Twitter, as a Journalistic Tool:

Exploring its Impact on Canadian Journalists

By

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Dedication

To my Mom,

Without with your unconditional support, I would not have been able to accomplish this… You are a true hero and my everlasting inspiration.

To my husband,

I am so grateful for having such a loving, caring, and wise friend and partner. Thank you for always supporting my decisions.

To my son, Theo,

Since you were born, just few months after I started my graduate degree, you have been my inspiration to turn tiredness into enthusiasm and weakness into strength. You have made every challenge an enjoyable experience.

To my sister and family in- Law,

Thank you for your always being the best family that anyone could ask for.

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the impacts of Canadian mainstream journalists using Twitter as a professional tool. This paper also examines how journalists use the microblogging tool in the workplace, despite the ongoing debate over the legitimacy of utilizing it in professional settings. The research purposefully samples six journalists from diverse media outlets in Edmonton, Alberta, using semi-structured interviews as a data collection method, while employing content analysis to analyze data generated from the interviews.

The study findings show that Canadian journalists, who are active on Twitter, use the microblogging tool as an extension of their traditional broadcasting activities, and therefore apply the same professional rules and guidelines to their Twitter use. At the same time, data gathered from the interviews demonstrate that the personalized features of Twitter allow journalists to reveal to the audiences who they are, which according to study participants helps neutralize any potential biases.

Findings also reveal that using Twitter as a journalistic tool can be a double-sided sword, which can be harmful to journalists' credibility and reputation; and therefore suggest that journalists should always be cognisant that their tweets are accurate and do not contradict with the traditional norms of professional journalism.

Keywords: social media, Twitter, professional journalists, mainstream media, journalistic guidelines, qualitative interviews, content analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter I. Introduction

The rise of social media platforms has significantly influenced online social interactions, both personal and professional. Schultz and Sheffer (2010) argue that the use of social media platforms has gone beyond social networking, the primary reason for their existence (p. 227). With the growing popularity of these online platforms among users, social media have been significantly used in the news industry. Global and Canadian mainstream media organizations were quick to integrate social media in the workplace. Similarly, professional journalists[1] have adopted social media such as Twitter for a variety of purposes, such as breaking news, self-promotion, and engaging in discussions, as well as sharing mundane details about their daily activities (Rogstad, 2013, p. 688).

From the point of view of individual journalists, among all the social media tools, Twitter in particular is a strategic choice for researching, networking, and personal branding, whereas the value of Twitter from the organizational point of view lies in the fact that it helps journalists interact with the audience, research and circulate content (Hedman, 2015, p. 279).

Boyd et al. (2010) define Twitter as a microblogging service that enables users to post messages (tweets) of up to 140 characters. Twitter, one of the fastest growing social networking platforms in terms of users, is being used as a vital source of information in the news industry (Lasorsa et al., 2012, p. 4). It is also being used as a journalistic tool to generate story ideas, share news, and reach out to diverse audiences. Broersma and Graham (2013) clarify that "the microblogging platform has become popular among mainstream journalists in the years after its launch in July 2006" (p.446). Twitter is a convenient, cheap and effective tool that is useful for journalists in search of news and information. Farhi (2009) quotes Stoltz that: "Twitter works best when the story is changing so fast that the mainstream media can't assemble all the facts at

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[1] Journalists working for mainstream media; not citizen journalists and bloggers.

once" (para. 8). The speed of Twitter, especially in emergencies and natural disasters, makes it ideal as a headline service, and it can also promote stories that the mainstream media often ignore (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010), while its brevity allows pushing out scoops and breaking news (Farhi, 2009, para. 6).

Despite the widespread adoption of Twitter as a journalistic tool, the microblogging platform does not seem to be very popular among some journalists, who either have not used or adopted it in the workplace, or are still skeptical about its journalistic value. This point of view will also be highlighted later on in this paper.

Background

There have been a number of major events in recent history in which Twitter was used by mainstream media organization and journalists for breaking news, such as during the 2012 US Presidential elections (Hermida, 2013), the outbreak of the Arab revolutions in 2010 (Lotan et al., 2011); as well as the Mumbai attacks and the Iranian election protests in 2009 (Newman, 2009; Hermida, 2010).

During the revolutionary outbreak throughout the Arab world, particularly between 2010 and 2011, it was a real challenge for media outlets to send out their correspondents to cover the revolutionary movements. Working as a journalist in Lebanon, I remember when our news director encouraged us to use social media as a tool to share news updates, videos, and images. In March of 2011, when the revolution started in Syria, journalists had to rely on videos taken by amateurs and made available on social media, as international mainstream media such as Reuters and Associated Press were not allowed to enter the country… Not until then had I realized the significant role of social media as an information sharing tool, where everyone with a smart

phone could take a picture or video and send it out via social media, despite all the restrictions on journalists that were practiced by the controlling regimes.

Purpose

Exploring the implications of using Twitter by professional Canadian journalists, I hope that this research study contributes to the general understanding of how Canadian j-tweeters utilize Twitter, while also examining the various opportunities and challenges that accompany the use of the microblogging platform as a journalistic tool.

There have been an extensive number of academic research projects on the integration of Twitter in journalism. However, most of these studies mainly focus on the impact of Twitter and other social media tools on journalism as a field rather than on individual journalists. Existing projects also tend to sample global, US, or European media.

In contrast, this paper explores the consequences of Twitter on Canadian mainstream journalists; particularly in Edmonton, Alberta. Exploring the professional and personal resources that these journalists rely, this capstone project also tends to provide a better understanding of what should (not) appear on professional journalists' Twitter feed.

I hope that the findings of this study can be helpful to journalists who are active on Twitter, as well as other journalists and media professionals who are still skeptical about using the platform as a professional journalistic tool.

Summary

In the next chapter, I review the existing literature to date on the use of Twitter as a journalistic tool. Existing literature suggests that Twitter allows journalists to share stories, grow audience, connect with sources, and even share personal updates. However, the online platform can be a double-edged sword. It is possible that j-tweeters can hurt their career, as a result of

posting 'inappropriate' tweets that may not align with their employers' broadcasting/ publishing policy. While most of the existing studies explore the impact of Twitter on the evolving field of journalism, this study mainly focuses on exploring the implications on professional journalists by sampling Canadian j-tweeters who work for Edmonton-based mainstream media organizations.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with six journalists who are highly active on Twitter, or in other words those who use the platform regularly for work-related purposes. The interview questions were specifically designed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How can professional journalists benefit from Twitter? And what are the risks that accompany its use?

RQ2: What professional resources should journalists rely on to guide their use of Twitter?

RQ3: What are the personal decisions that journalists should make before tweeting?

To explore these questions, content analysis was used to analyze data generated from the qualitative interviews, from which several themes were derived. Based on the responses of the majority of the participants, the benefits of using Twitter as a journalistic tool outweigh the potential pitfalls of the online platform. Nevertheless, journalists should always be cognisant that what they post on Twitter is accurate and does not contradict with the journalistic norms. The study also revealed that the majority of the mainstream journalists in Edmonton do use Twitter as an extension of traditional broadcasting tools, and therefore apply the same professional guidelines for Twitter use. Finally, stud findings suggested that the use of Twitter also allows neutralizing potential biases of individual journalists to a degree. According to the participants, the challenge for professional journalists is maintaining fairness rather than objectivity and neutrality.

Chapter II. Literature Review

This review of the existing literature explores the different motives for using Twitter by mainstream journalists as a professional tool. This section also highlights major findings on the impact of Twitter on professional journalists, who adopted the online platform in the workplace, through exploring both opportunities and pitfalls of using the microblogging platform. Another overarching theme in the existing literature is the organizational rules and guidelines on integrating Twitter in the newsroom; and whether or not journalists apply these professional guidelines to their online practices on Twitter.

Before discussing these major aspects of this paper, I start this literature review with exploring significant findings on the implementation of social media in journalism for the purpose of providing a better understanding of how mainstream journalists first started to adopt social media platforms in the newsroom.

Integrating Social Media into the Newsroom

Alejandro (2010) explains that social media editor[2] positions have been created in the newsrooms of the *British Broadcasting Corporation*, *New York Times*, *Sky News*, and *USA Today* (p. 15). The purpose of creating these positions is to help journalists engage more proactively with social networks as newsgathering and distribution channels for journalism (p. 15). Columbia University's chief digital officer Sreenath Sreenivasan says that the increase in the number of social media editors indicates that media outlets are thinking about social media strategically (Bullard, 2013, p. 3).

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[2] Social media correspondents are quickly becoming the "multi-tasking genii of the newsroom in the vanguard of reporting (Travers, 2011, para. 9).

Due to the dramatic growth in social media popularity among users in the United States and Canada, it seems highly significant for mainstream journalists to adopt social media into the professional realm of disseminating news. Smith (2009) clarifies that around one of every six minutes that people spend online is spent in a social network of some type (p. 22). Research studies also confirm that the social media news use is on the rise. For example, one study by ComScore analytics, an internet technology company shows that in 2011 Canadians increased their usage of social media services by 32%, through sharing information and interacting with reporters and editors on Twitter (Currie, 2012, p. 2). Surveying 13 social media editors at Canadian news organizations, Currie indicates that the influence of these editors is growing, and along with it, the influence of the audience they represent (p. 22). Another study by the Pew Research Center (2012) reveals that the number of American users who said they get news from social media platforms have grown from 19 percent in 2010 to 36 percent in 2012 (p. 20). The use of social media by news organizations is still on the rise, according to a recent study by the Pew Research Center. The study that particularly looks into Twitter and Facebook confirms that more users on both platforms are getting news than in the past:

> As of early 2015, 63% of Facebook and Twitter users get news on their respective sites. This is up substantially from 2013, when about half of each social network's users (47% for Facebook and 52% for Twitter) reported getting news there (Barthel et al., 2015, p. 2).

With that said, it is possible to argue that the integration of Twitter into the news industry is a result of the ongoing growth and popularity of Twitter among all users, including journalists. The increasing appeal of online platforms such as Twitter and Facebook lies in the fact that not only do these platforms allow reporters to break stories and pass on information outside of traditional broadcast or publication deadlines, but they allow the audience to directly interact

with journalists (Smith, 2009, p. 23). In a survey of Associated Press Media Editors (APME), Miller (2012) reveals that 97 percent of 77 respondents said that their primary goal for using social media is reaching target audiences (para. 3). According to the respondents, more than half of the organizations they represent use social media on a daily basis (para. 12). Another significant reason for integrating social media platforms into professional journalism is collecting information, especially when traditional journalists find it difficult to gain access to cover newsworthy events such as political conflicts or natural disasters. For instance, during the disputed presidential elections in Iran in 2009, the Iranian government restricted access to international correspondents, expelled Tehran-based journalists, and arrested others (Siamdoust, 2009). Global mainstream media organizations such as the *CNN* and *BBC* used news updates and footage, relying on social media to get the story out after the authorities threatened to throw out anyone supplying them with footage (Newman, 2009, p. 24). Despite some concerns about accuracy, *"*the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* also made the information emerging from social networks a central part of their coverage, allocating specific resources to provide a filtered take of the activity of these platforms" (p. 28).

Similarly, during the Arab uprisings that first occurred in Tunisia in 2010, traditional media organizations also utilized social media to send out updates and report on the revolutions across different regions in the Middle East (Lotan et al., 2011, p. 1376).

