Understanding Social Media and the Management of Corporate Issues:

An Analysis of Tweets Regarding an Award of an Honorary Doctorate

By

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Dedication

For my children, Danny and Marian, my greatest source of inspiration and energy that made me a better woman and professional every single day.

For my husband, Oscar, who heard my frustrations, dried my tears, and encouraged me up to keep the study going and to never give up!

For my mom and dad, and also for my beloved brothers and sisters, who have always supported me.

This work is for all of you... and for the Virgin of Fatima who encourages me to live in faith!

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Abstract

This study explores the use of microblogs (e.g., Twitter) for supporting, or undermining, the

principles of corporate social responsibility (CSR) at institutions of higher education. This is a

case study of a controversy that arose at a university surrounding the conferring of an honorary

degree to a CEO of a major multinational company. Critics claimed publicly that the recipient,

and by implication the company, had been unresponsive to social and environmental issues.

Using a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data, the study was

carried out in three stages. In Stage 1, a dataset of microblogs posted during the controversy was

collected and its content categorized. In Stage 2, a semi-structured questionnaire-interview (a

hybrid technique allowing for respondents to draft textual responses to interview questions) was

administered to a small sample of communications and public-relations professionals who were

directly or indirectly involved with the university when the controversy took place. Respondents

were asked to identify and interpret the uses and effects of microblogs in their professional

practice, especially in relation to the principles of CSR. In Stage 3, respondents were asked,

using the same questionnaire-interview technique, to identify and interpret the uses and effects

of the microblog dataset consisting of microblogs broadcast during the controversy. Results of

the study suggest that: (a) the microblogs neither directly supported nor undermined the

principles of CSR for the university; but (b) by allowing critics of the university and others to

express their sentiments, opinions, and feelings related to the controversy, the microblogs may

have indirectly supported the principles of CSR.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Contextual Background

In 2012, a controversy arose at the University of Alberta regarding one of its degree recipients. This recipient was Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, a recognized worldwide leader in water resource management and Chairman of Nestlé. This multinational company has drawn criticism for the alleged use of child labour, the issue of unethical promotion of baby formula in developing nations, and the company's apparent advocacy for water privatization (Simmons, 2012).

With the award of the honorary degree, citizens criticized Nestlé through a variety of responses including protests on streets, passionate discussions on the university's blog and also online conversations in social media, including Twitter. The university's stakeholders, such as students, professors, media, and non-governmental organizations expressed, for example by posting tweets, profound

Figure 1.1: Protestors at the University of Alberta

disagreement and disappointment with the university and its decision to award the honorary degree to Brabeck-Letmathe.

When corporations make decisions there are implications for the area of professional practice as reflected in what has been called Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Social responsibility influences a company's image, reputation, and thereby affects, in turn, the

company's relations with stakeholders (Etter, Plotkowiak, & Stanoevska-Slabeva, 2011, p. 2).

It must be noted that stakeholders or "interest groups" are any individual or group who affect

or are affected by the actions, decisions, policies, practices, or goals of the organizations

(Tetrevova & Sabolova, 2010). For universities, stakeholders include students, graduates,

employees, the government (e.g. federal, provincial, local), corporate supporters, suppliers,

other educational institutions (e.g. competitors), media, and other communities.

Some argue that higher educational institutions also face CSR as a required part of their

management and operation and in fact are expected to advocate and act with greater concern

for social responsibility than would be the case with other organizations due to their dual role

as an administrator of endowments (e.g. tuition, fees, room, board, donations, etc.) and as

teaching organizations who are entrusted with understanding and conveying moral, ethical, and

trust values (Muijen, 2004; Garriga & Melé, 2004).

Social responsiveness has been debated over the last years and it has intensified with

the advent of social media as is shown in a project by the Pew Research Center (see Figure

1.2) in which 34% of American social media users posted thoughts about social and political

issues, and 31% used social media tools, like Twitter, to encourage other people to take

actions on these issues (Rainie, Smith, Lehman Schlozman, Brady & Verba, 2012).

Younger social media users are more likely to use the tools for civic activities

% of users of social networking sites or Twitter who use social media these ways

■ Ages 18-29 ■ Ages 30-49 ■ Ages 50-64 ■ Ages 65+

	Like / promote political material	Encourage others to vote	Post thoughts on issues	Repost political content	Encourage others to act	Post links to political stories	Belong to political group on SNS	Follow officials / candidates on social media
Ages 18-29	44%	34%	42%	36%	36%	33%	26%	25%
Ages 30-49	40%	36%	34%	32%	31%	28%	21%	20%
Ages 50-64	32%	34%	28%	29%	27%	25%	14%	15%
Ages 65+	24%	32%	20%	31%	27%	18%	8%	10%

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Civic Engagement Survey, conducted July 16-August 7, 2012 on landline and cell phones and in English and Spanish. N for social media users ages 18-29=323. N for social media users ages 30-49=388. N for social media users ages 50-64=323. N for social media users ages 65+=167.

Figure 1.2.: Statistics about the use of Twitter for disclosing social and political issues.

In Canada, the ability to constantly communicate and engage with people around the world has increased considerably over the last few years. For instance, English-speaking Canadian Twitter users averaged about 33.4 hours online a week, while francophones were at 23.8 hours (Oliveira, 2011). In addition, Canadians have also out-tweeted Americans with 13.7% of Canadians on Twitter every month, whereas Americans have lagged behind at 11.3% (Rubenstein, 2010).

Recently, organizations use social media tools like Twitter to manage CSR communication in order to establish good public relations with their stakeholders (Etter et al., 2011). Nevertheless, in a higher educational context, Junco, Heibergert & Loken (2011) noted that there is very little empirical evidence available concerning the impact of social media on student learning and engagement (p. 119).

Since the current literature has offered insights and understandings about social media and its ability to disclose CSR issues, this study attempted to provide more learning and reflection on how university stakeholders are communicating and expressing their concerns related to social responsibility through social media, especially on Twitter.

1.2 The Research Problem

This study analyzed the use of social media, especially Twitter, and its support for CSR principles in the higher educational context, focusing on the case of an honorary doctorate controversy, which was considered as an issue of corporate citizenship arising within the university. The research question for the study was:

How do tweets or microblog messages about a public controversy at a university support or undermine the principles of corporate social responsibility?

1.3 Rationale of Purpose of the Study

This study undertook the purpose of offering a big picture view of what people were tweeting about corporate citizenship within a university and of the potential benefits of encouraging Twitter conversations for the application of CSR principles among stakeholders. Thus, it sought to make a contribution to the study of the higher educational context, and in particular the context of the universities and colleges in Alberta.

The research was conducted by using a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data. The study was carried out in the following three stages:

Stage One: This stage included a collection of microblogs posted during the controversy and the categorization of its content.

Stage Two: This stage comprised administering a semi-structured questionnaire-interview based on a hybrid technique allowing for respondents to draft textual responses to interview questions. It was administered to a small sample of stakeholders such as communications and public-relations professionals who were working for the university when the controversy took place, and also media communications practitioners and former students. Respondents were asked to identify and interpret the uses and effects of microblogs in their professional practice, especially in relation to the application and enhancement of the principles of CSR.

Stage Three: This stage included the same questionnaire-interview technique, to identify and interpret respondent uses of the microblog dataset consisting of tweets broadcast during the controversy.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

This social study examined tweets about the awarding of an honorary degree at the University of Alberta in 2012 and about the debate that emerged in relation to the award. The controversy loped in relation to the awarding of the degree to a recipient who was a CEO of Nestlé, a company which had been criticized for apparently not acting in accordance with the principles of CSR. This research evaluated how the content of the tweets aligned with CSR principles and, in turn, how the tweets supported or undermined the principles of CSR. Data was collected and analyzed using strategies such as the categorization of the content of tweets and the administering of hybrid questionnaires-interviews.

This chapter is divided into three themes: a) the global theory or the paradigm of pragmatism which allows a variety of lenses to analyze the problem using mixed methods; b) theoretical context on the research problem which outlines constructs such as the corporatization of higher education, the significance of CSR and its principles, and an overview of Twitter and its characteristics; and c) literature on the dictum "the medium is the message" (Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011, p. 22) and other assumptions on Twitter in a public relations context.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The advent of the Internet and, subsequently, the development of social media tools have created the most fascinating, dynamic, democratic and open disclosure of information in human history. Models on interconnected network systems have provided the landscape for theories of knowledge, moving from a hierarchical, formal model of learning with a strong determinist worldview, to one based more on a dynamic character of knowing and interaction, and also a new parallel processing of information comprised into the framework of the pragmatist worldview (Glassman & Kang, 2010).

Thus, this study was based on the paradigm because it allowed the research to tease out the consequences of actions around a problem-centered analysis under pluralistic theoretical lenses. Creswell (2008) described the pragmatist worldview as an ontology that is not committed to any one system or reality because it can apply mixed methods research, which draws liberally in both quantitative and qualitative assumptions of a research design. In addition, all investigators who choose this paradigm model are totally free to select the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best fit their needs and purposes.

The pragmatist worldview allows the development of studies that open doors to different forms of data collection and analysis to offer better understanding and comprehensive discussion of a particular problem (see Figure 2.1) because it is analyzed from a perspective of an external world independent of the researcher's mind as well as that lodged in his/her own assumptions (Creswell, 2008). The pragmatic model also allows certain flexibility to analyze content in media (e.g. Twitter) and analyze views and perceptions from actors or users (e.g. interviews), therefore both research methods were considered the foundation of the present study.

Perspectives About Mixed Methods
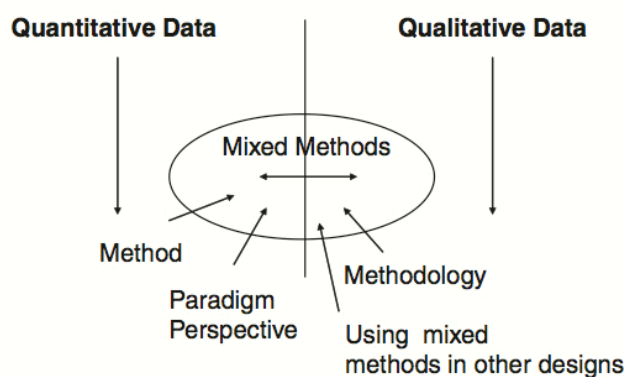
Figure 2.1: Perspectives about the mixed methods. This figure shows that the mixed methods were originally viewed as two separate strands of research-qualitative and quantitative-with a clear vision between the two methods (Creswell, 2009, p. 102)

2.2 Theoretical Context

    2.2.1 Universities as corporate citizens. According to Daft and Armstrong (2012),

universities operate in a complex environment in which a large number of stakeholders, different

technologies, and a variety of partnerships coexist. These institutions must cope with changing

government regulations, competition for quality students and instructors, and scarce financial

resources for programs. University trends consist of applying new knowledge through teaching

and learning, encouraging creativity and innovation, and promoting community involvement and

partnerships (Daft & Armstrong, 2012, p. 141).

    Over the last 30 years, the Canadian government's conception of and approach to higher

education has changed dramatically (Polster, 2006). Corporatization of universities and colleges

is a new approach, which involves looking for ways to be less wasteful and more profitable in

terms of use their resources (Mills, 2012). Even though this new approach has remarkable

advantages within higher education, Mills (2012) noted that university administrators find that

corporatization places limits on their own power, and Westheimer (2010) pointed out these limits

debilitate democratic faculty governance and also erode critical thinking among their

stakeholders.

    In the current climate, higher education has had to adapt its curricula and implement

measures oriented to the sustainability of facilities, operations, and services, while aligning its

needs with the principles of corporate social responsibility (Muijen, 2004; Winter, Wiseman &

Muirhead, 2006). Its commitment of offering high level of teaching and researching and also its

performance as a role model in terms of moral and ethical principles, encourages universities to

put into practice strategies that could face corporate issues and crisis communications. Therefore,

this research attempted to analyze messages on Twitter during the Brabeck-Letmathe

controversy, and evaluated the potential support or undermining of those messages to CSR

principles.

Due to universities becoming more effective, efficient, competitive, and able to raise funds

from private sources, Munk (2010) called them '*corporate citizens*' or '*corporate universities*'

that work in partnerships in mutually productive outcomes (p. 32). Thus, it is a given that a focus

on community should be the third leg of a university's core agenda alongside teaching and

research, providing an intangible, but nonetheless, real benefit for a university's reputation if it is

seen to act as a good citizen in relation to its wider community.
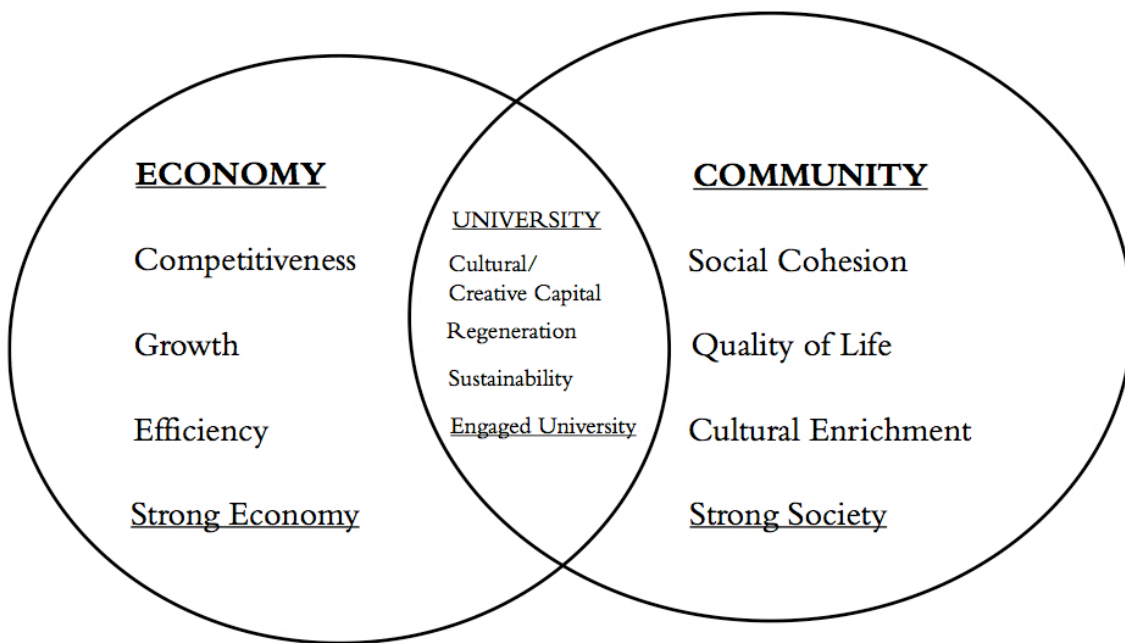
Figure 2.2.: The University, the Economy, and the Community. This figure describes how universities sit at the intersection of the economy and the community, and also how the engaged universities are both impacted by, and contribute to, a strong economy and a strong, vibrant society. Certainly, both domains pull the universities in sometimes conflicting directions (Munk, 2010, p.37)

Munk (2010) pointed out that the new approach of 'corporate universities' identifies higher education institutions as entities that 'dance' to the tune of the big organizations and other corporate players. He referred to the phenomenon of 'academic capitalism' as learning's sake giving way to the business agenda (p. 36). Universities sit at the intersection of big domains such as the economy and community, which can pull them in conflicting directions.

Furthermore, Munk (2010) explained that the university's role should envisage the ways in which economic and social factors may act in unison, and even create synergies and win-win relations. For example, he explained how Dublin City University (DCU) uses its surroundings to create mutually beneficial linkages with its communities. This allows DCU to be a public institution, which has the ability to bring community issues to light with a certain degree of independence and moral legitimacy. Thus, contemporary universities act as complex social networks in which 'social capital' (Shirky, 2008) faces an important challenge in dealing with ethical and moral issues based on CSR principles.

Nowadays, the challenge for most companies, organizations and educational institutions is focused on how to reach out to multiple stakeholder groups (e.g. students, employees, competitors, activists, partnerships, etc.) in a way that experience simple, credible, and interactive activities. The International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation is developing a study based on content analysis of 72 company websites which aims to provide results about what companies are doing regarding the best practices in CSR communication (McCallister, Illia, & Rodriguez, 2012). The IABC' study notes that social media and other online tools have not historically been used for increasing interaction and dialogue about CSR activities (Vorvoreanu cited by McCallister et al., 2012). Therefore, in the light of providing some knowledge about the use of Twitter and its relation to CSR activities the

purpose of the current study was to offer new insights about how institutions of higher education

use Twitter to help or attenuate CSR actions.

    2.2.2   **Significance and scope of corporate social responsibility.** Corporate social

responsibility can be defined as an "important factor influencing a company's image and

reputation and thereby its stakeholder relations" (Etter et al., 2011, p. 1). The meaning of

corporate social responsibility conveys the "idea of legal responsibility or ability", or "socially

responsible behavior in the ethical sense", or also, to be "responsible for" (Garriga & Mele,

2004, p.).

    The CSR processes include a variety of policies and outcomes or corporate practices that

are adapted to societal expectations (Fieseler, Fleck, & Meckel, 2009). Authors such as Muijen

(2004) explored theoretical frameworks in metaphorical contexts referring to CSR as the

triple 'P' concept, also known as the term "triple bottom line" (people, planet and profit), and

sustainable development coined by John Elkington in 1997. "[CSR] extends to people, the planet

and immaterial aspects, such as trust and responsibility, and then back from that realm of

underlying moral, spiritual and social values to actions, strategies and policies" (p. 235.). Muijen

(2004) noted that in universities, the rhetorical power of CSR mobilizes minds and prepares

people for actions. Therefore, this study considered CSR as ethical and moral principles that an

organization should embrace to improve the quality of life of all its stakeholders as well as to

achieve, in short or long term, better financial organizational outcomes.

