suggested RLSH bestows many emotional and psychological rewards (Fishwick & Mak, 2015).

The virtues and values of superheroes serve as a symbol for individuals to unite as Fishwick and Mak (2015) explain, "Real life superheroes engage in social and symbolic activities which embody their vision of how society should be" (p.19). Frimer's (2016) research uses a social functionalist lens to argue how these superhero stories help individuals identify with one another because hero creation helps human form large, powerful groups of non-kin. RLSH are like real-life heroes such as Nelson Mandela, Pope John Paul, and Mother Teresa who were individuals who exemplified sacred values that others related to (Frimer, 2016). This symbolic relationship of RLSH's demonstrates the theory how Reference Idols can act as powerful forces in organizing social relationships and motivating individuals and groups to act (Frimer, 2016).

### **Everyone's A Superhero**

Superheroes help people relate to others. Marvel Comics has been winning new fans because of inclusiveness and bringing diversity to comics (Dockterman, 2015). Dockterman's (2015) research indicates how "In 2014, women made up an estimated 37% of Marvel Comics' fan base, up from 25% only a year before and that in 2015, *Publishers Weekly's* survey of comic-book retailers concluded that women ages 17 to 30 are the fastest growing demographics in comics" (p.80). Marvel is attracting new readers because of a growing diversity of characters, and being cognizant of the audience for gender, ethnicity, and age (Dockterman, 2015). This relates to SpiderMable because she is a young six-year-old girl and the inclusiveness now

includes her generation and audience. Comic superheroes have become a representation of the audiences themselves and no longer just focused on the male teenager (Dockterman, 2015). The superhero archetype influences society because “people will always need heroes...they teach and inspire others to be something more than themselves,” (Russell, 2013, p. 121). The story of the superhero is a monomyth (Hero's Journey) that people all understand and share.

## **2b. Storytelling (The Hero's Journey)**

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### **The Hero's Journey (Monomyth)**

Why do people relate to stories about heroes? According to mythologist Joseph Campbell (1949), it's because the hero's story is a “monomyth” - a single, universal, and timeless story. The foundation for my research on the concept of the hero and storytelling is based upon Campbell's (1949) book, “The hero with a thousand faces”. He presents a pattern of narrative he called the “Hero's Journey” that follows the path of a mythological adventure where a hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation, initiation, and return (Indick, 2004). Throughout the literature, the monomyth and the structure of the “Hero's Journey” is central in research about storytelling and heroes.

Indick (2004) examined the use of the hero archetype throughout history from classical heroes in ancient Greco-Roman traditions to current Hollywood superhero movies like Spider-Man. He observed the hero is the integral archetype in the collective unconscious of culture, for individuals personally relate to the hero individually, and also simultaneously embodies the collective hopes and ideals of the culture that creates him (2004, p.1). Winterbach's (2006) research using content analysis of comics aligns with that conducted by Indick (2004). Their work supports how the mythology of the hero, who appears in myth, legend, and folklore, has resurfaced in 20th century as the comic book superhero. The superhero is a reinvention of the

major hero myths and re-surfacing of the mythological hero (Winterback, 2006). "Heroes are simply ourselves projected outwardly their stories are our stories" (Indick, 2004, p.12).

Winterback (2006) concludes, "The ultimate purpose of the hero myth is the re-telling of stories that explore and explain the different stages of life on earth" (p.132) for it appears ever since early civilisations, the concept of the hero has been vital to human existence.

What are the benefits of understanding the elements of the "Hero's Journey"? Robertson and Lawrence's (2015) research applies the lens of relational-cultural theory to illustrate how psychology counsellors can aid clients to make sense of their struggles and understand their own personal journey. They use Campbell's "Hero's Journey" as a roadmap for helping clients confront and respond to life's challenges because it highlights the importance of connecting with others to face potential dilemmas and helps transform clients from victim to hero through different stages of their own journey (Robertson & Lawrence, 2015).

In the *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, Rubin (2009) also applies Campbell's "Hero's Journey" as a therapy tool to help clients story their lives and challenges as a personal myth or epic adventure. Rubin (2009) uses the "Hero's Journey" as a template to superimpose clinical issues patients have in counselling, which helps support their personal narrative identity and cognitive therapy. The concept of the monomyth is a single, universal story. It is a story that is shared by individuals and society, and the power of storytelling using the template of the "Hero's Journey" based on the literature is that it is understood and relatable to others.

## **2c. Social Influence and Engagement**

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### **Impact of Superheroes on Individuals**

How does a superhero story influence an individual? Rubin's research argued (2012) the themes of many Superman and Wonder Woman stories provided young readers with vehicles for

positive identification and lessons with “good ultimately triumphing over evil.” William Martson, creator of the lie detector and also the character of Wonder Woman, claimed that “Comics are America’s most popular mental vitamin, as superhero stories build up our power-producing desire compulsion by stimulating a child’s natural longing to battle and overcome obstacles, particularly evil ones, and in so doing better a child’s chances for emotional survival and self-advancement” (Rubin, 2012, p.411). SpiderMable was a young girl fighting cancer, and for her, superheroes provided a means of connection and emotional strength. Mable’s mother confirmed: “Allowing Mable to be a superhero has given her daughter and herself a way to endure” (Querengesser, 2015).

Individuals can identify with superheroes. The process of social influence by which individuals adopt the values and behaviors of personae is described by the theoretical construct called “identification” (Brown & Fraser, 2009). Brown and Fraser (2009) draw on Burke’s (1969) description of identification as occurring “when one individual shares the interests of another individual or believes that he or she shares the interests of another” (p.188).

Superhero stories have become more realistic over time. A key appreciation for psychotherapists about superheroes is that since their emergence in the 1930s, the characters have become more “real” as comic creators such as Spider Man co-creator Stan Lee have made superhero stories as real and believable as possible (Rubin, 2012). The social influence of superheroes resonates with individuals because there is an aspect about the stories they identify with. Rubin (2012) stated: “Superheroes provide a glimpse into our own fragile selves, and on an even larger scale, societal vulnerability – with the underscored message that there is hope for all, because for as far as superheroes may fall, they ultimately rise to face the enemies of society and demons within their own psyches” (p.423).

Superheroes can also act as reference idols inspiring others to behave in a similar way. Erickson & McEvoy's (1981) research studied the influence of reference idols, specifically the positive influence of public heroes on individuals. Their research examined different levels of influence, and one of the highest was positive emulation. According to Erickson & McEvoy (1981), this occurs when these public heroes are so valued that the individual strives to behave as they do in some way, and at this level, the reference idol serves in a normative capacity for the actor to commit energy and resources, establishing behavioral guidelines which come to be internalized and behaviorally enacted. When many individuals are socially influenced, this impacts society.

### **Impact of Superheroes on Society**

How do superhero stories lead and transform society? Avolio, Gardner, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa's (2004) research looked at the process by which a leader impacts follower attitudes and behaviors. They reviewed how Tajfel (1972) introduced the idea of social identity to refer to a process by which individuals identify with the group, feel pride in belonging, and see membership in the group as an important aspect of their identity. This community of social identity connects individuals together. As Brown & Fraser (2002) argue, "one of the important consequences of mass communication is the increased opportunity mass audiences have to develop relationships with mythic characters, those Kittelson (1997) described as people who express our deepest goals and values" (p.184). It is important to understand the symbiotic relationship between an individual and others. Sullivan & Venter (2005) state "Psychologists have long believed that individuals' self-concepts can't be understood without consideration of their relationships and interactions with significant others" (James, 1890; Maslow, 1967)

(Sullivan & Venter, 2005, p.102). Superhero stories can lead others to unite towards a community identity.

Heroic individuals can act like mirrors towards other individuals who share similar attitudes and behaviors. As Sullivan & Venter (2005) explain, "Perceiving heroes as standards and models of behavior (i.e., Campbell, 1949) implies social comparison as the mechanism of influence for people regularly garner information about themselves and their abilities through comparisons with others" (p.102). In this way superheroes become a form of role models for others to follow.

### **Social Influence and Engagement**

The final element that I'm researching is the connection about how superhero stories may be a factor contributing to social influence and engagement in society. What enables a superhero story to support the production and maintenance of social identity among individuals? As Avolio et al. (2004) referenced in Tajfel's (1972) research, "social identity is an individual's knowledge that the person belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to the individual of this group membership. Three factors that increase social identity are prototypicality: degree to which an item is an exemplar of the category of which it is a member (psychologydictionary.org); social attraction; and identity salience" (Avolio et al. 2004, p.807). What does this mean? These are the attributes of social identity that an individual and/or a society identifies and connects with, which are also explained in some research as attributes that can attract people to leaders. These leadership behaviors enable followers to connect with their leaders and the values, beliefs, goals and activities that are identified with the leader over time, which builds networks of collaborative relationships with followers (Avolio et al. 2004). This raises the question, what values did Edmontonians relate to, or identify with, SpiderMable?

## 2d. Social media and networking

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### Social media content sharing

Why does some social media content generate more interest than others, and what factors cause the formation of viral trends? Asur, Huberman, Szabo, and Wang's research studied trending topics on Twitter. Asur et al. (2011) discovered "the resonance of the content with the users of social network plays a major role in causing trends" (p.1), and "trending topics on Twitter mostly consisted of two to three word expressions" (p. 3). Shorter phrases were easy to share. The most important factor Asur et al. (2011) identified in determining trends was "the retweets by other users" and if "the content that trended was largely news from traditional media sources which was then amplified by repeated retweets on Twitter which generated trends" (p.11). Social media content from traditional media sources that was short and resonated with users was more likely to be retweeted with others causing a trend or "viral online content." "What makes online content viral?" asked Berger and Milkman (2012) in the *Journal of Marketing Research*. Berger and Milkman used a psychological approach for understanding diffusion, which is defined as how information is distributed and flowed to examine how emotions shape virality by analyzing New York Times articles published over a three-month period (2012). Their results demonstrated that "positive content is more viral than negative content, but the relationship between emotion and social transmission is more complex than valence alone" (Berger & Milkman, 2012, p.193). They determined physiological arousal affects virality, and that "content that evokes high-arousal positive (awes) or negative (anger or anxiety) emotions is more viral than content that is low arousal (sad)" (Berger & Milkman, 2012, p.193). There is an opportunity to explore how storytelling impacts emotion and social transmission.

### **Social media connections**

What is the power of social media? Social media connects people. One of the key reasons why it has become popular to share information through social media is because of the cost. It doesn't require an elaborate budget like traditional media to reach and engage a large demographic (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011, p.272). To share the story of SpiderMable on Twitter, there was no cost to tweet #SpiderMable from Edmonton to the other side of the world in Australia. Social media also enables two-way conversations among users. "Social media is about users and being connected to other users; it is not about significant investments in expensive production and media" (Hanna et al., 2011, p.272). Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre (2011) explain the internet has changed from users just using it to consume content to now using the internet through social media "(content sharing sites, blogs, social networking and wikis) to create, modify, share, and discuss internet content" (p.251). Social media gives users a voice that can be heard and responded to.

Online social media enabled a shift in sharing information and expanded into an interactive medium where users have a voice. This voice plays an important role in society, especially when the voice can be amplified (Reyes, 2015). Social media allows information to be shared instantaneously in real-time. The immediate exposure of ideas can be communicated to a large audience (Reyes, 2015). Social media platforms like Twitter are a valuable source of information for providing real-time narrations/updates on real-world happenings (Conte, Troncy, & Naaman, 2014). One voice can be quickly magnified and shared to many on social media. With technological advances online, it is also now possible to effectively monitor, measure, and understand social media activities through analytics.

### **Example: #Batkid**

Conte' et al.'s (2014) research analyzes and extracts resources that helps tell event's stories by analyzing a stream of tweets from various case-studies. One of the case studies is the event story of Batkid. Before there was #SpiderMable, there was #SFBatkid. Batkid is also the story of a real-life superhero who on November 15, 2013, was a five-year-old boy from San Francisco who was battling leukemia and had the dream to be Batman for a day (Powell, 2014).

With the help of the Make-A-Wish foundation, the City of San Francisco, and a huge following of supporters, they helped turn fantasy into reality as this young boy became Batkid. As Powell (2014) examined in *Making Wishes Come True: Behind the Scenes with #SFBatkid*, he outlined five social media lessons learned from the campaign (p.16):

- 1. Amazing content is the essential ingredient for a successful social media campaign.*
- 2. Going viral is not a strategy but is an outcome from having engaging content.*
- 3. Bring together social and traditional media platforms to produce results.*
- 4. Believe in your content and evaluate its value at the start of a campaign.*
- 5. Be creative about how to share your content and consider who will engage with it.*

These elements can all be compared to my case study of SpiderMable and will be used as a baseline model to evaluate if the lessons are consistent with Powell's assessment.

## **2e. Culture and Theory**

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In reviewing the literature, a diverse variety of theories were explored and examined, however, I converged and narrowed down my selection to focus more in-depth on theories that were more applicable to my research project. In this section I provide a summary of these theories, before focusing on the primary framework used in my research: The Hero's Journey.

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Social cognitive theory provides a framework for understanding, predicting, and changing human behavior; it identifies human behavior as an interaction of personal factors, behavior, and the environment (Bandura 1986). This theory potentially may demonstrate what possible factors may have influenced or contributed to the thoughts and actions of Edmontonians to support the viral spread of the story of SpiderMable.

### **Symbolic Interactionism Theory**

Symbolic interaction examines the meanings emerging from the reciprocal interaction of individuals in social environment with other individuals (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, & Demirbuken, 2009). Carter and Fuller (2016) assess past theories of symbolic interactionism referencing the works of Herbert Blumer, Manford Kuhn, and Sheldon Stryker to establish, "Symbolic interactionism is a micro-leveled theoretical framework and perspective in sociology that addresses how society is created and maintained through repeated interactions among individuals," (p.932) and this can be used to predict future cases. This theory potentially demonstrates what the meaning and symbol SpiderMable represented to the public. Bandura (2001) explains "Through symbols, people give meaning, form, and continuity to their experiences" (p.267). As multiple people share similar meanings it creates multiplicity.

Dionysiou and Tsoukas' (2013) research is based on Mead's concept of role taking and the relational aspect of agency; and they identify how the actions of individuals fit together to create mutual sharing to create multiplicity. People share information and through the exchange gain an understanding of each other's views and influence each other (Bandura, 2001, p.295). Potts (2015) states, "Networks connect individuals and organizations" (p.635). Wilkinson (1991) treats social interaction and purposive action as core elements of community life. He refers to

community as a fundamental social bond that grows naturally out of the interactions and interests connecting people to each other, and by virtue of which “they derive their social being and identities” (Wilkinson 1991). Howarth (2001) concurs that people “need to be in and of communities in order to realise a distinct sense of self, attachment, individuality and commonality” (p.227). Bessant (2012) observes “the dynamic relationship between the community and the development of the self, most notably through the acquisition of common social attitudes” (p.633) creates a core element of community life. Symbolic interaction provides a foundation for potentially why Edmontonians connected to the story of SpiderMable and related in large group to take action of support in her Hero's Journey.