These incidents demonstrate that social media platforms have significantly changed the traditional role of the mainstream media; especially in a breaking story (Newman, p.30). However, research studies argue that it is certain that these platforms will never replace traditional media. Newman argues that "it is perhaps best to think of social media as

supplementary dimension to the coverage of real time events" (p. 34). The *Guardian* Social

Media Development Editor says:

> We are using user generated content not as a primary source, but to extend the life of
>
> stories, as a way of adding more perspective and insight, not just as way to let people talk
>
> amongst themselves, but actually with a purpose to generate more leads and more insight
>
> (Newman, p.13).

Twitter as a Journalistic Tool

It is possible to argue that the integration of social media platforms such as Twitter as

journalistic tools is one of the most prominent implications that social media has had on

journalism. Speaking to the value of journalism being adaptable to online technology in the age

of social media, former editor-in-chief of the *Guardian* Alan Rusbridger argues that "it is

journalistically better to open up and allow other voices in to get something that's more engaged

and more involved" (Newman et al., 2012, p. 14). Hermida (2012b) argues that "Twitter

facilitates the instant, online dissemination and reception of short fragments of information from

sources outside the formal structures of journalism" (p. 695).

Amongst the various social media platforms, Twitter features seem to be the most

suitable for allowing "a more engaged and involved" journalism. The corporation itself has

implemented changes in Twitter's interface, emphasizing the platform's role as a professional

tool in news and information over private conversation. Van Dijck (2012) explains that by 2012,

the motto of Twitter home page is now: "Share and discover what's happening right now,

anywhere in the world." She writes:

> This subtle but meaningful change in Twitter's interface indicates a strategy that
>
> emphasizes (global, public) news and information over (personal, private) conversation in

restricted circles, corresponding to the technical adjustments made to the interface in terms of lists of followers (p. 345).

How do Mainstream Journalists Use Twitter? A review of existing literature on the use of Twitter by professional journalists confirms that the primary reasons for adopting Twitter in the workplace include growing audience, reporting and breaking news, as well as promoting stories.

Growing Audience. Hermida (2013) explains that using Twitter in journalism plays a significant role in driving traffic to the websites of the mainstream media (p. 299), especially that audiences are no longer expected to hear from journalists during news bulletins (Smith, 2009, p. 22).

Studying the impact of social media on mainstream media, Newman (2009) addresses how Twitter and other social media websites are driving a significant and growing percentage of traffic to the full stories on the website of the *Guardian* (p. 37). According to Newman (2009), Twitter seems to be working for the *BBC* as well:

> Each week, the staff at *BBC* Click post a number of tweets, along with links to stories on their own website or useful resources elsewhere. The tweet was passed on (re-tweeted) nine times through four continents and a small percentage of followers in each network clicked on the link to the full story. The result was 4,012 additional click-throughs to the Click Online website, 33 per cent of the total page views (12,000) for this story (Newman, 2009, p. 44-45).

The role of Twitter in driving traffic has been also significant during the revolutions that took place in the Arab world, particularly between 2009 and 2011. Newman says that "20 to 25 percent of *Al Jazeera* traffic came from Twitter and Facebook (p. 53). Newman adds that "Al

Jazeera achieved these impressive figures by buying prominent placement on the key Twitter

hashtags for eighteen consecutive days with links to the live stream" (p. 53).

Reporting News. Farhi (2009) argues that Twitter features, brevity and speed in particular

make it ideal for breaking and reporting news (p. 28). A recent study by Vis (2013) looks at how

Paul Lewis from the *Guardian* and Ravi Somaiya from the *New York Times* extensively used

Twitter in their coverage of the UK riots in 2011. Analyzing tweets of two journalists during the

four-day riots, Vis argues that it is evident that Twitter is no longer just a social media platform;

it is now an effective reporting tool (p. 43). The usage of Twitter by professional journalists to

report on the UK riots in 2011 in particular "highlights journalism as a process flowing and

developing between tweets, Live Blogs, other online content, and print" (Vis, p. 43).

> Twitter can be a serious aid in reporting. It can be a living, breathing tip sheet for facts,
>
> new sources and story ideas. It can provide instantaneous access to hard-to-reach
>
> newsmakers, given that there's no PR person standing between a reporter and a tweet to a
>
> government official or corporate executive (Farhi, p. 28).

Promoting Stories. Surveying 3,374 senior news editors, Bullard (2012) argues that the

main reason for using social media in news organizations is promoting stories. The Pew

Research Center (2011) also reveal that the majority of the tweets of 13 mainstream news outlets

in the US promote the organizations' own work and sent users back to their websites (p. 1).

Through conducting a content analysis of more than 3,600 tweets, the study[3] also reveals that

these organizations are less likely to use Twitter as a reporting tool or sharing outside content. It

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[3] The study has been conducted in cooperation between the Pew Research Center and the George Washington

University's School of Media and Public Affairs (Pew Research Center, 2011, p. 2).

may be noteworthy here to mention that no further studies were conducted by the Pew Research

Center on how mainstream media use Twitter.

    Other Reasons. In addition to growing audience, reporting news, and promoting stories,

professional journalists also use Twitter to "engage with audiences and build their brand"

(Bullard, 2012, p. 9). Additionally, some mainstream journalists utilize the microblogging tool

for "offering commentary and becoming a better journalist, as well as connecting with sources"

(Clune, 2013; Schultz & Sheffer, 2010; Sheffer & Schultz, 2010; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012).

    Looking at the existing literature on the reasons for using Twitter in journalism, one can

argue that it is reasonable to have incomparable findings, given the ever-changing nature of

Twitter. The discrepancy can also occur as a result of using different methods, measurements,

topics, and timeframes (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010, p. 481).

    Addressing the importance of online platforms in journalism, Sanderson and Hambrick

(2012) argue that these platforms can no longer be ignored, due to the tremendous influence that

they have on journalism (p. 400). Although this study examines tweets of sports journalists, it

might be possible to argue that other journalists specialized in areas such as politics, crime,

business and art can also use Twitter for the same reasons identified by Schultz and Sheffer

(2010) and Sanderson and Hambrick (2012).

    Opportunities vs. Pitfalls. There are plenty of studies on the impact of adopting Twitter

as a journalistic tool. Some of the literature focus on the opportunities that Twitter has brought to

mainstream media and professional journalists, while some other studies remain skeptical about

the efficiency of using Twitter as a journalistic tool, given the "challenges" that the platform may

possibly have on the traditional norms and practices of journalism.

Opportunities. As one of the prominent technologies of the 21st century, Twitter is a

powerful journalistic tool that is available to newsrooms and inherent to their survival" (Clune,

2013, para. 4). Hermida (2010) identifies Twitter as a social media platform, which allows online

and instant dissemination of short fragments of data from a variety of official and unofficial

sources (p. 297). The power of this micro-blogging platform lies in the fact that the ''tweets''

can be shared publicly or within a social network of followers (Hermida, 2010, p. 298-299).

Commenting on Twitter effect[4] in journalism, co-founder of Twitter Biz Stone notes that he did

not expect that Twitter was going to be adopted that fast by global media corporations

(Alejandro, 2010, p. 20). The victory of US president Barack Obama is one of the major events

that can best describe *Twitter effect*, due to its impact in spreading news through the online tool.

Obama's re-election for presidency on November 2012 was first announced via Twitter and:

> The post spread instantly to become the most retweeted message of 2012. It was
>
> retweeted more than 810,000 times by users in more than 200 countries (Hermida, 2013,
>
> p. 1).

Newman et al. (2012) argue that the role of Twitter as a reporting tool can be significant,

particularly around breaking news events (p. 11). Examples of such events are natural disasters,

elections, and political unrest. Twitter for example has had a major role in the reporting of the

Arab uprisings. Lotan et al. (2011) conduct a study on the information flows on Twitter during

the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Their findings suggest that news on Twitter is being

co-constructed by journalists as well as by bloggers and activists (p. 1400). Gillmor argues that

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[4] The tweets can spread out like the branches of a tree and reach a very large number of

Twitter users (Alejandro, 2010, p. 20).

journalism, in the era of Twitter and social media, has changed from a lecture to a conversation (Lotan et al., 2011, p. 1400).

In a personal interview, digital editor at the Telegraph Media Group Ed Roussel refers to Twitter as a fantastic journalistic tool:

> It has a great immediacy… the way it forces people to condense their views into 140 characters is quite brilliant. It forces people to cut right to the chase (Newman et al., 2012, p. 14).

The "immediacy" that Roussel talks about is a key feature that differentiates Twitter from the rest of the social media platforms, which makes it a good fit for journalism. Exploring how social media are changing the news industry, Newman (2011) uses the death of Osama Bin Laden as a case study to tackle the role of Twitter in breaking news. The announcement of Bin Laden's death and its dissemination among users on Twitter before even reaching the mainstream media (p. 30) certainly demonstrates Twitter's new role, as a direct reporting tool (Vis, 2013, p. 29).

> By the time President Obama got up to speak the element of surprise had gone. Many people watching already knew the headlines, which they'd shared and discussed amongst themselves (Newman, 2011, p. 31).

Twitter's brevity is another important factor that allows users to get their news updates in a quick and easy way. The Guardian's technology correspondent Jemima Kiss says that Twitter's short messaging is a good investment of her time. She finds that brevity can help with the filtering and processing of information (Newman, 2009, p. 37).

Commenting on the significance of Twitter as a news and information platform, Hermida (2010) argues that it will be largely influenced by its adoption, both in journalism and other

spheres (p. 304). This is evident through the integration of Twitter by global media organizations that are heavily investing in their Twitter accounts, due the platform's potential in driving online reach, and improving their journalism.

Lasorsa et al. (2012) argue that Twitter has a unique way to reach audiences. Unlike traditional organizations, it enables journalists to "virtually communicate anything to anyone, beyond many of the natural constraints posed by organizational norms or social networking "friendship" barriers (p. 7).

Taking into consideration Vis's (2013) study "Twitter as a reporting tool for breaking news," one can argue that by using Twitter to send out breaking news, journalists can increase the number of their followers. The findings of Vis's research reveal that the two journalists sampled have attracted significant number of followers to their tweets and feed during the four-day riots in the UK (p. 43). In the era of Twitter being a new reporting tool, it is more significant for journalists nowadays to be multi-skilled (Alejandro, 2010. P. 15). Journalists can now be on multiple platforms at the same time, which can have a significant impact on growing their audience across traditional and online media.

Pitfalls. As much as Twitter's brevity and immediacy fit into the fast nature of journalism, telling a story in 140 characters remains a challenging task. In a study about the impact of Twitter on sports journalism, Sears (2011) says that having trouble dealing with brevity constraints is common among several journalists he interviewed as one of the methods for his research (p. 54).

Discussing the relationship between sports journalism and Twitter, Sears also (2011) draws attention to the risk associated with producing and consuming information under an accelerated time crunch" (p. 60). Twitter can also be dangerous, as the medium "does not allow

for the journalist to get into the larger issues involved in a story, and therefore it encourages the reader to not seek out those larger issues" (p. 89).

On the topic of verifying the source of news on Twitter, Hermida (2012b) argues that the platform provides a medium for a mix of news and information without an established order:

> One false message, allegedly from the Indian government, asked Twitter users to stop posting about police and military operations. The BBC conceded it should have checked the information, or at the very least indicated it was unverified (p. 664).