    While, some research presents CSR as a controversial, complex, and unclear field due to

the vast landscape of theories and a vast proliferation of views, Garriga & Melé (2004) tried

to organize CSR principles into four main categories of theories (see Figure 2.3) and this study

took into consideration the ethical theories based on the moral and ethical responsibilities and

Figure 2.3:. Table of Corporate Social Responsibility Theories. This table illustrates the four basic focus employed by CSR theories and related approaches of instrumental, political, integrative, and ethical according to Garriga & Mele (2004, p.64)

Types of theory	Approaches	Short description	Some key references
Instrumental theories (focusing on achieving economic objectives through social activities)	Maximization of shareholder value	Long-term value maximization	Friedman (1970), Jensen (2000)
	Strategies for competitive advantages	• Social investments in a competitive context	Porter and Kramer (2002)
		• Strategies based on the natural resource view of the firm and the dynamic capabilities of the firm	Hart (1995), Lizt (1996)
		• Strategies for the bottom of the economic pyramid	Prahalad and Hammond (2002), Hart and Christensen (2002), Prahalad (2003)
	Cause-related marketing	Altruistic activities socially recognized used as an instrument of marketing	Varadarajan and Menon (1988), Murray and Montanari (1986)
Political theories (focusing on a responsible use of business power in the political arena)	Corporate constitutionalism	Social responsibilities of businesses arise from the amount of social power that they have	Davis (1960, 1967)
	Integrative Social Contract Theory	Assumes that a social contract between business and society exists	Donaldson and Dunfee (1994, 1999)
	Corporate (or business) citizenship	The firm is understood as being like a citizen with certain involvement in the community	Wood and Lodgson (2002), Andriof and McIntosh (2001) Matten and Crane (in press)
Integrative theories (focusing on the integration of social demands)	Issues management	Corporate processes of response to those social and political issues which may impact significantly upon it	Sethi (1975), Ackerman (1973), Jones (1980), Vogel, (1986), Wartick and Mahon (1994)
	Public responsibility	Law and the existing public policy process are taken as a reference for social performance	Preston and Post (1975, 1981)
	Stakeholder management	Balances the interests of the stakeholders of the firm	Mitchell et al. (1997), Agle and Mitchell (1999), Rowley (1997)
	Corporate social performance	Searches for social legitimacy and processes to give appropriate responses to social issues	Carroll (1979), Wartick and Cochran (1985), Wood (1991b) Swanson (1995)

Figure 2.3. (Continued)

Types of theory	Approaches	Short description	Some key references
Ethical theories (focusing on the right thing to achieve a good society	Stakeholder normative theory	Considers fiduciary duties towards stakeholders of the firm. Its application requires reference to some moral theory (Kantian, Utilitarianism, theories of justice, etc.)	Freeman (1984, 1994), Evan and Freeman (1988), Donaldson and Preston (1995), Freeman and Phillips (2002), Phillips et al. (2003)
	Universal rights	Frameworks based on human rights, labor rights and respect for the environment	The Global Sullivan Principles (1999), UN Global Compact (1999)
	Sustainable development	Aimed at achieving human development considering present and future generations	World Commission on Environment and Development (Brutland Report) (1987), Gladwin and Kennelly (1995)
	The common good	Oriented towards the common good of society	Alford and Naughton (2002), Melé (2002) Kaku (1997)

requirements that cement the relationship between business and society. Therefore, a

university's action should be expressed in terms of doing right and appropriate things to

achieve a good society.

According to Rao Metha (2011) it is important for universities to make big efforts to

integrate CSR principles as part of their communication process. Fieseler et al. (2010) posited

that corporate blogs, a new form of interactive online publication, provide a platform for

exchanging opinions and comments on both old and emerging issues, which may prove an ideal

instrument for companies to use to engage stakeholders. They attempted to understand the

particular domain of corporate sustainability blogging based on an explorative case study of

McDonalds's and its CSR blog. Fieseler et al.(2010) concluded that mostly highly engaged

customers and stakeholders take advantage of the opportunity to interact with a company via its

weblogs. However, it is also true that the influence of the company's blog on the overall

network agenda remains marginal, because it does not have a direct impact on a large public

sphere, it only reaches a very active and well-informed clientele.

Thus, Fieseler et al. (2010) proposed the concept of microblogs, the most well-known of

which is Twitter, to describe the special case of symmetric communication. Microblogs are

created in the sense that weblogs and other participative media have almost no gate-keeping

mechanism. This enables conversations without formal hierarchies. One of the most recent

examples is how the presidential campaign of Barack Obama used Twitter as a communication

tool to keep abreast of critical social issues and reach a majority of the population both within

and outside of the United States of America (Fieseler et al., 2010).

This study considered the symmetrical communication model to analyze those tweets related with the Brabeck-Letmathe controversy and identified certain connections and associations with CSR values within higher education.

2.2.3 Overview of Twitter. Rheingold (2012) described Twitter as a social network, which consists of a blank box where users can enter a text of no more than 140 characters, through a question 'what is happening'. Twitter works as open, immediate, diverse, and reciprocal social media. The power of Twitter goes beyond that of forming a community because 'it forms ecology in which communities can emerge' (p. 143). It is a platform for mass collaboration, which has the ability to follow searches (e.g. names and hashtags) in real time.

Recently Twitter has gained great popularity among students and professors (Junco et al., 2011), media and consumers (Greer & Ferguson, 2011), the health sector (Chew & Eysenbach, 2010), political campaigns (Sandoval, Nava, Arteaga, & Criado, 2012), the entertainment industry (Hoe-Lian & Sian Lee, 2011), and even for disasters and crisis situations (Kumar, S., Barbier, G., Abbasi, M. & Liu, H., 2011). The question is - why do people give time, information, and support to others online, even when they do not know people on the other side of the social media? Rheingold (2012) pointed out that all this is about 'social capital', where knowledge turns into 'capital' and the word 'social' means communion of insights, views and opinions (p. 204).

A study on the analysis of tweets in response to the death of Michael Jackson (Hoe-Lian & Sian-Lee, 2011) suggested that microblogs possess characteristics unique from other communication platforms because they can impact the grieving process. This process allows tweeters or users to share their emotions, thoughts, frustrations and experiences with anyone, anytime and anywhere. Twitter allows public dialogue that can impact people, especially Junco

et al. (2011) provided evidence that this social networking can be used as an educational tool to help engage students and to mobilize faculty into a more active and participatory role (p. 119).

Another study about Mexican political campaigns provided some lessons learned on the use of Twitter. Sandoval et al. (2012) evaluated the power of citizens who used this platform as a free space to share, criticize or mock their candidates. Politicians, on the other hand, took advantage to communicate with their voters through an easy and inexpensive way to disperse their messages.

In the health sector, Twitter has an interesting value that allows authorities of this field to become aware of and respond in real time to public concerns. It was demonstrated by research at the University of Toronto that monitored the use of terms 'H1N1' versus 'swine flu' and validated Twitter as a real-time content, sentiment, and public attention trend-tracking tool (Chew & Eysenbach, 2010).
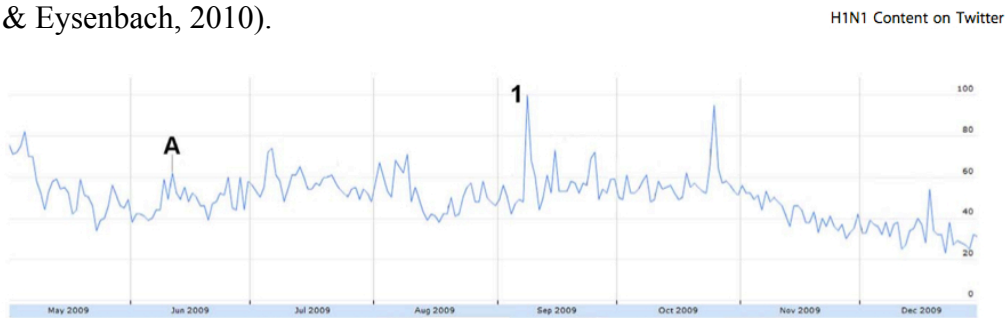
Figure 13. The relative proportion of tweets sharing personal opinions & interest from May 1 to December 31, 2009. Figure was scaled to the highest peak on Sept. 8 where 5.34% of all tweets shared personal opinions. The peak was assigned a score of 100. A = June 11: WHO pandemic level 6 announcement. 1 = Sept. 8: Case of H1N1 confirmed at PAX videogame convention in Seattle.
doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0014118.g013
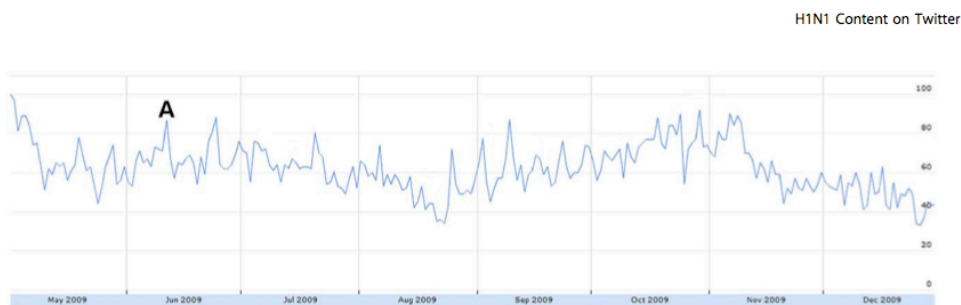
Figure 7. The relative proportion of tweets expressing frustration from May 1 to December 31, 2009. Figure was scaled to the highest peak on May 1 where 4.65% of all tweets expressed frustration. The peak was assigned a score of 100. A = June 11: WHO pandemic level 6 announcement.
doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0014118.g007

Figure 2.4.: This figure illustrates the analysis of tweets during the 2009 H1N1 outbreak according to Chew & Eysenbach, 2010, pp. 8-11.

Social media, and particularly Twitter, have become a weapon for corporations as well as individuals to serve the society, and Gupta (2011) added that corporations are using it to carry out their corporate social responsibility, while individuals are using it to build up social movement-raising funds for causes catalyzing mass upheavals. According to Gupta (2011) Twitter processed more than one billion tweets in December 2009 and averages almost 40 million tweets per day (p. 3). Thus, using social media that impact stakeholder groups have to be well run and develop a strategic plan of needs.

Furthermore, in terms of spreading messages, the ability of reaching stakeholders, and the need of interaction among them, microblogs could be tools to monitor CSR activities within universities. Climate change, resource scarcity, overpopulation, pollution, social injustice, health, and well-being are CSR issues that organizations have to deal with in an economically and environmentally sustainable manner, while also recognizing stakeholder interests. In the educational context, a 'corporate university' (Munck, 2010, p. 32) has a dual role in terms of CSR, teaching about sustainable development and inspiring moral and professional integrity in students. Thus, universities are encouraged to use different communication strategies to monitor and evaluate social responsibility. Currently, Web 2.0 is a valuable channel to inform and share corporate citizenship issues and Twitter acts as a social media with high reach of audience, no gate-keeping mechanism, and no formal hierarchies of communication.

2.3 Communication Approaches

2.3.1. Twitter is the message. Marshall McLuhan (1967) coined the phrase "the medium is the message" that describes how the potential of the technology can determine the media's usage and effects (Schultz et al., 2011). Twitter easily manifests McLuhan's phrase due to being

a tool for sentiment analysis as an assistant professor of computer science at Northeastern

University said:

> I think this is going to be one of the most important datasets of this era, because we are
> looking at what people are talking about in real time at the scale of an entire
> society...There's just simply so much data that you can do pretty decently, even by taking
> naïve approaches... (Savage, 2011, p. 19).

Even though Twitter offers important advantages for researchers, it contains limitations

which should be taken into account. Twitter data may have noise or the use of unnecessary

technical language and jargon. Some of this data includes errors and spam that do not provide

meaning and sense for study. Another Twitter limitation is related with the quick way to spread

news and comments that can produce a sort of collective 'hysteria', which may not correspond

to the reality (Savage, 2011).

It must be noted that Twitter is used by a wider variety of people who collect, report,

analyze, and disseminate news and other forms of communications without professional or

formal training. This participation in social media is labeled as citizen journalism and is

identified as 'the inside looking out' (Barnes, 2012, p.17). On Twitter, there are more people that

use this media to play opinion leadership roles than other users. Sometimes, these opinion

leaders who are identified by a large amount of followers, posts, retweets, and page rank

(Jungnickel, 2011) make room for bias on certain discussions. Therefore, researchers have to

avoid bias by gathering as much data as possible to get a true representation of population

(Savage, 2011).

The statement 'the medium is the message' posited that most of our challenges in trying

to explain the media effects are centered in doing today's job with yesterday's tools and

yesterday's concepts (McLuhan, 1967, p. 11). Twitter has particular characteristics that include

concepts such as simplicity and interactivity never seen before in other media. Its effects are unique even if we compare them with other social media. As McLuhan (1967) would say, Twitter "has overthrown the regime of 'time' and 'space' and pours upon us instantly and continuously the concerns of all other men*"* (p. 16).

According to McLuhan (1967) the new generation claims roles instead of goals. This statement means that new mass media culture, specifically Twitter culture, is moving into a world of total involvement in which everybody is involved with everybody else.

2.3.2. Two-way communications models. One of the most important challenges of research focused on a social context is to study communication behaviors related to problem solving. It is crucial to understand the social phenomena associated with the development and behavior of publics or stakeholders. On this topic, James Grunig, a noted public relations theorist, published studies about how to resolve conflict through 'negotiation, communication, and compromise' (Westbrook, 1999). Grunig (Toth, 2007) identified two-way public relations models:

1. Symmetrical model: represents a balanced flow of communication whereby all parties are communicating with each other as equals, seeking to maintain a relationship based on mutual understanding and needs. Toth (2007) presented an interesting example, which was the relationship between the United States of America and the former Soviet Union from the late 1940s to mid-1980s. Both countries had a credible and equal ability to destroy each other resulting in a symmetrical relationship. Furthermore, in the public relations literature, the vast majority of qualitative research, based on in-depth interviews and case studies, falls into the symmetrical model.

2. Asymmetrical model: suggests that the balance of the relationship is a tipped one of the relational parties that are based on formal contracts specifying particular roles and power relationships. According to Toth (2007) most formal and conservative organizations ruled by traditional superior-subordinate communication are included in the asymmetrical model category. Much of the asymmetrical research has been focused on quantitative methodologies in order to employ analytical tools to successful outcomes.

Toth (2007) concluded that symmetrical models of public relations are probably best observed by examining the actual system in which organizations operate. It must be noted that these models are included in general systems theories, which posit that every system is bound to fail at some point. This is because they tend to maintain their status quo, which will ultimately fail due to resulting in closed systems or "entropy".

The Grunig study (Toth, 2007) emphasized that the interchange of information or feedback is important to the flow of communication in a public relations process. Additionally, feedback causes public relations systems to either grow and prosper, or fail or die, "the irony is that effective symmetric public relations require some form of asymmetric public relations to achieve its goals of mutual satisfaction and simultaneously moving the organization to its next level" (Toth, 2007, p. 75).

Thus, feedback gives the communication process a two-way discourse that reinforces in organizations, the concepts of listening instead of only talking, collaborating instead of controlling, and sharing instead of persuading. Thanks to social media, particularly Twitter, institutions and multinational corporations are experiencing a new strategy to market their products and services, based on collaboration and sharing.

2.3.3. Public Relations 2.0 and Twitter. In the mid to late 1990's an American industry analyst named Brian Solis designated the term 'Public Relations 2.0' to describe the impact that the web would have on public relations and how the communication industry would be forced to eventually connect with costumers directly (Sancar, 2013, p. 185). Consequently, Shirky (2008) recounted how social tools such as blogging software (e.g. WordPress and Twitter), file-sharing platforms (e.g. Flickr and Dropbox), and online collaborations (e.g. Wikipedia) support interactions among people in a way that previously could only be achieved through institutions (Shirky, 2008).

Moreover, researchers have attempted to explain this new way of communication using social media is a new way of creativity. Jones (2012) stated that the process of creating content comes from social media users and it is focused on a contagious and spontaneous social activity, which is termed as "social creativity" (p.33). In addition, the author affirmed social media provides a number of powerful ways of creating value that is not under control of the organization or even of the leaders, but it is controlled by consumers and users, or put another way, the networks that structure society. Therefore, corporations have to run their activities in given realities and share those with as many people as possible and to make those realities better in the first place. As social media is ruled by speed, transparency and authenticity, the games of running a modern business should follow the same rules (Jones, 2012, p.78).

Sancar (2013) posited that Twitter is an important tool for the research process in order to enable -*leaders*- to know their target audience's perception of them and to see feedback in real time. This is done through using keywords, such as #hashtags which enable users to call out specific topics. These hashtags are a community driven convention for adding context and metadata to tweets (p.186). New modern businesses use Twitter to measure public opinion and

act based on what they hear to from their stakeholders such as consumers, employees, government, competitors, and opponents.

Hence, Twitter has provided a new platform for airing grievances previously unavailable. Hoe-Lian & Sian-Lee (2011) affirmed that tweets have the ability to reduce uncertainty, anxiety, stress, increase empowerment, confidence and control, and cultivate an environment where users may comfortably express their views, feelings and experiences (p. 442). Moreover, Martin (2012) stated that social media allows activists to engage in networking which amplifies their message, finds more like-minded people, and brings them out onto the street. For example, he referred to Twitter and Facebook playing an integral part in the Arab uprisings and allowed one man's protest- the self-immolation of Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi in December 2010- to inspire millions of people to take to the streets and demand change (Martin, 2008).

