The Impact of Digital Spaces on Journalism Norms

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Abstract

Journalists are among the many audiences using social media to actively connect with networked communities. This qualitative study examined how eight Canadian journalists were engaging with social media in personal and professional environments. Results from the semi-structured interviews revealed all participants were using social media in personal, informal contexts to connect with friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and in some cases, strangers. Data confirmed study participants were also utilizing social media in more formal, professional contexts. For example, the majority of participants reported utilizing social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, to generate story ideas, find sources for stories, or promote stories to wider audiences. The study also uncovered instances whereby journalists shared personal opinions on their social media sites about issues ranging from crime to politics. This study attempted to explore with journalists how they reconciled their decisions to share opinions via social media with traditional journalism norms rooted in principles of objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality. The paper then assessed these findings against a theoretical framework informed by communications scholar Joshua Meyrowitz's medium theory to better understand how emerging communicative practices with social media may be transforming the sense of public and private spaces within which journalists have traditionally operated.

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Backgrounder and Rationale

Journalists are among the many millions of people using web-based social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, to actively connect with large networked communities. Many journalism organizations are recognizing that social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, are giving audiences unprecedented access to journalists' personal lives and views, just as some journalists are recognizing social media connects them with audience in new ways. Some organizations, including the New York Times and the BBC, have responded by crafting specific guidelines for employees, in the form of social media policies, that discuss the *do's and don'ts* of using online platforms in ways that align with acceptable journalism standards. Other organizations, such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) have continued to rely on more general policies, some of which pre-date the arrival of many of today's more popular social media sites. For example, four years prior to the introduction of Facebook, the CAJ unveiled ethics guidelines that included directives on fairness, independence and conflict of interest. The guidelines stated, "We lose our credibility as fair observers if we write opinion pieces about subjects that we also cover as reporters" (CAJ Ethics Guidelines, 2002, para. 47). Similarly, the CBC expects employees associated with information programming, including news and current affairs, to comply with its *Journalism Standards and Practices* guidebook, most recently revised in 2004. In a section entitled, *Credibility*, the CBC advises journalists to avoid any "situation which could cause reasonable apprehension that a journalist or the organization is biased or under the influence of any pressure group..." (CBC Policies and Guidelines, Credibility, 2004, para. 2). The policy further states "the organization must be sensitive to [information programmers'] published views, their personal involvements and their associations and backgrounds in order to avoid any perception of bias or

of susceptibility to undue influence in the execution of their professional responsibilities" (CBC Policies and Guidelines, Credibility, 2004, para. 3). Neither of the aforementioned policies specifically refers to social media usage by journalists. However, at the time this paper was being written, the executive editor of CBC News confirmed the CBC was drafting a social media policy (E. Enkin, personal communication, January 27, 2010), a sign, perhaps, that broader ethical guidelines have not provided enough specific direction to employees who are actively participating in online spaces.

As journalists continue to use social media, for work and leisure, and as more media organizations craft social media policies, the intent of this study was to examine the online-sharing practices of journalists for whom such policies are being created. Eight Canadian journalists were interviewed about how and why they used social media, including an exploration of factors that influenced their decisions to share personal information and opinion, online. The study focused particularly on participant engagement with Facebook. Facebook first emerged in the college and university scene in 2004 when founder Mark Zuckerberg launched the site from his Harvard dorm room. The intended audience was primarily post-secondary students who were encouraged to use it to connect with friends. Interest soon expanded beyond the post-secondary community. Six years after its launch, the site, different from other SNS in that it did not have a distinct focus such as dating, music sharing, or professional networking, claimed to have 400 million active users (Facebook statistics, 2010).

This paper begins with a review of the industry and academic literature. Analysis of industry publications confirms the issue of social media usage by journalists is on the radar of journalism communities. A review of the academic literature provides a closer examination of some of the traditional journalism norms and practices that have operated in North America since

the early 1900s. The review paid close attention to scholarly discussion of the principle of journalistic objectivity. The concluding section of the literature review provides an overview of Meyrowitz's medium theory (1985), which offers a useful theoretical framework that blends medium theory and sociological theory to examine the effects of changes in electronic media on social behavior.

Following the literature review, a methodology section will detail how Thorne's Interpretive Description framework (2008) was used to guide this qualitative inquiry. The methodology section will also address how Meyrowitz's writings on media scholarship (1985, 2001, 2008) both informed the structure of this qualitative inquiry, and provided a framework with which to interpret the study findings. From there, the findings section will concentrate primarily on the themes that emerged from participant interviews. Finally, the discussion section will feature a theoretical analysis of the data, in which Meyrowitz's theory will be used to examine the central research question of how emerging communicative practices with social media may be transforming the sense of public and private spaces within which journalists have traditionally operated. The discussion section will also highlight a number of questions that might stimulate more research to promote new knowledge in this area.