A more recent study by Hermida (2013) illustrates that being fast and being right is nothing new in journalism, but with everyone being able to disseminate the news, news validation becomes a high priority (p. 303). Goodman (2009) came to a similar conclusion:

> The ease and flow of information. The difficulty of knowing its accuracy and meaning. It's like searching for medical advice in an online world of quacks and cures. If there's anything we have learned, it's that the need for guides — and dare I say trusted guides — is greater than ever (para. 10).

For Wasserman (2009), using Twitter in journalism comes at a price (para. 6). Posing a question on whether or not Twitter is a threat to newspapers, Wasserman (2009) elaborates that another challenge with using Twitter is "keeping reporters off the streets and in front of their screens" (para. 14), which he considers dangerous, because it will only serve "the better-connected" people and will leave those who do not use Twitter unheard (para. 14).

Becoming familiar with Twitter's technology may be another challenge for older journalists (Sears, 2011). Several journalists point out to the "young demographic for Twitter," which according to them can put older journalists at a disadvantage (p. 63).

In a commentary about Twitter posing a threat to newspapers, Wasserman (2009) explains how "news bosses are pushing forward and pulling back, fearful of looking out of date by reminding their eager staff about the danger of going too far" (para. 7). This is simply because getting too personal and/or expressing opinion on Twitter may impact journalists in an unpleasant way. Farhi (2014a) explains how CNN correspondent Diana Magnay got reprimanded over one of her tweets (para, 3). While covering the Israeli-Palestinian war in Gaza in 2014, Magnay Tweeted "Scum," referring to Israeli group members who threatened her, after she reported "that they were cheering a missile attack on Gaza[5]" (Farhi, 2014, para. 3). The Associated Press has also reprimanded journalists for breaking news on Twitter before posting it on the wires, reminding them of the organization's social media policy (BBC, 2011). Canadian sports journalist Damian Goddard was also punished for the way he used Twitter. He got fired from the Canadian Rogers Sportsnet from his position as a sports anchor over his tweets against same-sex marriage[6] (CBC sports, 2011). In a similar incident in 2010, Octavia Nasr, former CNN's senior editor for Middle Eastern affairs lost her job over a Tweet[7], where she expressed condolences on death of one of Hezbollah's Shiite leaders. Nasr got fired from the CNN after twenty years of service (Zak, 2011). Mike Wise from the Washington Post also got suspended from his position due to "an inconsistency of professional standards associated with Twitter" (Sears, 2011, p. 61).

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[5] "Israelis on hill above Sderot cheer as bombs land on #Gaza; threaten to 'destroy our car if I say a word wrong'. Scum" (Calderon, 2014).

[6] Goddard said that he "whole-heartedly supports the true meaning of marriage (CBC sports, 2011).

[7] "Sad to hear of the passing of Sayyed Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah … One of Hezbollah's giants I respect a lot" (Steller, 2010).

A major pitfall for me with Twitter was forgetting that—irrespective of my different

media jobs—in each one, and specifically the Washington Post, whatever I do in

whatever medium reflects on that job (Quoted in Sears, 2011, p. 61).

Despite the occurrence of these incidents in the recent history of journalism, mainstream

journalists continue to tweet, retweet, and talk about their jobs, while engaging in discussions

with others, and providing information about their personal lives (Lasorsa et al., p. 31).

Professional vs. Personal Tweets: Blurring the Lines

This review reveals that there is an ongoing debate over using Twitter as a journalistic

tool. Sanderson and Hambrick (2012) explain that the use of Twitter by journalists blurs the line

between what's professional and what's personal (p. 384). For example, the *Guardian's*

technology correspondent Jemima Kiss uses her Twitter account for both personal and

professional purposes. According to Kiss, both she and her employer are comfortable with the

mix, although this might not be always appropriate in journalism (Quoted in Newman, 2009, p.

37).

The discussion on the use of Twitter as a journalistic tool opens the door for debating

whether or not journalists' Twitter feed should include personal opinion.

Analysing tweets for two mainstream journalists during the UK riots in 2009, Vis's (2013) study

shows that 22.4 percent of one of the two journalists' tweets included opinion/ reaction,

compared to 5 percent of the tweets that belong to the other journalist (p. 42). According to Vis

(2013), tweeting messages that include opinion during the riots highlights the "watering down of

an established journalistic norm, possibly giving rise to a new hybrid norm on Twitter" (p. 43).

This interrelates with the argument raised by Lasorsa et al. (2012) that journalists who use

Twitter appear to be adjusting the professional norms and practices to the evolving norms and

practices of the online platform (p. 31). Analyzing over 22,000 tweets for 500 journalists, the study examines how mainstream journalists negotiate the professional norms of journalism through for example expressing opinions and sharing personal stories (p. 28).

Organizational Guidelines on Twitter Use

Organizational policies and guidelines on the professional use of Twitter among mainstream journalists is another primary theme in the existing literature. Hermida (2010) clarifies that the growing popularity of Twitter among professional journalists has led mainstream media organizations "to institute Twitter policies to bring its use in line with established practices" (p. 299).

Some organizations such as the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Bloomberg* have informal policies and guidelines for their journalists. These informal guidelines request from the staff to be careful walking through the social media minefield (Cozma and Chen, 2013, p. 34). News organizations such as *Reuters* have noted in their policies that "journalists are people too, with all the rights of citizens" (Farhi, 2014, para 13), while the *Washington Post* has a formal policy based on the assumption that journalists' social media accounts "reflect on the reputation and credibility" of the newsroom (Russell et al., 2015, p. 936).

Despite this adoption of Twitter as a journalistic platform, there is an ongoing debate over the rules and regulations that should guide journalists' use of the microblogging tool. While Singer (2005) argues that online platforms like Twitter "challenge long-standing professional norms and practices" (p. 177), other studies argue that journalists seem to be adjusting the traditional norms to the evolving norms and practices of Twitter (Vis, 2013; Lasorsa et al., 2012).

Studying the use of the *BBC* mainstream journalists of Twitter, Hermida (2009) indicates that journalists view Twitter and other forms of blogging as "platforms for delivering content that complements broadcast output, albeit in a more personal and informal tone" (p. 14). The difference between traditional forms of broadcasting and platforms like Twitter "it seems to be more about the style, rather than the substance, of reporting" (p. 14).

BBC director general Mark Thompson says that "journalists who are of interest to the public at large, because of the name and the title they've got, have to consider their use of social media carefully" (Quoted in Newman, 2009, p. 38). Similarly, Smith (2009) argues that professional journalists who are active on Twitter should always remember that these online media tools are not just a "hyperpersonal or informal style of writing" (p. 22). Commenting on whether journalists should break news on Twitter, Hermida (2012a) argues that "the guidance for journalists not to break news on Twitter is based on a flawed understanding of today's media ecosystem, which assumes that journalists still have a monopoly on breaking the news (para. 12). To this point, Newman et al. (2012) similarly say that mainstream media is still powerful, but no longer has the monopoly over the journalistic tools (p. 15). Similarly, and prior to the development of Twitter, Pavlik (2001) predicts a transformation in journalists' traditional role (p. 217).

> Journalists need to become much more than just a teller of facts. (…) The journalist of the twenty-first century will need to become a much more skillful storyteller, one who can not only weave together the facts of an event or process but connect those facts to a much wider set of contextualizing events and circumstances (p. 217-218).

Pavlik's contextual journalism also explains that journalists' role as an interpreter of events will be much expanded and somewhat changed (p. 218).

The journalist will add value by through searching and sorting "through increasingly large electronic information haystacks to find the single needle of significance. (…) Journalists, and journalistic organizations, will need to become much more responsive to their audiences, (…) who in many cases will not only be smarter but more well informed on a subject than the reporter him- or herself (p. 219).

Summary and Gaps in Existing Literature

Despite the challenges of using Twitter as a journalistic tool, journalists continue to use the online platform to break news, share information, search out sources, engage with other users, promote their own work, and comment on the work of others. According to Holton and Lewis (2011), Twitter has ignited debate over whether journalists should offer opinions and other non-traditional information using the medium (para. 12). The American Society of Newspaper Editors suggests that journalists should approach Twitter with traditional ethics in mind, avoiding opinion for the sake of objectivity (para. 12). On the contrary, Ingram (2010) argues that "allowing journalists to express their opinions is a positive thing, because then everyone knows where they stand, instead of suspecting hidden agendas" (para. 5). Quoted in Ingram, Weinberger explains that "transparency is the new objectivity," and that readers can now make up their own minds about whether journalists are credible or not by looking at the sources of the news they are reporting, rather than relying on the notion of objectivity (para. 7).

As online technologies continue to evolve, Bardoel and Deuze (2001) suggest that future journalists will "serve as a node in a complex environment between technology and society, between news and analysis, between annotation and selection, between orientation and investigation" (p. 100). Bardoel and Deuze's argument was before the rise of Twitter and other

social media platforms. Yet, it reflects the role of current journalists, who have incorporated online technologies into traditional journalism.

Chapter III. Theoretical Context

While the role of theory in framing research studies is significant, Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that theory derived from data already collected is more likely to resemble reality (p. 12). Further, Glaser (1978) says it is significant to "recognize what is important in the data and give it a meaning, which helps formulate theory that is faithful to the reality of the phenomena under study" (p. 46). With that being said, the current study did not initially intend to adopt a theoretical framework prior to data gathering. However, data collected do support Roger's diffusion of innovation theory that explained as "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (Rogers, 1983, p. 5).

Diffusion of Innovation

Evidence shows that Twitter is a valuable tool used by professional Canadian journalists mainly as an extension of traditional media. Applying Roger's (1983) diffusion of innovations (DOI) theory helps understand the motives behind the adoption of Twitter and its diffusion among Edmonton-based journalists.

Rogers defines innovation as "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or another unit of adoption" (p. 35). Rogers categorizes adopters into: Innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (p. 22). Knowing that Twitter did not diffuse as a mainstream media tool until 2008 (Chung et al., 2015, p. 3375), all of the study participants seem to fall, as DOI theory would predict, into early and late majority categories (See Table 1).

Another significant aspect of Roger's theory is identifying different elements of the process, in which Twitter, as an innovation, has diffused and become a professional tool for mainstream journalists. Rogers writes:

The main elements in the diffusion of new ideas are: 1) The innovation itself, 2) The communication channel through which the message about an innovation is shared, 3) Time, which affects the diffusion process in several ways; and 4) the social system, which constitutes a boundary within which an innovation diffuses (Rogers, 1983, p. 35).

Evidence also reveals that the continuous use of Twitter among journalists proves the successful diffusion of the innovation, as revealed by study participants. Based on the findings, the participants were influenced by their organizations and Twitter early adopters' subjective evaluations[8] (Rogers, 1983, p. 67).

Table 1

Where do Study Participants belong in Rogers' groups of Adopters?