Even though there are many studies focused on Twitter and its powerful influence in online conversations, public relations between large corporations and users is still an area rarely explored. Vorvoreanu (2009) conducted research about how corporations can practice public relations on Facebook while being sensitive to Facebook culture and help to preserve it. This study, in terms of relationship management and dialogic approaches to public relations, showed that Facebook is not regarded as an appropriate context for in-depth discussion, to engage dialogue between organizations and publics. The study revealed that Facebook does act as an appropriate medium for marketing and advertising, and specifically for increasing awareness of a company, product or brand.

One of the reasons why Facebook or any other social media faces different challenges for encouraging engagement between organizations and users is described in the following three dynamics by Rheingold (2012):

a) *Invisible audiences:* People interacting in social media environments, much of the time, do not know who is on the other side of the social networking. Managing invisible audiences can often be tricky.

b) *Context collisions:* Consequently, managing invisible audiences also brings up different social contexts that we should address and understand to use social media properly and in a smart way.

c) *Public and private convergence:* in social media private and public spaces turn out to be more about control than anything else. Sometimes people have the ability to control publicity, sometimes they do not.

Rheingold's studies (2012) concluded that these dynamics have a powerful meaning, and social and cultural implications. They alter how people work as well as how organizations work. Organizations do not work in isolation, and Twitter is the perfect tool to distribute information which could be positive or negative. It all depends on how organizations work and whether or not they behave without lying and that they follow moral, ethical and sustainable principles.

Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011) identified strategies for monitoring, understanding, and responding to different social media activities and presented a framework or "honeycomb" (see Figure 2.5) by using seven functional blocks which are described as follows:

a) Identity: The extent to which users reveal themselves

b) Conversations: The construct with which users communicate with each other

c) Sharing: Represents the extent which users exchange, distribute and receive content

d) Presence: It is about users knowing if others are available

e) Relationships: The extent to which users relate to each other

f) Reputation: The construct to which users know the social standing of others and content

g) <u>Groups:</u> The extent to which users are ordered or formed communities.

Figure 1.   The honeycomb of social media
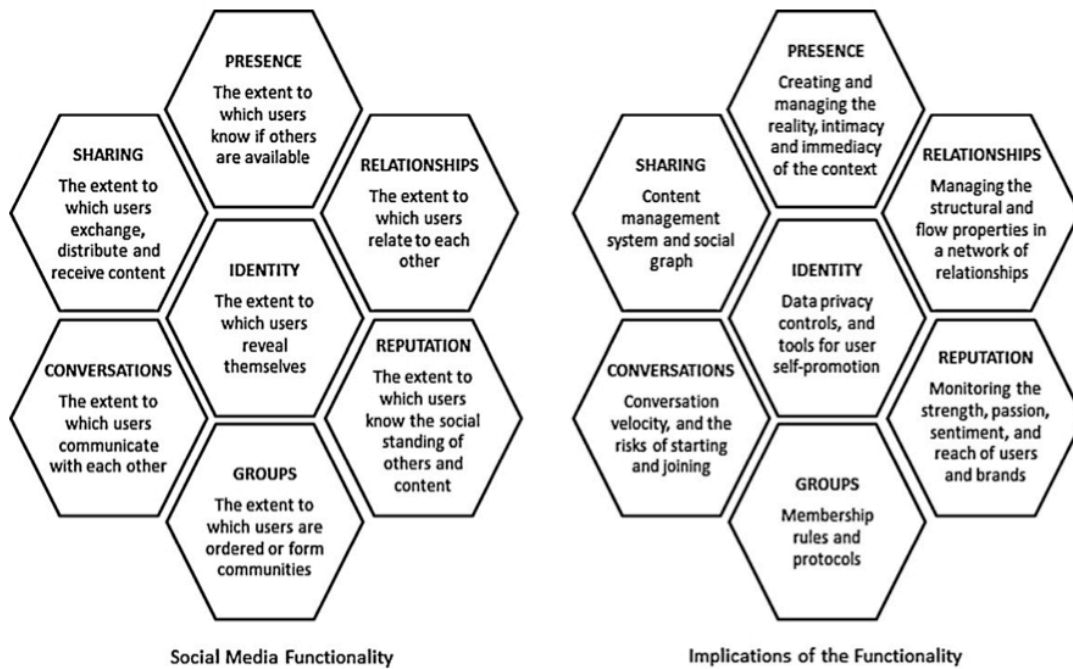
Figure 2.5.: This figure illustrates the honeycomb of social media according to Kietzmann et al., 2011, p.243.

Twitter is a space where online reputation is displayed and users are able to agree or criticize messages related to the organization's image and activities. Monitoring tweets about CSR issues placed in universities is considered a complex and difficult work due to their structure and stakeholder relationships. However, if they make appropriate efforts to monitor and evaluate their messages on Twitter, they will be able to perceive many benefits.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

As previously mentioned in the theoretical framework section of the literature review chapter, the philosophical worldview reflected in this study is based on the pragmatist position. Rossman & Wilson (cited by Creswell, 2008) emphasized that pragmatism determines a research problem and uses all approaches available to understand it. Therefore, to understand the use of Twitter in terms of supporting CSR principles within a higher educational context, this study adopts content analysis as part of its methodology through a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods, using data collection from questionnaire-interviews and the analysis of the content of microblogs.

According to Creswell (2008) qualitative research is based on exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems. This study intended to understand how university stakeholders used Twitter to spread news and opinions about controversies related to CSR issues and how citizens and communities responded to this news. It did this by collecting data asking about the questions and procedures related to the participants' settings who represent the university community. This study also used quantitative methods in order to test and examine a Twitter dataset that could be measured and analyzed using numerical procedures (Creswell, 2008). The research uses a mixed method because it used concurrent procedures. Researchers use concurrent procedures when they collect, analyze, and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data at (approximately) the same time (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). The notation for this type of procedures can be written as QUAN + QUAL (see Figure

3.1) and it applies equal weight/importance to both quantitative and qualitative methods used

during the same timeframe.
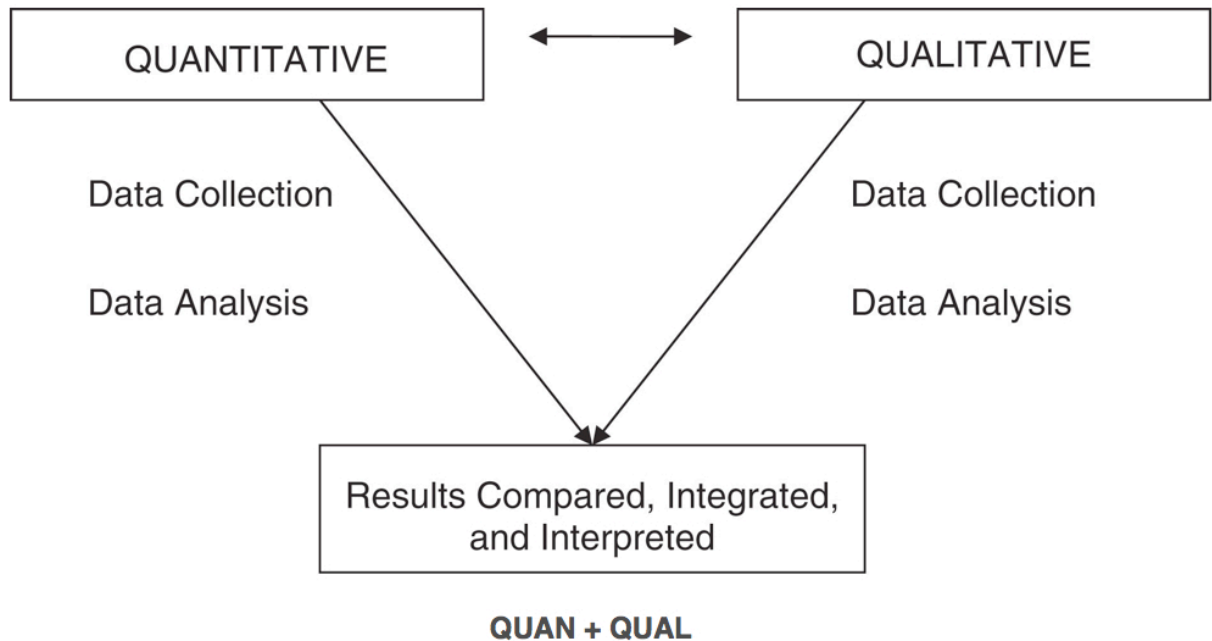
Figure 3.1.: This figure was extracted and adapted from the Triangulation Design by Creswell & Plano-Clark (2007)

This study also used qualitative content analysis focused on the characteristics of language

as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text (Hsieh &

Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The goal was to provide meaning and understanding of the phenomenon

under study and text data in electronic forms (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The content analysis methodology is presented in the following three stages,

which allowed to address, resolve, and answer the research question:

Stage One: This stage included gathering and collecting microblog messages (e.g., using tools

such as Topsy) and then, describing and examining these messages in particular cultural contexts

(Merrigan, Huston, Johnston, 2012, p. 128).

Stage Two: This stage involved collecting insights by respondents who were asked through

questionnaire-interviews about their experiences using Twitter particularly in relation to CSR principles.

Stage Three: This stage used the same technique of questionnaire-interviews used in Stage Two, asking respondents to answer questions posed with reference to a Twitter dataset that I provided to the respondents.

As well, it is important to highlight that through reading the literature it became clear that the best way to approach this research problem was by doing a multi-method research. According to Berman, Ford-Gilboe, & Campbell (1998) there has been little practical examination of the ways in which stories and numbers can be used together to achieve different purposes in social research (p.4). This study attempted to analyze responses from interviews and to also, count the frequency of tweets. Furthermore, it evaluated their content to provide understandings of Twitter.

This study considered that the best strategy for gathering and analyzing data was to explore in-depth how tweets supported or undermined discussions about the application and enhancement of the principles of CSR. Investigating a contemporary phenomenon such as the honorary degree at the University of Alberta in 2012, through a natural setting or messages posted on a real-life platform like Twitter, this study might generate answers to "how" and "why" questions that could contribute to our understanding the nature and complexity of the research problem (Benbasat, Goldstein, & Mead, 1987).

3.2. Gathering of Twitter Data and Recruiting Participants

Stage One: The study harvested 1,077 tweets from February 15 to March 15, 2012. The time period of the data collection corresponded to the time that the honorary degree controversy occurred within the University of Alberta. The research collected all tweets using the Topsy Data Services search engine (see Figure 3.2.) and the keyword was #UAlberta. From the 1,077

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Figure 3.2.: Twitter Dataset

tweets that were chosen randomly, 457 tweets were used for analysis, results, findings and conclusions.

Stage Two: A total of 6 individuals were invited by email to participate in the study. Meho (2006)

recommended some guidelines for conducting effective e-mail interviews and pointed out that

the best way to recruit is to invite them individually rather than via a mailing list or message

board. In that way, people were recruited purposely through email from February 1 to February

15, 2013. The original plan was to enroll a person from each of the stakeholder

group including the University Relation Office, Faculty of Extension, AlumniAssociation,

Council of Canadians, Media, community represented by former professors, former

students, and savvy social media. Nevertheless, this study only enrolled those stakeholders who

agreed to participate in the research namely four communications and public relations

professionals who were working for the university, a media journalist, and a former student.

Stage Three: The study used the same respondents from Stage Two, however only four agreed to

participate in this stage.

3.3. Data Collection Strategy

This study used online research methods because they allowed easy access to participants and

avoided practical constraints, for example, costs associated with travel and long data transcriptions

(James, 2007). Applying e-mail interviews let respondents remain in their own comfort zone and

provide clearer and more accurate answers instead of using face-to-face or telephone interviews

(Cook, 2011).

3.3.1. Data Collection in Stage One. Merrigan et al. (2012) noted that a search engine is a

commonly used in content analysis because a selected medium for a selected time period supply

important population of messages that can be searched for simply by entering key words.

Regarding the data collection from the Twitter dataset, the study chose randomly 457 tweets from 1,077 messages harvested over one month with the keyword or hashtag #UAlberta. The dataset came from Topsy Data Services that provided all publicly available tweet content over the time selected with proprietary measurements that quantify the volume and characteristics of communication for any keyword, term or domain of interest (Topsy, 2013).

O'Leary (2012) posited that the Topsy platform is highlighted among other social search engines due to its richness of data in applying algorithms to rank tweets and links based on their importance. Also, Topsy possesses a strong advantage against Twitter's own search engine, because of its large tweet database from 2008 with real-time updating, which is of high interest for the majority of researchers, business people, and communicators. Additionally, Topsy, in some cases, is more valuable tool for studies than to the Library of Congress because the latter has not developed a tweet archive available for the public yet (Gross, 2013).

In terms of upgrading and growing, since March 2012, Topsy has subscribed to the full Twitter'firehose' which is producing over a quarter billion posts (tweets) per day, with volumes increasing at more than 40% annually, allowing better services and accurate analysis of tweets (Topsy, 2013). Considering these advantages and opportunities, this study was based on collecting Twitter data through the Topsy search engine.

3.3.2. Data Collection in Stage Two and Stage Three. The research process compiled six completed semi-structured questionnaire-interviews and four questionnaire-interviews with a dataset. As a researcher I admit that to follow up Stage Two was an easier activity than Stage Three, basically due to two reasons: 1) Stage Two included open questions that encouraged the expression of feelings with a certain flexibility that allowed me to follow up with respondents

and establish more contact and trust with them; 2) Stage Three was more complex because

the respondents needed the time and ability to check and interpret the enclosed dataset of

tweets.The method of collection data through both questionnaire-interviews is summarized in the

following steps:

  • A first introductory email, which provided brief information about my student status as

   well as the research purposes. I told my interviewees that I acquired their e-mail address

   through the university directory and websites and I invited them to participate in the research.

  • Once the person confirmed his/her participation in the research, I proceeded to send a second

   email which provided details about the study and the deadlines, and also emphasized the

   anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Moreover, a consent form was attached that had

   to be signed and returned to me by mail or email. This email also enclosed a short survey which

   measured the usage of Twitter and knowledge about the term of corporate social responsibility

   among the interviewers. It did not provide any incentive to the interviewers (e.g. gift card, cash,

   etc.), it just described the potential benefits to the participants such as better understanding of

   Twitter and its relation to CSR issues within the higher educational context.

  • The third email included the interviews, which contained seven open-ended questions (see

   Appendix 1). This step took between 2 and 3 weeks depending on the respondents. I included

   instructions to the participants on completing the interview, for example, encouraging

   participants to use acronyms (e.g., CSR), emoticons (e.g., ☺, ☼,★) and abbreviations (e.g.,

   LOL, laughing out loud) as well as underlining and capitalization (for emphasis). I checked

   messages from interviewees regularly for further clarifications, illustrations, explanations, or to

see if elaborations were needed. I limited the number of reminders to one or two; otherwise, it

may be construed as pressure to continue participation.

• The last email included the questionnaire with seven open-closed ended questions (see

Appendix 2) plus a Twitter dataset. The respondents had to answer the questions according to

the dataset which consisted of a small sample of 29 tweets chosen randomly. I wanted to

ensure that sending a small sample of tweets would not produce mental fatigue among

respondents. I also sent an email with a tutorial video attached that allowed the participants

to have more details on responding to a questionnaire-interview (see Appendix 3). This

activity could take approximately 40 minutes and this step lasted between 3 and 4 weeks.

3.4. Data Analysis Strategy

This study was focused on the concurrent mixed method in terms of converged or merged

quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007) in order to allow for validating,

interpreting, clarifying, and illustrating quantitative findings, and to permitit the examination and

application of theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.41). For the purposes of analysis, the study

employed methods of inquiry such as both open and closed-ended questions and both emerging

and predetermined approaches. It also used quantitative and qualitative data collection, rationale

development for mixing, integration of data at different stages of inquiry, and visual pictures of

the procedures in the study (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007).

Moreover, content analysis was the technique chosen for the research since it is the

appropriate strategy used for an exploratory case study and is associated with the hermeneutic

perspective, also defined as 'the study of interpretive understanding or meaning' (Mertens cited

in Merrigan et al., 2012, p. 42).

Even though I considered using the Topsy platform to code and analyze the data set of tweets due to the high amount of messages, I analyzed the data manually, using paper and pen. This allowed me to: a) be more involved with the data in a tactile fashion, b) include my impressions and reflections in the coding process, c) not spend too much money and time learning new platforms and different kinds of software for analysis purposes.

3.4.1. Data Analysis in Stage One. The strategy employed to analyze tweets was the same one used in interviews such as focusing on coding and categorizing micro-blogs. Furthermore, I obtained metrics through counting variables including types of stakeholders, tweets associated with controversy, and tweets related with CSR issues beyond the higher educational context. The following steps describe the technique used for the content analysis of messages of the Twitter platform:

a. From the total of 457 tweets randomly selected, I organized the tweets into two big groups including those messages related with CSR issues and tweets off-topic or considered spam on CSR issues. The criteria used to divide tweets was based on the following key words: UAlberta, protests, water, honorary degree, Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, nestle, shame, embarrassed, oil sands, and global warming. This analysis was developed manually which means that keywords and rationale by the researcher were crucial to group the tweets.

b. Then, I identified codes represented in words and phrases that emerged from the content of tweets (see Figure 3.3).