### **Self and Identity**

How are people influenced by their heroes? Can the process of inclusion-of-other-in-self be used to explain an individual's connections to cultural heroes as it describes how significant others and social groups influence individuals' self-concepts (Sullivan & Venter, 2005). The results from Sullivan and Venter's research indicated people's heroes affect their ability to describe themselves, and “heroes serve as models of personal conduct and standards of comparison for the masses, as they become exemplars for the model citizen” (2005, p.102). This theory may be applied to help understand why Edmontonians connected to SpiderMable, and if the values and behaviors she showcased were what citizens resonated with in a role-model.

### **Reference Group Theory and Reference Idols**

Reference Group Theory compares an individual or group to another group to use as a standard to base their behaviours on (Thompson, Hickey, & Thompson, 2016). McEvoy and Erickson (1981) argue how reference idols have a considerable influence on individual's

attitudes, identities, and action patterns (p. 111). This theory provides potential reasoning for why individuals would collectively be influenced by superhero culture. “With reference idols, individual’s attitudes, identities and role-taking can revolve around a meaningful image or symbolic personification... and these public figures can help to create and sustain value and action systems of the sociocultural system” (McEvoy & Erickson, 1981, p. 114). This could support an explanation of how SpiderMable represented a symbol of “goodness” for the public.

### **Summary**

From the literature, superheroes are both models for us and modeled after us (Rosenberg, 2010). Individuals relate to superhero stories because the stories are an extension and reflection of their self and society. The stories lead to a “monomyth” which is a universal story and can be represented in the elements of the “Hero’s Journey”, from separation, initiation, and return (Indick, 2014). These stories impact society because superheroes become a role model for others to follow. This leads to opportunities for engagement and social good. The use of social media can be applied to share the stories across a world audience. Symbolic Interactionism theory provides a framework for understanding how superheroes act as a symbol. People can give them form and meaning, and use them to provide continuity to their experiences (Bandura, 2001).

I am interested in exploring how each of these elements contribute to research on superheroes as change agents, and how the storytelling model of the Hero’s Journey on social media can be used as a tool to advance unity and collective action. This leads to how the case study of SpiderMable can be analyzed using the #SpiderMable hashtag on Twitter to understand, “Why did Edmontonians relate and unite to the real-life superhero story of SpiderMable on Twitter?”

### **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

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What power do superhero stories have to connect people together? The superhero adventures of SpiderMable captured on the social media platform Twitter influenced an entire community in the city of Edmonton to come together and share in her 'hero's journey'. The purpose of this project studied the research question, "Why did Edmontonians relate to the 'real-life' superhero story of SpiderMable on Twitter?" The objective of this chapter outlines the design and methodology I used to conduct the research, data collection and analysis.

My research was guided by sociological and sociocultural perspectives, and used an exploratory case-study approach. I applied a text-oriented qualitative methodology combining discourse analysis and content analysis to analyze tweets from Twitter referencing the #SpiderMable hashtag during a 48-hour window when the story of SpiderMable first appeared online and in the public sphere. The content was examined to determine why stories of "real-world" heroes unite individuals by: 1) analyzing what factors on social media contributed to increasing the reach and exposure to others; 2) determining if the definition of the characteristics and qualities of superheroes resonated with the public; 3) evaluating if Joseph Campbell's model of the Hero's Journey applied and if it is still relevant to a social media story online; and finally, 4) applying theory to understand how the Hero's Journey supports a shared experience of individuals to unite. The participants involved in this study were public Twitter users who expressed their opinions, commentary, and feedback in tweets on the story of SpiderMable utilizing the #SpiderMable hashtag. I also conducted a one-on-one in-person interview with SpiderMable's mother, Lisa to provide a direct account and first-person experience of what happened on September 28, 2015. The social media analytical tool that was used to capture all the data was a Twitter Metrics spreadsheet developed by the social media analytics company

Union Metrics. Together, these findings establish insight into the influence superheroes have on individuals and society and how these stories can potentially inspire behaviours, unity, and collective action.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided my case study analysis:

**RQ1:** What factors of social media (Twitter) helped SpiderMable's story go viral online and in doing so, connect audiences together?

**RQ2:** Can SpiderMable be defined as a superhero: and if so, how has our understanding of the hero archetype evolved?

**RQ3:** Does the Hero's Journey model apply to superhero stories told on social media?

**RQ4:** How does the Hero's Journey support a shared experience of individuals to unite?

### **Research Design**

The design of this study and data collection methodology was developed to answer the research question "Why did Edmontonians relate to the real-life superhero story of SpiderMable on Twitter?" I focused on observing common patterns and similar conversations that appeared in public text-orientated commentary on Twitter referencing the #SpiderMable story. The aim was to evaluate why SpiderMable's superhero story was able to resonate with so many individuals and how it impacted others to connect and participate in her journey.

SpiderMable's story began on September 28, 2015, when the Children's Wish Foundation made a dream come true for a little girl named Mable to be transformed into a superhero and fight crime for a day in the City of Edmonton. SpiderMable's adventures on that day were captured in real-time on social media and was also shared across a variety of other

media channels such as radio, television, and newspaper. Although various channels reported the story of her journey, social media enabled the richest source of real-time interactive comments from the public. The social media platforms Twitter and Facebook contain pertinent data; however, an important factor to note is that on September 28, 2015 the Facebook server was down for parts of the day due to outage issues and not everyone was able to log onto the site (Newsweek, Mosendz, 2015). Twitter provided the richest source of real-time commentary from the public and the story of SpiderMable's adventures can be historically tracked and documented in a time-sequential order to study what Edmontonians were thinking through their two-way conversation and dialogue with others in the public. The saga of SpiderMable was shared on Twitter and was the most popular trending topic across Canada (Ramsay, 2015). Edmontonians, celebrities, elected officials, and even the Prime Minister of Canada shared tweets of support. The #SpiderMable hashtag was retweeted from as far as China, Australia, and Brazil (Ramsay, 2015). The story of SpiderMable's origin when it first appeared on social media and in the public sphere, when compared and explored in the context of broader literature on superheroes and hero archetypes helps illuminate how a superhero story can impact society.

SpiderMable's "real-life" superhero story is not the only case, for a similar event happened in San Francisco when the city rallied and transformed into Gotham City to fulfill the wish of a five-year-old leukemia patient who dreamed of being like Batman as Batkid for a day (Ramsay & Kornik, 2015). These case studies demonstrate superhero stories can unite individuals together and to also potentially engage in collective action. Why is this? When participants such as the Prime Minister of Canada, mayors from different parts of the province, and other elected officials would tweet their support for #SpiderMable, this research is vital at understanding how these superhero stories inspire community towards a greater cause. This

research further builds the framework for harnessing the strength of utilizing elements of a superhero story and the “Hero’s Journey” model as a tool to engage individuals to connect, inspire attitudes, and influence behaviours.

### **Research Method**

To determine an approach for studying conversations on Twitter, I was able to adapt two similar University of Alberta MACT capstone projects to understand the specific phenomena of social media and analyzing online content. Chantelle Peronino’s (2016) MACT research project, “Linking Luna: Implications of a Viral Video on Conservation Awareness of Endangered Killer Whales,” evaluated online Youtube comments referencing public commentary on the subject of an endangered killer whale named Luna. Jaylene Ulmer’s (2016) MACT research project, “Towards a Community Inspired Place-Brand,” studied how “social media can be used as an essential tool in the place-branding process,” and used Twitter content and dialogue as a component for her evaluation. The basic structure of my project was modeled after Ulmer’s approach as her “research was conducted using inductive logic to observe and identify common patterns and themes in the data drawn from online data including an in-person interview that lead towards a theory” (Ulmer, 2016) for understanding how superhero stories are an extension of the hero archetype and how Joseph Campbell’s model of the “Hero’s Journey” applies. Additionally, this research expanded upon factors that contribute to social media content going viral.

I conducted qualitative research that was guided by sociological and sociocultural perspectives and the method I administered was discourse analysis. Discourse analysis “embraces social constructivist epistemology, which posits that everything we know is made real through language” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Schutz, 1967; Wittgenstein, 1953). SpiderMable’s case study captures real-time conversations on Twitter containing dialogue about

public opinions and perspectives. Lefebvre (2016) referenced that discourse analysis is a “Finely grained study...of very detailed transcripts of spoken or written words (including pauses, turn taking, word emphasis, tone, etc.) to identify ways in which social processes are constructed through conversations, deconstructing texts, and studying their patterns and contexts, often with the goal of unveiling hidden meaning or social process” (Richards & Morse, 2013).

My research design consisted of qualitative content analysis of tweets from Twitter over a 48-hour timeframe where the real-life superhero story of SpiderMable took place in the city of Edmonton and her adventures were shared on Twitter using the #SpiderMable hashtag. My research fixated on finding patterns or trends in online tweets to uncover “hidden” meaning about why Edmontonians connected to the story of SpiderMable to demonstrate how the hero archetype model evolved and still applies with superhero stories on social media. Qualitative content analysis enabled a deeper discernment in uncovering meaning. Hsieh & Shannon (2005) observed “qualitative content analysis is one of numerous research methods used to analyze text data and research using qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text” (Budd, Thorp, & Donohew, 1967; Lindkvist, 1981; McTavish & Pirro, 1990; Tesch, 1990). They further stated (2005), “The goal of content analysis is “to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314) and can be used as research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns.”

As Pascal Jürgens and Andreas Jungherr (2016) argued, “The ever increasing use of digital tools and services has led to the emergence of a new data source for social scientists for increasingly multifaceted uses of digital services result in digital trace data (Freelon, 2014;

Golder and Macy, 2012; Howison, Wiggins, and Crowston, 2011; Jungherr, 2015), data wittingly or unwittingly produced by users and examples for the former are texts of tweets, Facebook posts, or pictures posted on a photo-sharing site” (p.7). The amount of real-time data that can be collected and reviewed as the SpiderMable event unfolded throughout the day Twitter was the most effective tool to capture the story. Tweet content can be analyzed to understand conversation topics, characteristics of individuals or organizations tweeting, and public beliefs and opinions about a specific topic (Kim et al., 2013).

### **Participants**

The data I specifically sampled and involved in this research project was drawn from public domain Twitter users who added tweets referencing the #SpiderMable hashtag. To encapsulate a direct experience and perspective on events that happened on September 28, 2015, I also conducted a one-on-one in-person interview with Mable's (SpiderMable) mother.

**Adequacy and Appropriateness:** The story of SpiderMable launched on September 28, 2015 and the majority of tweets were captured on this day along with additional follow-up date of September 29, 2015. The amount of data from these dates provided an adequate amount of information to analyze and believed to have achieved saturation. The appropriateness was based on the #SpiderMable hashtag.

**Audit Trail:** The interview with Mable's mother was recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed into a word document. I had access to the Twitter data referencing the #SpiderMable hashtag online from the source-provider Union Metrics for a one-month period where I was able to access the metrics on their company portal. I made hardcopy backups of this information rendered as .pdf and Microsoft Excel files in a spreadsheet so I could return to the data for my

research and if needed to provide a copy for others to recreate the process. This process was based off of Pascal Jurgens and Andreas Jungherr's (2016) recommendation that:

*“When working with digital trace data, reliable storage before data processing is crucial. No matter how sophisticated your data processing approach, be sure to keep an unaltered version of the data originally collected by you. Thus, you will always be able to turn to the original data. Losing data to a hardware failure or human error might thus seriously damage your research project”* (2016, p.29).

### **Setting**

The primary setting where I conducted the majority of my research was from data extracted from Twitter as I analyzed publicly available tweets, mostly based in the city of Edmonton area during a 48-hour timeframe window from Twitter users who tweeted with the #SpiderMable hashtag on September 28 and 29, 2015. Bongsug Chae (2015) identified that “Twitter, unlike Facebook data, can be considered ‘open’ as research and business communities can access Twitter data using Twitter Application Program Interface (API) (Twitter, 2013) which has offered them opportunities to access data in unprecedented scale and size” (2015, p.248). The one-hour interview with Mable's mother was conducted in 2017 at the Rutherford Library at the University of Alberta in a private room with the researcher, and in the room was also her daughter, Mable.

### **Instrument**

**Twitter Background:** Chae (2015) stated that “Twitter, along with Facebook and YouTube, represents the rapid growth of Web 2.0, or social media applications, in recent years and that since its inception in 2006, this microblogging application has been the fastest growing

social media platform” (p.248). As Forgie, Duff, and Ross (2013) observed, “Posting in 140 characters or less is easy, informal, and with a few simple searches, it is possible to find others who share similar interests and join their cyber conversation (Cain Miller 2009) and Twitter allows people to share information instead of just receiving it” (Forgie et al., 2013, p.8). Chae (2015) argues:

“People and organizations form dynamic communities through following and being followed by others, and information is disseminated rapidly. A tweet is a message of up to 140 characters. Three types of tweets are found in Twitter: original tweets, replies, and retweets. Original tweets appear in the sender’s profile page and Home timeline. Such an original tweet can be retweeted by other users. Also, Twitter users can join the conversation by @replying to others and by retweeting. These tweets are traceable. Twitter offers API to researchers, practitioners, and organizations that are interested in collecting and analyzing tweets (Twitter, 2013).” (Chae, 2015, p.248).

**Data Gathering Strategies:** The strategy I used to collect data was to seek out “information rich” content online from participants on Twitter that used the hashtag “SpiderMable”. Jürgens and Jungherr (2016) noted hashtag/keyword-based searches can provide data for research. They state (2016) “One common approach to data collection on Twitter is the collection of tweets using topically relevant character strings in keywords or hashtags” (p.25).

**Collecting Content:** Initially, I was going to manually collect and import tweets directly from Twitter into an Excel spreadsheet. However, with thousands of tweets, this wasn’t a time-effective approach. I searched online for scripts that would help automate the process, however Twitter has a time-limit of seven days from which you can collect historic data, without having to purchase. I sought out different companies online that would have access to provide Twitter

analytics, and the most-cost effective company was Union Metrics, located in the United States at 301 8th Street, Suite 240, San Francisco, CA 94103. Their contact details are: support@unionmetrics.com, <http://unionmetrics.com>, and phone number at 888-834-8113. They were able to provide me with a downloadable spreadsheet of all the historic tweets referencing the hashtag #SpiderMable from the month of September 2015 and also provided analytics, impressions, and metrics.

### **Procedures**

Twitter is a powerful tool for researchers, as the data from public tweets can be recorded and analyzed. According to Lalji and Deshmukh (2016), “social media sites such as Twitter... have become an important platform where users can share their valuable opinions on certain topics” (p.2887). Chae (2015) stated, “In recent years, Twitter data has become one of the most popular information sources for practical applications and academic research” (p.249). These platforms provide various opportunities to use a variety of techniques to extract and understand the opinion of others (Lalji and Deshmukh, 2016). The following section outlines the following steps that were used to conduct Twitter analysis on the topic and hashtag #SpiderMable.