Before proceeding with an examination of the academic and industry literature concerning the opinion-sharing practices of journalists who engage in social media, it is important to provide some definitions that will offer clarification about study participants as well as a brief explanation of social networking sites (SNS), specifically Facebook and Twitter.

Key Definitions

The Straight News Reporter

Professional journalists work in various capacities, some of which not only allow for, but also demand the sharing of opinion. As journalism ethics scholar Stephen Ward (2006) explains, the editorial writer, columnist, investigative reporter, or documentarian has much more latitude when it comes to developing opinion, as long as that opinion has been derived from rigorous fact-finding. However, straight news reporters fall into their own category, with "rigid rules on all forms of editorializing" (p. 310). This project focused primarily on so-called straight news journalists who are often implicitly or explicitly directed by employers, colleagues, or self, to keep personal opinion out of their stories and out of public view, although one participant indicated she was required to write editorials in addition to straight news stories.

Social Networking Sites

Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social networking sites (SNS) as web-based services that allow users to create personal profiles, connect with other users, and cross-reference their profile lists within the context of much larger online communities. Facebook claims to be the largest social media site in the world, with the company offering estimates that users share an estimated 5 billion pieces of content each week (Facebook Statistics, 2010). All participants in this study were Facebook users. This study was concerned with participants' use of some of the more popular applications associated with Facebook, including but not limited to *status updates* which encourage users to post short comments about themselves on their main profile pages, the ability to *friend* or invite others to join one's own network, the ability to join Facebook *groups* which are created by Facebook users to promote interests or issues ranging from the eclectically quirky to mainstream political. Participants also referred to other common Facebook features such as the

photo sharing, e-mail, and chat utilities. Some of the study participants were also users and or followers of *Twitter*, another free social media site that encourages users to follow one another's short personal posts, called *tweets*, which cannot exceed 140 characters. While this study did not focus on this micro blogging service, several participants referred to it.

The Literature Review

In the Field

A review of the literature reveals scholars' deepening interest in the relationship between Web 2.0 technologies and journalism practice. The literature chronicles the fact these technologies have afforded millions of people the opportunity to instantaneously and cheaply publish and broadcast content that was formerly the purview of large-scale media institutions (Keen, 2007; Singer, 2007; Shirky, 2008). Many scholars are writing about this mass amateurization of the media, with much focus on blogging by non-journalists and professional journalists, alike (MacKinnon, 2005; Singer, 2007; Lasica, 2003). While scholars have closely examined and in some cases developed theory about the relationship between developments in computer-mediated communication and journalism practice, few have conducted qualitative interviews with professional journalists who are engaged with SNS. This study seeks to better understand how eight Canadian journalists make decisions about this engagement, and what this engagement looks like.

In the mean time, a growing number of commentaries are emerging in both academic and professional publications about whether reporters who offer their opinions in online spaces are indeed breaching journalism norms such as objectivity and neutrality. Such commentaries often arise after journalists share opinions in online spaces. One such incident occurred in late 2009 when Washington Post Managing Editor Raju Narisetti used Twitter to make personal comments

about healthcare reform, and then about elderly politicians. Narisetti's tweets sparked controversy, and resulted in him closing his Twitter account. Shortly after, the Washington Post unveiled its social media policy that advised journalists to refrain from making political commentary on social media sites in the name of preserving journalistic neutrality. While the Post's ombudsman characterized Narisetti's tweets as "innocuous" (Alexander, 2009), commentators waded in with calls for stringent interpretations of neutrality and objectivity in journalism. Writing about the incident for the American Journalism Review, Morton (2009) concluded, "… nothing about the new [social media] venues changes the old rules about a reporter's obligation to be, and appear to be, neutral. From that flows credibility and credibility is the basic reason for a newspaper's business success" (p. 60). Many other examples of reporters sharing opinions via social media sites have been cited in industry literature. Myers (2009) conducted an informal survey of American journalists' Facebook status updates prior to Barack Obama's presidential inauguration. Some status lines were overtly supportive of Obama's victory while other updates were more veiled. Interestingly, Myers indicated the journalists who revealed their support, online, for Obama were the same journalists who told him they would never stick an Obama political sign in their front lawns. Myers articulated the gap, or disconnect, between what reporters were *saying* about objectivity, and what they were *doing* in the online sphere. Though not articulated, the article generated an image of journalists viewing their online spaces and physical spaces in markedly different ways, the subject of which will be addressed in the discussion section of this study.

Elissa Sonnenberg (2009) addresses journalists' questionable online activity by arguing reporters, especially those with less experience, have always made mistakes. The assistant director of the University of Cincinnati journalism program contends inexperienced journalists

have always struggled with issues of objectivity, accuracy, and relationships with their sources. Most of them, she contends, eventually learn that errors erode the public trust, but adds, "today's shifting definitions of objectivity, clouded by 24/7 social networking and an overabundance of news sources places a specific burden on journalists navigating the Web" (p. 24).