Example of tweet	*'Actually, student protests at #UAlberta, including disrupting ceremonies, go back at least as far as 1965:http//t.co/OLNPzTUO'*			
Codes	Opinions	Disruption of activities	Criticism	Retrospective of past university activism

Figure 3.3. Example of codes from the dataset of tweets.

c. After the coding process, I placed categories and/or sub-categories that described and

portrayed the group of tweets (see Figure 3.4)

Category	1. Sharing opinions: People were able to post their feelings and started conversations adopting a stance on the honorary degree issue.	
Sub-Categories	People were able to post tweets about what they observed related with the protest and felt about the controversy.	People interpreted their feelings through memories from past protests within the university

Figure 3.4. Example of category and sub-categories from the dataset of tweets.

d. Consequently, I identified the most common stakeholders that appeared on tweets with the

metrics and percentage of each. To identify the stakeholders, I had to research Twitter's users'

profiles finding out their relationship with internal or external publics within the university.

3.4.2. Data Analysis in Stage Two and Stage Three. According to mixed methods the

strategy of data analysis is focused on content analysis of interviews and questionnaires. Mayan

(2009) divided content analysis into two types: manifest and latent. This study used manifest

content in order to count the number of tweets that mentioned or displayed any word or phrase

related with the controversy, while it also employed latent content including the coding of

particular words or phrases and the categorization of the primary patterns in the data (p.94). The

following steps summarize the strategy to develop content analysis of questionnaire-interviews

according to Mayan (2009):

a. I grouped all interviews regarding every single questions. For example, question #1 (Q1) and

responses from participant #1 (P1), participant #2 (P2), participant #3 (P3), and so on .

b. Consequently, I reread all the data and highlighted sections of the text, and made comments in

the margins regarding anything that struck me or called my attention (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5.: Coding of interviews.

13-02-24 8:32 PM

Erika Fernandez Fernandez 13 May, 2013 11:09 AM
Professional use of Twitter

13-02-24 8:32 PM

Erika Fernandez Fernandez 13 May, 2013 11:09 AM
Twitter as a tool for work

13-02-24 8:32 PM

Erika Fernandez Fernandez 13 May, 2013 11:09 AM
Twitter as a brand tool...branding through Twitter

13-02-24 8:32 PM

Erika Fernandez Fernandez 13 May, 2013 11:09 AM
Recognitions for using Twitter

13-02-24 8:32 PM

Erika Fernandez Fernandez 13 May, 2013 11:09 AM
Breaking news events

13-02-24 8:32 PM

Participant #1

Interview (2)

1. How, in your view, Twitter has impacted or not the way of communicating among your relatives, friends, co-workers, acquaintances, and others?

Participant #1
I am a newspaper columnist; using Twitter aggressively and creatively is an essential part of my job as a journalist. I use Twitter to cover breaking local, provincial and national news events - whether I'm offering play-by-play on City Council arena debates or the Preferential Health Access Inquiry, providing election-night political analysis, reporting from the field on a live event like the Nestle honorary degree protest, reviewing Fringe plays or offering real-time reaction to a developing crisis such as the HUB Mall shooting. I also use Twitter as a vector for vigourous political debate and social engagement. ██████████████████████████ ████████████████████████████████████ *I use Twitter very little for personal or family interaction – I use it almost exclusively in a professional context. (Most of my close personal friends and family rely on Facebook for private, social communication.) I use Twitter to communicate with co-workers, sources, other journalists, and regular readers of The Edmonton Journal. I use it to build my own brand in the community. I have received local, national and international awards/recognition for my pioneering use of Twitter as a news media platform.*

2. Please tell me about the messages do you post on Twitter that keep your followers interacting and sharing information with you? Please provide me an example.

Participant #1
I live-tweet breaking news events. I offer pithy commentary on the news of the day. I "link out" to my column, to other pieces I think people should be reading, to provocative or controversial commentary. I retweet smart, funny, or newsworthy Tweets from others. I use humour to keep people engaged, and I invite and encourage responses from others. Sometimes, these are important breaking news alerts. Sometimes, they're just funny one-liners.

c. Mayan (2009) noted that the researcher might include all those comments, which express

overall impressions, points of interest, and plans for working with the data.

Codes or thematic phrases	*Sometimes, these are important breaking news alerts*	*Examples of typical posts for me would include news about our students, job postings and announcements about the program etc*	*I don't generally post negative comments in an effort to avoid on-line spats*	*I "link out" to my column, to other pieces I think people should be reading, to provocative or controversial commentary*	*I invite and encourage responses from others*

Figure 3.6. Example of codes from the interviews.

d. The next step was to code, which consisted of identifying persistent words, phrases, themes, or

concepts within the data (see Figure 3.6.).

e. After the coding was complete, I cut the highlighted areas out of the text and grouped them

into the categories that emerged. Also, I noticed that some categories had more than one idea or

perspective. Then, I developed sub-categories (see Figure 3.7.).

Categories	**Category 1**: Twitter is most used for professional purposes and contributes to build own branding in the community.	**Category 2**: Twitter might adopt both asymmetrical and symmetrical models of communications due to technical capabilities and its social perception among users.	**Category 3**: Twitter reaches public goals rather than private purposes, and helps to increase of contacts, however, the duration of on-line relationships is very weak.	**Category 4**: Twitter can not replace usual modes of communication and might face challenges such as on-line reputation

Sub-Categories	Twitter is more related with work environments than any other social media (e.g. Facebook)	Twitter can help some professionals to share their work and talents.	Twitter allows users asymmetrical communication or the ability to be informed an easy and almost immediate way in only one direction.	Twitter can experience symmetrical communication because let users communicate in a balance flow with equal opportunities of feedback	Users do not use Twitter to embrace strong bonds with close people (e.g. family and friends)	Twitter increases frequency to involve with a large amount of people, but it decreases duration of contact	Users identify risks damaging related with on-line reputation	Users refuse to lose usual modes of communication

Figure 3.7. Example of categories and sub-categories from the interviews.

f. Once all categories and sub-categories were delineated, I checked to see if they represented and answered the questions regarding the interview or questionnaire.

g. Then, I moved onto a higher level of analysis by discovering the relationships among the categories and found common themes or threads that run in the data which link to the research question, the variables presented in the literature review, and the categories that represented the participant's insights (Mayan, 2009).

3.5. Rigour

This study applied validity criteria to evaluate whether the phenomenon or case study proposed in the research problem were found in the analyzed data (Mayan, 2009). I used in-depth questions to figure out how the research question was responded to. My purpose was to get insights in-depth on the use of Twitter in supporting CSR principles. Therefore, the study achieved more validity, consistency, and logic according to the research problem.

To achieve validity, this study employed two strategies to verify the research goals:

1. <u>Triangulation Design</u>: This is the most common and well-known approach in mixed methods, and its purpose is the best understanding of a research problem 'obtaining different but complementary data on the same topic' (Morse, 1991, cited by Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007, p. 62). As previously mentioned, this study applied three different sources of data: a) analysis of tweets, b) semi-structured questionnaire-interviews; and c) hybrid questionnaire-interview with enclosed dataset. The intent in using this design is to bring together strengths of qualitative methods (e.g. small number of interviewers, detailed and in-depth data) and quantitative methods (e.g. large sample of tweets, trends, and generalization). The triangulation design allowed me to compare and contrast quantitative statistical results from Twitter with qualitative findings from questionnaire-interviews and to validate both results.

2. <u>Peer review</u>: This is the process of engaging other research colleagues in an extended and extensive discussion in working with data by having constructive feedback and the opportunity to respond to questions of tentative analysis that the researcher should perform in order to follow the rigour of the study (Mayan, 2009). The strategy to choose these peer reviews was based on getting a communications practitioner who would provide critical thinking to the analysis of data, and a second peer reviewer from a different field who would offer his insights as a regular Twitter user. The peer reviewers contributed to making questions which enhanced my reflections about the analysis of tweets and helped me to communicate clearly and built strong arguments around my research question.

3.6. Ethics Considerations

According to advanced research presented in the literature review chapter and following

the guidelines for ethics approval by the Research Ethics Board (REB) 2, at the University of

Alberta on December 4 of 2012 (see Appendix 4), as an autonomous researcher I proceeded to

recruit the respondents as summarized in the steps below:

• The six participants of semi-structured questionnaire-interviews were informed about the

purpose, procedure, and benefits and/or risks of the study through a letter of consent which

was sent to each participant. In the letter, I explained to participants that their interviews were

anonymous in the sense that no information would be disclosed that contained names or

information related with their association with the university.

• Besides this, the consent letter informed them about the participant's rights to refuse to

answer any questions or continue in the study. Their involvement was voluntary, and they had

the right to acquire a copy of this study in order to allow access to the data that would be collected.

• All questionnaires were conducted by e-mail and the consent forms were printed out and

signed by participants. It must be noted that three of them sent the consent forms by email and

two of the participants used regular mail to send the original ones. One of the participants could

not send the consent form by either email or mail due to technical and physical barriers,

therefore I sent, with the consultation to the project supervisor, an email which confirmed her

decision to participate in the study as accepting all rights and risks exposed in the consent form

(see Appendix 5).

• The consent form included the agreement to participate in Stage Two and Stage Three.

• In Stage Three only four of the six respondents who participated in Stage Two consented

to be part of the study. The two respondents who did not participate were notified

through a few reminders, however, they did not comment on why they did not participate in Stage Three.

• Regarding the Twitter dataset that was enclosed together with the questionnaires, names, logos, or icons that identified Twitter users were all removed. A participant expressed her discomfort to check a dataset without names, and I proceeded to explain to her a detailed reason to remove user identities according to the ethics approval by REB 2. The participant understood and accepted this reason.

• Interviews and questionnaires were stored in my home computer and were accessible only to me and must be retained for five years according to the University of Alberta policy.

3.7. Limitations

The most important challenge in mixed methods is to reconcile the quantitative and qualitative results with the research problem. To decrease these differences, this research collected information from three sources of data that validated the problem with the study results and attempted to get a better understanding of Twitter and messages related with corporate citizenship issues.

In Stage One, the study used statistical methods to analyze a large amount of tweets, and then necessary, in Stage Two and Stage Three, to explore in-depth insights through sending questionnaires to six respondents. Thus, this research used internal and external criteria which would provide better understanding and interpretation the use of Twitter over public controversies within universities.

This study was also limited by a few other factors. Primarily, the most crucial challenge conducting e-mail questionnaires was to establish trust between the researcher and the participant (Meho, 2006). E-mail interviewing loses visual and nonverbal cues and does not allow the

collection of extra information through face-to-face observation. Despite this limitation, I emphasized the use of emoticons, acronyms, capital letters, and some common expressions as important forms of communications; and also I kept follow ups regularly with my respondents in order to develop better relationships with them.

Secondly, the sampling of interview participants was influenced by personal and professional reasons. For example, some potential interviewers could experience fear of sanctions for expressing opinions that seem to undermine the decision-making structure within their organizations.

Another limitation found in the data collection through the search engine was the lack of accuracy and complete data. Topsy does not keep all tweets, but only maintains the ones that are retweeted a lot, or that came from people whom Topsy deems influential or have been cited in other people's tweets. In addition, the influence algorithm lets researchers sort search results by relevance rather that in chronological order (Boutin, 2011).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

The following chapter presents the themes that emerged from both the data and the research questions that guided this study. This data was organized into the three stages and were presented within the framework of a content analysis strategy by Mayan's perspective.
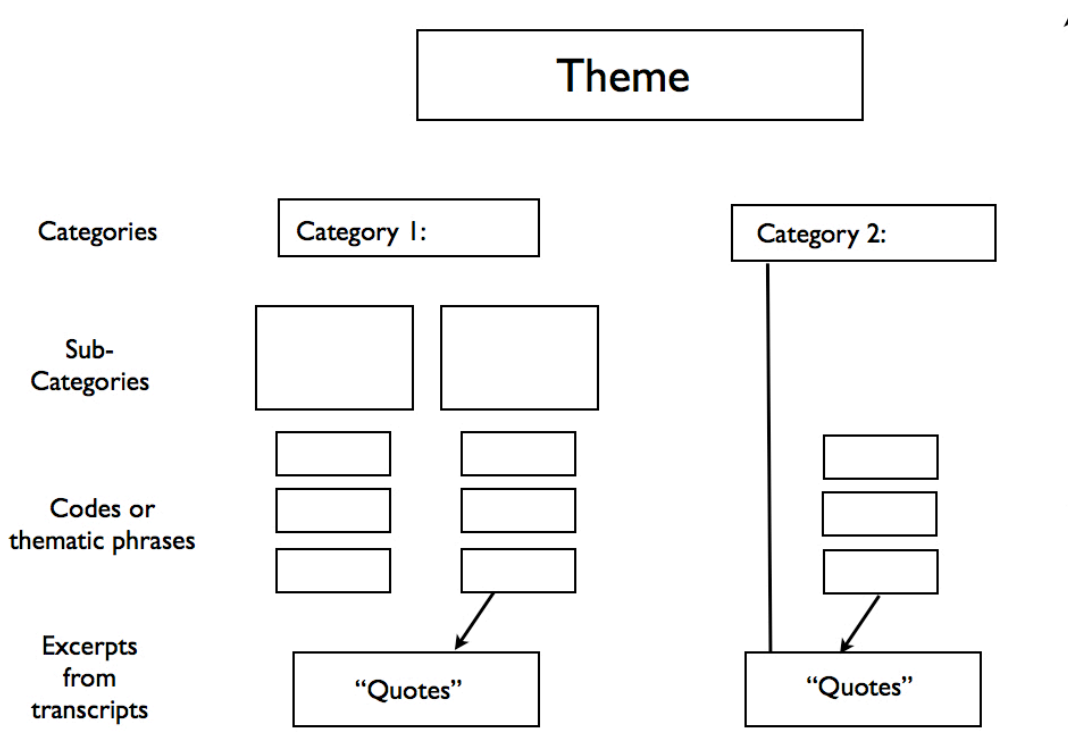
Figure 4.1.: Graphic of content analysis adapted from Mayan (2009, p.96)

Utilizing as a case study the Brabeck-Letmathe controversy regarding the honorary degree that emerged at the University of Alberta between February and March in 2012, this study collected all tweets posted over that issue. This chapter develops categories and themes that were revealed in the analysis of those tweets. Furthermore, this chapter offers, through questionnaire-

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interviews, categories and themes that emerged from stakeholder insights on Twitter and their effects on CSR issues within universities.

4.2. Stage One: Content Analysis of Tweets

4.2.1. Big picture of the disclosure of CSR issues on Twitter. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, this study randomly chose 457 tweets from 1,077 total messages harvested with the keyword or hashtag #UAlberta. From the random amount of tweets, 172 (37.63%) tweets were related to the university controversy and other issues associated with CSR because they displayed words such as honorary degree, Nestle, Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, protest, water, shame, embarrassed, oil sands, and global warming (e.g. "*24 hrs after #ualberta pres claims CofC is only group opposed to degree for #nestle and Brabeck, 70 orgs speak out: http:// t.co/4fTrhvrr")*. Other groups emerged in the data, with a total of 285 (62.37%) tweets, which were considered as unrelated, off-topic, and spam because these messages did not reflect any relation to CSR issues (e.g. *Major hepatitis C breakthrough by #UAlberta researchers: http:// t.co/zZII1w2B@edmontonjournal #hepC)*.