The adventures of SpiderMable began on September 28, 2015. Her story was shared on a variety of news channels from radio, television, newspaper, websites, and social media. For a real-time log of the historic events and public opinions during that day, Twitter provided the most useful and richest source of data. Chae (2015) described a framework for extracting intelligence from Twitter data (tweets and metadata) with the first step being to identify the topic of interest using a keyword(s) or hashtag(s). The topic for my search was tweets referencing the #spidermable hashtag. My initial approach for capturing Twitter comments was manually copying and pasting comments referencing the #spidermable hashtag on Twitter into a

spreadsheet, however, as there were over 5,000 tweets this method would not capture as much metadata and was very time-consuming. I sought to automate the process by using Application Programming Interface (API) searches that would capture historic data, but since my research was conducted in 2017, Twitter only samples content published within the past seven days (Twitter, 2017). To fully capture all the historic tweets and metadata, the primary option was to purchase the Twitter metrics from an external vendor. I sourced five companies, Twitter (twitter.com), Hashtracking (hashtracking.com), Tweet Archivist (www.tweetarchivist.com), Gnip (gnip.com) and Union Metrics (unionmetrics.com). Each of these companies would provide the basic historic tweet data I required and each offered similar analytics. The company I chose was Union Metrics as they were the most cost-effective and also supplied metric spreadsheets. Union Metrics provided one-month subscription access to their tracker portal dashboard (a visual representation of data) to view the historic tweets referencing the #spidermable hashtag and to export and download the metadata metric.

I reviewed all the data through Union Metric's portal and then exported all the historic Twitter comments for analysis into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. I also screen-captured rendered copies of the infographic charts that were displayed on the tracker portal in a .pdf format. There was a large amount of metadata contained in the Excel spreadsheet, so I sorted the data to only show the fields I was interested in capturing: Username, Date, Time, Text, Tweet type, Impressions, Reach, Exposure, Tweet Total, and Contributors. This allowed for a simple overall perspective to view and understand the data to extract for analysis.

In addition to the Twitter data, a one-on-one interview was conducted with SpiderMable's mother to provide a direct account of the events on September 28, 2015. The one-

hour interview was conducted at the Rutherford Library at the University of Alberta and transcribed from a recorded audio recording.

### **Analysis**

**Data Analysis Technique:** I used qualitative content analysis to understand why the superhero story of SpiderMable united and connected individuals, and to evaluate if the model of the Hero's Archetype applied to a superhero story shared on social media medium. I selected this technique because I wanted to "uncover the relation between the text (discourse) and... look for how people understand their world and the ways that their understanding is shaped and remade" (Lefebvre, 2016).

**Twitter Analysis:** I analyzed tweets on Twitter referencing the hashtag #SpiderMable ([twitter.com/hashtag/spidermable](https://twitter.com/hashtag/spidermable)). Although there were also tweets referencing the hashtag #SpiderMabel with an incorrect spelling of Mable's name with "el" at the end, these were excluded from this research study.

**Twitter Hashtag Analysis:** Chae (2015) states hashtags are an important component of tweets, as they are equivalent to areas or fields of interest used to categorize academic papers (or researchers) or tags used to categorize blog postings.

**Twitter Sentiment Analysis:** Chae (2015) states "Twitter Sentiment Analysis" or (opinion mining) is primarily interested in extracting subjective information (e.g., emotion, opinions) in tweets" (also see: Feldman, 2013; Pang and Lee, 2008, p.250).

**Twitter Counts:** Jürgens and Jungherr (2016) state, "The most basic approach to the analysis of Twitter data is counting entities as you can count the mentions of actors be it by username, as hashtag, or keyword, mentions of specific character strings in hashtags or keywords, links to objects outside of Twitter, or the use of Twitter's usage conventions, such as

@mentions, retweets, or hashtags” (p. 44). Union Metrics provided these counts in the infographic charts and the historic Twitter data. Jürgens and Jungherr called this process collective curating as this information is important because it provides insights into the interests and majority of what Twitter users found relevant during a specific time frame (2016).

The procedure I chose for Twitter Content Analytics is the model recommended by Chae (2015) by counting and also using word analysis and sentiment analysis to observe keywords on what patterns emerge from the tweets and observe the content and how it references the Hero's Journey as described by Campbell.

**Analysis Step 1:** What factors on social media caused SpiderMable's story to go viral online and connect audiences together? Using Union Metrics data, I evaluated the trends that emerged on Twitter, and summarized the key findings of patterns that appeared from the data.

**Analysis Step 2:** How has the archetype of the hero evolved into the definition of the superhero? To demonstrate how Campbell's model of the Hero's Journey applies to superheroes, I wanted to first establish the parameters for the definition of what a superhero is. Popular comic book writer Jeph Loeb and philosopher/author Tom Morris developed strong definitions and a solid structure for what heroes and superheroes are, and why people relate to these characters. I used the attributes and definitions they described of a superhero to connect tweets referencing #SpiderMable from the public to demonstrate how there is a mutual understanding of what superheroes are and symbolize among the public.

**Analysis Step 3:** Does the model of the Hero's Journey apply to superhero stories on social media? To test if the storytelling pattern of the monomyth (Hero's Journey) is still applicable and present in social media superhero stories online, and to illustrate how it has

possibly translated on a social media platform like Twitter, I used Campbell's 12 Stages of the Hero's Journey to map out how public tweets can be framed into the various stages of narrative.

**Analysis Step 4:** How does the model of the Hero's Journey in superhero stories support a shared experience of individuals to unite? Joseph Campbell (1949) argued that the Hero's Journey is a monomyth, a timeless and universal story that basically follows the same structure:

“A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (Campbell, 1949, p.23).

I applied this framework to my Twitter data to showcase how the Hero's Journey connects individuals whether they are conscious of it or not, and how it provides meaning through their interactions. This strategic process of research enables me to provide an answer for why Edmontonians related and responded to the real-life superhero story of SpiderMable, as it unfolded and was constructed through their interactions and discussions on Twitter.

**Theoretical:** My qualitative research was guided by sociological and sociocultural perspectives. Sociology Theory studies how the experiences of individuals are shaped by interactions with social groups and society as a whole because just being in a group can change an individual's behaviour (Little, Vyain, Scaramuzzo, Cody-Rydzewski, Griffiths, Strayer, Keirns, & McGivern (2014). Sociocultural Theory studies how communication is a process involved with concepts such as social structures, identities, norms, rituals, and collective belief systems (Craig & Muller, 2007). I selected these theories because they both study collective belief systems and how individuals interact and are influenced by others, which provides a solid

theoretical framework for understanding how the Hero's Journey of SpiderMable impacted Edmontonians.

### **Summary**

The superhero adventures of SpiderMable captured on the social media platform Twitter influenced an entire community in the city of Edmonton to come together and share in her journey. For my analysis, I begin my research by using the data from Union Metrics to highlight what factors on Twitter caused SpiderMable's story to go viral online and connect audiences together? I then demonstrate how Campbell's model of the Hero's Journey applies to superheroes, and establish the parameters for the definition of what a superhero is. I next test if the Hero's Journey structure is still applicable and present in social media superhero stories online by mapping out tweets to Campbell's 12 Stages of the Hero's Journey. Finally, I incorporate theory that is guided by sociological and sociocultural perspectives to answer how the model of the Hero's Journey in superhero stories like SpiderMable support a shared experience of individuals (Edmontonians) to unite on a social media platform such as Twitter.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

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What did public tweets from Twitter reveal about how individuals connected to the adventures of SpiderMable, and how are people influenced by superhero stories that follow the model of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey? This research paper was guided by sociological and sociocultural perspectives and used an exploratory case study approach to answer "Why did Edmontonians relate and respond to the 'real-life' superhero story of SpiderMable on Twitter?" Through a text-oriented qualitative methodology that combined discourse analysis and content analysis, public tweets were analyzed referencing the #SpiderMable hashtag during a 48-hour time frame when the story of SpiderMable emerged online. Twitter only provided historical data using the Search Application Programming Interface (API) from the previous week (seven days), so to access historical content from 18 months ago, I sourced an external third party service (Union Metrics) to obtain the data. Tracking the #SpiderMable hashtag on September 28 and September 29 2015 resulted in the following metrics (Union Metrics, 2017) where over 34,000 tweets were generated:

<b>Tweet Breakdown for #SpiderMable hashtag on Twitter on September 28 and 29, 2015</b>
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<b>Total tweets by Twitter users:</b>	34,483
<b>Tweet type: Regular</b>	6,896
<b>Tweet type: Replies</b>	1,111
<b>Tweet type: Retweets</b>	26,476
<b>Potential reach:</b>	34,633,097
<b>Contributors</b>	11,889
<b>Potential Impressions/ Exposure</b>	238,736,975
<b>Average Tweet per Hour</b>	718.4
<b>Retweet Rate</b>	3.3

Additionally, a one-on-one interview was conducted with SpiderMable's mother to provide a direct account and perspective on the events from that day. Four questions guided this research analysis:

**RQ1:** What factors of social media (Twitter) helped SpiderMable's story go viral online and in doing so, connect audiences together?

**RQ2:** Can SpiderMable be defined as a superhero: and if so, how has our understanding of the hero archetype evolved?

**RQ3:** Does the Hero's Journey model apply to superhero stories told on social media?

**RQ4:** How does the Hero's Journey support a shared experience of individuals to unite?

I extracted this data and placed it on a spreadsheet that documented all the tweet commentary to review and conduct discourse analysis and content (sentiment) analysis. The following chapter presents my findings divided into four sections. Firstly, I reviewed and analyzed how the used of social media impacted the sharing of SpiderMable's story to connect audiences together. Secondly, I used the tweet conversations to determine if the public's perception of SpiderMable was aligned with the traits and description of a superhero as defined by Jeph Loeb and Tom Morris (2005). Thirdly, I tested if Joseph Campbell's model of the Hero's Journey applied to SpiderMable's adventures (superhero stories) on a social media platform and if it still relevant today. Fourthly, I applied theory to determine how the Hero's Journey supports a shared experience of individuals to unite to answer why Edmontonians related and responded to the real-life superhero story of SpiderMable on Twitter. Finally, I summarized my research findings and proposed future discussions. The results provide awareness into the influence superheroes have on society, and how these stories can impact individuals to relate, unite, and influence behaviours towards collection action.

### Symbols

As Campbell argued that the Hero's Journey is a universal and timeless story, it helps individuals predict what will happen next. Another aspect that helped connect people was symbols, as the Spider-Man-themed story helped individuals make sense of what was happening, and what SpiderMable symbolized. Spider-Man was a recognizable superhero, and his fictional adventures made it easier for people to relate and understand to SpiderMable's non-fictional story. This was observed by WoS\_Spidey's tweet who understood why Spider-Man symbolized.

WoS_Spidey	Hate Peter Parker and Spider-Man all you want. But that little girl, #SpiderMable, just reminded me in the magic that comes with Spider-Man
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Symbols help create mutual meaning, and superheroes like Spider-Man make it easier for individuals to relate and understand what values and beliefs they share. "Humans, consciously and subconsciously, are always striving to make sense of their surrounding world and Symbols—such as gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words—help people understand the world" (Little et al., 2014, p.89). "Symbols provide clues to understanding experiences and they convey recognizable meanings that are shared by societies" (Little et al., 2014, p.89).

How can superheroes and the Hero's Journey model support a shared experience for individuals to unite? The impact of SpiderMable's story influenced how individuals collectively interacted and formed as a group to show their support make a wish come true for a little girl. SpiderMable was a superhero that symbolized the greater good in people, and individuals wanted to get involved. As DionProle's tweet indicated, SpiderMable was more than an individual, she represented according to DionProle, "Canada."

DionProle	Thanks #SpiderMable for keep Edmonton safe and representing the rest of Canada in your amazing crusade on battling the evils of this world
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Mable's mother, Lisa, shared her perspective about what SpiderMable symbolized for the community:

“SpiderMable represented the ultimate child, a pretty, little, charming, and smart child who people could relate to, a child who battled something we don't want anybody to ever have to face. A serious sickness, in her case, cancer, but it doesn't matter what kind but it's anything that knocks you down. The hope of the superhero is to rise above, to be beyond that ...[and overcome the challenges]” (Lisa, 2017).

Superheroes bring out goodness as Loeb and Morris (2005) argued, “Good is inherently attractive... what is good will draw us in its direction. It will motivate us and direct our steps” (p.6). SpiderMable was a superhero as she embodied hope and goodness, and she served as a role model that people were attracted to and who could follow. Her Hero's Journey was a story people could relate to, that she was fighting a challenge to overcome, and through her adventures succeed in victory, and also inspire an entire city.

erind11	#SpiderMable thing today shows how humanity can come together, put politics and fighting aside and make a wish come true for another human
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**Analysis 1: What factors of social media (Twitter) helped SpiderMable's story go viral online and in doing so, connect audiences together?**

On September 28, 2015, the story of SpiderMable went viral across the globe on Twitter. CTV News reported, “[SpiderMable] earned countless messages of support from the likes of politicians, celebrities, sports stars and Spider-Man himself (at least, his Twitter account)” (Elliot, 2015). SpiderMable's epic adventure was the most popular trending topic across Canada, and the #SpiderMable hashtag was retweeted from as far as China, Australia, and Brazil (Ramsay, 2015). Initially, for the event, SpiderMable's family “hoped a few people would come out to cheer for Mable, but the stunt quickly picked up attention on social media...and then ‘It just went boom, and all of a sudden we've got so many people out there,’ said Lisa” (Elliot, 2015). Just like the similar event of Batkid in San Francisco in 2013, where the hashtag #SFbatkid was an important factor in spreading Batkid's story with nearly 600,000 tweets between November 5 and 16 (Schwartz, 2013), so too was the #SpiderMable hashtag for SpiderMable and Twitter was the tool that enabled her story to reach a global audience.

Lisa (2017) was amazed by the power of social media and how it could connect so many people:

“None of us, absolutely not one single person involved in planning that day had any idea that it was going to explode the way it did. Before that day, we didn't have Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter. We had no idea of the influence of social media. During the event, at 10:00 a.m. we had the Premier of Alberta Rachel Notley tweeting support, and then at 10:05 a.m. we get a tweet from the Prime Minister of Canada Stephen Harper. We didn't have a single clue about the power and magnitude of social media.” (2017).

Little et al. (2014) observed social media can dramatically transform how people get involved because it speeds up how individuals become aware and informed of an issue almost instantaneously, you can build up an audience without ever meeting the people you are inspiring, and are freer without geographic barriers.

### **Twitter**

What is Twitter? Twitter is a social media platform that is free for anyone (friends, family, coworkers, strangers etc.) to “communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent messages” (Twitter, 2017). How Twitter works is that “people post ‘tweets’ which may contain photos, videos, links, and up to 140 characters of text, and these messages are posted to a user profile, and can be sent to followers or searchable on Twitter search through hashtags etc.” (Twitter, 2017). Why was the social media platform Twitter instrumental in helping communicate SpiderMable’s story to go viral? As Chang (2010) observed, “Twitter self-defined its service as ‘a real-time information network powered by people all around the world; that lets you share and discover what's happening now” (p.2). Information can be immediately disseminated. He further declared, “Twitter's popularity can be attributed to its ease of use and concise content requirements (message must be composed within 140 characters including space and links) (Thomas, 2010) and that one can send and read the Twitter messages (tweets) through any compatible interface, such as: Internet, mobile phone, and short message service” (Chang, 2010, p.2). Additionally, “Twitter has become a relatively new method of mass communication, arguably, because it operates in real-time and was designed for mobility” (Zhao & Rosson, 2009) (Chang, 2010, p.3). Wherever you were in Edmonton, if you had a smart phone you could track what, where, and when SpiderMable was. Twitter is a powerful tool for researchers, as the data from public tweets can be recorded and analyzed. According to Lalji and Deshmukh,(2016)

“social media sites such as Twitter...have become an important platform where users can share their valuable opinions on certain topics” (p.2887).