The issue of how journalists should manage their online activities is a prominent theme in industry literature, with some organizations providing specific guidance to journalists, and others providing none. A few organizations, such as the Washington Post, New York Times, and the BBC, have offered explicit policy to journalists in the newsroom about social media practices. However, the vast majority of newsrooms in North America have not offered specific policy. This lack of guidance from management is addressed by Mendoza (2008), who when investigating whether reporters should befriend their sources on Facebook, concluded the guidelines are fuzzy.

> Reporters have not received much in the way of managerial guidance on this subject, and there tend to be no established guidelines. When Facebook does come up in newsrooms, the talks and seminars are about the ethics of using information gleaned from social media sites in news stories rather than possible conflicts of interest from reporters' own accounts. (p. 13)

Whether a reporter decides to share personal opinion on social media sites may relate in some way to the reporter's understanding of traditional journalistic norms, such as objectivity, which are to be addressed in the next sections of this review.

The Objectivity Norm: A Snapshot

The emergence of the objectivity norm in journalism practice is often tied to technological change, specifically to the adoption of the telegraph and newswire services. Hampton (2008) explains objectivity, as a norm, took root in the United States, when reporters were required by their newswire employers to provide impartial bias-free copy due to the fact

buyers were from different regions, and shared different political agendas. As a result, newswire copy was saleable to a much larger audience if the copy was free of regionalized reporter bias and opinion. Schudson (2001) criticizes the technology and employer-influence arguments, suggesting instead that the objectivity norm developed in direct response to a burgeoning public relations industry. He contends lobbyists and propagandists in the early part of the twentieth century were actively foisting politically driven agendas upon newspapers, to the point that reporters felt compelled to organize and push back. This organizing among newspaper reporters, argues Schudson, manifested with the development of one of the earliest written journalistic codes of practice, which was unveiled at the 1922-23 opening convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Citing Pratte's book on the history of newspaper editors in America, Schudson explains the code was multifaceted and included a declaration of impartiality that read, "News reports should be free from opinion or bias of any kind" (2001, p. 162). Schudson further argues "analytical fairness had no secure place until journalists as an occupational group developed loyalties more to their audiences and to themselves as an occupational community than to their publishers" (p.159). In writing about the genesis of the objectivity norm, Ward (2004) suggests a multitude of factors were at play:

> Objectivity is not the result of just one factor, such as the desire of newspaper owners for neutral copy or the impact of a new technology such as the telegraph. I explain objectivity as a rhetorical invention that emerged from a new journalism – audience relationship – the journalist as impartial mass informer. This new role grew out of a revolution in journalism practice and the nature of society in the nineteenth century. New technology, the commercialization of news, professionalism in journalism, fears about the manipulation of public opinion, and the advent of 'objective' society were among the many motivations for the construction of objectivity. (p. 33)

Regarding locale, many scholars (Ward, 2004; Schudson, 2001; Hampton, 2008) are in agreement that the history of the objectivity norm is rooted in North America. Some, however,

contend that journalism in Britain, while often portrayed as sharing the objectivity norm, has never fully adopted the norm. Hampton (2008) states, "Outside of such particular institutional contexts as Reuters and the BBC, British journalists throughout the twentieth century were less influenced by American-style objectivity than by such concepts as accuracy and truth, fair play, and independence" (p. 489). Hampton's work is a reminder that different norms operate in different locations, which is why it is important to note this study was developed in the context of journalism practice in North America.

Journalism scholars and historians continue to debate which factors have most heavily influenced the development of the objectivity norm in journalism. There is also debate about what form the norm should take in present day context. A variety of pundits, practitioners, and scholars are articulating new approaches to objectivity, some of which shall be reviewed in the following section.

Trying to Define Objectivity

There is much disagreement about what journalistic objectivity is, what it should look like, and the role it should play in the practice of journalism (Boeyink, 1992; Cunningham, 2003; MacKinnon, 2005; Pavlik, 2000; Ryan, 2001; Schudson, 2001; Ward, 2004, Ward, 2007b). Objectivity is defined by the OED as, "The quality or character of being objective; (in later use) *esp.* the ability to consider or represent facts, information, etc., without being influenced by personal feelings or opinions; impartiality; detachment" (Objectivity, n.d.). Cunningham (2003) argues if one were to ask 10 journalists to define objectivity, one could receive "ten different answers" (p. 26). Cunningham recounts how in 1996, the Society of Professional Journalists removed from its ethics code all references to *objectivity*, an acknowledgement of the confusion surrounding the norm. Despite the confusion, many ethics codes continue to reference the norm,

which is often associated with the promotion of fair coverage, whereby reporters are encouraged to check their assumptions and biases, whilst striving to remain objective. Schudson (2001) explains the objectivity norm in terms of the job of the journalist:

> The objectivity norm guides journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts. Objective reporting is supposed to be cool, rather than emotional, in tone. Objective reporting takes pains to represent fairly each leading side in a political controversy. According to the objectivity norm, the journalist's job consists of reporting something called 'news' without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way. (p. 150)

Schudson also distinguishes journalists who embrace the objectivity norm from those who take a more partisan view, stating, "Partisan journalists, like objective journalists, typically reject inaccuracy, lying and misinformation, but partisan journalists do not hesitate to present information from the perspective of a particular party or faction" (2001, p. 150).