---
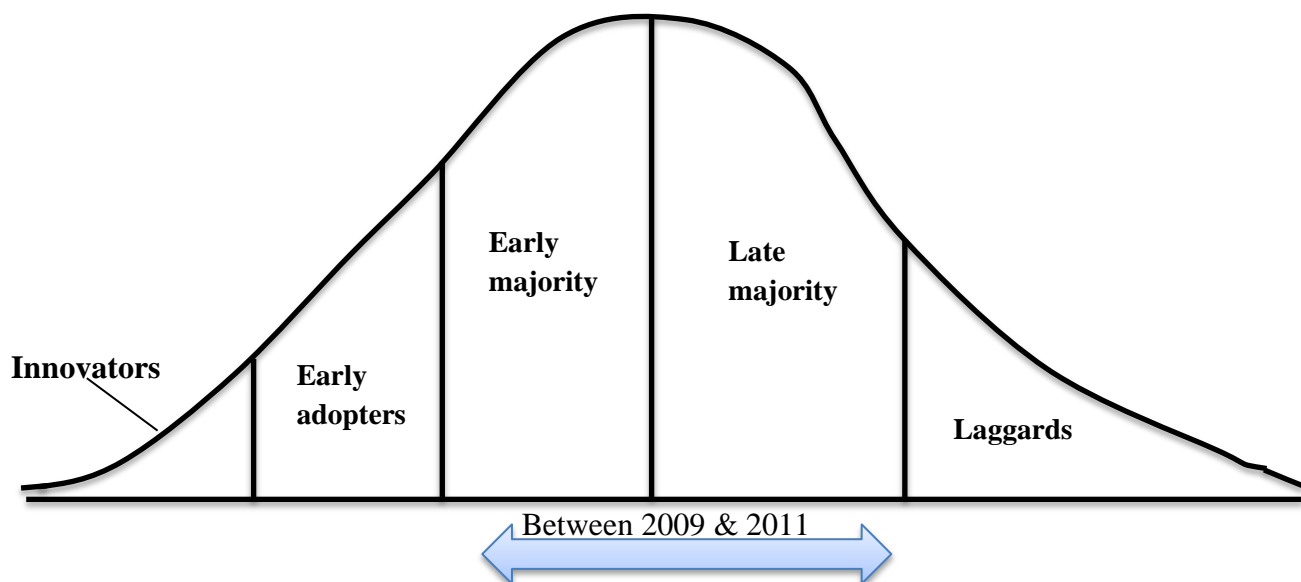
[8] Based on Rogers DOI theory, subjective evaluations of a new idea are likely to influence an individual at the decision stage, and perhaps at the confirmation stage (p. 21).

Applying Roger's theory to this project is also significant, as it justifies having different categories of adopters. There are journalists who embraced Twitter early on in the process; others who were initially hesitant to use the "innovative tool" but ended up adopting Twitter; and those who are still resistant to the notion of using Twitter as a journalistic tool. Based on Roger's (1983) theory, any idea that challenges the traditional values and norms of a social system will not be adopted as rapidly as an innovation that is compatible with these norms (p. 15). Compatibility along with relative advantage, complexity, trialability, and observability are the characteristics of an innovation, which affect the level of individuals' adoption (p. 15). Rogers defines these characteristics as follows:

Relative change is "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supersedes." *Compatibility* is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with the existing norms. *Complexity* is "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use. *Triability* is "the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis; and finally observability is "the degree to which the results are visible to others" (p. 15).

Roger's definitions of the above characterises do apply to Twitter as an innovative journalistic tool, as findings of the study show, particularly the debate over normalizing Twitter to fit into the traditional rules and guidelines.

Chapter IV. Research Design and Methodology

This chapter delivers a thorough insight of the various methods that I utilized in collecting qualitative data in the context of my capstone project. I explain in details the criteria used to identify my research sample group, describe sample size, and clarify the methods used in data collection analysis.

This research is an exploratory inductive study. It particularly focuses on exploring the implications of Twitter on professional journalists. The tools used to collect data are designed to help understand journalists' experience with Twitter, and therefore explore how this online microblogging platform may impact journalists. This study explores the following questions:

RQ1: How can professional journalists benefit from using Twitter? And what are the

risks that accompany its use?

RQ2: What professional resources should journalists rely on in the use of Twitter?

RQ3: What are the personal decisions that journalists should make before tweeting?

To answer these questions, I used Sandelowski's (2000) qualitative description method (QD), purposefully sampling Canadian journalists who are highly active on Twitter in terms of their online activity on the microblogging tool. I conducted qualitative interviews as a data gathering strategy in order to explore the reasons for using Twitter in journalism, studying the impact of the online platform on journalists, as well as testing the efficiency of social media guidelines. Lastly, qualitative content analysis is the data analysis technique utilized in this research.

Qualitative Description

Taking into account the exploratory inductive nature of this research, the qualitative description approach is appropriate when researchers are looking to answer questions such as, how do people respond to an event (e.g., thoughts, feelings, attitudes)? What reasons do people give for using or not using a service/product/procedure? What concerns do people have about an event? (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 337).

The qualitative description approach usually entails less interpretation than other qualitative approaches such as ethnography or phenomenology (Neergaard et al., 2009, p. 2). Because of the ongoing debate over using Twitter as a reporting tool, as the literature review indicates, staying closer to the data avoids possible limitations related to lack of rigour and validity of interpretation. This research explores how the phenomenon of using Twitter in journalism may impact journalists' careers (Chung et al., 2015, p. 3386). Qualitative description requires describing participants' experiences in a language similar to their own language (Neergaard et al., 2009, p. 2). Nevertheless, QD allows a low-level of interpretation, which according to Neergaard et al., is a result of the describer's perceptions, inclinations, sensitivities and sensibilities (p. 2).

Although the qualitative description method is more popular in health sciences, as indicated by Neergaard et al. (2009, p. 2), QD is a good fit for the type of this research, where description is fundamentally significant for understanding the participants' experiences with Twitter as a journalistic tool. In qualitative research, description is vital, allowing clear understanding of the data.

Researchers must know their data well and, to the extent possible, from the points of view of research participants, whom I call informants, from their own points of view, and

the points of view of other stakeholders, such as policy makers, practitioners, the general

public, and other researchers (Gilgun, 2015, p. 743).

The following pages explain how QD should be tied in with the study sample, data

collection, data analysis, and research outcomes.

Sampling

Purposeful sampling is highly significant for the qualitative nature of the study. The

sample consists of Canadian j-tweeters, who are active on Twitter, based on their activity on the

platform, and can best represent or have valuable knowledge for the research questions (Morse et

al., 2002, p. 12). The sample represents a wide variety of Canadian news organizations based in

Edmonton, Alberta, but also operate in all across Canada.

A list of Canadian journalists who are present and highly active on Twitter was generated

using Followerwonk (https://moz.com/followerwonk/). The "Search Bios" tool allows an easy

and simple search process. Users will just need to type in the category that they are looking for

such as journalist, reporter, or the name of a media organization. The search results can then be

ordered by number of tweets, followers, following, account age or social authority.

In order to identify the study's final participants, I also used Followerwonk to monitor the

journalists' online activity and growth, and then compared the overall popularity, reach and/or

visibility of potential participants. For example, "re-tweets are a means of amplifying the reach

of a tweet, while the @replies received by a user can be seen as a direct result of the visibility of

their tweets" (Bruns & Burgess, 2012, p. 6). On Followerwonk, the following data are

accessible:

- Number of followers
- Number of users followed

- Average followers per day

- Average tweets per week

- Days on Twitter

Through accessing this type of information and comparing journalists' activity on Twitter, I was able to identify potential participants with active presence on Twitter.

To improve representativeness of my research sample, I chose participants from various mainstream print and broadcasting media organizations in Edmonton, Alberta. I initially contacted eight professional journalists via their professional e-mail address, which were available at the time of the interviews either on their Twitter profile or the organizations' websites. My final sample consisted of six journalists; they are all Edmonton-based journalists who worked for Canadian mainstream media organizations. One of the journalists was a Television news anchor, two of them hosted daily radio programs, and two other worked as reporters for print media. My sample also involved one sports reporter who worked for a daily newspaper. My study sample included three females and three males, and they represent different age groups and level of experience. At the time of the interviews were conducted, two of the participants had less than 10 years of experience in journalism, two had between 15 and 17 years, one had 22 years, and one with over 35 years (See Table 2).The study's sample included journalists with at least 5,500 followers (at the time of the interview). As for the number of the tweets, the participant with the least number of tweets had 15,900 tweets. As for the experience with Twitter, all participants joined Twitter between 2009 and 2011.

Table 2

Interview Summary

Participant	Gender	Media Type	Seniority	Followers	Tweets
1	M	Broadcast	15 years	16.8K	20.6K
2	F	Print	6 years	11.9K	27.9K
3	M	Broadcast	36 years	6968	23.7K
4	F	Broadcast	22 years	12.2K	32.1K
5	M	Print	8 years	15K	44K
6	F	Print	17 years	5538	16.3K

Note: All interviews were conducted between end of April and Mid-May of 2016

Data Collection

To explore my research question(s), I used semi-structured interviews with open- ended questions, which is a common data collection method in qualitative description (Neergaard et al., 2009, p. 2).

Interviews. Conducting interviews with journalists allowed eliciting participants' views and perspectives on the use of Twitter in journalism (Nind, 2008, p. 10). I used an audio recorder to help capture the interviews and transcribe the audio interviews into text.

The implementation of semi-structured interviews was significant to provide data about study the impact of Twitter use on mainstream journalists (Merrigan et al., 2012, p. 115). Due to the amount of data that the semi-structured interviews can/do usually generate, I felt that my data collected from the interviews were saturated after interviewing a maximum of six journalists. I conducted three face-to-face interviews, one phone interview, one via email, and one over Skype. I asked a wide range of questions pertaining to the journalists' use of Twitter as a

reporting tool, their views on Twitter, and the challenges of using this platform in journalism (Appendix C: Interview Questions). The interviews ranged in length between 18 to 45 minutes.

Review of Online Documents. Reviewing online documents was not a primary data collection method; however t it was very useful, as it provided significant background information on the topic, and assisted in developing a better understanding of the research sample. These documents included articles, stories, and reports available online, as well as international and Canadian media outlets. Other documents also included reports and information available on social media analytics programs such as Followerwonk that I mentioned earlier in this paper.

Lastly, Twitter was a very valuable source for data collection, as it was my go –to reference while I was looking for potential participants, while monitoring their online activity. Through examining Twitter, I was able to find links to stories and academic resources on the use of Twitter in journalism, through searching for trends such as *#twitter in journalism* and *#twitter and journalists.*

Participant's Right to Privacy, Anonymity, and Confidentiality

As a researcher throughout this study, I was vigilant to do my best to protect the participants' privacy as well as to keep their identity anonymous, as I promised in my initial interview request. Because I appreciated the participants' time and willingness to participate, I left it up to them to decide the interview times and dates for more convenience.

Additionally, the approach I took to design the interview questions was primarily based on considering the participants' privacy in the first place. The main focus of the questions was to collect information about the journalists' general impressions of the use of Twitter as a professional tool instead of digging into their personal use of the online platform.

Because protecting the anonymity of research participants is a fundamental ethical

principle in qualitative research (Nind, 2008, p. 8), I promised all participants anonymity,

through: 1) assigning participants a code number, so they cannot be identified, 2) storing the data

in a password-protected laptop, as well as a USB stick that I stored in a secure place (See

Appendix B: Consent Form). However, participants were given the opportunity to decide

whether or not they would like to disclose their names in the study's acknowledgement section. I

also assured all participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time

before end of May, 2016 (See Appendix B: Consent Form).