### **Hashtags #**

What was the importance and role of the hashtag #SpiderMable in connecting a mass audience together? Chang (2010) defined, “Hashtags, words or phrases prefixed with a pound sign (#), are the primary way in which Twitter users organize the information they tweet and the hashtags that are currently most widely used appear in the Twitter sidebar as trending topics” (p.2). Hashtags make it easier to find and track information. Chang (2010) observed, “This enables tweets on a specific subject to be found more easily by searching for their common hashtag than by searching for the full text of specific tweets” (p.3) and “hashtags are quite useful in the context of conferences or events, provided that the hashtags have been announced or promoted; thereby, all event-related information can be tagged in the same way and shared by the participants” (p.3).

### **Social media content sharing**

Why does some social media content generate more interest than others and what factors cause the formation of trends? Asur, Huberman, Szabo, and Wang's research studied trending topics on Twitter. Asur et al. (2011) discovered “the resonance of the content with the users of social network plays a major role in causing trends” (p.1), and “trending topics on Twitter mostly consisted of two to three word expressions” (p.3). Shorter phrases were easy to share. The most important factor Asur et al. (2011) identified in determining trends was “the retweets by other users” and if “the content that trended was largely news from traditional media sources which was then amplified by repeated retweets on Twitter which generated trends” (p.11). Social media

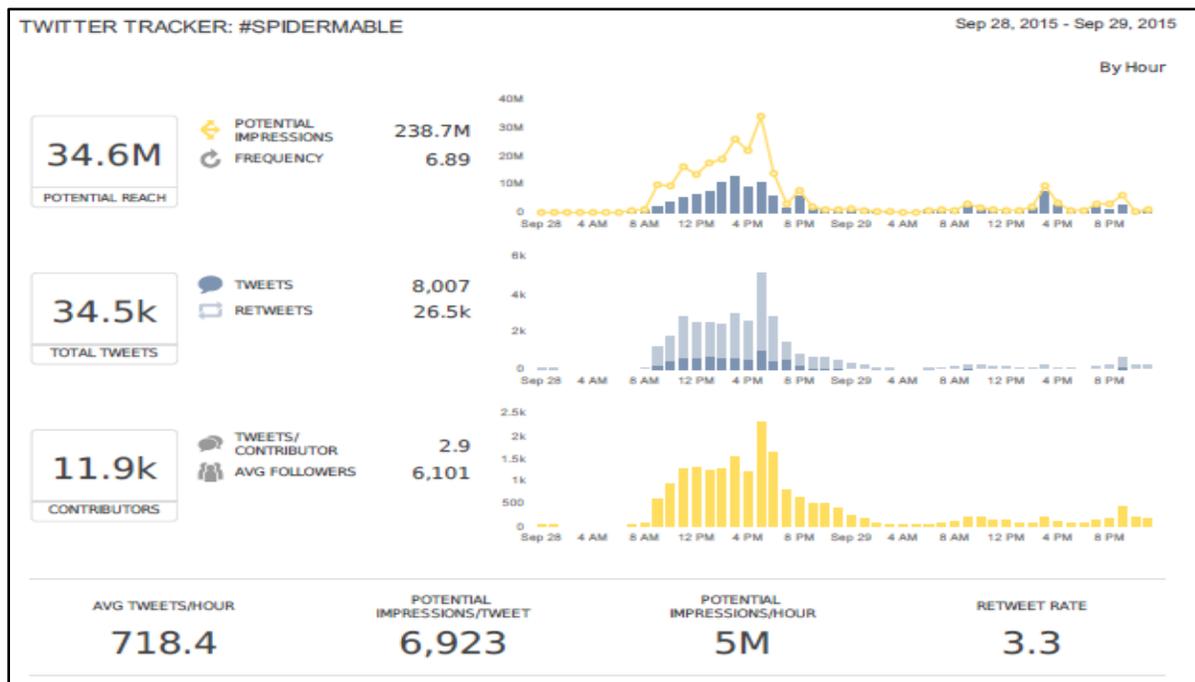
content from traditional media sources that was short and resonated with users was more likely to be retweeted with others causing a trend or “viral online content.”

The Twitter metrics from tracking the #SpiderMable hashtag on the dates **September 28 and 29, 2015** resulted in the following data (Union Metrics, 2017):

**Tweet Breakdown for #SpiderMable hashtag on Twitter on September 28 and 29, 2015**

<b>Total tweets by Twitter users:</b>	34,483
Tweet type: <b>Regular</b>	6,896
Tweet type: <b>Replies</b>	1,111
Tweet type: <b>Retweets</b>	26,476
<b>Potential reach:</b>	34,633,097
<b>Contributors</b>	11,889
<b>Potential Impressions/ Exposure</b>	238,736,975
<b>Average Tweet per Hour</b>	718.4
<b>Retweet Rate</b>	3.3

**Tweet Activity for #SpiderMable on Twitter on September 28 and 29, 2015**



**Top Ten Tweets for #SpiderMable based on most impressions on September 28 and 29, 2015**

TOP TWEETS
🔍 ☰

IMPRESSIONS



**Spider-Man** @SpiderMan

Sep 28, 2015

Go, #SpiderMable! We believe in you!  
[twitter.com/metroedmonton/...](https://twitter.com/metroedmonton/)

🔗 104.1k
📄 448
👤 4
📊

8.6M

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**Edmonton Police** @edmontonpolice

Sep 28, 2015

#SpiderMable we hope you've seen this! #yeg needs you to save @EdmontonOilers Captain @Ferknuckle  
[@ChildrensWishAB](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=L73z7D...)

🔗 120.9k
📄 430
👤 3
📊

7.4M

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**Edmonton Oilers** @EdmontonOilers

Sep 28, 2015

#Oilers forward @cmcdavid97 leaving practice to join the search for missing captain @Ferknuckle!  
 #SpiderMable



🔗 646.2k
📄 361
👤 1
📊

7.2M



**City of Edmonton** @CityofEdmonton

Sep 28, 2015


🔗 168.3k
📄 249
👤 3
📊

7M



**NHL** @NHL

Sep 29, 2015

Thank you for saving @EdmontonOilers captain @Ferknuckle, #SpiderMable! You're our hero.  
[s.nhl.com/6016Bzjre](https://s.nhl.com/6016Bzjre)



🔗 5.4M
📄 128
👤 0
📊

6.2M



**BreannaKarstensSmith** @BreannaCTV

Sep 28, 2015


🔗 5,112
📄 304
👤 0
📊

6.1M



**Justin Trudeau** @JustinTrudeau

Sep 28, 2015

🔗 2.9M
📄 173
👤 0
📊

5.4M



**NHL** @NHL

Sep 28, 2015

🔗 of @EdmontonOilers
📊

5.4M



**Marvel Entertainment** @Marvel

Sep 28, 2015

🔗 4.6M
📄 0
👤 0
📊

4.6M



**Bleacher Report** @BleacherReport

Sep 28, 2015


🔗 3.7M
📄 110
👤 0
📊

3.9M

The data indicates that the hashtag #SpiderMable was essential for increasing SpiderMable's story to reach a large audience because it allows individuals to sort and easily search and track information like Chang (2010) observed. Additionally, the other top hashtags such as #yeg, #Oilers, #CBC, #elxn42 etc. helped expand the reach of SpiderMable's story to different audiences. The data shows that the majority of tweets were generated on the day-of the event, supporting that Twitter's strength is the real-time updates to information. Regular Tweets (original content) only accounted for 20% of the tweets shared by users, while Replies accounted for 3%, and the majority of tweets were through users Retweeting Tweets of others at 77%. This data represents a sort of echo-like effect, where the original content or original tweets were generated by approximately 20% of tweets, while the rest (77%) were tweets that were re-shared. Although this is not a part of my research, it is interesting to note for future study these statistics are strikingly close to the Pareto Principle (80/20 rule) that states, "for many events roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes" (Kiremire, 2011). For Twitter contributors, over the 48-hour window, there were 11,889 Twitter accounts (people) who sent tweets using #SpiderMable hashtag. From the data, a large part for sharing SpiderMable's story was the potential reach a Twitter user had to connect with others. Union Metrics (2017) stated the importance of reach is that, "In social media, reach refers to the size of the potential audience for a message, or the maximum number of people who could have been exposed to a message. It's a lot like how newspapers and magazines use reach to measure circulation numbers or how TV programs use Nielsen rating as reach counts the size of your unique potential audience." The biggest contributors had large audience followings, such as Marvel, City of Edmonton, Spider-Man, National Hockey League, and the Edmonton Oilers.

Identical to the BatKid event, “Amazing content is the essential ingredient for a successful social media campaign” (Powell, 2014, p.16). Throughout SpiderMable’s event, there was a very diverse audience that tweeted and also uploaded photos that were very emotional and positively-orientated. Additionally, as Powell (2014) observed, “Bring together social and traditional media platforms to produce results” (p.16), many news agencies were following and sharing SpiderMable’s story. The traditional media such as agencies like CBC, CTV, and Global, uploaded video as well to some of their tweets. One of the top 10 tweets was from CTV reporter Breanna Kartstens Smith where she uploaded a photo along with her tweet, “She got him!!!!#SpiderMable saved @Ferknuckle!! #yeg”



Together, all these elements of the hashtag #SpiderMable, Twitter contributors with large followers, the use of traditional media incorporated with social media, having amazing content that resonated with audiences, allowed Edmontonians to connect with each other through social media (Union Metrics, 2017). Twitter was the tool that enabled Edmontonians and also others to participate in the journey of SpiderMable as it allowed information to be shared in real-time, it was mobile-friendly and accessible, and it was a cost-effective method to collectively act in the hero’s journey of the amazing SpiderMable.

**Analysis 2: Can SpiderMable be defined as a superhero: and if so, how has our understanding of the hero archetype evolved?**

To assess why Edmontonians related to stories about superheroes, it was important to first understand what superheroes are and to establish a consistent definition of what they represent. Additionally, the concept of a superhero must also include the relationship with the hero aspect, and how the two elements relate to each other. By distinguishing these parameters and understanding the background on what a superhero is, it presented a foundation to expand upon my argument for why people related to superhero stories.

Award-winning film, television, and comic book writer Jeph Loeb and philosopher Tom Morris asserted a strong characterization about what heroes and superheroes are in *Superheroes and Philosophy: Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way* (2005, Morris & Morris). Their definition of a superhero presented a solid base to build the framework for determining why individuals would relate to these personalities and the attributes superheroes demonstrate. I extracted tweets referencing #Spidermable on Twitter, and purposively selected public commentaries that were consistent and supportive of Loeb and Morris's argument, then mapped them to the appropriate statements. The public tweets confirmed the public's alignment and understanding of the concept of a hero/superhero and the attributes they represent.

Why are hero and superhero stories so relevant? Loeb and Morris (2005) state:

“...these characters embody our deepest hopes and fears, as well as our highest aspirations, and that they can help us deal with our worst nightmares. They chart out questions we'll all have to face in the future. And they shed new light on our present condition. In addition, they do all this in such a way as to give us a new sense of direction and resolve as we live our own lives.” (Morris & Morris, 2005, p.11).

People resonate with these characters because they provide an example for others to emulate. The concept of a hero has existed throughout history. A hero represents a “moral category” for Loeb and Morris (2005) as they identify, “no level of achievements alone is enough to make someone a hero, that person must also embody noble qualities as well” (p.11). Therefore, a hero is someone who is admired for achievements and embodies noble qualities.

Loeb and Morris (2005) argue that there are many heroes in the real world around us every day, such as firemen, police officers, doctors, nurses, and teachers as the people in these jobs often rise above the natural concern for the self to put the needs of others first (p.13) and “they fight for human health, safety, growth, and excellence” (p.13). Unfortunately, as Loeb and Morris (2005) observe, “we don’t often think of these people as heroes because their contributions are so common, and so regular to our experience, that we can easily overlook their distinctive character” (p.13). However, Loeb and Morris argue that these activities are heroic and this is why the concept of superheroes is important, because it brings greater awareness and magnifies the lens through which we see heroes.

“The superheroes stand out, not just because of their outfits and powers, but because of their altruistic activism and dedication to what is good” (Loeb & Morris, 2005, p.14). This is demonstrated from the public’s perception in tweets of SpiderMable, as BiancaCTV acknowledges SpiderMable overwhelms Edmontonians with goodness. 917thebounce shares this sentiment that SpiderMable makes the city of Edmonton a better place.

BiancaCTV	We're so often overwhelmed by the tragedies...Thanks #SpiderMable for overwhelming us with the good. It's impossible not to smile for her!
917thebounce	We're lucky to have the cutest superhero in the universe making our city a better place! #yeg #SpiderMable <a href="https://t.co/m8CjVa5jn5">https://t.co/m8CjVa5jn5</a>

What are the traits of superheroes? According to Loeb and Morris (2005), “As a rule, superheroes have powers and abilities far beyond those of ordinary mortals. And to a person they

pursue justice, defending the defenseless, helping those who cannot help themselves, and overcoming evil with the force of good” (p.11). DionProle shares this belief about SpiderMable in their tweet as they reference how SpiderMable keeps Edmonton safe. Mindtaker\_ also acknowledges the term “justice” to describe SpiderMable as a hero.

DionProle	Thanks #SpiderMable for keep Edmonton safe and representing the rest of Canada in your amazing crusade on battling the evils of this world!
Mindtaker_	No villain is safe from justice when facing the tiny fury contained in The Amazing #SpiderMable The hero #Edmonton needs.

Regular humans, however, can still be superheroes. Loeb and Morris (2005) state, “A superhero is a hero with superhuman powers, or at least with human abilities that have been developed to a superhuman level. That gets Batman and Green Arrow, among others, into the fray, where they belong. But remembering the "super," we can never allow ourselves to forget the "hero" element as well” (p.14). The public tweets support this argument that SpiderMable is a superhero, as Xeryfyn acknowledges her “heroic” elements of being brave in the face of danger and resilient while karen\_sp\_fitZ describes a “power” that SpiderMable is able to bring people together and for their goodness to shine.

Xeryfyn	#SpiderMable reminds us of the hero in all of us: brave in the face of danger, resilient in times of need & stronger when we stand together#yeg
karen_sp_fitZ	Among #SpiderMable's powers: bringing together the ppl of #yeg & showing them their best, kindest sides. #superhero <a href="http://t.co/rBl48WH1Qe">http://t.co/rBl48WH1Qe</a>

Superheroes are both inspirational and aspirational as Loeb and Morris (2005) argue, “The concept of a hero is what philosophers call a normative concept. It doesn't just characterize what is, it offers us a glimpse of what we can be” (p.15). They further explain (2005) superheroes “present us with something to which we all should aspire” (p.15). SpiderMable symbolizes strength and determination and encourages others as both joeyjojrshabado and the ChildrensWishAB reference how she inspires people to act.

joeyjojrshabado	My little 7yr old man was so inspired by #SpiderMable he decided to make crafts to sell for cancer <a href="https://t.co/voM3CPzHRt">https://t.co/voM3CPzHRt</a>
ChildrensWishAB	#SpiderMable inspires others across Canada to become heroes and grant wishes #joyisawonderdrug <a href="http://t.co/fRlhOXuMqT">http://t.co/fRlhOXuMqT</a>

Superheroes bring out goodness. Loeb and Morris (2005) describe that the ancient philosopher Plato, “believed that good is inherently attractive...what is good will draw us in its direction. It will motivate us and direct our steps. That's why the depiction of the heroic in superhero stories is of moral force” (Loeb & Morris, 2005, p.16).