● Tweets related with CSR issues   ● Tweets non-related with CSR issues

37.63%

62.37%
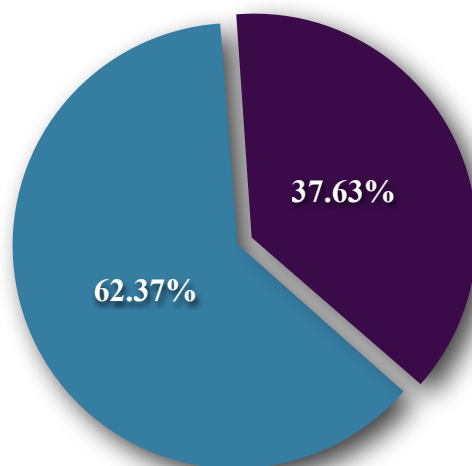
Figure 4.2: Tweets posted over the honorary degree controversy

It must be noted that of the group of tweets related to CSR issues, only 108 of them, or 62.80% of the total of tweets were related with the Brabeck-Letmathe controversy. The rest of the tweets (37.20%) were not associated with the controversy, however they screened CSR issues such as oil sands and/or global warming (e.g. "*Upcoming #ualberta event: Novel perspectives on "Indigenous Relationships With the Alberta Oil Sands" http://t.co/kmAaGw8l #ableg #oilsands)*.
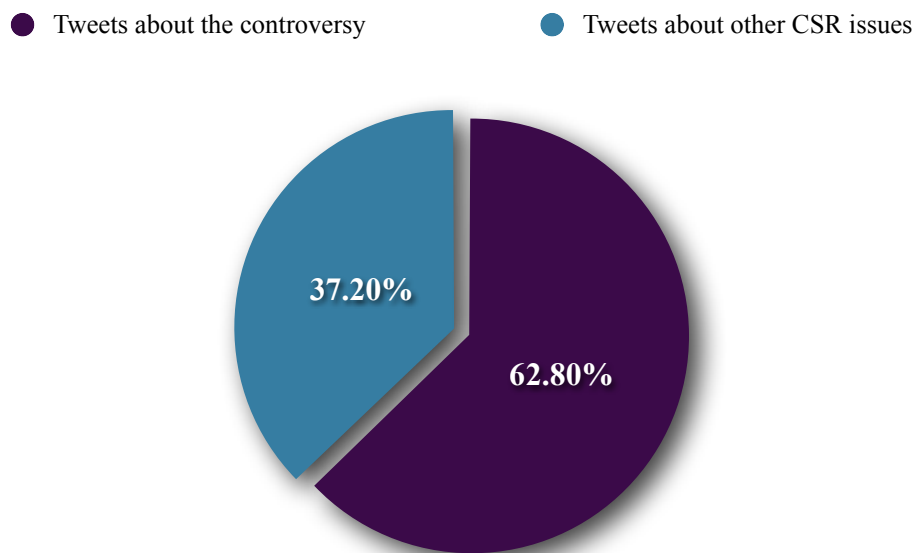
Figure 4.3: Tweets posted about the controversy and other CSR issues

Furthermore, the group of stakeholders who posted the most tweets (22.67%) related to the university controversy and other CSR issues, came from community sites such as former professors, free-lance journalists, and savvy social media. Other groups that posted a significant number of tweets (21.51%) over the course of the controversy were media sites including the Edmonton Journal and CBC news. Regarding official sites from the university and university leadership, they only posted comments or information (19.18%) about the water event rather than responses to the controversy. Also, 18.60% of tweets on the controversy were posted from graduate and

 undergraduate students. University academic and non-academic staff sites

posted 11.62% of tweets on the degree recognition. Even though non-governmental

organizations (4.65%) and official sites of the Alberta government (1.74%) posted messages,

they showed less interest in comparison to other groups**.**
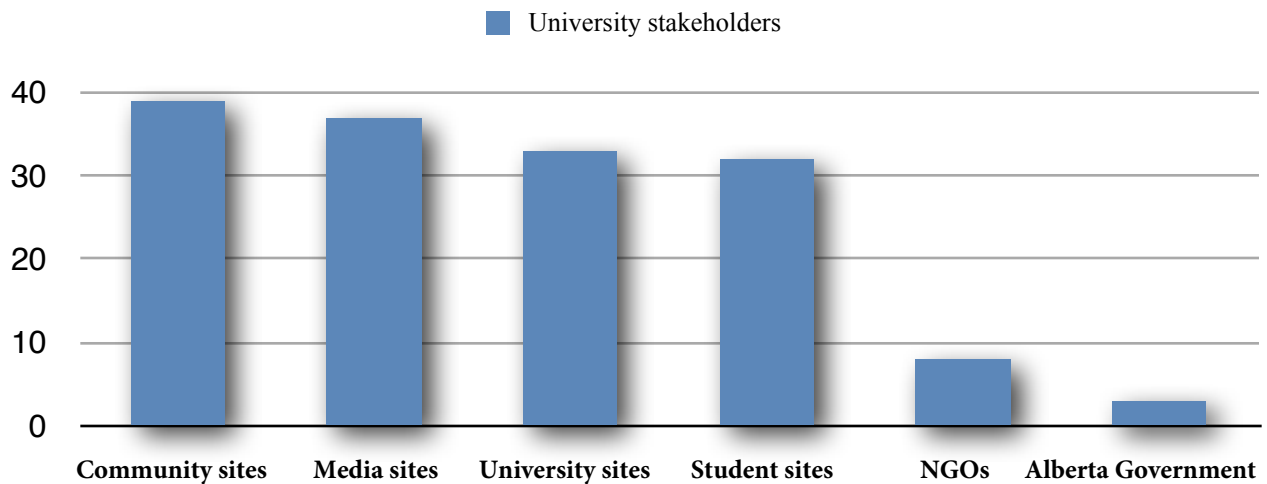
Figure 4.4.: Frequency of posts and groups of stakeholders who posted tweets on public controversy and other CSR issues

4.2.2. Twitter as a platform to disseminate news and information. Table 4.1 shows three

categories: "news", "information on the water event", and "information on Peter Brabeck-

Letmathe", which have a close relation with the ability of Twitter to spread news and information.

They are summarized in the following:

✱ **Category 1:** *Twitter was a platform to spread news and information among followers. The*

role of opinion leaders was crucial due to their capacity to capture large amounts of followers and

their ability to impact others and raise awareness on certain issues. This category which shared

hashtags such as #Edmonton Journal, #CBC, etc., or news stories from journalists and

links was 11.11% of all tweets analyzed.

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Table 4.1.:Twitter as a platform to disseminate news and information.

Category	**1. News:** Twitter was a platform to spread news and information among followers and the role of opinion leaders was crucial due to to their capacity to capture large amount of followers and their ability to impact others and raise awareness on certain issues.	
Sub-Categories	There are people who have influential participation on Twitter. They are able to expand information on a topic through links, photos, graphics, etc. Opinion leaders start discussions and promote debates	Opinion leaders are more likely to be elite users (e.g. celebrities, media, bloggers, and organizations). Therefore, they add a large amount of followers.
Codes	Key people or opinion leaders on Twitter	Providing information
Example of tweet	"Follow live tweets @paulatics and others at the #UAlberta protests against the honorary degree for Nestle's CEO", "Here are texts of speeches by Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, Sunita Narain and Steve Hrudey, today's #ualberta honorees. http://t.co/hELBe7lU #yeg"	

Category	**2. Information on the water event:** Twitter provided information in real time on the water event and also, offered updates about the protest outside of the ceremony.		
Sub-Categories	This subcategory describes some tweets offered updates about the event.	This subcategory notes the relevance to open discussions on the honorary doctorate within the university.	
Codes	Live stream on water issues	Updates about development of the event	Experience of joy for open discussion
Example of tweet	"Very good #livestream discussion on #water at #UAlberta now; very much enjoying diverse opinions: http://t.co/7cMjzNUC" "Inside, the Timms Auditorium is far from full - a decent house, but not certainly not packed. #ualberta" "Dr Steve Hrudey - 45% of Alberta water is used for southern irrigation, 3% used by oil sands. #ualberta #h2o		

Table 4.1. (Continued)

Category	3. **Information on Peter Brabeck-Lemathe:** There were tweets on the honorary degree recipient information including perceptions about the protest.		
Sub-Categories	This category describes how tweets recognize the act of protest and how protesters express their right to address controversial issues.	While there are facts that justify the honorary doctorate it's also true that people refer their opinions in a passionate and emotional debate.	
Codes	Community consultation	Seeking engagement	Value of facts
Example of tweet	"Brabeck-Lemathe addresses protesters, says he values facts over strong emotions", "Should #ualberta have awarded Peter Brabeck-Letmathe with an honorary degree? Tweet us your thoughts!"		

✳ **Category 2:** *Twitter provided information in real time on the water event and also offered updates about the protest outside of the ceremony.* This category registered that 16.66% of tweets made comments about what was happening over the day of the honorary degree recognition.

✳ **Category 3:** *There were tweets on the honorary degree recipient information including perceptions about the protest.* University stakeholders posted comments (3.48%) on Peter Brabeck-Letmathe and reasons for the protests.

These categories as well as subcategories and codes presented in the Table 4.1 have reflected a **theme** that was exposed as: <u>*Twitter might be a platform to disseminate news and information in real time and some users have the ability to impact others and raise awareness on certain issues with their tweets.*</u>

4.2.3. Twitter as a tool to express feelings and share opinions. Over the analysis of tweets emerged three categories: "sharing opinions", "airing anger or shame", and "expressing humor", which revealed what stakeholders said and felt about the award and what this issue represented to the university community. These categories are as follows:

✳ **Category 1:** *People were able to post their feelings and started conversations adopting a stance on the honorary degree issue.* In this category there were 30 tweets registered or 27.77% of all data analyzed. These tweets were associated with personal stories, experiences, and critiques on the honorary degree event.

✳ **Category 2:** *Tweets expressed concerns about the role of higher education and questioned the decision making by the university related to the degree recipient.* This category was revealed in

11 tweets (10.18%) and demonstrated feelings such as confusion, humiliation, concerns, and acts of reflection among university stakeholders.

✴ **Category 3:** *Some tweets used sarcasm and irony as a technique for calling attention and fueling the controversy.* This category comprised 2.77% of the analyzed data and displayed jokes about the event and the recipient.

Categories, subcategories and codes (see Table 4.2) were represented within a **theme** that was exposed in the following statement: <u>*Through use of such tones as sarcasm, some users were able to share opinions and express their feelings through Twitter, which included anger and shame on the honorary degree.*</u>

4.2.4. The role of Twitter in Public Relations. With respect to the controversy some tweets were related to promotions and public relations activities, which were exposed in three categories "advertising", "video", and "fostering discussions". They are presented as follows:

✴ **Category 1:** *Twitter was used to promote the award ceremony, and also to summon people to the protest which emphasized disagreement with and shame in relation to the honorary degree decision.* In this category 14 tweets (12.96%) established connections to other media. For example, links from personal and company blogs, websites, etc.

✴ **Category 2:** *Tweets linked with a video, made by the university, on the panel discussion of the water event.* Four tweets, 3.70% of the total data analyzed, shared the link to this video. This allowed more information, involvement, and more discussions.

✴ **Category 3:** *Twitter's discussions invited wider discussions and social engagement in other social media such as Facebook.* This category consisted of invitations to Facebook discussions, also encouragement in social engagement amounted to 9.25% of the data analyzed.

Table 4.2.: Twitter as a tool to express feelings and share opinions.

Category	1. Sharing opinions: People were able to post their feelings and started conversations adopting a stance on the honorary degree issue.			
Sub-Categories	People were able to post tweets about what they observed related with the protest and felt about the controversy.		People interpreted their feelings through memories from past protests within the university	
Codes	Opinions	Disruption of activities	Criticism	Retrospective of past university activism
Example of tweet	"Actually, students protests at #UAlberta, including disrupting ceremonies, go back at least as far as 1965:http://t.co/OLNPzTUO", "Epidemiology prof says #ualberta should teach student moral integrity; say Indira Samaraseka failing to do so".			

Category	2. Airing anger or shame: Tweets expressed concerns about the role of the higher education and questioned the decision making by the university related with the honorary degree recipient				
Sub-Categories	The decision made by the university started a reflexion about the higher education principles.		People aired their feelings and express disagreement.		
Codes	Act of reflection	Feeling of confusion	Feeling of discomfort	Humiliation	Concern
Example of tweet	"Tomorrow #UAlberta will award an honorary degree to Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, chair of Nestle. I'm embarrassed...", "@UAlberta Pres Indira opened her admin to controversy when the honorary degree was awarded. Can't hide behind tradition now. #ualberta"				

Table 4.2. (Continued)

Category	3. Expressing humor: Some tweets used sarcasm and irony as a technique for calling attention and fueling the controversy.		
Sub-Categories	Tweeters use personal techniques and gimmick to express their feelings.	Some tweets undertake a strong emotional and choleric content that raise controversies.	
Codes	Sarcasm	Denigration	Criticism
Example of tweet	"Thanks to #UAlberta for not funding my appearance at this conference at CSUF; they spent their money on an honorary PhD for a water pirate"		

Considering categories, subcategories and the codes presented in Table 4.4, the

following t**heme** was seen: *according to technical features embedded in Twitter, it is possible to*

extend discussions and provide more information through linking blogs, videos, and other social

media.

Categories	Description	Examples	Metrics	%
1.Sharing opinions	A tweet which shares a personal stories, experiences, critiques on the honorary degree event.	*"Actually, students protests at #UAlberta, including disrupting ceremonies, go back at least as far as 1965:http://t.co/ OLNPzTUO"*	30	27.77
2.Advertising	A tweet which draws the reader's attention to an online publication (e.g. personal blogs, company blogs, websites, etc	*"Today's Journal editorial on #nestle: http://t.co/7ola535z Rally at Timms at 2pm to say no to #nestle, shame on #UAlberta"*	14	12.96
3.News	A tweet which shares or references a news story and links. e.g. hash tags #Edmonton Journal, #CBC, etc	*"Follow live tweets @paulatics and others at the #UAlberta protests against the honorary degree for Nestle's CEO"*	12	11.11
4.Express anger or shame	Reproach or negatively about the honorary degree recipient	*"Tomorrow #UAlberta will award an honorary degree to Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, chair of Nestle. I'm embarrassed..."*	11	10.18
5.Information on the event	Inviting, refusing or commenting on the event	*Dr Steve Hrudey - 45% of Alberta water is used for southern irrigation, 3% used by oil sands. #ualberta #h2o*	18	16.66
6.Information on Peter Brabeck-Letmathe	Comments about the recipient	*"Brabeck-Letmathe addresses protesters, says he values facts over strong emotions"*	6	5.55
7.Express humor	A tweet which shares jokes about the event or the recipient	*"Thanks to #UAlberta for not funding my appearance at this conference at CSUF; they spent their money on an honorary PhD for a water pirate"*	3	2.77
8.Video	A tweet which shares links on videos related with the event	*"The video of the panel discussion on #water at #UAlberta is now up: http:// t.co/usLdwhhf #UAlbertah2o*	4	3.70
9. Fostering discussions	A tweet which invites to discuss the topic on other media. e.g. Facebook, The Gateway, etc	*"The @UAlberta livestream & integrated Facebook discussion are now live: http:// t.co//7cMjzNUC"*	10	9.25

Table 4.3. Analysis of Tweets and Metrics

Table 4.4.: The role of Twitter in Public Relations

Category	1. Advertising: Twitter allowed the promotion the water event, and also to summon people to the protest which emphasized in disagreement with and shame relation to the honorary degree decision.			
Sub-Categories	This subcategory summarize how Twitter and journal editions might be key tools to inform on the rally "to say no to nestle".			
Codes	Media	Invitation	Rally	Shame and disagreement
Example of tweet	"Today's Journal editorial on #nestle: http://t.co/7ola535z Rally at Timms at 2pm to say no to #nestle, shame on #UAlberta", "RT @paulatics: For the lunch crowd - my column on #ualberta, #nestle, water, and who we choose to honour. http://t.co/MpuDyFL2 #yeg #abed"			

Category	2. Video: Tweets linked with a video made by the university on the panel discussion of water event.		
Sub-Categories	This social media uses tools and other media to reinforce information and increase discussions	One of the most crucial part in using Twitter is to get involve more people as much as possible.	
Codes	Involvement	Increasing information	Discussions
Example of tweet	"The video of the panel discussion on #water at #UAlberta is now up: http://t.co/usLdwhhf #UAlbertah2o		

Table 4.3. (Continued)

Category	3. Fostering discussion: Twitter's discussions invited wider discussions and social engagement in other social media such as Facebook		
Sub-Categories	Social media can help one another and increase the capacity of users without overlapping media roles.		Twitter allows, through links, to extend discussions in other social media with other users.
Codes	Facebook discussion	Invitation	To encourage social engagement
Example	"The @UAlberta livestream & integrated Facebook discussion are now live: http://t.co//7cMjzNUC"		

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Sharing opinions   Anger or shame   Humor
News   Event information   Information about the recipient
Advertising   Video   Other discussions
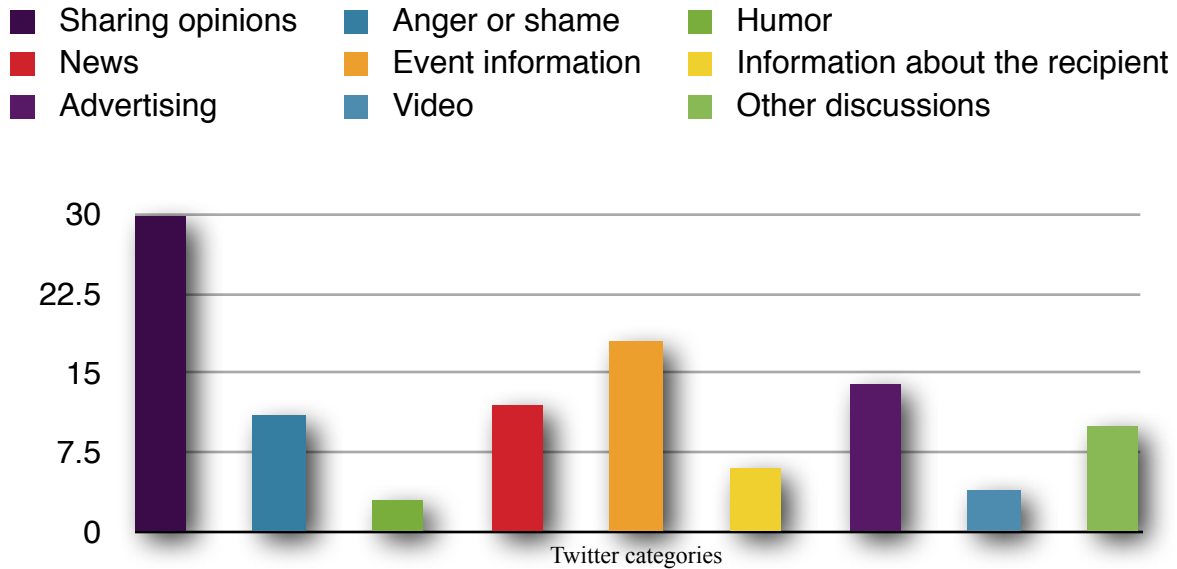
Figure 4.5: Analysis of Tweets and metrics

4.3. Stage Two: Semi-structured Questionnaire-Interviews

4.3.1. Perceptions about Twitter usage. With the purpose of achieving a better

understanding of how often the potential participants of the study use Twitter and also the kind

of knowledge they possess about corporate citizenship, this study provided a brief questionnaire at the

beginning of each interview. This questionnaire included four closed ended questions. The six

interviewees answered all questions reflecting the following results:

a. Most of the respondents use Twitter more than twice per week. One of the participants uses

Twitter many times per week and even per day because Twitter is an important tool for her

work.

b. All of the participants affirmed that they use Twitter for sharing news, expressing feelings,

linking websites, pictures, graphics, etc.; and retweeting posts that are important for sharing.