Data Analysis

For data analysis, I used qualitative content analysis, which is suitable for organizing data

generated from semi-structured interviews. Content analysis is one of the major approaches used

to analyze data in qualitative description (Neergaard et al., 2015, Sandelowski, 2000). For this

study, content analysis was used to analyze data gathered from face-to-face, Skype, and phone

interviews. Quoting Sandelowski and Barroso (2003), Vaismoradi et al., (2013) argue that "the

use of qualitative descriptive approach such as content analysis is suitable in cases where a

relatively low level of interpretation is required" (p. 399). Staying closer to the data, as argued by

Neergaard et al. (2009) is necessary in the analytical process and presentation of data (p. 2).

My initial goal from this study was "a rich and straight description of how Twitter can

professionally impact Canadian journalists". In terms of analysis, my goal was neither thick

description (ethnography), theory development (grounded theory) nor interpretative meaning of

an experience (phenomenology) (Neergaard, et al., 2009, p. 2).

Qualitative content analysis allowed coding and categorizing the data generated from the

interviews into different patterns and codes, and then developing core themes. Upon labeling
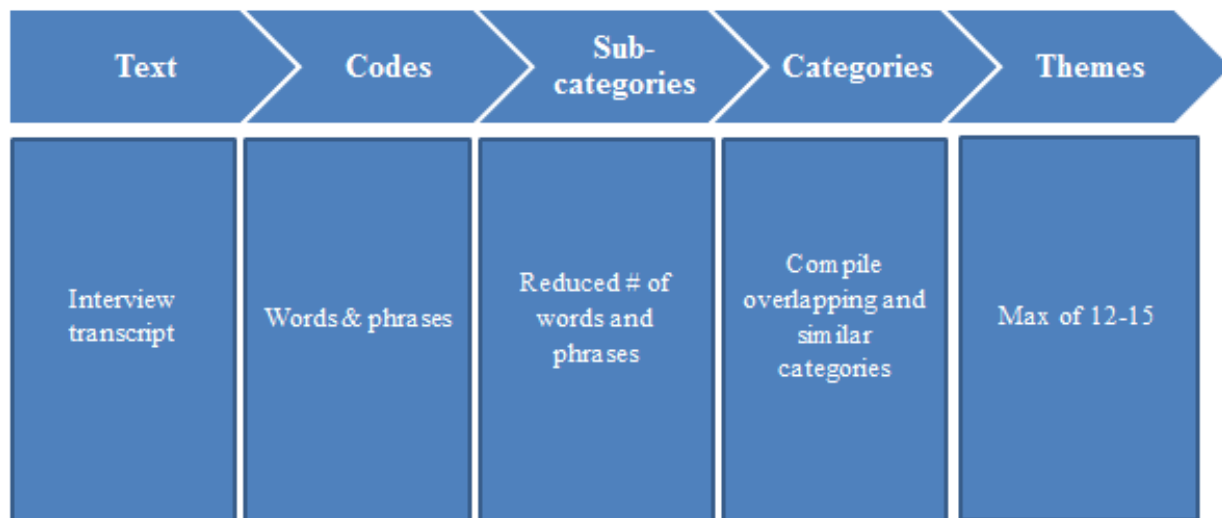
these themes, I was able to justify the correlation between using Twitter as a reporting tool and its impact on journalists.

My data analysis method was informed by the following strategies proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 9):

- Coding should be drawn from notes, observations or interviews

- Recording insights and reflections on the data

- Sorting through the data to identify similar phrases, patterns, themes, sequences and important features

- Looking for commonalities and differences among the data and extracting them for further consideration and analysis

- Gradually deciding on a small group or generalizations that hold true for the data, and

- Examining these generalizations in the light of existing knowledge

After transforming the recordings into transcripts, I read the transcripts of the interviews, and then coded and grouped codes from the actual words used by participants. I then looked for overlapping and similar categories. I then grouped the list of categories into themes and allocate each theme a different colour. I revisited the transcripts and mark the data that fit under a particular category with the matching colour in order to make sure what the participants said is captured in the analysis.

Table 3

The Process of Generating Themes

Text	Codes	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
Interview transcript	Words & phrases	Reduced # of words and phrases	Compile overlapping and similar categories	Max of 12-15

I utilized NVivo (http://www.qsrinternational.com/product) textual processing tool to help analyze the data collected from the interviews. NVivo allows classification, sorting, and arranging many types of non –numerical data such as field notes, videos, audios, and recording and word documents. It also helps organize and store data in an easy and searchable way. For coding, I specifically used "in vivo coding," in which I used the participants' own language, as suggested by Neergaard (2009, p. 3).

NVivo was efficient to use in this qualitative research for the following reasons, as discussed by Sotiriadou et al. (2010, p. 230):

- Similar process with manual handling of data

- Effective for (semi) structured interview

- Efficient for small sample size

- Applicable for a various types of data (for example, text and audio)

Researcher's Role and Bias

My experience as a journalist using social media - particularly Twitter and Facebook - was an eye opener to how valuable these tools can be to a journalist. However my job as a researcher is to do everything I can to minimize any possible biases through enhancing rigour, remaining as objective as I can be, and making sure that codes are emerged from the data (Milne, J., & Oberle, K, 2005, p. 417). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, staying closer to the data and reflecting on the participants' points of view are significant when using the qualitative description method. This will demonstrate integrity and neutrality that Neergaard et al. (2009) identify as the most significant principles to meet when using qualitative description method (p. 4). Throughout the data analysis process, I was also diligent to maintain authenticity, validity, and reliability (Lewis, 2002). As Lewis writes:

> First authenticity, requiring that views expressed are fair and representative and a need to check across strategies and contexts. Second, validity/credibility, requiring checks as to whether interpretations of views expressed are correct. Third, reliability/ trustworthiness, concerning whether responses are typical of what the person believes (p. 113).

Additionally, my role as a researcher required constant validation of the categories, so I tried to avoid forcing categories throughout the data analysis process, while "taking into consideration the participants' context through the use of field notes and descriptive summaries" (Milne and Oberle, 2005, p. 419).

Chapter V. Findings

The findings of this qualitative study represent the data generated from the semi-structured interviews with six Edmonton-based Canadian journalists from diverse broadcast and print media. The study's findings also address the research questions, through identifying significant key themes and sub-themes.

Based on my review of the existing literature in this area, I designed the interview questions with a focus on four major thematic areas:

1) Canadian journalists' professional use of Twitter;

2) The benefits and risks accompanying the use of the microblogging tool by professional journalists;

3) The guidelines and best practices available by media organizations; and lastly,

4) The personal decisions that journalists should make before posting on Twitter.

Twitter, as a Valuable Journalistic Tool

Data revealed that all of the participants use Twitter on daily basis with slight difference in the levels of online engagement in terms of frequency, which could vary from once or twice to ten times a day. Here is an example on how one Edmonton journalist explains her routine use of the platform:

> I wake up each morning at 3am and check my Twitter feed. True; I can get caught up very quickly right away. I follow reputable news organizations that can tell me what is happening overseas. Also I follow a lot of local people who weigh in on things…and tell Edmonton stories in 140 characters. You can get a heads up on stories (Participant 3, e-mail conversation, May 9th, 2016).

According to the participants, the frequency of their use of Twitter depends on whether they have something valuable and/or newsworthy to share with thousands of people online. Participants' activity on Twitter includes sending out tweets and retweets; sharing posts and links posted by other users; and connecting with audiences through responding to their inquiries and comments.

The majority of the journalists that I interviewed shared their early experience with Twitter, explaining how their employers and early adopters' colleagues encouraged them to join the online platform.

> The organization that I work for wanted all to join for the purpose of engaging with the audience. There were some people that were early adopters of Twitter. I had a bit of idea about it, but basically we were told that we should all be on Twitter, so we can get involved (Participant 4, personal communication, May 11th, 2016).

Four out of six participants revealed that at first they thought Twitter would be a big waste of time. They said they were hesitant to start a new a Twitter account, and then confused about how to use the tool. One of the three female interviewees said it took her about six months to get used to Twitter, explaining that when she first joined the platform, she was just a lurker who was watching how other journalists were using it.

Data showed that currently all of the participants, without exception, view Twitter as a valuable professional tool that they currently use on regular basis, and for a variety of purposes. Here are some examples of how participants' attitudes changed over time:

- "I saw a value in it pretty early on in the process" (Participant 1, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

- "I was on it and sort of watching how other people were using it, but was not using it myself. (…) Then, I would try tweet things that eject more of a voice, but I did not do that very frequently. (…) I did not start using it more until I had been in the news room probably for about 6 months" (Participant 2, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

- "It was confusing at first. I cursed it, but in the end it became a very useful tool and source of my only addiction" (Participant 3, e-mail communication, May 9th, 2016).

- "I was sort of hesitant; I thought it is going to be a big waste of time and I am not really interested in that kind of social media approach to journalism. (…) Now, I tweet every day. (…) I am pretty active whether I am working or not" (Participant 6, phone communication, May 18th, 2016).

Breaking News and Live Broadcast. One of the most common uses among the study's participants is breaking news. Data from the interviews unveiled that Twitter has been used by professional journalists as a live broadcast tool, especially in events like natural disasters, accidents, and crimes, in which people who are experiencing the current events can tell their stories and share pictures videos and updates. Data generated from the interviews showed that Twitter among journalists is viewed as a valuable tool that aides them in understanding how events are unfolding prior to covering the story for their media outlet.

Sharing Information. Study participants often use Twitter to share their stories and other journalists' stories as well. They also use Twitter to share service-oriented information, for instance sending updates on weather conditions, car accidents, road closures, and natural disasters. In one person's words:

Twitter is a wonderful tool for information sharing. People trapped in earthquakes and building collapses are tweeting their location to rescuers. People in marginalized population are using Twitter. I mean Twitter is giving citizens the ability to tell their stories; and I think that is incredible (Participant 1, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

Generating Content. Participants also use Twitter to generate ideas for their stories. Data revealed that journalists' activities on Twitter also involve looking for things that people online talk about and interest them the most. One participant said that if people are talking about something interesting that others would care about, she would contact them, follow up with them, and tell their stories on mainstream media. As one person stated:

Anywhere you can generate story ideas is great, and Twitter is in a lot of ways, and I don't mean stories that happened on Twitter, I mean actual stories; things that people are talking about that I would only saw because they are talking about it on Twitter. That is really useful I found, and it kept me focused. I know because a lot of people saw it as a distraction, but it forced me to realize that there were lots of things that were going on and how to navigate them all, you know (Participant 2, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

Connecting with Users. Based on the participants' responses, journalists use Twitter to interact with their audience through the direct messaging feature that Twitter allows. Most of the journalists I interviewed said that they use Twitter to raise questions about major events and breaking news. One of the participants said: "Generally, we use Twitter to engage with the audience; to get responses about certain things that we are talking about on radio (…). So, we

will get those responses and read those on the radio" (Participant 4, personal communication, May 11th, 2016).