SteveRickettsSP	#SpiderMable signifies all that is good about Edmonton
aimeok	The #SpiderMable stuff is so, so sweet. One of those days you feel good about humanity.

Superheroes remind us about values. As Loeb and Morris (2005) claim, “From our childhoods and on into adulthood, superheroes can remind us of the importance of self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and expending ourselves for something good, noble, and important. They can broaden our mental horizons and support our moral determination” (p.16). This is supported by RaibowSociety’s comment about SpiderMable’s courage, and iamjasonmill’s acknowledgement of her superhero spirit.

RainbowSociety	Thank you #SpiderMable for your superhero courage! You've made #YEG a safer city. Shout out to @ChildrensWishAB! #wishcometrue #bestdayever
iamjasonmills	Above all, I'm thankful for a girl with a superhero spirit. #SpiderMable, you are a fighter & you're going to do great things in life.

Superhero stories are relatable because they speak to both our hopes and fears. Loeb and Morris (2005) highlight, “superheroes have been around for so long, and have continued to be so popular, in part, because they speak to our nature, as well as both our aspirations and our fears. We all aspire to make a difference, to have an impact in this world, and to be acknowledged for that impact. The superheroes can keep that flame alive in our hearts as we ponder their sense of mission, and as we see them live it. But their stories can also speak to our fears, and in equally

important ways” (p.16). The public’s view that SpiderMable is on a mission is reflected in VirginRadioTO’s response.

AlmaDentalCtr	Little #SpiderMable is making everyone smile as she bravely takes on cancer and crime in Edmonton: <a href="http://t.co/Icwn53HHeU">http://t.co/Icwn53HHeU</a> via @VancouverSun
VirginRadioTO	"Good luck to #SpiderMable in #yeg! This 6 year old crime fighter is on an important mission.

Superheroes are symbolic in that they demonstrate challenges can be overcome. Loeb and Morris (2005) convey, “We all fear harm. The superheroes show us that all these dangers can be confronted and overcome. They display the power of character and courage over adversity. And so, even in dealing with our fears, they can be inspirational” (Loeb and Morris, 2005, p. 17).

jana_pruden	I have several friends going through treatment. It's hard enough for an adult. Being brave and strong really is heroic. #SpiderMable
sarahevekelly	6-yr-old Edmonton leukemia survivor answers desperate mayor’s call, saves NHL Captain from CERTAIN PERIL #SpiderMable <a href="http://t.co/OnsZDlcPlg">http://t.co/OnsZDlcPlg</a>

Superheroes never give up. As Loeb and Morris (2005) highlight:

“Superheroes show us that nothing worth doing is easy. Even with their superpowers, the greatest of the superheroes often prevail against adversity only because of what philosophers know of as the classic virtues, and some neo-classic ones as well, like courage, determination, persistence, teamwork, and creativity. They don't accept defeat. They won't ever give up. They believe in themselves, and in their cause, and they go all-out to achieve their goals. By showing us how even very powerful people have to fight and struggle and stick to that fight in order to prevail, they help us deal with the fears that we all face concerning our own prospects in the world. So, it will be tough. So what? We can do it.” (Loeb & Morris, 2005, p.17).

up993	She did it! Way to go #SpiderMable! With the help of her friends around #YEG today, she was able to save @Ferknuckle! <a href="http://t.co/SdN10pGi2u">http://t.co/SdN10pGi2u</a>
BreannaCTV	Success!! #SpiderMable saves Black Cat!! Now time to find @Ferknuckle #yeg <a href="http://t.co/lw0VlqC3cZ">http://t.co/lw0VlqC3cZ</a>

Superheroes set an example to do right. “The superheroes work for not just people who appreciate their efforts, but often for people who criticize and revile them. They don't do what they do because it's popular. They do it because it's right” (Loeb & Morris, 2005, p.18).

KCampbellyeg	#SpiderMable is all about doing the right thing. Before she gets on the zipline she asks about buying tickets. <a href="http://t.co/DEbCA02rDA">http://t.co/DEbCA02rDA</a>
peggy_blair	This is all that is right with the world. Right here. Today. In Edmonton. #spidermable <a href="http://t.co/T8Ch9uMFHB">http://t.co/T8Ch9uMFHB</a>

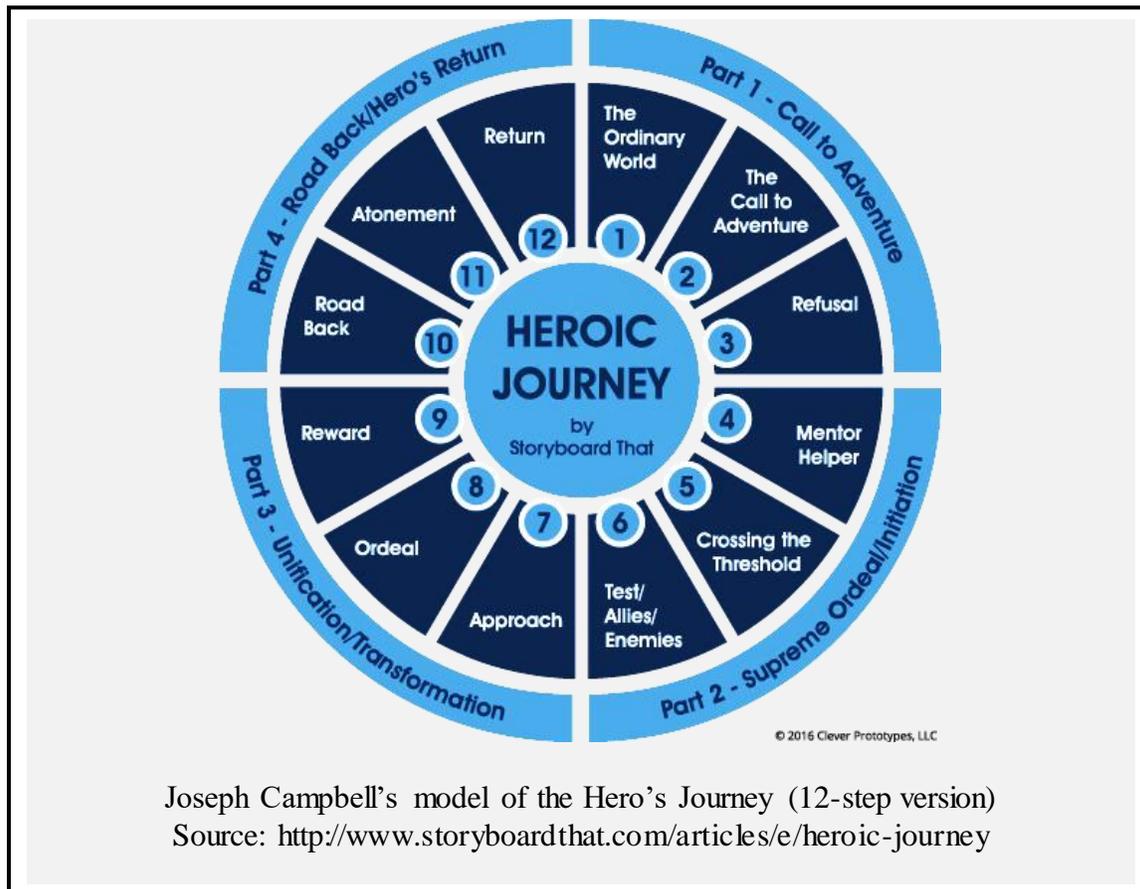
Superheroes are role models. As Loeb and Morris (2005) reference the philosopher Seneca, they conclude his advice summarizes it best what superheroes embody,

*“Choose for yourself a moral hero whose life, conversation, and expressive face all please you, then picture him to yourself at all times as your protector, and as your ethical pattern. We all need someone whose example can regulate our characters. And then, again: Cherish some man of great character, and keep him always in mind. Then live as if he were watching you, and order all your actions as if he saw them (Seneca, as quoted by Loeb & Morris, 2005, p.19).”*

blairiuscaeser	#SpiderMable my new favourite superhero... I am inspired by this superhero. <a href="https://t.co/NjPKQe0Vig">https://t.co/NjPKQe0Vig</a>
HerRoyalVagesty	I don't idolize people as a general rule but today, @ChildrensWishAB ,@Ferknuckle & many others just became heroes of mine. #SpiderMable

As both blairiuscaeser and HerRoyalVagesty’s tweets confirm, both individuals idolized and were ultimately inspired by SpiderMable and her journey.

### Analysis 3: Does the Hero's Journey model apply to superhero stories told on social media?



According to Christopher Vogler (1992), “The Hero's Journey is a pattern of narrative identified by the American scholar Joseph Campbell that appears in drama, storytelling, myth, religious ritual, and psychological development. It describes the typical adventure of the archetype known as The Hero, the person who goes out and achieves great deeds on behalf of the group, tribe, or civilization.” To determine if this model is still applicable in today's society and can be adapted in social media, I tested if the 12 stages could be applied to the tweets referencing #Spidermable. Since Twitter is a public sphere, there was a diverse audience of various individuals, and this study tested if the tweets could be compiled and mapped into the framework of the monomyth, - the Hero's Journey of a little girl named SpiderMable.

The story of SpiderMable can be mapped by the use of tweets from the public and applied to the model defined by Joseph Campbell as the Hero's Journey. What does this mean? The importance of this pattern of narrative is what Campbell (1949) claimed was a "monomyth," a single, universal, and timeless story. "In his study of world hero myths Campbell discovered that they are all basically the same story – retold endlessly in infinite variations, and that all storytelling, consciously or not, follows the ancient patterns of myth (Vogler, 1992). Although Edmontonians may not have been conscious about the hero archetype in SpiderMable's journey, they related to her adventures because the event followed a universal storyline whose meaning was understood. "The theme of the hero myth is universal, occurring in every culture, in every time; it is as infinitely varied as the human race itself; and yet its basic form remains the same, an incredibly tenacious set of elements that spring in endless repetition from the deepest reaches of the mind of (hu)man" (Vogler, 1992). In a way, the character of SpiderMable was a composition of a universally collective story. Vogler (1992) states, "this accounts for the universal power of such stories... stories built on the model of the hero myth have an appeal that can be felt by everyone, because they spring from a universal source in the collective unconscious, and because they reflect universal concerns."

Beginning at Stage 1, SpiderMable is introduced to Edmontonians and presented with a situation that she is unaware of, the start of her hero's journey. She has a wish, to be a superhero for a day and fight crime with Spiderman. At Stage 2, SpiderMable is being called to adventure and is faced with change, to make her dream come true. At Stage 3, there is uncertainty and danger ahead and she must decide if she accepts the call to save local hockey captain Andrew Ferrence from the villain Mysterio. At Stage 4, she meets with mentors who help her on her quest. SpiderMan supports her on her mission, Mayor Don Iveson presents her with special web

slinging tools, and the Police Service Deputy Chief briefs her on the investigation. At Stage 5, she must now cross the threshold as she enters a new and unfamiliar world. At Stage 6, she is tested and for SpiderMable, she zip-lines to rescue the Black Cat. At Stage 7, it is the approach where SpiderMable and her newfound allies prepare for her battle. SpiderMable now has an additional ally in the Black Cat, along with an ever-increasing crowd of supporters (Edmontonians) cheering her on journey. At Stage 8, SpiderMable faces her biggest ordeal as she confronts death and her greatest fear. SpiderMable overcomes the fear of cancer and out of this moment comes a new life as she never gives up. At Stage 9, SpiderMable is rewarded as she saves local hockey captain Andrew Ferrence was the villain Mysterio. At Stage 10, SpiderMable is tired, but now on the road back. At Stage 11, the climax and also the resurrection, SpiderMable's completes her journey. She got to fight crime and be a hero for day with Spiderman and greatly demonstrates that wishes can come true. At Stage 12, she returns with the elixir and shares with the community what she has been transformed by. Edmontonians are inspired by the courage, strength, and unity of everyone coming together and demonstrating what can be created by collective action of everyone striving towards good.

Campbell's model of the Hero's Journey is still relevant and can be translates to superhero stories on social media. Even though his theory was developed in 1949, it supports his argument that the monomyth is timeless. The following section maps the public tweets referencing the #SpiderMable hashtag to the stages of the Hero's Journey.

### Stage 1: THE ORDINARY WORLD

The hero, uneasy, uncomfortable or unaware, is introduced sympathetically so the audience can identify with the situation or dilemma. The hero is shown against a background of environment, heredity, and personal history. Some kind of polarity in the hero's life is pulling in different directions and causing stress (Vogler, 1985).

 Twitter Feeds		
1	ChildrensWishAB	Can it be?! All is quiet in #yeg. For now. It does seem there is someone lurking in the shadows. What's in store for tomorrow? #SpiderMable
2	925FreshRadio	Mable is set to become "Spider-Mable" today!! Find out how you can cheer her on. <a href="http://t.co/5cU3akhKle">http://t.co/5cU3akhKle</a> #SpiderMable <a href="http://t.co/KOzvJPA5SE">http://t.co/KOzvJPA5SE</a>
3	manabrownies	"Something pretty cool is happening in my city today. #SpiderMable <a href="http://t.co/8lyBOqz8r9">http://t.co/8lyBOqz8r9</a> "
4	jana_pruden	#SpiderMable's father, Neil, tells me she could have had any wish in the world, and all she wanted was to fight crime with Spider-Man.
5	ProtagonistsOtt	"1960s-era Spider-Man is her favourite because he was the closest hero to being human, her mother said." <a href="http://t.co/A1kBMPpKNi">http://t.co/A1kBMPpKNi</a> #SpiderMable
6	RoundTableLaw	She likes Spider-Man because they both have radioactive blood. #ouch #thefeels #SpiderMable <a href="https://t.co/NoPZgAbgn5">https://t.co/NoPZgAbgn5</a>
7	JimEwing_PVS	It takes a village of #EveryDayHeroes to raise a #SuperHero. Go #SpiderMable! <a href="https://t.co/9eKSrHT5Ho">https://t.co/9eKSrHT5Ho</a>
8	CanBlogHouse	Good Morning! If you live in #YEG keep your eyes peeled for #SpiderMable today! <a href="https://t.co/UJf7xC54a4">https://t.co/UJf7xC54a4</a> <a href="http://t.co/SbW2Udqp">http://t.co/SbW2Udqp</a>
9	CreatingPeople	Help #MakeAWish for a sick child come true in #yeg #SpiderMable <a href="http://t.co/Oofym1HE2c">http://t.co/Oofym1HE2c</a>
10	debbie_g79	Okay #SpiderMable... #YEG needs you today, be our hero!

### Stage 2: THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

Something shakes up the situation, either from external pressures or from something rising up from deep within, so the hero must face the beginnings of change. (Vogler, 1985).