A participant noted that she uses Twitter for engaging in debate and conversation, and

responding to tweets from others.

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c. The workplace is where respondents use Twitter the most. However, they also attempt to post

tweets and check conversations from their homes. Only one person being able to manage Twitter

while commuting on public transportation.

d. Regarding their knowledge on corporate social responsibility, most of the respondents

associated the term with a decision-making process based on ethical values and compliance with

legal requirements.

     Once the brief questionnaire was completed this study proceeded to send the interviews

via email. It received participant insights about how Twitter has impacted their way of communicating

among relatives, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances. They told their stories about how they

particularly interact and share information on Twitter. These views were organized into three

categories as follows:

✶ **Category 1**: *Twitter is commonly used for professional purposes and contributes to building*

a brand in the community.

✶ **Category 2**: *Twitter lets people express their views and feelings with a certain flexibility and*

freedom, however it would not replace the usual modes of communications.

✶ **Category 3**: *Twitter is used to increase contact with other users rather than embrace strong*

ties with them for long periods.

     These three categories brought up a bigger view which is included in the framework of

the user's behavior regarding Twitter usage. A **theme** provided by categories, subcategories and

codes (see Table 4.5) was reflected as: *Twitter facilitates professional uses due to its flexible*

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Table 4.5.: Perceptions about the Twitter usage.

Categories	Category 1: Twitter is commonly used for professional purposes and contributes to build a brand in the community.			Category 2: Twitter lets people express their views and feelings with a certain flexibility and freedom, however it would not replace the usual modes of communications.		Category 3: Twitter is used to increase contact with other users rather than embrace strong ties with them during long time.	
Sub-Categories	Twitter is more related with work environments than any other social media (e.g. Facebook)	Twitter can help some professionals to share their work and talents.	Twitter can experience symmetrical communication because let users communicate in a balance flow with similar opportunities of feedback	Twitter allows users asymmetrical communication or the ability to be informed an easy and almost immediate way in only one direction.	"Lurker" or people who use Twitter to keep updated but they do not participate in discussions or sharing comments	Users do not use Twitter to embrace strong bonds with close people (e.g. family and friends). They use Twitter as a news platform by companies and institutions.	Twitter increases frequency to involve with a large amount of people, but it decreases duration of contact and faces reputation risks.
Codes or thematic phrases	Most of my close personal friends and family rely on Facebook for private, social communication	I use it to build my own brand in the community Examples of typical posts for me would include news about our students, job postings and announcements about the program etc.	Twitter as a vector for vigorous political debate and social engagement I use Twitter … to connect with people in my field I otherwise might not have been able to.	I wouldn't say it is an active way for me to communicate to anyone with purposeful intention It hasn't replaced the usual modes of communication that I use I'm not doing it to build followers, I'm doing it to stay current on what's of interest to me.	I don't typically engage in Twitter conversations with contacts, however. I frequently append my own commentary to this so it is not a simple RT	I don't use it to communicate with my family Nice hat tip to @ualberta revolutionary Ag researcher Dr Roy Berg. Proud to have met him	Twitter has increased the frequency of my contacts with people, although it has also led to a decrease in duration of contact I can't communicate with family via twitter as they are unsophisticated users and risk damaging my on-line reputation and personal brand

capabilities, freedom characteristics, and increase of contact with other users although it has

not replaced the usual modes of communication.

4.3.2. Perceptions about public controversies posted on Twitter. The second group of

ideas expressed by respondents was related to the role of Twitter in discussing social issues and

participating in public controversies. Participants considered that supporting social discussions

depends upon the ability to use Twitter and also, the details of the controversy. Therefore, I

developed the following **categories**:

✳ **Category 1:** *Organizations likely discuss social issues and controversies when the*

organization's views and values are aligned with stakeholder's views and values.

✳ **Category 2:** *Twitter might raise awareness on some issues that people are not attuned to.*

✳ **Category 3:** *Twitter promotes dynamic, public, and polyphonic conversations that should*

lead to intelligent responses according to its technical features and impact among users.

These categories revealed that Twitter users take advantage of its technological benefits

to look for support or to discuss social issues. Through these categories, subcategories and

codes (see Table 4.6) the following **theme** was reflected: *Organizations are able to raise*

awareness on social issues and /or encourage participation in controversies through Twitter

because it promotes dynamic, public, and polyphonic conversations.

4.3.3. Impact of the honorary degree tweets at the University of Alberta. The third

group of ideas was related to the impact of tweets that displays CSR issues within a higher

educational context. The study's purpose was to evaluate the perception of U of A stakeholders about

the honorary degree issue and other CSR issues on the Twitter platform. From participants'

views, the **categories** revealed were:

Table 4.6. Perceptions of public controversies posted on Twitter.

Categories	**Category 1:** Organizations likely discuss social issues and controversies when the organization's views and values are aligned with stakeholder views and values.		**Category 4**: Twitter might raise awareness on some issues when people are not attuned to.		**Category 3:** Twitter promotes dynamic, public and polyphonic conversations that should lead to intelligent responses according to its technical features and impact among users.	
Sub-Categories	Organizations have policies and values that rule their actions	Organizations have to report a wider variety of stakeholders	Twitter allows spreading important information	Twitter might encourage people to look for more details in other resources	Tweeters should be prepared with clever responses to different reactions from followers.	The most important rule in Twitter is transparency which claims for real names, faces and personalities
Codes or thematic phrases	In the case of publicly funded institutions like a university, this is more complex in my view	A university may choose to support a cause like the United Way and use its social media streams to announce progress of a fund raising campaign, for example	I like the idea of expressing awareness and discussions social issues on Twitter	I think that people's perspectives and sharing help to build broad understanding of issues and help us form our own opinions	People who might called Twitter gunners have to engage with – ie fight with – Tweeters, in the dominant idiom of the 'verse.	The cynical Twitterverse insists on real names, real faces, real personalities. Transparency is its currency
	If you already have a presence, be prepared to argue and defend your corporate position. You can't be passive-aggressive.		Anonymous corporate or institutional accounts just don't carry much weight on Twitter	Raising awareness among those who might not be as attuned to the issues	The Edmonton Twitter community, in particular, has created, a vibrant local Twitterverse that is populated by smart, politically aware, and culturally savvy social media consumers who have a low tolerance for corporate spin and a high degree of skepticism about authority or received wisdom	Anonymous corporate or institutional accounts just don't carry much weight on Twitter
						It is not a place for propaganda, but for the clash of thesis and antithesis.

✶ **Category 1:** *Tweets about minor issues (minor in relation to the operation of the university's core programs), for example the awarding of an honorary degree, have a limited impact at universities.*

✶**Category 2:** *Universities teach CSR principles in their programs of study, but they do not discuss CSR issues very frequently in public.*

✶ **Category 3:** *Twitter provides a new language that encourages critical thinking about corporate citizenship within a higher educational context.*

These categories partially showed the management of CSR principles at the University of Alberta and the potential role of Twitter to disclose information on CSR. Through the categories, subcategories and codes (see more details in Table 4.7) the following theme emerged: *Even though the U of A does not encourage the use of a forum about CSR issues, it teaches CSR principles, considering that Twitter provides a new language for critical thinking about CSR issues within high educational contexts.*

4.4. Stage Three: Questionnaire-Interview Based on a Twitter Dataset

4.4.1. Characteristics of tweets on public controversies in terms of positive, negative and neutral tones. According to the question of how respondents described tweets on the honorary degree controversy in terms of positive, negative, and neutral tones, the categories revealed were as follows:

✶ **Category 1:** *Sardonic tones and tweets about reputation are considered negative content.*

✶ **Category 2:** *People use neutral tweets because they are not interested in debating and also because, Twitter provides facts and descriptions about an event without opinion.*

✶ **Category 3:** *Positive tweets are posted by citizen reporters who use the media to promote companies, social issues, and people.*

Table 4.7.: Impact of the public controversy tweets at the University of Alberta

Categories	Category 1: Tweets about minor issues (minor in relation to the operation of the university's core programs), for example the honorary degree, have a limited impact at universities.		Category 2: Universities teach CSR principles in their programs of study, but they do not discuss CSR issues very frequently in public.			Category 3: Twitter provides a new language that encourages critical thinking corporate citizenship within a higher educational context.	
Sub-Categories	Universities consider major issues those that affect an institution's reputation and are related with administration aspects.	Universities do not like to expose their issues on social media. CSR issues make vulnerable institutions.	Universities talk about sustainability rather than social responsibilities issues	Academic staff does not have or have low commitment toward CSR principles within universities	Lack of studies on CSR teachings and practicing at universities	Twitter empowers people for actions	Twitter is the language of new generations
Codes or thematic phrases	The only way they might have an impact is if they are related to major issues that might affect an institution's reputation (e.g., are we using sweat labour, are we paying people a living wage, are we mistreating a minority, are we investing in things that harm the environment, etc.)	Universities don't tend to air areas of sensitivity on Twitter I believe a public university undermines its reputation in the community as an institution that values debate and free expression when it engages in social media propaganda campaigns.	I don't think universities are using CSR for competitive advantage CSR is an operational activity of the institution, and again, most academics are not involved in the operational/administrative aspects It is NOT the role of a respected academic institution to engage in on-line political propaganda campaigns	If people in key leadership roles have an interest or a duty to incorporate CSR into their work they might use Twitter to keep up on their field of practice or to share positive stories about our institution – but that would need to be done through a corporate account.	Many universities teach CSR. It would be interesting to study to what extent those that teach it actually practice it at their institution.	I think people are empowered when they have correct information and can make informed decisions...I believe this is an attribute that social media can add to people's life and can be used in CSR At UAlberta Twitter is more about sharing what's happening on campus, building a sense of community, focusing on students and the student experience	I say this because social media is the language of people's life today For UAlberta to be a good listener on this topic

According to subcategories and codes shown in the Table 4.8, people are not interested in debating controversies. However, they admitted that debates are a source of getting information. From the participant's insights have emerged the following **theme**: *Tweets can be classified according their content in a: a) Positive way, or those tweets posted by citizen reporters who promote companies, social issues, and people; b) Neutral way, or those tweets that only provide facts and descriptions about an issue without opinion; c) Negative way, or those tweets that use sardonic tones or display messages on organizational or individual reputation.*

4.4.2. Advantages and disadvantages regarding the support of CSR principles on Twitter. The questions that explored the effects of supporting CSR principles on Twitter brought up some insights, which are well explained in the following **categories**:

✴ **Category 1:** *Advantages regarding Twitter usage are associated with the ability of spreading news, sharing information, and the opportunity to listen to stakeholders.*

✴ **Category 2:** *Disadvantages regarding Twitter usage are associated with the lack of capabilities to expand information, the interpretation of messages, and the use of propaganda without dialogue (*for more details see Table 4.9).

These advantages and disadvantages led to the following **theme**: *Twitter might be a tool to support CSR principles because it is able to spread information and requires two-way communications that claim responsiveness, although it faces challenges such as the lack of extended information, the lack of interpretation of messages and the use of propaganda without dialogue.*

Table 4.8.: Characteristics of tweets on public controversies in terms of positive, negative and neutral tones.

Categories	Category 1: Sardonic tones and tweets about reputation are considered negative content.		Category 2: People use neutral tweets because they are not interested in debating and Twitter allows to find facts and descriptions about an event without opinion	Category 3: Positive tweets are posted by citizen reporters who use the media to promote companies and discuss social and individual issues	
Sub-Categories			The most of users are not interested to use Twitter for debating controversies o social issues	Citizen reporters collect information and post messages providing facts and adding, sometimes, negative tones.	Citizen reporters help to keep informed people
Codes or thematic phrases	My tone, I would describe as sardonic. If I were a reporter, I would be required to maintain a neutral tone.	Most are negative at the light of University reputation because they clearly express that #1 students are not happy wit the administration and course of action of the UofA's president and her stand in the case of Nestle honorary degree, #2 reflect a discrepancy between the values of students and workers and UofA as an institution #3 reflects that this honorary degree is not the who the corporate body (UofA) wants to be /or it is.	Most of the tweets seem to highlight what was happening. The tone of the tweets about the honorary degree seemed neutral to me, just providing the facts and describing events without opinion. I'm not looking for opportunities to debate with others via Twitter.	It is like they are tweets from citizen reporters most of the time. I guess they have negative undertones.	I guess if I wanted to know what was going on around these event, they would help inform me. I think when I go to twitter (if I ever do) is to check what companies, businesses or "people" that I follow (as artists, writers or people that are famous) are doing, recommend or are offering (like Starbucks or second cup offering free coffee).

Table 4.9. Advantages and disadvantages regarding the support of CSR principles on Twitter.

Categories	Category 1: Advantages regarding Twitter use are associated with the ability of spreading news, sharing information, and the opportunity to listening stakeholders.			Category 2: Disadvantages regarding Twitter use are associated with the lack of capabilities to expand information, the interpretation of messages, and the use of propaganda without dialogue.		
Sub-Categories	On Twitter, organizations have the opportunity to be open and transparent among their stakeholders and perform social engagement.	When organizations use Twitter they can respond inquires and provide a better service to their stakeholders	Twitter allows to spread news and opinions in real time.	Tweets have a limited of 140 characters per message.	Due to Twitter can not provide a big picture of an issue, it makes room for misunderstanding and some cases, amplifies the issue.	Some organizations use Twitter for promoting themselves and they do not encourage dialogues and conversations.
Codes or thematic phrases	I think Twitter can and should be used as a tool for social engagement, education, debate. The biggest rule of crisis communication is to not hide, but to embrace your audience with truth and knowledge.	You can however use it to respond to inquiries and direct people to images, reports and other documentation related to your story.	The big advantage of Twitter is that information moves VERY FAST!	People who have concerns about a company's CSR performance could easily use Twitter to post pictures of things they take offense with.	There is the potential to fuel the controversy depending on the tone and content the tweets sent out by the institution	The disadvantage of using Twitter for corporate branding/PR purposes is that is a medium that punishes insincerity and demands authenticity. IF you can't provide what it demands, you only end up embarrassing yourself and diminishing your brand status.

4.4.3. Perceptions about establishing open discussions about CSR issues on Twitter within higher educational institutions. The data collected in the questionnaire brought up three categories which are focused on the benefits and risks to discuss CSR activities on Twitter. The respondents also provided a comparison between Twitter and other media such as blogs. The **categories** were summarized as follows:

✶ **Category 1:** *Open discussions on Twitter about CSR issues with off-campus community allow the development of a strong on-line community that would support university efforts.*

✶ **Category 2:** *Encouraging conversations on CSR issues with external publics would fuel controversies which could get out of control.*

✶ **Category 3:** *Comparing Twitter with blogs, tweets are not static statements and require fast and wise use of 140 characters.*

A **theme** reflected by categories, subcategories, and codes (see Table 4.10) was exposed as *any effort for making open discussions on CSR principles within universities would bring benefits such as strengthen an on-line community with the premise of knowing about the good use of social media.*

Table 4.10.: Perceptions on establishing open discussions about CSR issues on Twitter within higher educational institutions.

Categories	Category 1: Open discussion on Twitter about CSR issues with off-campus community allows the development of an on-line community that would support university efforts.		Category 2: Encouraging conversations on CSR issues with external publics would fuel controversies which could get out of control			Category 3: Comparing Twitter with blogs, tweets are not static statements and require fast and wise use of 140 characters.	
Sub-Categories	Universities would demonstrate that they are listening and responding stakeholder's needs	There are corporations that take seriously tweets and make decisions in terms of CSR principles.	Do not be responsive of the issues	Do not evaluate the issues and not be prepared for crisis	Do not know the abilities of Twitter usage	Twitter advantages: It is a dynamic medium and is able to connects people easily through a "click"	Twitter disadvantage: it does not have space for long explanations that offer details and makes room for misunderstandings
Codes or thematic phrases	I think that is important and interesting to realize that people ARE TALKING. Advantage of engaging is that the institution is seen to be engaging, hopefully listening and responding.	I recently had Air Canada respond to a concern I raised on Twitter while I was sitting on the plane experiencing a delay. I was very impressed.	Ideally, if you're going to be in this space, you should be responsive.	Nothing worse than not having your concerns/ comments directed to a Twitter account not acknowledged when it's such a major issue	I think you need to be very careful with your use of Twitter.	You do need to use those 140 characters wisely to get your message noticed and get people to click through. Twitter is soundbites. Twitter is for connecting people to more information that can inform an issue.	It is not a place for in depth conversation or diving deep into an issue.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The statistical results in Stage One presented in Chapter 4, exposed that the

majority of the tweets posted (62.75%), from February 15 to March 15 in 2012, did not reflect

any connection with social responsibility issues. Furthermore, only 37.63% of tweets

responded to the Brabeck-Letmathe controversy or were related with other corporate citizenship

issues. This result supports the category found in Stage Two which says that *"universities*

teach CSR principles in their programs of study, but they do not discuss CSR issues very

frequently in public". Munk (2010) explains that universities, similar to any corporation,

include two large domains, economy and community, and both domains pull universities in

conflicting directions. The assumption that the U of A did not encourage a public forum

through Twitter about the Brabeck-Letmathe issue, could have been to avoid conflicts related

with organizational reputation. Moreover, the honorary degree controversy was considered a

minor issue and had a limited impact at the university. This was reflected by respondents:

> *I believe a public university undermines its reputation in the community as an institution*
> *that values debate and free expression when it engages in social media propaganda*
> *campaigns... The only way tweets might have an impact is if they are related to major*
> *issues that might affect an institution's reputation (e.g., are we using sweat labour, are we*
> *paying people a living wage, are we mistreating a minority, are we investing in things*
> *that harm the environment, etc.). Universities don't tend to air areas of sensitivity on*
> *Twitter.*

The reason that institutions of higher education elevate dialogue and engagement in

sustainability-related topics, rather than the principles of corporate citizenship is they do not see

CSR as a competitive advantage (e.g. *I'm not sure students would even know what they were*

looking at when it came to making a decision to attend an institution). Another aspect related to

communication failures experienced by universities is the low level of commitment of academic

staff in getting involved and encouraging conversations about CSR. This is because they

associate social responsibility with operational/administrative activities of the institutions in

which most of them prefer not to intervene. One respondent commented the following:

> *Profs want to talk about research and academic stuff. While it could be a broad-brush statement, I would say that academics don't generally get involved in the administrative side of their institution. It really wouldn't be their place to talk about sustainability at their institution as an "official" of the institution, because that is not their role. They may talk about it from an academic freedom or research perspective though, but I think most people are tied up in their own academic topics/pursuits, and they'd only be apt to talk about it if the institution's activities crossed over into their area of academic interest/research.*

Respondents held the opinion that ***"encouraging conversations on CSR issues with***

university external publics would fuel controversies which could get out of control".