Other Uses. One of the participants that I interviewed said that he also uses Twitter as a recruitment tool to find guests for his daily show. Based on data collected from the interviews, professional journalists also use Twitter as a gathering and research tool. He said:

When you describe Twitter as a journalistic tool, I would 100 percent agree. I can't imagine not having Twitter now. I cannot imagine not having Twitter now. I am happy to tell you that Twitter was significant in my last two contract negotiations (Participant 1, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

Twitter, as a Double-Sided Sword

Despite the popularity of Twitter as a professional tool among all participants, they all agreed to the fact that there are potential pitfalls that journalists should be aware of and careful not to fall into while using Twitter. Nevertheless, the participants reported that the benefits of Twitter outweigh its risks, as long as journalists stay professional and are always aware of the potential downsides of the platform.

Benefits. The six participants that were interviewed shared their positive experience with Twitter, and spoke about the benefits of the tool.

Direct Engagement. Based on the interviews, Twitter allows journalists to directly communicate and engage with people from diverse backgrounds. According to majority of the participants, the platform connects journalists with people, therefore makes journalists closer to their resources than ever possible before" (Participant 2, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

Growing Audience. The data also showed that the participants benefit from using Twitter in growing their audience. One participant spoke about how covering one event increased his followers on Twitter from 1,500 to 4,500. However, one participant was unsure about Twitter being a tool that helps journalists in building their platform and supporting their brand:

> People talk about, you know sort of building your platform, your profile, I do not know; it is interested to see statistics; I am not convinced that it completely translates into people sort of supporting your brand or whatever it is (Participant 6, phone communication, May 18th, 2016).

Building a Network. According to the participants, Twitter also provides journalists with the opportunity to develop a network of people.

> I think because journalists, politicians, and other people in that milieu are on Twitter, you get connected to a lot of people; you hear from different people; different voices about different topics. I read a lot of things on Twitter, and I will be like that is interesting, so I click on them. I think just the advantage of being a part of that is quite good (Participant 4, personal communication, May 11th, 2016).

Another participant also spoke about the benefit of using Twitter as a networking tool, so journalists can keep up with everything being updated on Twitter.

> I sort of developed a network of people that are really plugged in, and that is what journalism is about. It is about knowing what it is going around you, and having people who will talk to you, and I think I was able to do a lot of that. Really a lot of it came through my Twitter presence at the end of it I would say (Participant 2, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

Independence, Power, and Attractiveness. Data also revealed that one of the advantages of Twitter is that it allows journalists to operate with independence from the outlet that they work for. One participant who only uses Twitter professionally said that the online platform gives journalists some sort of power and control of their own content; as well as showcase their skills to prospective employers.

Risks. Data also unveiled a number of risks that participants said journalists in particular may fall into as soon as they stop using the tool in a professional way.

It is not an Intimate Conversation. Getting too personal and too opinionated is one of the pitfalls of Twitter, which according to the participants can be conflicting to the purpose of their Twitter account being a professional and work-related tool.

> Obviously there is a degree of personal engagement involved in using social media.
> Using a Twitter account for a professional purpose, I think what gets you in trouble is
> when you indulge in personal asides, so you may hold a personal view that is well outside
> to mainstream and if you broadcast it that reflects not just on you, but also on your
> employer, and things you say on social media need to be; aren't going to blow on you or
> the people who are paying you to work for them (Participant 5, Skype communication,
> May 12th, 2016).

False Information. Falling into false information on Twitter is another major issue that could impact journalists in a bad way. Participants said that journalists should always be cognisant and careful when using the platform as a source of information or story generator. Journalists should also make sure that they attribute quotes to the correct sources (Participant 3, e-mail communication, May 9th, 2016); otherwise they will impact their professional reputation and credibility. To that point, one of the participants spoke about Twitter, as a place where

everyone has a voice, which he described as the best thing about Twitter as much as it is the worst thing about it. Another participant revealed that although she has been a journalist for over fifteen years, she still lives in fear of falling into tweeting or retweeting incorrect information.

> Sometimes the information is not correct and if it's not and you retweet it…that's a pitfall no journalist wants to fall into. And you certainly want to ensure anything you tweet is correct and factual (Participant 3, e-mail communication, May 9th, 2016).

> *Trolls.* Furthermore, data revealed that another potential pitfall of Twitter is getting tempted to indulge in unconstructive debates. Based on the participants' answers, journalists as public figures should always ignore Twitter trolls. Two participants; one female and one male spoke in particular about female journalists being a target for harassment, verbal violence, and death threats.

> Especially for female journalists, sometimes if they report something that anger a group of people, they face unbelievable harassment, threat and violence, that is very hard to deal with (…) So that is a real danger, and I know women who faced that and it was very disturbing and difficult to people (Participant 6, phone communication, May 18th 2016).

> Commenting on how to response to these trolls, one of the participants said that trolls roam the twitter-verse, and they can be very cruel. She added: "There is a temptation to engage in an unconstructive debate with them…but you must block them immediately and hopefully they go away (Participant 3, e-mail communication, May 9th, 2016).

> *Inappropriate Tweets.* Most of the study's participants also addressed the risk of tweeting something inappropriate or "stupid", or that does not align with an employer's policy. However, one participant said that he does view this as a negative side of Twitter. He explained

that journalists should be aware of their responsibilities as public figures, and therefore should

know what should stay out of Twitter or even how to act in real life.

> You do not have a lot of sympathy for someone who is a public figure when he/she goes
>
> off on Twitter saying a bunch of dumb things. That is not Twitter's fault; it is your fault
>
> (Participant 1, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

Despite recognizing the potential pitfalls of Twitter, data showed that the majority of the

interviewees do not see Twitter as a terribly risky tool as long as journalists operate with a high

level of discretion and use it professionally.

> I think most good journalists have to be discrete anyway just to be good at their job. I
>
> think for somebody like that, it is far more useful than it is harmful. To me, it is not a
>
> terribly risky tool as long as you are using it professionally (Participant 5, May 12th,
>
> 2016).

Twitter, as an Extension of the Professional Self

Study participants were asked about the type of guidelines, rules and regulations that

professional journalists should rely on in their use of Twitter. Based on majority of the

responses, most Canadian and international media organizations have guidelines and best

practices on social media in place, and they are often a part of their code of ethics that journalists

are required to agree to and sign. All of the participants said that it is always valuable to take

advice from the best practices on social media available by media organizations. On the contrary,

three participants argued that the danger in these guidelines going too far into how journalists

should perform on Twitter is in overgeneralizing and getting too descriptive.

The guidelines created by a corporation undoubtedly have the corporations' best interests, which maybe not necessarily best interests of the individual journalist, so I guess there is a risk in that (Participant 5, Skype communication, May 12th, 2016).

In order to minimize this risk, it was suggested that journalists should always stay authentic while following the rules. One of the participants for example said: "I try to be real; I try to be honest and I try to be professional as well; and those are the standards that I live up to, and hopefully my tweets reflect me as a person and as a journalist" (Participant 6, phone communication, May 18th, 2016).

Data also showed that professional journalists normally do not look at these guidelines before they post on Twitter. Participants reported that journalists should regard Twitter as an extension of their professional identities, and therefore whatever they cannot say on air and/or publish in a paper, it should stay out of their Twitter feed. In other words, data revealed that the rules that journalists should follow on Twitter is to perform the same way they perform on air.

Same Ethical Standards Apply. Regardless of whether or not written guidelines are in place, journalists should apply the same ethical standards in their use of Twitter, as data revealed. These findings support a previous study on BBC J-tweeters (Hermida, 2009), which revealed that "BBC bloggers do not consider blogging as substantially different from other forms of media work, particularly in a broadcast context," and therefore they are expected to remain within existing editorial parameters (p. 10-11). One participant said that good journalists should always question if their tweets are ethical and legal prior to posting them. Another participant said that professional journalists should be ethical human beings before anything else, and therefore they do not really need guidelines and best practices for the safety of their reputation as journalists, otherwise, they are probably not getting it. The same participant explained that for

example journalists cannot make disparaging comments to a certain group of people because these things are very obvious and would not be a part of his conduct on the personal as well as professional level. The participants noted:

- "To me, my name is my brand, so if I were to do something that would bring my name to ill repute, I will be hurting my own business" (Participant 1, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

- "There are ethical guidelines for everything. There are already standard in place. This is not a far stretch from that" (Participant 2, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

- "Just apply common sense if you have any" (Participant 4, personal communication, May 11th, 2016).

- "As a definite rule, I think you have to be very careful with what you tweet as someone responsible for delivering news" (Participant 3, e-mail communication, May 9th, 2016).

- "I think the same rules apply if you just approach it in a civilized respectful manner that you are not likely getting into trouble" (Participant 5, Skype communication, May 12th, 2016).

- "You just have to be comfortable putting something out there with your name on it forever" (Participant 6, phone communication, May 18th, 2016).

"**I am the Same Person on Twitter.**" Data showed that all participants with no exception do not use a separate personal account for tweeting personal things. They all have one account that they use whether they are at work, or spending time with family and friends. Most of the participants found it complicated to separate between professional and personal tweets.

I think part of the situation is that a journalist is not a 9 to 5 job. Journalism is so much a part

of your identity, so for instance I am not at work now, but yet we are talking about

journalism. (…)You are not always working, but you are always a journalist (Participant 6,

phone communication, May 18th, 2016).

Regardless of the type of the tweet, data showed that participants are always cautious that

their tweets do not offend their reputation, employer, and/or audience. All participants agreed

that their identity does not change with the platform, and therefore people will always identify

them as journalists who work for certain media organizations even if they do not use the name of

the employer on Twitter.

According to the data, journalists not only represent themselves, but also the organizations

that they work for, and therefore the way they conduct themselves online and offline will always

have an impact on their employers.

Objectivity, Neutrality, and Fairness

   The Challenge of Being Fair. The study's participants were asked how journalists can

be authentic on Twitter, while maintaining objectivity and neutrality. Participants said that it is

significant for any journalist to be honest and objective; however being objective does not

necessarily mean not having any value judgements. They stated:

- "I do not maintain neutrality hundred percent of the time on Twitter; I maintain an

  open-mindedness, but not neutrality" (Participant 1, personal communication, April

  27th, 2016).

- "Regardless of the commentary that I have made, I was very fair and that was my

  reporting was objective" (Participant 2, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

- "I think fairness is the test; you try to be objective and balanced in the way that you

   approach things" (Participant 4, personal communication, May 11th, 2016).

- "I do not think journalists should be neutral, I think they should be fair (Participant 4,

   personal communication, May 11th, 2016).

- "I stress the difference between neutrality and objectivity" (Participant 5, Skype

   communication, May 12th, 2016).

- "It may come down to this debate: Whether anyone can really be objective or neutral"

   (Participant 6, phone communication, May 18th, 2016).

The majority of the participants explained that being fair in journalism requires that

journalists constantly question their interviewee regardless of whether or not they agree with

what they are saying. According to the data, being fair also entails interviewing people from

different backgrounds and points of views.

   Tweeting Opinion to a Degree is Healthy. According to the majority of the participants,

there are plenty of accounts on Twitter that provide updates on what is happening in the world,

and therefore journalists who allow their personality to come out on Twitter help audiences to

connect with them and their our work. According to the data generated from the interviews,

people will have no connection with journalists who are robots tweeting; people instead want to

see a bit of a personal spark of who these journalists are. For example one female participant said

that showing people a bit of your life and family and that you are human interest others and make

them want to connect to you. Another male participant said that journalists can express their

opinion on things that do not affect their job such as same sex marriage, or participating in an

event that supports the LGBT community. Nevertheless, according to the data, journalists have

to treat their Twitter feed the way they treat their broadcast tool, and therefore give it a thought before posting.