 Twitter Feeds		
1	EdmontonOilers	RT @Nov_ProjectCAN: We knew something was wrong when @Ferknuckle missed his workout this morning! Please save him #SpiderMable
2	GlobalEdmonton	"News comes in that a prominent Edmontonian has been kidnapped. #yeg #SpiderMable <a href="https://t.co/hh8kFbHgYC">https://t.co/hh8kFbHgYC</a> <a href="http://t.co/P0yjJxp6J3">http://t.co/P0yjJxp6J3</a> "
3	edmontonpolice	#SpiderMable we hope you've seen this! #yeg needs you to save @EdmontonOilers Captain @Ferknuckle <a href="https://t.co/ZUfGCGUHWq">https://t.co/ZUfGCGUHWq</a> @ChildrensWishAB
4	917thebounce	BREAKING NEWS- Edmonton Oiler @Ferknuckle was kidnapped! The only one who can save him is #SpiderMable WATCH: <a href="https://t.co/AGx9BeVDA4">https://t.co/AGx9BeVDA4</a>
5	RachelNotley	Please #SpiderMable - you're our only hope! #yeg <a href="https://t.co/LxwBs0Whrj">https://t.co/LxwBs0Whrj</a>
6	KitchenMagpie	Nefarious! The @EdmontonOilers Captain has been kidnapped! The only person that can help him is #SpiderMable! #yeg <a href="http://t.co/DJCzAFA9hO">http://t.co/DJCzAFA9hO</a>
7	iBry83	An awesome crime fighting kid! She's been called on to save a kidnapped @Ferknuckle #yeg #SpiderMable <a href="https://t.co/sGKiMlevZp">https://t.co/sGKiMlevZp</a>
8	td_kristen	#SpiderMable Your the only one who can save #andrewferrence! The world needs you! Now get out there and kick some bum! <a href="http://t.co/TsdWEFg56l">http://t.co/TsdWEFg56l</a>
9	tedgbauer	Desperate plea for help for #SpiderMable from Ference girls. #yeg <a href="https://t.co/Tf104yhjWD">https://t.co/Tf104yhjWD</a>
10	frantastic999	Just heard that #SpiderMable will be rescuing ppl in Edmonton today. Go cheer her on! Sending support to #SpiderMable you go girl!!!

### Stage 3: REFUSAL OF THE CALL

The hero feels the fear of the unknown and tries to turn away from the adventure, however briefly. Alternately, another character may express the uncertainty and danger ahead (Vogler, 1985).

 Twitter Feeds		
1	Childrens WishAB	#SpiderMable's reaction to seeing the news that the city needs her - "I wasn't expecting this!" And she's off! <a href="http://t.co/f2B5wUT0af">http://t.co/f2B5wUT0af</a>
2	casmangroup	Best of luck to #SpiderMable as she attempts to save #yeg for the forces of evil today <a href="http://t.co/CbeuDxae4u">http://t.co/CbeuDxae4u</a> #webslinger #gogetem
3	JimmyButlerPC	Sounds like trouble is afoot in Edmonton. They need the services of #SpiderMable. #yeg #Edmonton
4	905ShineFM	Fewf! #SpiderMable has answered the plea from @edmontonpolice! She's on her way to help now! <a href="https://t.co/4p8Fp12XZX">https://t.co/4p8Fp12XZX</a>
5	kale_mac	Oilers Captain @Ferknuckle has been kidnapped. Call to #SpiderMable has been answered. She's on her way! #yeg #spiderman #nhl #totherescue
6	twistedellipse	Curse you #Mysterio! You'll get yours once #SpiderMable and Spiderman get their hands on you! #yeg <a href="https://t.co/U6DCwMAM6g">https://t.co/U6DCwMAM6g</a>
7	anne_theriault	#SpiderMable - fighting cancer, breaking down gender roles and rescuing grown men from evil-doers. Literally the hero I've been waiting for.
8	JimmyShew	Hockey season hanging in the balance. Uncertainty in a normally safe city. We need you Spider-Mable! #SpiderMable #yeg
9	PeopleOfCanada	For a little fun, follow #SpiderMable today. Little girl with leukemia is helping Spiderman in Edmonton a la Batkid.
10	BreannaCTV	#SpiderMable has agreed to help find @Ferknuckle She's fueling up before heading to City Hall to meet @doniveson #yeg <a href="http://t.co/8tvjPDGpPS">http://t.co/8tvjPDGpPS</a>

### Stage 4: MEETING WITH THE MENTOR

The hero comes across a seasoned traveler of the worlds who gives him or her training, equipment, or advice that will help on the journey. Or the hero reaches within to a source of courage and wisdom (Vogler, 1985).

 Twitter Feeds		
1	Childrens WishAB	#spidermable to the rescue! Our hero is on her way to City Hall to meet with @doniveson! We're sure he'll have more info on the @andrew.ference disappearance! #childrenswish #wishesworkwonders <a href="https://t.co/DvP8X5J62Y">https://t.co/DvP8X5J62Y</a>
2	edmontonpolice	#yeg is definitely in good hands now! #SpiderMable has her partner - Spider-Man to help save @Ferknuckle <a href="https://t.co/xUVuuLVL0J">https://t.co/xUVuuLVL0J</a>
3	twistedellipse	#SpiderMable gets web blasters from @doniveson and now some tips from @edmontonpolice! Better watch out Mysterio!! <a href="https://t.co/ONCY6rKKkv">https://t.co/ONCY6rKKkv</a>
4	Emily_Mertz	The #eps gave #SpiderMable a special bag full of crime-fighting tools to help her catch #Mysterio <a href="http://t.co/nteCLfdSAd">http://t.co/nteCLfdSAd</a>
5	tedgbauer	@doniveson says villain is wearing a purple cape, adds #SpiderMable has free run of city to find @Ferknuckle #yeg <a href="http://t.co/6tvbgit5sP">http://t.co/6tvbgit5sP</a>
6	yegjohnbrennan	Mayor @doniveson providing #SpiderMable with crime fighting gear to help find @EdmontonOilers Captain @Ferknuckle <a href="http://t.co/vWE5PqEibk">http://t.co/vWE5PqEibk</a>
7	tracey_anderson	I love that in my city our mayor @doniveson and our premier @RachelNotley are helping #SpiderMable's wish come true. #yeg rules today.
8	YEGTweetup	#SpiderMable is off to meet with @edmontonpolice & get some information on helping to get @Ferknuckle back! #yeg <a href="http://t.co/HKEiVyo4fx">http://t.co/HKEiVyo4fx</a>
9	Childrens WishAB	The team @edmontonpolice met with #SpiderMable to give her a few tips for her mission <a href="http://t.co/zocO81pIh9">http://t.co/zocO81pIh9</a>
10	MinDhariwal	#SpiderMable has received Intel from #eps Sgt. Steve Sharpe, the bad guy's name is #Mysterio next stop #WEM #yeg #cbc <a href="http://t.co/LKieYNS8lv">http://t.co/LKieYNS8lv</a>

### Stage 5: CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

At the end of Act One, the hero commits to leaving the Ordinary World and entering a new region or condition with unfamiliar rules and values. (Vogler, 1985).

 Twitter Feeds		
1	jana_pruden	""Now go save the city,"" @doniveson says. ""Okay!"" says #SpiderMable"
2	BreannaCTV	#SpiderMable's Grandpa tells me her favourite saying is "I got this." #toughgirl #yeg <a href="http://t.co/cVXbISODy7">http://t.co/cVXbISODy7</a>
3	globalnews	#SpiderMable meets the media and fills them in on her mission to catch Mysterio <a href="http://t.co/O8NLxkQb4D">http://t.co/O8NLxkQb4D</a>
4	eI_cormier	"Spider-Mable, Spider-Mable, Spider-quick, so strong and able, Fighting crime, only six, Missing Oilers? She's the fix, Here comes the #SpiderMable"
5	CancerSocietyAB	#YEG calls on #SpiderMable to save the day! Cheer on this amazing little cancer fighter <a href="http://t.co/z4rKqx9ut1">http://t.co/z4rKqx9ut1</a> <a href="http://t.co/iZI1gA5PZn">http://t.co/iZI1gA5PZn</a>
6	pbsamboryk	Mysterio is one of #Spiderman's greatest foes! #SpiderMable is helping to take him down and save @Ferknuckle! <a href="http://t.co/fUkvWPIg1H">http://t.co/fUkvWPIg1H</a>
7	KentwoodFordYeg	Spider senses tingling? That's cause #spiderman and #spidermable are on the case! #CutenessOverload #yeg <a href="https://t.co/UgMMe55v4u">https://t.co/UgMMe55v4u</a>
8	naitnewswatch	"Look at that confidence! #spidermable is on the case! Watch out bad guys!"
9	TorrensJonathan	Seriously - stop what you're doing and follow #SpiderMable on her epic journey today. It's just the best.
10	Childrens WishAB	#SpiderMable is being recognized all over #yeg as she's on her crime fighting adventure! <a href="http://t.co/EZ0m6L5YKr">http://t.co/EZ0m6L5YKr</a>

### Stage 6: TESTS, ALLIES AND ENEMIES.

The hero is tested and sorts out allegiances in the Special World. (Vogler, 1985).

 Twitter Feeds		
1	BoyerMichel	Spiderman shares some of his secrets and vows to help #SpiderMable save Edmonton. Never would have imagined... <a href="http://t.co/kK9hrwqXeP">http://t.co/kK9hrwqXeP</a>
2	MinDhariwal	#SpiderMable has received Intel from #eps Sgt. Steve Sharpe, the bad guy's name is #Mysterio next stop #WEM #yeg #cbc <a href="http://t.co/LKieYNS8lv">http://t.co/LKieYNS8lv</a>
3	BreannaCTV	#SpiderMable is preparing to zip line across the water park as part of superhero training #yeg @Official_WEM <a href="http://t.co/gAqIKYYtIv">http://t.co/gAqIKYYtIv</a>
4	Childrens WishAB	#SpiderMable has just figured out she needs to zip line to save Black Cat! To the rescue! <a href="http://t.co/2qiruGaT5C">http://t.co/2qiruGaT5C</a>
5	630CHED	Black Cat has been calling for #SpiderMable's help. She's tied up in the @Official_WEM Waterpark. <a href="http://t.co/Xmc5HotrEt">http://t.co/Xmc5HotrEt</a>
6	SpiderMan	Go, #SpiderMable! We believe in you! <a href="https://t.co/xQFjYOBcZC">https://t.co/xQFjYOBcZC</a>
7	JustinTrudeau	Glad to know next time I'm in Edmonton I'll be safe thanks to #SpiderMable! <a href="https://t.co/Wx0ErG1Gm2">https://t.co/Wx0ErG1Gm2</a>
8	stephenharper	Canada is rooting for you #SpiderMable! <a href="https://t.co/GZO4EZ4Kgk">https://t.co/GZO4EZ4Kgk</a>
9	loopyandlumpy	#SpiderMable just flew down to rescue Black Cat!!! Yaaaay! Well done, superhero!
10	BBBSCalgary	2nd angle of #SpiderMable saving Black Cat! Amazing what she can do... with some mentoring from Spidey ;) #yyc #yeg <a href="https://t.co/UrlWkw4awx">https://t.co/UrlWkw4awx</a>

### Stage 7: APPROACH.

The hero and newfound allies prepare for the major challenge in the Special world. (Vogler, 1985).

Twitter Feeds		
1	MLSA_BellaireHS	Cancer patient #SpiderMable is on the case, collecting clues about a missing Edmonton Oiler... Kidnapped! #superhero <a href="https://t.co/CrtDxBrtmm">https://t.co/CrtDxBrtmm</a>
2	cspotweet	#Spidermable gets a hand from her sidekicks Spiderman and Black Cat. #yeg <a href="http://t.co/1AXnIwHRWs">http://t.co/1AXnIwHRWs</a>
3	MJForbes	Massive following as entourage grows for #SpiderMable <a href="http://t.co/OmeqmcWLn4">http://t.co/OmeqmcWLn4</a>
4	Performance104	#SpiderMable, we're behind you all the way! Hope you can rescue @ferknuckle! Everyone has to check this out...awesome!
5	ScorpioTheatre	Good luck #SpiderMable on your quest to save Edmonton from the nefarious Mysterio!
6	DrSautner	#SpiderMable We r cheering for u in Ft McMurray #ymm Please find our Captain and arrest the bad guys! Love it #yeg <a href="https://t.co/v0EQhKwTbj">https://t.co/v0EQhKwTbj</a>
7	pbsamboryk	@joanneefcl Last I heard #SpiderMable and Spider-Man have teamed up with Black Cat and are hot on the heels of Mysterio at WEM!
8	Emily_Mertz	#spiderMable gives the waiting media an update on her adventure.. "I'm not very scared" <a href="http://t.co/TyJJhdCr5J">http://t.co/TyJJhdCr5J</a>
9	tedgbauer	#SpiderMable faces media like a pro - "We're going to go hunt Mysterio" She's better than some law enforcement #yeg <a href="http://t.co/cyJl1tNDfi">http://t.co/cyJl1tNDfi</a>
10	KokuaTrySport	Thankful to have heroes like #SpiderMable to keep #yeg safe! Good luck rescuing EDMOilers captain @Ferknuckle Mable!! We know you can do it!

### Stage 8: THE ORDEAL

Near the middle of the story, the hero enters a central space in the Special World and confronts death or faces his or her greatest fear. Out of the moment of death comes a new life. (Vogler, 1985).

Twitter Feeds		
1	mayorblaine	<b>#SpiderMable captures my heart not because of her illness but because of her strength.</b>
2	tree_turty_tree	With great power comes great responsibility, #SpiderMable! <a href="https://t.co/WwXehWqW9i">https://t.co/WwXehWqW9i</a>
3	CyberAnonymous	CBCNews: RT briarstewart: #Spidermable facing one of the scariest scenes, the media scrum! #cbc <a href="http://t.co/I8E349zV4z">http://t.co/I8E349zV4z</a>
4	630CHED	#SpiderMable's parents say not even leg pain & fatigue would prevent the daughter from embracing the day. <a href="http://t.co/ZIwP8kqx43">http://t.co/ZIwP8kqx43</a>
5	marksuits	Update: #SpiderMable is at the zoo to rescue the kidnapped Andrew FERENCE. <a href="http://t.co/ONiG0UtPo9">http://t.co/ONiG0UtPo9</a> <a href="http://t.co/R1Dw9Sr5Xm">http://t.co/R1Dw9Sr5Xm</a>
6	JasonGregor	Sounds like #SpiderMable is getting closer to finding @Ferknuckle. Her spidey sense her at the Zoo. Go cheer her on.
7	ChildrensWishAB	#SpiderMable has learned so much from her heroes Spider-Man and Black Cat on her wish adventure! <a href="http://t.co/RFTliLoqzi">http://t.co/RFTliLoqzi</a>
8	Cammc2point0	Almost got him! You can do it #SpiderMable !!!
9	KoryKocur	#SpiderMable has her spidey senses are tingling <a href="https://t.co/4BVuRawNUA">https://t.co/4BVuRawNUA</a>
10	IvonneMMI	Hurry #SpiderMable RT @jana_pruden: Oilers captain Andrew FERENCE's calling for help from #SpiderMable <a href="http://t.co/urZSzx Dz">http://t.co/urZSzx Dz</a>

### Stage 9: THE REWARD

The hero takes possession of the treasure won by facing death. There may be celebration, but there is also danger of losing the treasure again (Vogler, 1985).