Therefore, Twitter accounts are a place to discuss what is happening on campus rather than

fostering debates on performing good citizenship actions. Rao Metha (2011) posited that there is

so much skepticism among stakeholders and universities that, in the last couple of decades, the

latter have transformed themselves and have incorporated more courses in ethics and

sustainability as well as corporate responsibility. Even though the higher education efforts have

been important, this field would seem not to have managed proper outcomes in CSR

communication yet (e.g. *At UAlberta Twitter is more about sharing what's happening on*

campus, building a sense of community, focusing on students and the student experience... It is

not really a place for broadcasting corporate messages per se).

Although the majority of the tweets did not give prominence to the public controversy,

they received considerable attention among stakeholders registering in Stage One 108 tweets

from the 457 analyzed. According to a theme that emerged from the results, <u>*Twitter might be a*</u>

<u>*platform to disseminate news and information in real-time and some users have the ability to*</u>

impact others and raise awareness on certain issues with their tweets (see Figure 5.1). Chew &

Eysenbach (2010) and Gupta (2011) claimed that Twitter has an interesting value that allows

authorities to become aware of real-time responses to public concerns and build up a social

movement raising funds for causes. For the Brabeck-Letmathe debate, Twitter was a tool to share

personal stories, experiences, information and critiques about the award recipient, and also,

information associated with the water event. Some respondents commented about the abilities of

Twitter in the following way:

> *Examples of typical posts for me would include news about our students, job postings and announcements about the program etc... I think people are empowered when they have correct information and can make informed decisions...I believe this is an attribute that social media can add to people's life and can be used in CSR... I say this because social media is the language of people's life today.*

Regarding the group of stakeholders who posted messages on the honorary doctorate

issue, the community group identified as former professors, free-lance journalists, and savvy

social media who posted more tweets than any other stakeholder group with 22.67%. It has

brought light to the concept of citizen journalism developed by Barnes (2012) who identified

these users as "the inside looking out" (p.17) or people that collect, report, analyze and

disseminate news and other forms of communications without professional training. It was also

observed in the results that media sites and their journalists used Twitter as an important tool for

their work. This kept people informed and developed their own branding within the community.

(e.g. *I use Twitter ... to connect with people in my field I otherwise might not have been able to).*

Another predominant theme was *according to technical features embedded into Twitter, it*

aims to extend discussions and provide more information through linking blogs, videos, and

other social media. As noted by Brian Solis (cited by Sancar, 2013), we are experiencing "public

Figure 5.1:. Themes that emerged in the results.

Stage One:
Analysis of Tweets Results

Twitter might be a platform to disseminate news and information in real time and some users have the ability to impact others and raise awareness on certain issues with their tweets.
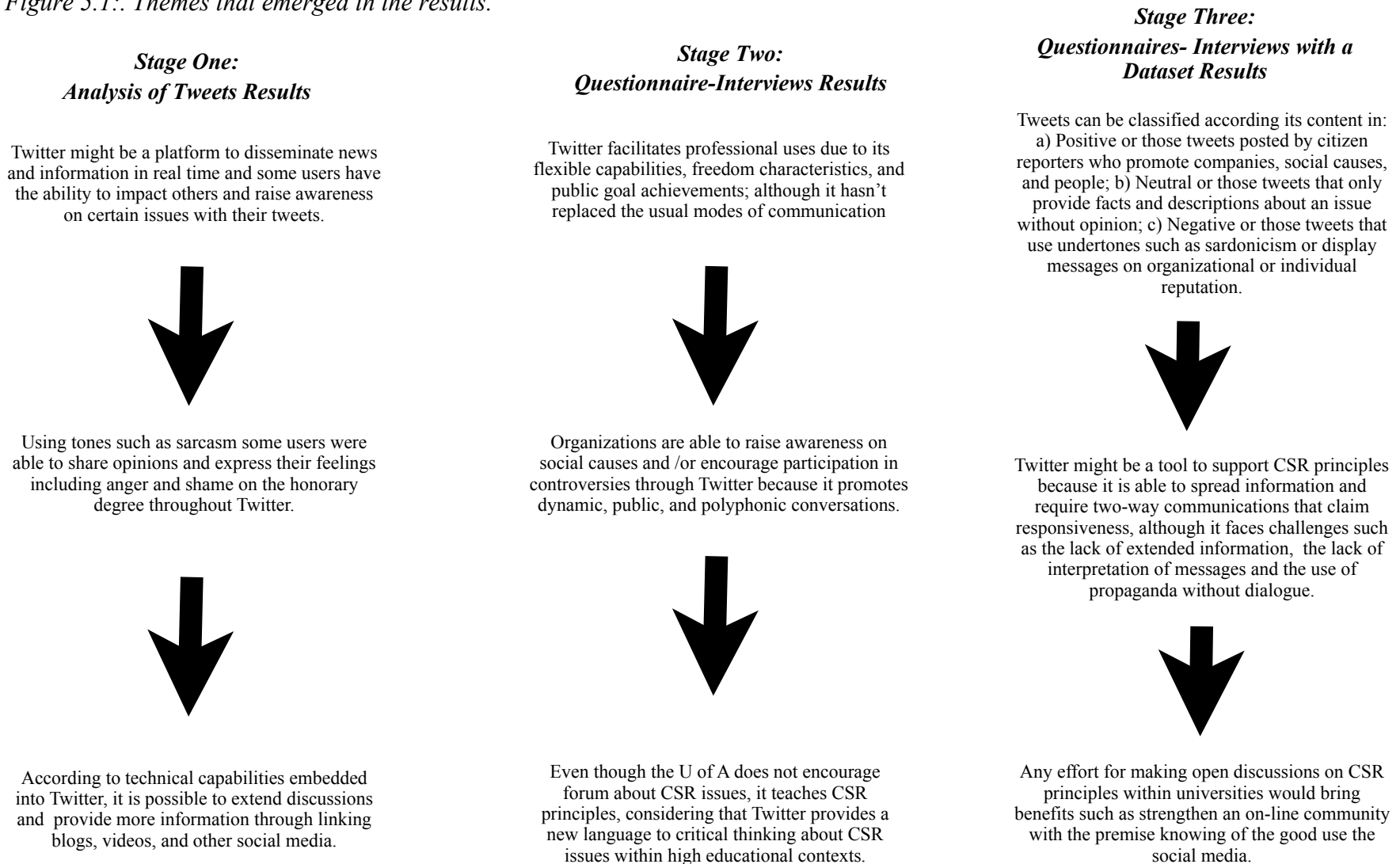
Using tones such as sarcasm some users were able to share opinions and express their feelings including anger and shame on the honorary degree throughout Twitter.

According to technical capabilities embedded into Twitter, it is possible to extend discussions and provide more information through linking blogs, videos, and other social media.

Stage Two:
Questionnaire-Interviews Results

Twitter facilitates professional uses due to its flexible capabilities, freedom characteristics, and public goal achievements; although it hasn't replaced the usual modes of communication

Organizations are able to raise awareness on social causes and /or encourage participation in controversies through Twitter because it promotes dynamic, public, and polyphonic conversations.

Even though the U of A does not encourage forum about CSR issues, it teaches CSR principles, considering that Twitter provides a new language to critical thinking about CSR issues within high educational contexts.

Stage Three:
Questionnaires- Interviews with a Dataset Results

Tweets can be classified according its content in: a) Positive or those tweets posted by citizen reporters who promote companies, social causes, and people; b) Neutral or those tweets that only provide facts and descriptions about an issue without opinion; c) Negative or those tweets that use undertones such as sardonicism or display messages on organizational or individual reputation.

Twitter might be a tool to support CSR principles because it is able to spread information and require two-way communications that claim responsiveness, although it faces challenges such as the lack of extended information, the lack of interpretation of messages and the use of propaganda without dialogue.

Any effort for making open discussions on CSR principles within universities would bring benefits such as strengthen an on-line community with the premise knowing of the good use the social media.

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relations 2.0" (p. 185) or the new way that organizations connect with stakeholders using the

advantages of the web 2.0. Technical features of Twitter empower organizations or individuals to

be more successful when they want to get information from their publics, or simply when they

need to promote their activities. Nevertheless Rheingold (2012) posited that Twitter or any other

social media face challenges for encouraging engagement and developing public relations that

include interactions based on invisible audiences, conflicts between social situations with social

contexts, and public and private convergence. Respondents also observed these challenges and

admitted that although Twitter expands their contacts the duration of those contacts is weak and

short (e.g. "*I don't use Twitter to communicate with my family"*). Respondents in Stage Two

expressed that ***"Twitter reaches public goals rather than private purposes",*** which means that it

is able to reach large amounts of people, spread information among them and get their feedback

developing a social capital activity.

To get better understanding of Twitter, in stage three, respondents did a comparison

between microblogs and blogs. It is clear that a box of 14 characters lacks the physical space to

discuss, and could result, often, in misunderstandings (e.g. *Nice spin #ualberta. Ignore Nestle's*

horrific track record, downplay public outcry, and demonize the Council of Cdns: http://t.co/

7zBZiuH1). However Twitter disseminates information to a wider variety of users in a dynamic

fashion and does so faster than blogs (*e.g. Twitter is soundbites...therefore, you need to use those*

140 characters wisely to get your message noticed and get people to click through). Furthermore,

Twitter faces a challenge in providing intelligent, objective, and unbiased responses to publics

who usually are more reactive than proactive. A respondent concluded that:

People who might be called Twitter gunners have to engage with – ie fight with – Tweeters, in the dominant idiom of the 'verse... Twitter is not a medium for sissies. Elbows up. Shoulder pads on. And be prepared for high sticking.

Other categories that revealed important insights were described as ***"people were able to post their feelings and started conversations adopting a stance on the honorary degree issue"*** and ***"tweets expressed concerns about the role of higher education and questioned the decision making by the university related to the degree recipient"***. These categories from Stage Two asserted that Twitter allows users to share emotions, thoughts, frustrations and experiences with anyone, anywhere, and anytime (Hoe-Lian & Sian-Lee, 2011). Twitter can be used as an educational tool to help engage students and to mobilize faculty into a more active and participatory role (Junco et al., 2011, p. 119). It is a space that allows users to leave comments that come from their thinking and their values. An important aspect of this is how Twitter and CSR principles complement each other, because one lets people express their values and the other one guides those values. For example some tweets displayed the following comments:

Actually @UAlberta, student protests at #UAlberta, including disrupting ceremonies, go back at least as far as 1965: http://t.co/OLNPzTUO

@UAlberta Pres Indira opened her admin to controversy when the honorary degree was awarded.

RT @EmilyRiddle: Tomorrow #ualberta will award an honorary degree to Peter Brabeck- Letmathe, chair of Nestle. I'm embarrassed....

Over the analysis of questionnaires with a dataset or stage three, this study developed a classification of tweets according to their content, whether it had positive, neutral, or negative tones. Regarding positive tweets, participants stated that all messages related to

discussing social issues, activities, people and the water event in the university were considered as

good items or comments. Neutral tweets were identified by respondents as messages that

provide facts and descriptions however they did not reflect opinions. Regarding negative

messages, respondents associated these messages with undertones such as sardonicism that

expressed feelings (e.g. shame, humiliation, embarrassment, etc.). The negative messages were

also related to institution reputation. Even though tweets have positive, neutral, or negative

contents and connotations, all of them are providing a feedback which is an extremely important

with respect to the flow communication in a public relations process (Grunig cited by Toth,

2007). Feedback experiences are a two-way communication process that allows organizations to

listen and speak with their publics. The following comment was given by a respondent:

> *Most are negative at the light of University reputation because they clearly express that*
> *#1 students are not happy with the administration and course of action of the UofA's*
> *president and her stand in the case of Nestle honorary degree, #2 reflect*
> *a discrepancy between the values of students and workers and UofA as an institution #3*
> *reflects that this honorary degree is not the person who the corporate body (UofA) wants*
> *to be/or it is.*

The results of the study highlighted that the most important factor in fostering public

debates and discussing social issues on Twitter is based on organizational or individual

transparency which rejects any attempt at anonymity (e.g. *The cynical Twitterverse insists on*

real names, real faces, real personalities. Transparency is its currency). Time and followers are

factors that play a crucial role in a communication crisis. Participants expressed the following:

> *If you don't already have a Twitter presence, you can't build one overnight. If you're not*
> *networked, this is not the time to start... if you have no followers and no re-tweeters, you*
> *are shouting into the great void.*

One of the participants brought up the phrase coined by McLuhan (1967) "the medium is

the message" and it was adapted for this study as "Twitter is the message". Therefore Twitter is

able to create a world of total involvement in which everybody is involved with everybody else

and information is constantly flowing. The respondent expressed the followings:

> *The Edmonton Twitter community, in particular, has created, a vibrant local Twitterverse that is populated by smart, politically aware, and culturally savvy social media consumers who have a low tolerance for corporate spin and a high degree of skepticism about authority or received wisdom. Any corporation or institution that attempts to engage with Edmonton's prickly Twitter community has to be prepared to work in that arena. Corporate bromides simply will not "sell" in that space.*

This comment demonstrated that Twitter creates an on-line community where everybody

is interconnected and defends their views from those people or organizations, who attempt to

contravene their principles and values. This is represented in the symmetrical public relations

model explained by Grunig (Toth, 2007) in which all parties communicate with each other as

equals, seeking to maintain a relationship based on mutual understandings and needs. The

process of forming communities in Twitter lies on the symmetrical model because it allows that

each user participates in a space with the same opportunities and conditions to achieve mutual

objectives. The following theme describes how the symmetrical model is reflected on Twitter:

Open discussions on Twitter about CSR issues with off-campus community allow the

development of a strong on-line community which would support university efforts.

Although Twitter adopts symmetrical models, it could also work in asymmetrical models.

Toth (2007) described the asymmetrical models as the ability to establish communication in only

one direction according to roles and power in a relationship. Rheingold (2012) posited that

Twitter experiences asymmetrical feedback in order to one does not have social obligation to

follow others simply because they are followed. Grunig (Toth, 2007) pointed out the irony that

some systems based on symmetrical models eventually require some form of asymmetrical

public relations to achieve their goal of mutual understandings and needs in order to reach a high

level of communication (p. 75). Tweeters do not necessarily use the medium to engage in

conversations, add followers, or maintain constant feedback. Twitter allows users to make their

own decision about interacting with others or simply being a lurker or person who uses Twitter

for updates but that does not participate in discussions or share comments. Respondents

explained as follows:

> *I wouldn't say it is an active way for me to communicate to anyone with purposeful intention...However...I'm not doing it to build followers, I'm doing it to stay current on what's of interest to me. I don't typically engage in Twitter conversations with contacts, however.*

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusions

The current study based on the pragmatic paradigm used a mixed methods approach and content analysis as a strategy, to endeavor to understand more deeply the use of Twitter and its support for the principles of CSR within a higher educational context. To address the research question on how tweets supported or undermined CSR principles within higher educational institutions, the study applied a hybrid technique of questionnaire-interviews and analyzed a large amount of tweets posted using the development of the Brabeck-Letmathe controversy that emerged at the University of Alberta.

The results of the study suggest that: a) the microblogs neither directly supported nor undermined the principles of CSR for the university; but b) by allowing critics of the university and others to express their sentiments, opinions, and feelings related to the controversy, the microblogs may have indirectly supported the principles of CSR.

Respondents suggested that universities do not tend to air areas of sensitivity on Twitter. Respondents also were concerned about undermining their institution's reputation when engaging public comments or protests on social media. However, the analysis of tweets suggested that a variety of tones and contents and the creation of positive, neutral, or negative can be messages characterize the use of Twitter in relation to public controversies and the enhancement of CSR principles.

Furthermore, participants stated that in their view, tweets might have a significant impact on the institution's reputation is if they were related to major CSR issues. They concluded that the case of an honorary degree controversy can be considered a minor issue.

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However, this study allowed for the achievement of conclusions such as: university

stakeholders were able to express their opinions and views about the award recipient and

exposed critiques about the decision made by the university. Thus, the university community

could support the development of open discussions using Twitter and, in turn, to reject any

intention of reducing open dialogue about issues of public concern.

Respondents described Twitter as a new language of people's life today. Twitter offers

dynamic, polyphonic, flexible, democratic and interactive conversations unlike any other social

media including blogs. In spite of these benefits, participants expressed the opinion that Twitter

experiences challenges related to building strong ties among users and also about the short

duration of relationships among users. Even though Twitter facilitates conversations in terms of

simple, credible and interactive forms it would not replace the usual modes of communication

such as face-to-face interaction.