On the contrary, participants revealed that weighing in on things that political or legal such as government decisions would be a no-go, as one tweet can be the reason of bringing a journalist's career down.

> You just have to be cognisant that the way you are expressing your opinion; any opinion could affect your professional relationship, but I think you have to understand what that relationship is with your employer. I express opinions about all kind of things that do not really affect my job (Participant 4, personal communication, May 11th, 2016).

Balancing Bias and Increasing Transparency. Most of the interviewees discussed how tweeting opinion to a degree is healthy, as it helps people to view journalists as human beings not just mere sources of news. As described by some participants, Twitter helps neutralize bias in journalism to a degree.

- "You know when you got a balance, when both sides are accusing you of bias" (Participant 6, phone communication, May 18th, 2016).

- People see me as multi-dimensional person who has multiple interests, not just my job" (Participant 2, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

- "I think that people know that this is what Twitter is about; it is not just me giving you what my job is about" (Participant 2, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

- "I am a human and that does not impact my ability to tell a story" (Participant 5, Skype interview, May 12th, 2016).

Job Description. Data revealed that a journalists' job title is a major determinant of how his/her Twitter feed should look in terms of the content. Four participants indicated that a radio

or television host can post a tweet that reflects the journalist's opinion to a degree. On the

contrary, data revealed that if a standard news or court reporter tweets an opinion on a story

he/she is covering, they will perceived as unprofessional. Participants said that even in tragic

situations, news reporters usually are less expressive on Twitter than personality-type talk show

hosts.

However, according to most of the participants, all journalists; whether a news reporter,

commentator, columnist, and/or a talk show host cannot be to opinionated and seem to have an

agenda, otherwise people will lose interest in their reporting very quickly. Below are some of

what the participants had to say on the topic.

> Tweeting personal opinion comes back to your objectivity. It comes back to your
>
> professional reputation and credibility. (…) You will never see me tweet support for a
>
> political party. (…) It is irrelevant, and I think it would influence people's perception of
>
> my coverage and reporting (Participant 1, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

Know Your Audience. Another aspect that journalists should be aware of, according to

the participants is to know and identify who their audience are. One female participant said that

spending a long time on social media has helped her with getting to know her audience better,

and therefore becoming more comfortable with using Twitter, while maintaining journalistic

ethics.

Twitter is not a Substitute to Reporting. As mentioned earlier in the findings section,

all participants view Twitter as valuable tool for journalists; yet to them it Twitter is not a

substitute to reporting. According to the data gathered from the interviews, Twitter is an

extension of journalists' broadcast, and therefore it requires that same levels of accuracy, and

professionalism.

Sometimes it can be tempting to just do the search on Twitter, which can be very

valuable. But it is not the same thing as going out and knocking on doors or picking up

the phone, and so ideally a journalist is using all of those tools and more to create work

that is ethical, valuable, objective and great journalism (Participant 6, phone

communication, May 18th, 2016).

To conclude this section, it is important to highlight some observations related to the

interviews and study participants. Although I intended to design the questions in a way that does

not interfere with the participants' privacy and personal use of Twitter, all the journalists that I

interviewed were very open about the topic, and shared a lot of their experiences with Twitter.

The participants' willingness to share real examples of their professional use of Twitter was

significantly valuable for the findings of the study. In the previous section, I mentioned that all

participants were hesitant to join Twitter, and that they now cannot imagine not having Twitter.

This dramatic change demonstrates how evolving the field of journalism is; and Twitter has

become a powerful tool for professional use.

Furthermore, throughout the interviews, participants used similar words, phrases, and

even figures of speech to answer the questions, which was significant to the organization and

analysis of the gathered data. Words and phrases such as "cognisant", "professional self", "robot

tweeting", "neutrality", and "let your personality to come out" were some of many that were

used by most of the participants.

Table 4

Generated Themes

Major Themes	Major Sub-Themes	Research Questions
Twitter, as a Valuable Journalistic Tool	Breaking news and live broadcast Sharing information Generating content Connecting with users	**RQ1**

Twitter, as a Double-Sided Sword	Benefits:
	    Direct engagement
	    Growing audience
	    Building a network
	    Independence, power, and attractiveness
	Risks:
	    Intimate conversation
	    False information
	    Trolls
	    Inappropriate tweets
		RQ1

Twitter, as an Extension of the Professional Self	Same ethical standards apply Journalists are the same people on Twitter	**RQ2 & RQ3**

Objectivity, Neutrality, and Fairness	The challenge of being fair
	Tweeting opinion to a degree is healthy
	    Balancing bias and increasing transparency
	    Job description
	    Know your audience
	Twitter is not a substitute to reporting
		RQ2 & RQ3

Chapter VI. Discussion and Implications

The initial purpose of the study was to explore the impact of the use of Twitter on Canadian professional journalists, while identifying the various reasons behind their use of the microblogging tool. Despite the ongoing debate over Twitter's legitimacy as a journalistic tool, Canadian journalists from different age groups and levels of experience appear to be adopting Twitter as a powerful professional tool, using it for a variety of purposes. Nevertheless, journalists' use of Twitter to send out news updates, connect with users, and even to make commentary appear not to conflict with the traditional journalistic norms that journalists are required to follow. With that said, Twitter can be very valuable to journalists as long as they continue to use it in a professional way, "as it takes one tweet to bring a journalist's career down" (Participant 1, personal communication, April 27th, 2016).

Twitter Benefits Outweigh the Risks

As data revealed, journalists do not seem to be overly concerned about the potential risks of Twitter. Professional journalists who are active on Twitter and have been using it for the last few years appear to use the tool as an extension of their profession. Data generated from the interviews showed, participants were hesitant to join Twitter before they started to tweet infrequently, and then few months later, their posts were daily until they reached a point where they cannot imagine not having Twitter. The dramatic change in the participants' attitudes and practices demonstrates the value of Twitter as a professional tool for journalists. These findings confirm existing literature, which revealed that the significance of Twitter as a news and information platform is affected by its adoption (Hermida, 2010, p. 304).

The adoption of Twitter as a journalistic tool also proves that the benefits of Twitter outweigh the potential risks that accompany using the tool (Lasorsa et al., 2012, p. 22),

especially that journalists are aware that Twitter can be a dangerous tool if it is not used within the professional terms and conditions. Taking this argument into consideration, it appears that the growth in journalists' activity on Twitter through tweeting more frequently and getting more comfortable to let their personality come out on Twitter also shows that journalists do benefit from using the microblogging tool; otherwise they would not be using it the way they currently are.

A New Approach to Reporting

Edmonton- based journalists revealed that they use Twitter as an extension of their professional activities in other media formats, based on the data generated from the interviews. At the same time, data showed that participants have embraced some of the unique features of the platform, such as engaging into direct conversations with people, which opened the door for more openness than what mainstream media usually allow.

Based on the literature, social media tools have changed the approach to practicing journalism from a lecture to a conversation (Lotan et al., 2011, p. 1400), and that it is journalistically more valuable to allow other voices in to get something that's more engaged and more involved (Newman et al., 2012, p. 14). The direct engagement or the two-way communication on Twitter between journalists and users reveals that the role of journalists is no longer just delivering news. Twitter allows journalists to also receive news updates and information through direct communication with the audience and sources at the same time. This supports Pavlik's (2001) argument that new media technology is enabling the emergence of a new form of news (p. 217).

Being able to directly communicate with audiences and generate story ideas and content based on users' responses has allowed a new way of reporting to emerge. This non-traditional

way of reporting shows how mainstream journalists are evolving and continue to adapt to new

online technologies and social media tools. As Deuze (2003) writes:

> The application of particular online characteristics not only has consequences for the type
>
> of journalism produced on the web, but that these characteristics and online journalisms
>
> indeed connect to broader and more profound changes and redefinitions of professional
>
> journalism and its (news) culture as a whole (p. 203).

"Twittering" the News and "Normalizing" Twitter

Practicing journalism has always been associated with objectivity and journalists' ability

to report without bias. Although these norms continue to be major pillars of reporting, adopting

Twitter among professional journalists has introduced new practices, such as transparency and

offering opinion to a degree (Lasorsa et al., 2012; Murthy, 2013; & Sheffer & Schultz, 2010).

Existing literature argued that Twitter has allowed users to figure whether journalists are credible

or not by looking at the sources of the news they are reporting, rather than relying on the notion

of objectivity (Ingram, 2010, para. 7). Based on the participants' responses, journalists on

Twitter allow their personalities to come out through tweeting about things that are not work-

related, or offering an opinion on issues that do not affect their jobs. The majority of the

participants said that one of the main differences between Twitter and mainstream media is the

direct engagement that Twitter allows among users, which helps people understand where j-

tweeters come from when tweeting about something that do not necessarily agree with. To

further explain this point of the discussion, participants revealed that no matter how objective

they try to be on Twitter, they face accusations of bias from users with opposing political views

and affiliations. This opens the door to argue that objectivity is a relative thing, as individuals see

things from their own perspective; and therefore fairness is what journalists seem to look to

achieve when covering a story, or sending out a tweet. As a result, it is highly significant that journalists continue to be authentic and transparent on Twitter as well as other mainstream media tools, which can help them reveal their real self; and show their audience who they are; and where they are come from. As one interview participant put it:

> When the company that I was with went through a number of layoffs, I made a conscious decision to live tweet the layoffs. Even though I was not laid off; they kept me. (…) I felt like it was sort of the things that I would do, you know if I was in the newsroom and we had someone come in with a gun. I am a reporter and report news that affects a lot of people, and I felt that this was one of those situations, so I chose to do that, knowing that it could be consequences to it, that people could get angry, or I could get fired. I feel like I did it in a professional way, but I felt it was important (Participant 6, phone communication, May 18th, 2016).

In the literature, Hermida (2010) talks about "Twittering the news" or how journalism norms are bending as professional practices to adapt to social media tools such as Twitter (p. 300), while Lasorsa et al. (2012) explore how journalists are "normalizing Twitter" in a way that fits their existing professional norms, while adjusting those norms and practices to the evolving online social media and online technologies (p. 32).

This discussion does not tend to rationalize that journalists should offer opinion on Twitter, but to highlight the uniqueness of Twitter as a medium in facilitating interactions across discrete social networks (Murthy, 2013, p. 4), and therefore allow direct communication between journalists and other users. This has in turn opened the door for reporting with increased transparency, and open-mindedness on Twitter without disregarding the traditional practices that journalists follow in mainstream reporting.

The Name is the Brand

Whether or not formal (written) organizational guidelines on the use of Twitter are in place, the study revealed that professional journalists should always be cognisant about the possible implications of expressing political opinion and/or biased reporting. Journalists would suffer the consequences, particularly hurting their professional reputation and journalistic credibility, as revealed by study participants. Despite the assumption that journalists' social media accounts mainly "reflect on the reputation and credibility" of the newsroom (Russell et al., 2015, p. 936), the personalized/individualized nature of Twitter supports that journalists' names are their brand. As a result, performing the same way on Twitter as mainstream media can certainly help journalists protect their brand as individuals as well as professionals.