 Twitter Feeds		
1	alexiskienlen	#spidermable blasting mYsterio with webs! She got him! <a href="http://t.co/TbEsJCbnvE">http://t.co/TbEsJCbnvE</a>
2	905ShineFM	SHE DID IT!!! #SpiderMable! Our Hero! - AJ <a href="https://t.co/zlsFuzIUPR">https://t.co/zlsFuzIUPR</a>
3	BreannaCTV	Mysterio is headed to jail and @Ferknuckle is safe thanks to #SpiderMable #yeg <a href="http://t.co/406YfYYULV">http://t.co/406YfYYULV</a>
4	OilersNation	#SpiderMable found the captain. Ladies and gentlemen, the captain is safe. I repeat - the captain is safe! -bm #SpiderMableForPrimeMinister
5	realoilfan	#Attagirl #SpiderMable you saved the city and the #Oilers Capt. @Ferknuckle the whole country was with you today. #NiceWork
6	_Jenny_Bean_	#SpiderMable did it! @Ferknuckle is free, and #yeg is safe for another day!
7	flatoutwhimsy	Woohoo! #SpiderMable, Black Cat and Spiderman save our fair city from the dastardly deeds of Mysterio. <a href="https://t.co/zFQ35dF0FV">https://t.co/zFQ35dF0FV</a>
8	scottybomb	Looks like Mysterio's plans were foiled by #SpiderMable! The city of #yeg is safe once again!
9	edmontonpolice	Perfect conclusion! #SpiderMable saved @Ferknuckle and all of #yeg! Now we can take him away. <a href="http://t.co/LAXB98uOIQ">http://t.co/LAXB98uOIQ</a>
10	Mix1037radio	#SpiderMable did it! She saved Ference from Mysterio with help from so many cool #yeg-tonians. Here's the video. <a href="https://t.co/OOCtMZ1WrU">https://t.co/OOCtMZ1WrU</a> ~SR

### Stage 10: THE ROAD BACK

About three-fourths of the way through the story, the hero is driven to complete the adventure, leaving the Special World to be sure the treasure is brought home. Often a chase scene signals the urgency and danger of the mission (Vogler, 1985).

 Twitter Feeds		
1	tanis_eh	Poor #SpiderMable, she must be exhausted after her day of saving the city. Here hopes she gets ice cream and a nap soon.
2	YahooSportsNHL	#SpiderMable is "a tired superhero" after epic day in Edmonton. <a href="http://t.co/OMC5rVIDHt">http://t.co/OMC5rVIDHt</a> #NHL <a href="http://t.co/4ouwcyztD7">http://t.co/4ouwcyztD7</a>
3	BreannaCTV	Mysterio is headed to jail and @Ferknuckle is safe thanks to #SpiderMable #yeg <a href="http://t.co/406YfYYULV">http://t.co/406YfYYULV</a>
4	AlmaDentalCtr	Little #SpiderMable is making everyone smile as she bravely takes on cancer and crime in Edmonton: <a href="http://t.co/lcwn53HHeU">http://t.co/lcwn53HHeU</a> via @VancouverSun
5	ImThatGentleman	#SpiderMable to the rescue. Thanks for keeping the Edmonton streets safe. You will beat the leukemia battle! #Hero <a href="http://t.co/5b8AIVq5Vl">http://t.co/5b8AIVq5Vl</a>
6	paleoman50	#SpiderMable the best feel good story today....makes me glad to know humanity can come together. Well done everyone!
7	KCampbellyeg	We simply don't have enough days like today. Thank you #SpiderMable for inspiring all of us in so many ways. <a href="http://t.co/QVBR8OaK7U">http://t.co/QVBR8OaK7U</a>
8	markusoff	My wish is that #SpiderMable gets to live many more years, full of many more adventures and great memories. <a href="https://t.co/s8udKCRtQT">https://t.co/s8udKCRtQT</a>
9	tallertrees	So glad I will sleep well tonight knowing that #SpiderMable has kept our city safe! #cityofchampions
10	rtbfamily	SHE solved a crime but BEST of all she INSPIRED thousands of HEARTS #SpiderMable @Childrens_wish #hero #supportCWF <a href="https://t.co/8FHUHA98H">https://t.co/8FHUHA98H</a>

### Stage 11: THE RESURRECTION

At the climax, the hero is severely tested once more on the threshold of home. He or she is purified by a last sacrifice, another moment of death and rebirth, but on a higher and more complete level. By the hero's action, the polarities that were in conflict at the beginning are finally resolved (Vogler, 1985).

 Twitter Feeds		
1	globalnews	"ICYMI: #SpiderMable has her wildest dream come true thanks to the Children's Wish Foundation. <a href="http://t.co/az27rGIZfh">http://t.co/az27rGIZfh</a> <a href="http://t.co/wHCcrZgMWy">http://t.co/wHCcrZgMWy</a> "
2	Emily_Mertz	"We never imagined #spidermable would inspire so many people... She had our hearts from day 1" @ChildrensWishAB <a href="http://t.co/7siLMNXwaC">http://t.co/7siLMNXwaC</a>
3	esther_madziya	Great job #SpiderMable you've truly inspired us all!! @ChildrensWishAB @Ferknuckle @EdmontonOilers <a href="https://t.co/bKGxX0AAD2">https://t.co/bKGxX0AAD2</a>
4	NahremanIssa	I love that so many people came together to make #SpiderMable's wish come true! #yeg truly is the City of Champions! <a href="https://t.co/B0ab7zCJiq">https://t.co/B0ab7zCJiq</a>
5	staceybrotzel	With a city safe...a happy, sick, little girl rests. Thank you #SpiderMable. You made us smile and remember what it is to dream. #yeg
6	MyBedrockHome	Way to go #SpiderMable you saved @Ferknuckle!! What an amazing day! Dreams do come true. Thank you for sharing her dream @MakeAWishNAB
7	M0NST4R	It's incredible to see how far a child's wish can go with the support of the community and our city. #SpiderMable #SavesTheDay #YEGLove
8	DeeHigdon	Today is the closest I've seen to a fairy tale in real life. Thank you all #YEG grown ups who weren't afraid to dream w/ #SpiderMable!
9	habanerogal	That adorable #spidermable reminds us all of the wishes and hopes of all kids. @MakeAWishCA and all of @edmontonpolice so kind. #findference
10	TODA Yonline	Six-year-old girl with cancer lives her #superhero dream for a day as #spidermable <a href="http://t.co/8FnyRdCQ7z">http://t.co/8FnyRdCQ7z</a> <a href="http://t.co/iuMBnqybIp">http://t.co/iuMBnqybIp</a>

### Stage 12: RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR

The hero returns home or continues the journey, bearing some element of the treasure that has the power to transform the world as the hero has been transformed (Vogler, 1985).

 Twitter Feeds		
1	Xeryfyn	#SpiderMable reminds us of the hero in all of us: brave in the face of danger, resilient in times of need & stronger when we stand together #yeg
2	BiancaCTV	We're so often overwhelmed by the tragedies...Thanks #SpiderMable for overwhelming us with the good. It's impossible not to smile for her!
3	Smyth94ever	Thinking #SpiderMable may be my spirit animal. The innocence, courage, strength is truly amazing in this little girl. The world needs this.
4	BRinYWG	#SpiderMable embodies everything that is good about Edmonton and its people. That precious little girl is lucky to have you all, #yeg.
5	McMurrayMusings	Huge #ymmshoutout to the people of #yeg who came together to grant the wish of amazing superhero #SpiderMable. You are an amazing community!
6	RolandHung	What an inspirational story! Happy to see a community come together for a little girl! #SpiderMable #MakeAWish <a href="https://t.co/Ks9mEGLxzm">https://t.co/Ks9mEGLxzm</a>
7	erind11	#SpiderMable thing today shows how humanity can come together, put politics and fighting aside and make a wish come true for another human
8	AmaniGerard	Very grateful and honor to live in a city where everyone comes together to make a young girl's wish to come true. #yeg #SpiderMable #yegcc
9	biggpaparich	I challenge anyone to tell me that superheroes don't exist. Today is the benchmark of heroes in #yeg. I am a proud edmontonian.#SpiderMable
10	CancerSocietyAB	Way to go, #SpiderMable! You're an inspiration for young cancer fighters everywhere! <a href="https://t.co/oIT3p17jvv">https://t.co/oIT3p17jvv</a>

Campbell (1949) summarized the standard path of the Hero's Journey as, "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (p.23). What my analysis of the Twitter data revealed was that SpiderMable's story followed the path of the Hero's Journey. What the interesting observation is was that her journey that was shared on the social media platform Twitter was told from the collective "voice" from many individuals. It was not just told from one person's perspective, but from multiple viewpoints. It was like the story of SpiderMable was written by many writers who each wrote only one sentence, and individually, would only capture a limited experience. However, when composed together, the individual stories all feed into this one main story that tells the tale of a little girl who is transformed into the superhero SpiderMable, who has to defeat and overcome the villain Mysterio and save a local hockey captain, and in her victory she connects and inspires an entire community with the power of the hero within each of us. This supports Campbell's claim that the Hero's Journey, a monomyth – is one universal story as Edmontonians related to SpiderMable's adventures. As Vogler (1985) observed based on Campbell's theory of the Hero's Journey, "The theme of the hero myth is universal, occurring in every culture, in every time; it is as infinitely varied as the human race itself; and yet its basic form remains the same, an incredibly tenacious set of elements that spring in endless repetition from the deepest reaches of the mind of man" (p.2).

**Analysis 4: How can superheroes and the storytelling model of the Hero's Journey support a shared experience for individuals to unite?**

Why did so many individuals participate on social media and in real-life to support SpiderMable's heroic journey to rescue a local hockey captain and defeat a villain named Mysterio? Especially, why did random strangers get involved in her story, for what benefit was there for them? Campbell (1949) theorized that all heroic narratives are variations of a monomyth – which is a single, universal and timeless story. He developed the model called the “Hero's Journey” in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) that documented the pattern of narrative he argued all hero stories follow. With superheroes, their power lies in what they symbolize and represent – especially from a collective understanding. Beside Mickey Mouse, the superhero Superman was the first fictional character to be so successfully promoted as a universal icon, familiar all around the world, and recreated for generation after generation (Darowski, 2006). SpiderMable's story is a superhero adventure and Hero's Journey that was universally understood as it represented the hero archetype within every individual. As Campbell defined, “A hero properly is someone who has given his life to something bigger than himself or other than himself” (Campbell & Moyers, 1998, p.3), and SpiderMable symbolized this ideal.

The case study of SpiderMable provided a rich data source of individual opinions and collective perception on Twitter to demonstrate the effect SpiderMable had on people. To argue how superheroes and the storytelling model of the Hero's Journey can be used to support a shared experience for individuals to relate, unite, and even potentially act towards collective action, I applied theory that was guided by both a sociological and sociocultural perspective.

SpiderMable's story inspired many individuals and therefore society. As Menzies noted, “Because culture is comprised of individuals, myth has a societal as well as individual

significance” (2014, p.224). Another powerful effect of SpiderMable’s story was how it connected people not only on social media (Twitter), but also in the “real” world together. Reporter Jana Pruden (2015) from the Edmonton Journal newspaper interviewed a participant about how she started following the SpiderMable story on social media then decided to cheer SpiderMable on in-person. Pruden (2015) asked why, and the participant shared, “It’s just amazing...I like how the whole city as a whole came together as a community. You have to support when that happens. It makes you want to be a part of it.” It was important to both examine the sociocultural and sociological perspectives for this research. “Culture represents the beliefs, practices and artifacts of a group, while society represents the social structures and organization of the people who share those beliefs and practices. Neither society nor culture could exist without the other” (Little et al., 2014, p.80).

**Symbolic Immortality:** Why would individuals want to get involved in SpiderMable’s story? Just like a superhero, there is this deeper sense of purpose that calls. From an existential perspective, Ernest Becker (1973, 1975) argued, that, “human beings...strive for a sense of ‘symbolic immortality’, which is the sense that one is a valuable part of a cultural meaning system (a cultural worldview) that is larger, and more significant, than one’s individual existence” (Elad-Strenger ,2016, p.45). It is the sense of wanting to make a difference in the world just like a superhero does, and “leaving a personal mark on one’s meaning system by acting to advance and protect its values and goals allows the individual to stand out as heroic and unique” (Elad-Strenger, 2016, p.46) that helps satisfy an individual’s inclusion or belonging in a group.

When many individuals united and acted to support SpiderMable’s adventures, the effect grew even stronger. “Inclusion is a central component of Social Identity Theory as Taifel &

Turner, (1986) stated, ‘the groups to which people belong are an important component of their identity and sense of personal value’” (Elad-Strenger, 2016, p.51). As Allison\_cann’s tweet highlighted, the effect of the community support for SpiderMable affected her individually by “warming her heart”:

allison_cann	Nothing warms my heart as much as the community rallying together for #SpiderMable. Kudos to all involved!
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**The Purpose of the Hero’s Journey:** From a sociocultural perspective, why do superhero stories matter? As Indick (2004) argued, “Heroes are simply ourselves projected outwardly...as their stories are our stories” (2004, p.12). The Hero’s Journey connects us to each other, whereby it affects our individual behaviours as the stories impact our society, culture, and surroundings. Vogler (1985) argued, “Stories built on the model of the hero myth have an appeal that can be felt by everyone, because they spring from a universal source in the collective unconscious, and because they reflect universal concerns” (1985). Vogler (1985) further stated that “the idea imbedded in mythology and identified by Campbell in the [Hero’s Journey] can be applied to understanding any human problem” (p.2). Becker (1973) argued, human beings want to “achieve a sense of symbolic immortality” and “strive to feel their acts are heroic, in that they are timeless, meaningful, and unique” (Elad-Strenger, 2016, p.51). Superheroes and the Hero’s Journey model provide a map to understanding how society connects to the individual, but also how the individual connects to society as Campbell (1949) claimed, “There is no separateness...just as the way of social participation may lead in the end to a realization of the All in the individual, so that of exile brings the hero to the Self in all” (p.333).

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

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Why do superhero stories matter? On September 28, 2015, the real-life superhero journey of SpiderMable influenced an entire community in the city of Edmonton and on social media to engage in collective action as she inspired and united individuals towards the greater good of humanity. What was the meaning of SpiderMable? “Humans, consciously and subconsciously are always striving to make sense of their surrounding world and symbols...help people understand the world... as they convey recognizable meanings that are shared by societies” (Little et al., 2014, p.89).

SpiderMable is a symbol. She is a positive role model that symbolized the traits and qualities that are associated with the superhero that helped people to relate and understand what was happening. Superheroes bring out goodness. The philosopher Plato argued, “Good is inherently attractive...what is good will draw us in its direction and motivate us and direct our steps” (Loeb and Morris, 2005, p.14). Additionally, like the path of the Hero's Journey as defined by mythologist Joseph Campbell, the monomyth is a universal narrative pattern that is shared across history and societies making it easier for individuals to identify with. As Loeb and Morris (2005) attained, “the depiction of the heroic in superhero stories is of moral force” (p.16), and that what makes a superhero stand apart is that the “superheroes realize there is no real self-fulfillment without self-giving, and superheroes use their talents and powers for the greater good” (p.15).