It is interesting how this medium impacts publics and encourages open discussions,

which could result in social movements (Gupta, 2011). For example, in Edmonton, there is a

vibrant local Twitter community that is more tight-knit around tweeting to one another than in

Calgary (Fletcher, 2013). The Edmonton Twitterverse is populated by people who have strong

understanding about proper corporate management, which could directly or indirectly impact the

University of Alberta.

Finally, although higher educational institutions promote a high moral level of teachings

about CSR, social responsibility practice seems not be considered as a strategically competitive

advantage to enroll more students. Therefore, the lack of strategies of facing CSR issues and the

lack of a Twitter communication plan make universities more vulnerable in times of public

relations crisis putting in risk their reputation and image among their stakeholders.

6.2. Limitations

The purpose of this study was not determine whether the use of Twitter ensures

successful CSR communication campaigns. In fact, one of the respondents emphasized that there

are many CSR campaigns that have never incorporated Twitter in their strategies. Therefore, this

study suggested that Twitter could be part of an overall communication plan that includes

traditional media, non- traditional media, and social media.

This study focused on the Twitter perspective and other mediums used by the university

to discuss CSR principles were not evaluated. Therefore, university blogs (e.g.

Colloquy@UAlberta) the official website of the university, and university newspapers (e.g.

The Gateway) that played a crucial role disclosing CSR issues, were not taken as a part of this

study. While this is a preliminary study much can be built on the foundation of its results.

6.3. Recommendations

The study can offer higher educational institutions with some suggestions for exploring

through further studies new understandings and approaches about social responsibility. The

development of these studies or research could take place in key university departments that

manage sustainability activities and that manage the relationships between the university and

the community. As previously mentioned in the conclusions, universities should consider

corporate citizenship as a competitive advantage and also reconsider issuing sustainability

reports that include social responsibility as a crucial performance area.

Thus, it is important to develop a communication plan that establishes goals and

strategies of Twitter usage in times of public relations crisis or public controversies. The

communication plan should be aligned directly with sustainability reports, for example, the

Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS) ("Association for the

Advancement", 2008). An effective strategic communication plan includes the four-step public

relations process including research, planning, communication and evaluation, and also

addresses questions such as, Who needs to know? What do stakeholders need to know? Why

do they need to know? How are we going to tell them? and What do we want them to do with

the information they receive?

Following the direction of Kietzmann et al. (2011) who identified strategies for

monitoring, understanding, and responding in seven functional blocks, I would recommend

monitoring discussions on Twitter. The seven blocks are as follows:

a. Analyzing the identities of those who are tweeting messages in which the reputation of

universities are involved.

b. Following up on conversations that display news, debates and controversies posted on

Twitter space in which universities are involved.

c. Responding and sharing content that lets users know about institutions and their values.

d. Maintaining a presence that allows university stakeholders to get updates on sustainability

activities and issues.

e. Allowing interactions among stakeholders that contribute to maintaining strong

relationships within the universities.

f. Leading, in terms of democracy and freedom, forums which are related to the university's

reputation.

g. Fostering the creation of new on-line communities to contribute to university goals.

According to Aaker and Smith (2010) organizations could grab the attention of their audiences and get more effectiveness in social issue campaigns following a "Twitter Boot Camp" (p. 70) (see Figure 6.1) which is summarized as follows:

Get started. This means that profile design and content play a crucial role to draw the attention.

Find your target market. I would suggest that universities should think about people who are related with local and global social responsibility and align their actions according to stakeholders interests and values.

Get followers. The goal is to get as many followers as possible and a simple suggestion could be to follow a lot of people.

Get attention. Gatekeepers play an interesting role because they add value retweeting or replying to comments, questions, or piece of information posted by users. The idea is to support social capital in university Twitter accounts and among their followers.

Tweet smart. Users like to see different, fresh, and sometime controversial tweets that encourage interesting discussions. Send pictures, post questions, create contests, link good articles, all of these tips allow more people to keep informed, engaged and keep in tune with CSR activities within universities.

In the light of the limited scope of the current study, I would propose further research to analyze in depth what universities are teaching in terms of CSR principles and what part of those teachings are being practiced by the institutions. I also suggest auditing and monitoring this practice using Twitter, for instance, administering short surveys or responding to inquiries from citizens.

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Figure 6.1.: This figure illustrates the steps to grab attention on Twitter (Aaker & Smith, 2010, p. 69)
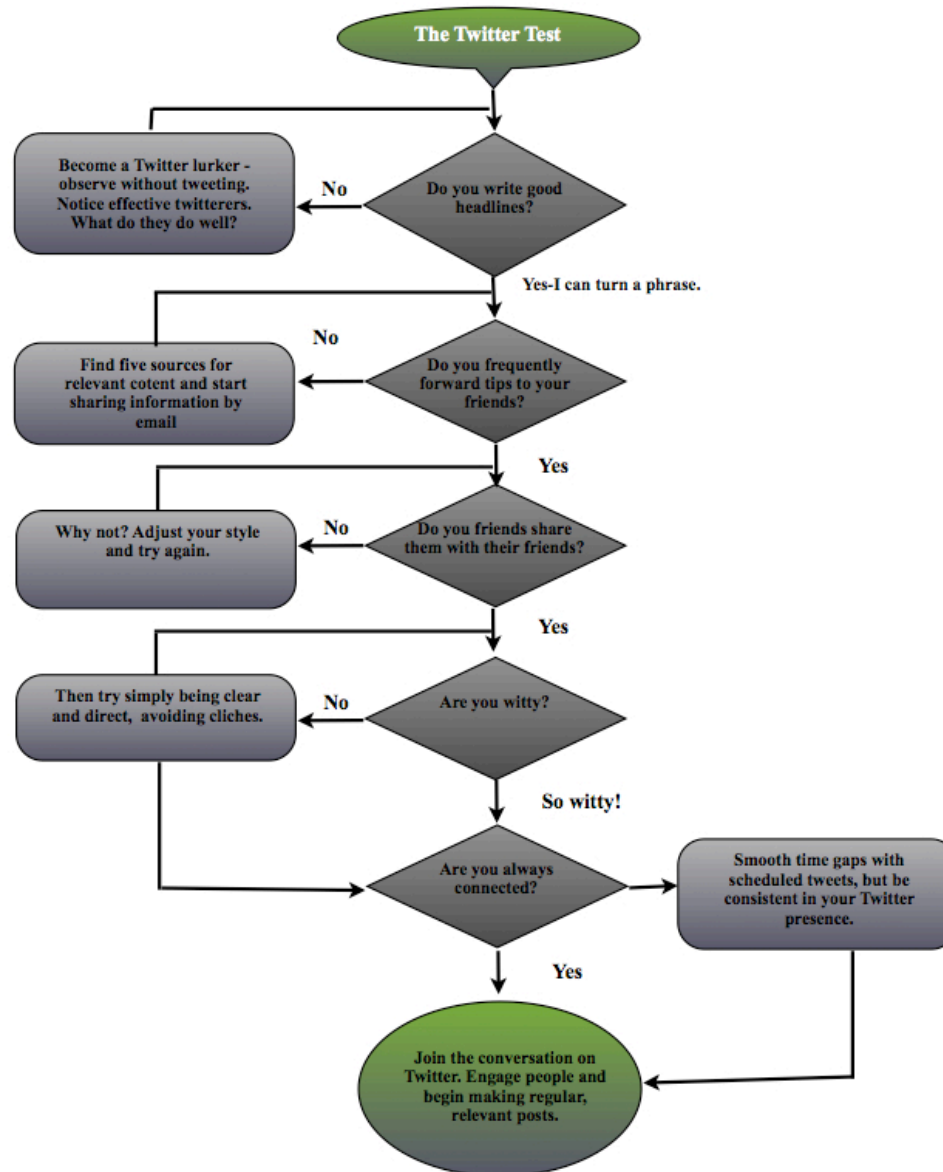
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UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Semi-structured Questionnaire-Interview.

I would like to learn from you!

What is this study about? The goal of this study is to explore the possible support of tweets or microblogs to the corporate social responsibility principles in the educational context.

Will I keep anonymity in your responses to the questions? All information collected will be coded to protect your privacy and anonymity. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Ethics Office at 780-492-2615.

Are you free to withdraw from the interviews? You are free to withdraw from the interviews and/or refuse to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with. The request for withdrawal of data must be received by the author in writing within three (3) weeks from the date of the interview.

Instruction of answering the e-mail interview:
-You could answer the questions on the body of this email or the attached document which is in   Word format.
-Participants are encouraged to use acronyms (e.g., CSR, corporate social responsibility), emoticons (e.g., ☺, ☼,★) and abbreviations (e.g., LOL, laughing out loud) as well as underlining and capitalization (for emphasis).
-There are no wrong or incorrect answers, please feel free to express your opinions and insights.
-If you do not understand any question or feel confused, please contact me immediately for better explanation.
-This interview takes approximately 25 minutes. Please send your responses by February 25, 2013.

Interview: Understanding Social Media and Corporate Social Responsibility principles

1. How, in your view, Twitter has impacted or not the way of communicating among your relatives, friends, co-workers, acquaintances, and others?

2. Please tell me about the messages do you post on Twitter that keeps your followers interacting and sharing information with you? Please provide me an example.

3. What do you think on those messages posted on Twitter that express awareness and/or support a social cause?

4. According to your experience as a sustainability practitioner, what do you think about those messages posted on Twitter that express opinions and views on public controversies?

5. The author H. Muijen noted that "*in universities, the rhetorical power of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mobilizes minds and prepares people for actions*". Drawing on your experience as a sustainability practitioner, how would you describe the relevance and importance of this quotation to those aspects of your work that involve using social media?

6. What do you believe is the impact or not of tweets that address CSR issues within a university?

7. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your valuable time!

Erika Fernandez
Master of Arts in Communication and Technology

Reference:
Muijen, H. (2004) Corporate social responsibility starts at universities. *Journal of Business Ethics, 53,* 235-246

Appendix 2. Questionnaire-Interview with a Dataset

**e-Questionnaire: Understanding Social Media in the
Management of Corporate Social Responsibility Issues**

This questionnaire is intended to find out how microblogs or tweets support the principles of corporate social responsibility (CSR) within higher education. Your opinions and views will help us to gain a better understanding of social media, specifically Twitter, in the management of CSR issues in an educational context.

The enclosed tweets dataset was chosen randomly from February 15 to March 15, 2012. All names and logos have been removed to protect the privacy of the Twitter users. Please read carefully the dataset attached in this message and then answer the questions below. To complete the questionnaire could take approximately 45 minutes and if you have any question please do not hesitate to contact me. I would be appreciated you email me the questionnaire by **March 15, 2013.**

According to the dataset of tweets, please respond the following questions:

1.Which of the following categories of Twitter is the most useful or interesting to you (Please choose only one category)?
__ Spreading news and information (e.g. posting links, video, photos, or comments about news)
__ Debating controversial issues (e.g. making questions or sharing topics which are open to discuss)
__ Advertising individual or corporate brand (e.g. posting messages about products of companies, individual recognitions, university projects, etc)
__ Sharing experiences (e.g. sharing personal stories, views, etc)

Can you tell me why you find this category of tweet activity more useful or interesting than others?

2.When you think about how the tweets in the dataset reflect on the honorary degree recipient, would you describe any of these tweets as: a) positive; b) negative; c) neutral? Can you tell me why you would describe the tweets in this way?

3. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be defined as an ethical response from corporations to stakeholders about economic, social, and environmental aspects with the purpose of improving the quality of life of their internal and external publics. How would you describe the relationship of Twitter to CSR? For example, is Twitter a key tool in supporting CSR? If so, how? Can Twitter detract or reduce an organization's intention to reach the goals of CSR? If so, how? Do you have an example from your own work or a case in higher education institutions that might illustrate your views on Twitter and CSR? If so, please describe it briefly

4.Twitter encourages transparency and authenticity in order to keep and increase online conversations. Thinking about the dataset of Tweets provided, how do you think Twitter should

be used, if at all, to support CSR in the case of a public controversy of the kind mentioned in the tweets? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of using Twitter to achieve the goals of CSR in the case of a public controversy?

5.According to a preliminary content analysis of tweets from the current research, the external stakeholders of the university (e.g. public media, former professors, students from different universities, citizen organizations, etc) reach 61.73% from total tweets analyzed. How would you describe the participation of people outside of the university in the Twitter dialogue on public controversy? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of encouraging Twitter conversations with external stakeholders to support CSR in the case of public controversy?

6.Marshall McLuhan said that, "the medium is the message". In the case of Twitter is a medium, this might mean that organizations should consider the constraints of Twitter in addition to the opportunities for communication that it offers. In that sense, what do you feel are the advantages and disadvantages of Twitter for achieving the goals of CSR, especially when compared with other media, such as, for example, a blog?

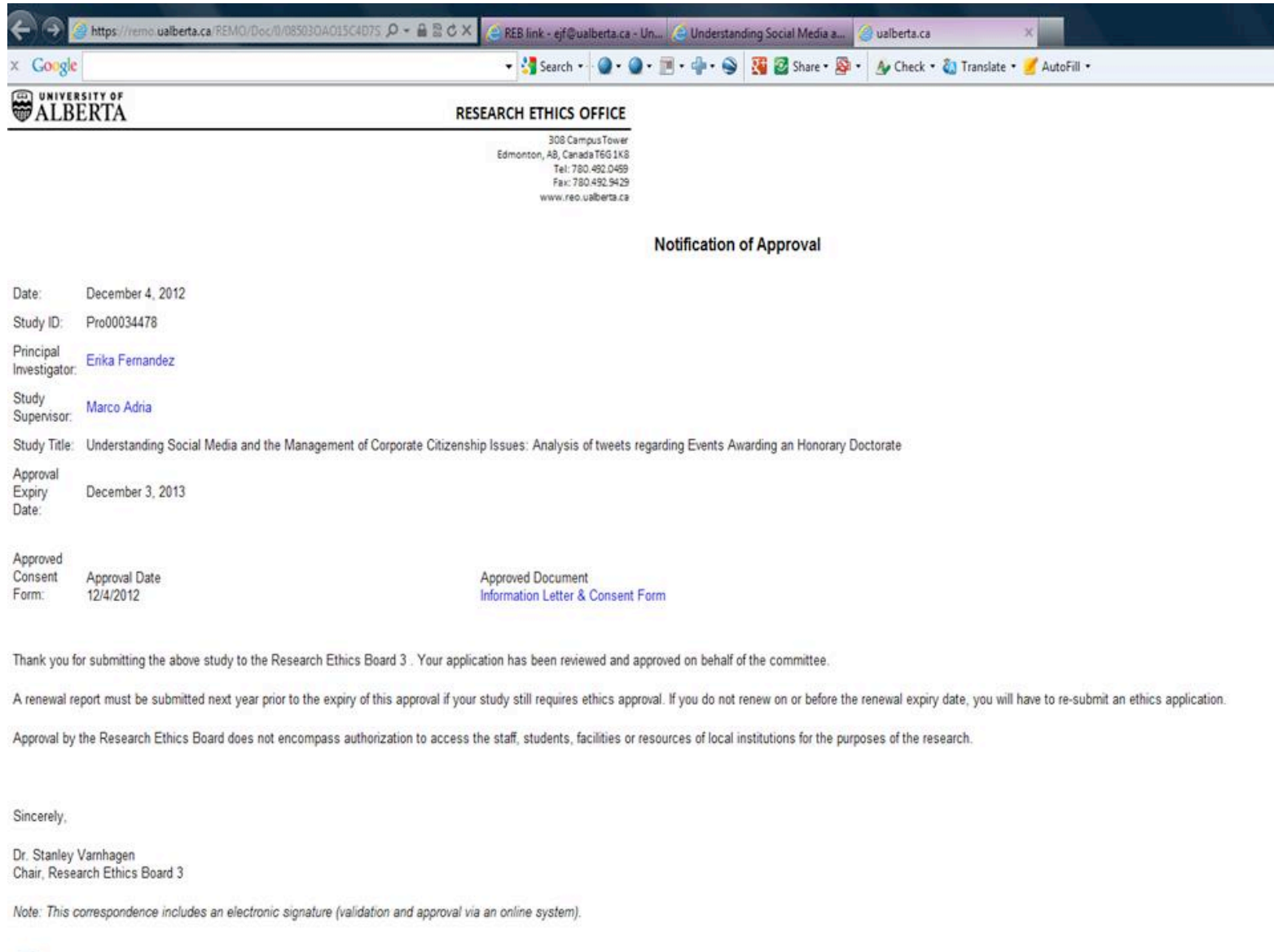7.Please use the below space for any additional information you would like to provide me with.

Thank you for your valuable insights and time.

Appendix 3. Tutorial Video.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpR389ADuGo

Appendix 4. Letter of approval by Research Ethics Board.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RESEARCH ETHICS OFFICE

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Notification of Approval

Date: December 4, 2012

Study ID: Pro00034478

Principal
Investigator: Erika Fernandez

Study
Supervisor: Marco Adria

Study Title: Understanding Social Media and the Management of Corporate Citizenship Issues: Analysis of tweets regarding Events Awarding an Honorary Doctorate

Approval
Expiry   December 3, 2013
Date:

Approved Consent Form:	Approval Date	Approved Document
	12/4/2012	Information Letter & Consent Form

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 3 . Your application has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee.

A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Stanley Varnhagen
Chair, Research Ethics Board 3

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA

Appendix 5. Participant's consent by email.