It appears that being able to make the right decisions on Twitter by professional journalists is not just an outcome of the implementation of organizational guidelines. Although these guidelines may have an impact on journalists' activity on Twitter (Russell et al., 2015), findings showed that participants do not always look at these guidelines (despite their availability) before posting on Twitter. Participants also revealed that social media guidelines are usually generic and do not discuss details on how to use Twitter. These findings open the door to argue that using Twitter as an extension of the mainstream broadcasting tools is to a large extent due to the change in the monopoly over the journalistic tools (Newman, 2012, p. 15). Twitter has allowed journalists to share the monopoly on breaking news with mainstream media (Hermida, 2012b, p. 659), and therefore using Twitter professionally is highly significant for journalists, considering that tweets will have an impact on their brand, and to a lesser extent on their employer as well.

Journalism as an Identity

In responding to the interview questions, most of the participants found it challenging to separate between journalism as a job and journalism as part of their identity. Canadian j-tweeters revealed that their tweeting activity is not strictly limited to their career, explaining that they tweet anytime during the day, or whenever they feel that they have something that is worth sharing with others. Whether they are at work, home, or on a vacation, their tweets always reflect who they are as journalists as well as human beings.

These findings open the door for arguing that Twitter has blurred the lines between what's professional and what's personal, which supports earlier argument of Sanderson and Hambrick (2012, p.348). However, this formula seems to be working for Edmonton-based professional journalists, which interrelates with findings of previous study by Newman (2009, p. 37). Study participants confirmed that they have one Twitter account, which they primarily use as a professional tool, as well as to tweet about things that are not necessarily related to work, such as posting personal updates, and promoting the city attractions on occasional basis.

These findings indicate that being comfortable with tweeting about work and non-work related issues from the same Twitter account once again proves that part of being a journalist cannot be separated from being a human being in the first place.

Chapter VII. Conclusion

Based on the participants' responses, a good description of Twitter would be an extension of journalists' broadcast, blog, story, or article; yet the online microblogging tool is not a replacement for professional reporting, as the study demonstrated (Newman, 2012).

Data derived from the semi-structured interviews supported existing literature in numerous ways. First, study findings reinforced existing literature on Twitter being a valuable tool for mainstream journalists, who increasingly continue to use the microblogging tool as a journalistic tool (Alejandro, 2010; Clune , 2013; Hermida, 2010 & 2013; Vis 2013).

Second, this study showed that Edmonton-based journalists use Twitter for the same professional purposes as other North American and international journalists. Reasons for using Twitter include: Breaking news, engaging in discussions with audiences; and sharing information (Rogstad, 2013). Other purposes for using Twitter among journalists include searching for news and information to generate content and (Broersma & Graham, 2013).

Third, findings from current study revealed that Twitter can be a double-sided sword for journalists, whose reputation, credibility and even their position may be impacted by a single tweet that could be considered "inappropriate" (Wasserman, 2009). In the same token, and as revealed by study participants, regardless of the medium and the tool, journalists should always be cognisant of the accuracy of what they are posting or broadcasting (Hermida, 2013; Goodman 2009).

Lastly, results from the current study also confirmed the uniqueness of Twitter being immediate, public, and ever-changing platform, just like being in a newsroom (Newman et al., 2012); with the difference of individuals' control over what is being published (Lasorsa et al., 2012).

To sum up this section, most of the previous studies focused on the integration of Twitter in journalism as a field and how mainstream media organizations adopted the platform in newsrooms, while the current study focused on exploring the topic from the perspective of Canadian journalists who use Twitter on regular basis. Results generated from this research study confirmed that the majority of the mainstream journalists on Twitter are able to perform with the same level of professionalism, while successfully adopting Twitter's personalized features.

The findings of the study were generated through conducting qualitative interviews and employing content analysis approach to analyze collected data.

Limitations

Part of my role as a researcher is to acknowledge the study limitations; particularly those related to the research design and methodology. First, due to the non-random sample, one can argue that the findings may not be applicable to the majority of Canadian journalists, considering that the study purposefully sampled active j-tweeters, who work for Edmonton- based media. Second, the findings also cannot be generalized, due to the small sample, which includes a total of six participants.

Despite such limitations, implementing semi-structured interviews as a data gathering method did generate in-depth findings that helped answer the research questions. Considering the qualitative nature of my research, I purposefully selected journalists who are active on Twitter in terms of tweeting frequency and number of followers. Additionally, all participants work for Edmonton-based media outlets, where they all operate in same political, socioeconomic, and legal settings. As for the sample size, the goal in qualitative research is to capture individual participant meaning, and purposefully select participants who can provide in-depth information of relevance to the research question/purpose (Milne & Oberle, 2005, p. 415). Although the

study's sample is small, it represents journalists who work for mainstream media outlets based in all different regions in the country, so a journalist who works for an organization (X) in Edmonton will most likely share a lot of commonalities with other journalists working for the same organization (X) in Calgary (Alberta), Vancouver (British Colombia), or anywhere else in Canada.

Opportunities for Future Research

Taking into account these limitations, it is suggested that future studies on the topic should also consider sampling journalists who may be reluctant to use Twitter as a professional tool. There are also a number of compelling opportunities for further research on the impact of using Twitter on professional journalists. One of these opportunities would be a quantitative study on the impact of tweeting opinion on journalists in terms of objectivity, and biases. Another interesting study on using Twitter as an extension of journalists broadcast tool would sample a limited number of journalists and compare their reporting on Twitter vs traditional media. That would require choosing a time frame to monitor their tweets, and certain topics or incidents to narrow down the study focus. These are only few of many opportunities for future research on the use of Twitter by professional journalists, considering the emerging nature of the microblogging tool (Lasorsa et al., 2012, p. 24); and the ongoing related discussion in the field of journalism as well.

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Appendix A

Recruitment/Invitation Letter

Initial letter will be sent to all participants via email,

Study Title
Twitter, as a Reporting Tool: Exploring its Impact on Professional Journalists

Dear _____,

My name is Hiba Kamal, and I'm a graduate student in the MACT program at the University of Alberta. I am currently working on my final research paper, which explores the implications of the use of Twitter on Canadian journalists. I am looking to interview professional journalists, who regularly use Twitter as part of their job. I visited your Twitter feed and saw you are quite active, and so am reaching out to you to ask if you are available to take part in my study.

Please be advised that I will not use any information that would identify my participants. All data will be anonymized, but you will be given the opportunity to include your name in the study's acknowledgement section.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are also able to withdraw your consent to participate at any time you wish during data collection and without penalty.

Should you require further details about the study or if you have any other concerns, please contact me via email at hkamal@ualberta.ca. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Hiba Kamal

Appendix B

Consent Form

Study Title
Twitter, as a Reporting Tool: Exploring its Impact on Professional Journalists

Research Investigator:	**Supervisor:**
Hiba Kamal, Graduate Student	Dr. Rob McMahon, Assistant Professor
Master of Arts Communication and Technology	Faculty of Extension
University of Alberta	University of Alberta
13416 163 Ave	Enterprise Square, 10230 Jasper Ave
Edmonton, AB, T6V 0G2	Edmonton, AB, T5J 4P6
hkamal@ualberta.ca	rdmcmaho@ualberta.ca

Research Background
My research explores the implications of the use of Twitter on Canadian journalists. I am conducting interviews with six journalists, who regularly use Twitter as part of their job, and have valuable knowledge about the topic. The reason for contacting you to participate in this qualitative study is your notable presence on Twitter, as seen in your public profile on the microblogging site.

Purpose
This research is the capstone study required for the completion of my Master of Arts degree in Communications and Technology (MACT) at the University of Alberta. The purpose of the research is to better understand how professional journalists are using Twitter as a journalistic tool, and how it may or may not affect their careers. The findings of this qualitative study may be used in research articles, presentations, and web postings.

Study Procedures
Interviews will be conducted in-person, or remotely by telephone or Skype. The interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes. If you can do an in-person interview, I can meet with you at any public place you suggest (your office, coffee shop, etc). All data collected will be audio recorded, transcribed and made anonymous. You will be given the opportunity to include your name in the study's acknowledgements section.

Benefits
Your participation in this study will contribute to our understanding of the appropriate use of Twitter in professional journalism and its impact on journalists. The results of this study will also

assist other academic researchers investigating the integration of Twitter in journalism and possibly other areas.

Risk
There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research outside of those aspects of your everyday life. If I learn of anything during the research that may affect your willingness to continue being in the study, I will immediately let you know. _____

Voluntary Participation
Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and without penalty. In such cases, the information gathered will be immediately destroyed and will not be used in the study. As I hope to submit the study to my academic supervisor in July 2016, the deadline for withdrawal is May 31st, 2016.

Confidentiality & Anonymity
I will do everything I can to protect your privacy and guarantee anonymity. I will be the only individual involved with data collection. However, I recommend that you use a personal rather than work e-mail address when communicating with me.
Because I want to ensure the accuracy of all data, I would like to return a synopsis of our conversation to you, in an effort to verify information, and check my observations.

Please be advised that I will keep all data in a secure place for a minimum of five years following completion of the study. It is your right to disclosure of the presence of any apparent or actual conflict of interest on the part of me, the researcher.

Finally, it is your right to a copy of a report of the research findings, which upon completion I can send your way without delay. Should you want a copy of the completed report, please contact me at (780) 994-6669 or via e-mail at hkamal@ualberta.ca.

Further Information
Should you agree to participate in this study, please fill out the remainder of this consent form. Please keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have any concerns, complaints or issues at any point during this process, please feel free to contact me, or my project supervisor, Dr. Rob McMahon, Assistant Professor in the Graduate Program in Communication and Technology (MACT) at the University of Alberta.

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

Consent Statement
I have read this information letter, and consent to participating in this study on the implications of Twitter on Canadian journalists' careers. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

☐ I consent to have my name disclosed in the acknowledgement section

☐ I consent to allowing the researcher to send me a synopsis of our conversation for verification purposes.

_____ _____

Participant's Name (printed) and Signature   Date

_____ _____

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix C

Key Terms

J-tweeters: Journalists who are active on Twitter (Hedman, 2015, p. 279).

Professional/mainstream journalists: Journalists working for mainstream media; not citizen journalists and bloggers.

Social Media Editor: Someone who is paid to post on social media platforms (Travers, 2011, para. 9).

Twitter Effect: Defined as the rapid spread of information through the micro blogging service Twitter (Alejandro, 2010, p. 20).

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Participants' use of Twitter (Intro questions)

1) When did you join Twitter? And why?

2) How do you use Twitter in your professional career? And how often do you tweet?

Weighting benefits and risks of using Twitter

3) How do you think professional journalists can benefit from using Twitter? And what are the risks?

4) Would you say Twitter is a double-sided sword? If so, how?

Professional resources that journalists draw on

5) What are the professional resources that journalists should draw on in their use of Twitter?

6) As a journalist, how do weigh the pros and cons of having guidelines on Twitter in place?

7) How far into a journalist's personal life should/can journalistic norms and guidelines go?

8) In the absence of explicit professional guidelines on Twitter, what do you think journalists should think/do before they tweet?

9) What do you think about journalists tweeting personal opinion?

10) Do you think journalists should separate between professional vs. personal tweets? If so, why? And, how they can do that?

11) How can journalists maintain neutrality and objectivity, while being authentic on Twitter?