On September 28, 2015, SpiderMable was not the only superhero in action. However, SpiderMable was the catalyst that inspired a collective social movement of heroes to unite by providing significance and meaning towards something greater than any individual – symbolic immortality. Why did Edmontonians relate to the real-life story of SpiderMable? She was a

reflection of the hero within themselves, and they were a “valuable part of a cultural meaning system (a cultural worldview) larger, and more significant than individual existence” (Elad-Strenger, 2016, p.45).

Sociocultural theory studies how society shapes our culture and influences us. The evolution of the hero archetype in superhero stories can engage and inspire individuals in real-life. How has the influence of Spiderman impacted the life for Mable? Firstly, Mable could relate to Spiderman as he was her favourite superhero because they both shared something in common – they both had radioactive blood (Purdy, 2015). Also, as Spider-Man fought for good and defeated the villains he faced, Spider-Man helped Mable by giving her hope that she could overcome and defeat her cancer.

On September 28, 2015, Mable was transformed into the superhero SpiderMable. However, the event wasn't a one-time experience for it was just the beginning of SpiderMable's journey as she continues to make a difference as Lisa reflects:

“Ever since her big day, Mable has not been quiet. She has spent so much time paying it forward, by being SpiderMable and helping different organizations out, whether it is the Kids with Cancer Society, Children's Wish Foundation, the Canadian Cancer Society, or Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of Canada which is where she's working right now, she is not sitting on her laurels. She has taken the chance to go ahead and do something good with her fifteen minutes of fame” (Lisa, 2017).

How did SpiderMable's journey influence individuals on Twitter? Through content analysis of thousands of public tweets, it is conclusive that many people who responded and followed SpiderMable's journey using the hashtag #SpiderMable were inspired and motivated towards serving a greater cause for the good of humanity. The Hero's Journey of SpiderMable

symbolized the power of potential and what can happen when individuals in real-life unite to make a difference. This supports previous literature by Fishwick and Mak (2015) who claimed, "Real life superheroes engage in social and symbolic activities which embody their vision of how society should be" (p.19). Additionally, Frimer (2016) observed how these superhero stories help individuals identify with one another because hero creation helps human form large, powerful groups of non-kin.

Superheroes and their hero-archetype stories help people relate to others. For real-life superheroes, Fishwick and Mak's (2015) study surmised it bestows many emotional and psychological rewards. Ultimately, the superhero archetype influences society because "people will always need heroes...they teach and inspire others to be something more than themselves," (Russell, 2013, p. 121). The story of the superhero is a monomyth each individual shares as the meaning is universally understood.

Superhero fiction is a genre of stories that is becoming more popular in society through comics, cartoons, and movies, as these stories help us connect and communicate with each other. With the advancement of technology and online social media tools and applications, sharing these stories and experiences has become considerably easy. Twitter has allowed individuals to instantaneously be updated about an event and the reach of this message can be accessed by a global audience. Technology has enabled the meaning and stories of superheroes to be universally shared, furthering the concept of the monomyth and the Hero's Journey.

Future research should be considered to further explore the potential in using the concept of the superhero and the Hero's Journey narrative to inspire communities towards collective action and uniting for a greater cause. From an individual application, adopting the superhero motif can be a method to inspire hope such as Mable was able to apply with Spiderman and gain

inner strength, as the power of the superhero is the ability to instill courage and overcome adversity. As Loeb and Morris (2005) identified:

“We all fear harm. The superheroes show us that all these dangers can be confronted and overcome. They display the power of character and courage over adversity. And so, even in dealing with our fears, they can be inspirational” (Loeb and Morris, p.17).

Any audience can relate to a superhero, whether an adult or especially a child.

“Superheroes have the power to impact the real world as their power lies in influencing the minds of children to be the heroes they idolize” (Brown et al., 2015, p.2). SpiderMable’s story was almost an identical to Batkid, the real-life superhero story of a five-year-old boy from San Francisco who was battling leukemia and had a dream to be Batman for a day in 2013” (Powell, 2014, p.16). The growing trend and relationship individuals have with superheroes continues to expand. Superhero stories matter and are relevant because as Loeb and Morris (2015) denote, “these characters embody our deepest hopes and fears, as well as our highest aspirations, and that they can help us deal with our worst nightmares. And they shed new light on our present condition. In addition, they do all this in such a way as to give us a new sense of direction and resolve as we live our own lives” (p.11). This aligns with Indick’s conclusion, “Superheroes are simply ourselves projected outwardly, their stories are our stories” (p.12).

Within each of us is a superhero, that strives for the common good and something greater, and society is the reflection of those collective actions, where like SpiderMable, we are all a little bit better from it. SpiderMable, her story is a hero’s journey - a monomyth that is timeless and universal and that Edmontonians could identify with and unite to support; while also inspiring inside of them...their own superhero.

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## Appendices

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### Appendix A - Information Letter and Consent Form

**Study Title:** Superhero Stories and Why They Matter: Origin of the Real-Life SpiderMable

Research Investigator:  
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#### Background

Superhero fiction is a genre of stories that is becoming more popular in society through comics, cartoons, and movies, as stories help us connect and communicate with each other. How are these stories about superheroes influencing us, and how can they inspire individuals to unite towards a greater cause? Your participation in this study is to provide your perspective on the real-life superhero story of your daughter SpiderMable.

#### Purpose

On September 28, 2015, Mable inspired and connected the City of Edmonton together when she transformed into the real-life superhero SpiderMable. The purpose of this research studies “Why do Edmontonians relate to “real-life” superhero stories such as SpiderMable,” and examines how the hero archetype described by Joseph Campbell in “the Hero’s Journey” has evolved into the superhero and how this storytelling has adapted through social media networks. The findings of this research will provide insight into the influence superheroes have on society and how these stories affect and can inspire behaviours, unity, and participation, especially during difficult times like medical challenges.

The research will be used to complete the requirements for the Masters of Arts in Communication and Technology degree at the University of Alberta for Matthew Flores.

#### Study Procedures

My research will be using a text-oriented qualitative methodology combining discourse analysis and content analysis to analyze tweets from Twitter referencing the #SpiderMable hashtag during a 48-hour time frame when the story of SpiderMable emerged online and in the public sphere. The content will be examined to determine why stories of “real world” heroes unite individuals and how the “Hero’s Journey” can be applied to understand why.

To understand the story of SpiderMable directly, I’d like to conduct a one-on-one in-person interview with you. The interview will be held at a time and place that is convenient for you and that also provides confidentiality.

The time that it is expected for the interview is half an hour, however a full hour will be scheduled. Before beginning the interview, a recap of the ethics approval and opportunity for you to ask any questions will be provided. The interview will be recorded on a digital recorder that will be then be deleted after being transcribed. After the interview is complete, I will provide the transcribed copy for you to review for any concerns. Additionally, one month prior to submitting my research (May 1) I will share the final project with you to review again to withdraw or update any concerns.

#### Benefits/Risks

There will not be a direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Potential secondary benefits however for participating is that it will help share the story of SpiderMable to others and how superhero stories can be used to engage and inspire others through the use of the “Hero’s Journey” template. The potential risk for participating in this research is additional “media buzz” and lack of privacy. The potential risk to Mable as a minor is that she can be identified as a public figure. To minimize any risk where you feel uncomfortable in providing your comments, you can review and comment on the draft material before it will be made public one-month prior to the submission date.

**Voluntary Participation**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary, or not obliged to answer any specific questions even if participating in the study. You can withdraw from the study and can have any collected data withdrawn from the data base and not included in the study (prior to final submission on June 1, 2017).

**Confidentiality & Anonymity**

Due to your relationship to SpiderMable, as Mable's mother, your name will appear in this report as Mable's mother. No last names will be used in identifying any members in this research, however your first name will be used as such can't provide anonymity due to public personae and through news coverage you may potentially be identified. Your interview data will be strictly kept confidential.

A final copy of this research project will be made available to you for your review one-month prior before it is submitted to address any concerns you may have.

**Potential Future Use**

In addition to the interview being used for my capstone project, there may be the possibility that the results from this research may be used to be published in professional journals or news articles.

**Further Information**

If you have any questions or concerns please contact:

Research Investigator:  
**Matthew Flores, Graduate Student**  
  
**University of Alberta**  
**Edmonton, AB, T6G 2R3**  
**mflores@ualberta.ca**  
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Supervisor:  
**Dr. Rob McMahon, Assistant Professor**  
**Master of Arts in Communication & Technology,**  
**University of Alberta**  
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**780.248.1110**

**Ethics Approval Statement**

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

**Consent Statement**

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name (printed) and Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

<b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Opportunity to review draft material associated with your interview,</b>
<b>NO</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	Consent that I can email you for review and feedback prior to completion.
<b>NO</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	

### Appendix B – Interview Questions

Can you provide me with a background on how the story SpiderMable came to be?

Why do you think Edmontonians connected to SpiderMable?

Tell me about Mable's interest in comics and superheroes? How did she get interested?

How was it to see all the reaction/feedback of the public and their response and support? On the news? On Social media such as Twitter?

How do you think superhero stories have helped Mable?

Why do you think Mable's journey continues to inspire others?

How has the experience transformed Mable? Transformed You? Family? The Public?

What role do you think social media played in sharing Mable's story?

How did superheroes help Mable cope with her leukemia?

What does SpiderMable represent/symbolize?

### Appendix C – Definitions: Twitter Metrics (Union Metrics)

**Reach:** This number represents the maximum number of unique Twitter accounts that received tweets about the search query during the specific time period, based on Union Metric's reach algorithm. Reach can be described as the size of the maximum unique potential audience.

**Exposure:** Exposure is the number of overall potential impressions generated by tweets in the report. It is the total number of times tweets were delivered to timelines, including repeats. Since replies are only delivered to common followers' timelines, Union Metrics calculates them as a single impression.

**Activity:** The activity section provides details about the tweets including: Total number of tweets analyzed; Total number unique contributors (people who posted the tweets); Duration of the time period being analyzed; Graphical timeline showing tweet volume during the selected time period; and Tweet type breakdown which includes how many retweets and replies used for each specific hashtag being analyzed.

**Top Contributors:** This is the list of participants with the top contributions, and shows the highest contributor for each of three influence dimensions (sometimes the same person may show up in more than one category): Highest Exposure - the participant whose tweets generated

the most impressions; Most Retweeted - the participant who received the most retweets; and Most Mentioned - the participant who was @ mentioned the most times in the report.

**Contributors:** A complete list of all contributors (participants) is provided in the report analysis, including how many tweets they posted, how many retweets they received and how many impressions their tweets generated. This list is ordered by impressions.

**Top Tweets:** This is the most retweeted tweets, and provides retweet counts for each tweet. This retweet count includes both new-style automatic retweets and old-style manual retweets that start with "RT @username." In order for a tweet to show up as retweeted in this section, the original tweet must also be included in the report.

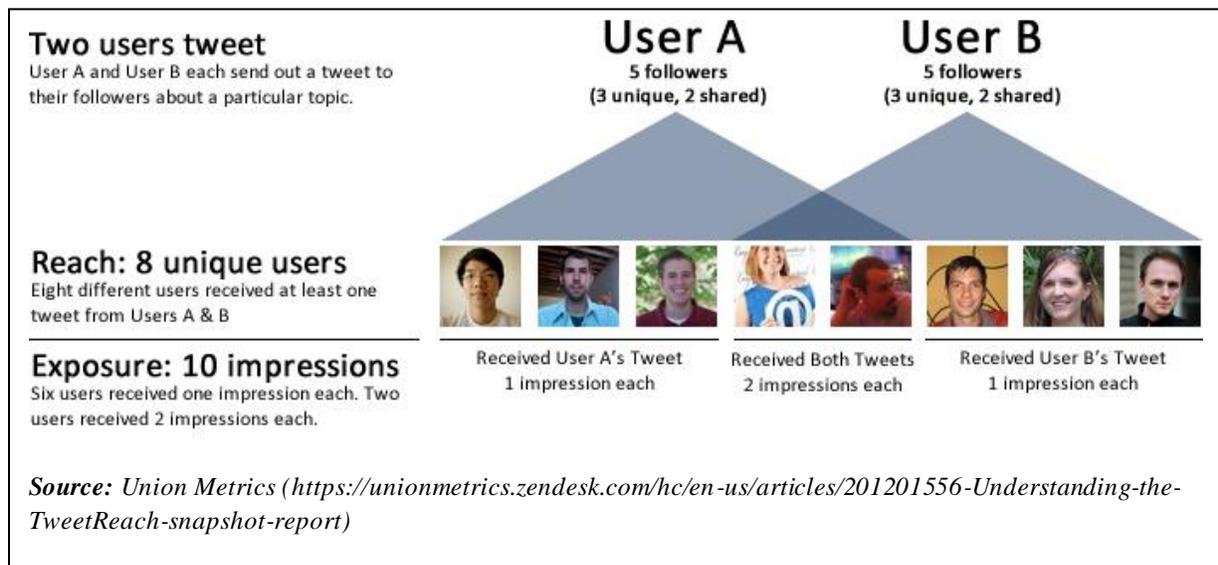
**Tweets Timeline:** A full list of all tweets is analyzed and provided in the Union Metrics report. It includes timestamps as well as start and end times.

**Understanding Reach vs. Exposure:**

**Reach** is the total number of potential unique Twitter users that received tweets about the search term. **Exposure** is the total number of times tweets about the search term were delivered to Twitter users. Union Metrics calls each receipt of a tweet a potential **impression**.

When we say "impression", we mean that a tweet has been delivered to the Twitter stream of a particular account. Not everyone who receives a tweet will read it, so you should consider this a measure of potential impressions. Both reach and impressions should be treated as directional metrics to give you an idea of the overall exposure the tracked term received. Use these metrics to get a sense of the size of your potential audience, and use engagement metrics like retweets, clicks and replies to gain a more complete understanding of your impact.

*Source: <https://unionmetrics.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/201201636-What-do-you-mean-by-Twitter-reach-exposure-and-impressions>*



**How to analyze reach and exposure**

Reach provides an understanding of the overall impact of your message or campaign. A high reach indicates that a broad base of different users found your message interesting and spread it to their followers. It often means that multiple unrelated people found out about your campaign from sources outside of Twitter. Conversely, a lower reach means that your message is likely only being shared among a smaller group of people who may be more interrelated (e.g. people in the same geographic area). A high reach will often be combined with a high exposure. If you notice the campaign has a low reach and a high exposure, it is an indicator that you may have a core of users that are trying to spread your message by tweeting repeatedly but that your campaign is failing to take off beyond those users' followers. A high exposure among a small group of people may mean they feel "bombarded" by your message. You may want to alter your message or seek out other ways to get more Twitter users involved to avoid over-saturating a small group.

**Explaining reach and its importance**

Union Metrics (2017) outlines the importance of reach as a metric with Twitter:

*“In social media, reach refers to the size of the potential audience for a message, or the maximum number of people who could have been exposed to a message. It's a lot like how newspapers and magazines use reach to measure circulation numbers or how TV programs use Nielsen ratings. Reach counts the size of your unique potential audience. Reach is essential to campaigns, because it will help you understand the potential impact of your tweets. It is important for quantifying the size of your message's universe and understanding if a campaign is successful. You can think of reach as the denominator in your measurement equations. Use reach alongside engagement numbers like clicks, retweets, or replies to calculate an engagement percentage (i.e. how many people participated out of the possible audience of your campaign)”*  
Source:<https://unionmetrics.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/201201776-Explaining-reach-and-its-importance>