Ryan's examination of objectivity (2001) offers an exhaustive yet useful explanation of the objectivity norm, drawing links between its practice in journalism and in science. Ryan reviews nine "philosophical constructs" underpinning objectivity, including accuracy, openness to new evidence, skepticism, and impartiality. He also refutes critics of the objectivity norm who usually come at the issue from a social constructivist view. The argument goes that people are incapable of viewing the world without their own biases and subjective lenses. Ryan articulates the position by offering Merrill's view which suggests, "Reporters and editors are conditioned by many factors (e.g., gender, circumstance, education), which, when coupled with the need to be selective in choosing stories and details for stories, make it impossible for reporters and editors to be objective" (2001, p. 6). Ryan goes on to challenge critics of objectivity by suggesting a much broader definition is required. He concludes with a call to various journalism communities such as public, standpoint, and existential, to "adopt a definition of objectivity that reflects most of their concerns" (2001, p. 18).

Redefining Objectivity

Some media scholars are articulating new approaches to ethics in journalism. In his study of journalism ethics, Boeyink (1992) recognized journalists often have trouble reconciling what is written in codes of practice, and what is happening in real life. This gap between practice and principle is problematic as ethical guidelines and codes are often filled with "lofty ethical principles" that are not always easy to apply as the reporter or newsroom grapples with specific situations (p. 107). Boeyink argues casuistry, "a case-centered methodology," provides a useful way to develop policy by carefully considering specific cases. Systematic and ongoing review of specific cases – such as should a reporter accept a coffee from a source – are used to develop ethical guidelines. Boeyink's explanation and support of casuistry in the development of journalism ethics provides another example of the struggle to redefine and operationalize the objectivity norm in the everyday practice of journalism.

Cunningham (2003) suggests journalists need to be encouraged: (a) to publically admit what they do is "far more subjective" than what the "aura of objectivity implies," and (b) to develop expertise to "sort through competing claims" by becoming masters in specific beats or specialties who are capable of informed analysis (p. 31). Cunningham argues the audience is better served when journalists become more transparent about the many subjective choices they make when crafting stories.

In his book, *The Invention of Journalism Ethics*, Ward (2004) theorizes a new model for journalism and objectivity. As referenced earlier, Ward argues that traditional objectivity, "with its rigid rules on all forms of editorializing applies to a narrow range of journalism – straight news reporting" (p. 310). Instead, he advocates what he terms pragmatic objectivity, which "concerns itself mainly with credibility – journalists' efforts to provide accurate and balanced

news and analysis to the public," (p. 310). Ward suggests it is time to dissolve the artificial distinction between opinion and news, and recognize that most reporting falls into a more interpretive rather than just-the-facts milieu. In an article for *Media*, he suggests it is time to stop thinking of reporters as "stenographers," but rather, "value-guided inquirers." He equates good journalism to "informed interpretations" which feature "multiple perspectives" that can be "tested by objective standards of fact, logic, and knowledge" (2007a, p. 28). Ward further outlines his theory of pragmatic objectivity by suggesting that while all journalists have "attachments and partialities" they still should not "violate the duty to report impartially and completely to the public" (2007b, p. 164). Ward argues that pragmatic objectivity allows journalists to bring to their stories a richer layer of context, analysis, interpretation, even "passion", all the while subjecting their work to "the restraint of objectivity to test their claims" (2004, p. 311).

Singer focuses her research (2007) on the normative roles of truth and transparency, examining how these norms operate in the world of the professional journalist, and the blogger. Her research suggests the codes of ethics for both groups are more similar than not. Both groups place value on both norms. However, Singer argues bloggers are more concerned with transparency – clearly articulating personal stands on issues before writing about them, while professional journalists, on the other hand, are more dedicated to the truth norm and rely on professionally prescribed methods to seek evidence for various claims. Singer's article also highlights the fluidity of the Web 2.0 environment in which professional journalists may be trying to reconcile "the rules" of their profession with the reality of sharing the power to publish with millions of non-professional communicators. The rules governing journalists are being reformulated, and Singer argues, may well become more clearly defined:

> The shifting media terrain offers not only a challenge but also an opportunity for journalists to strengthen their norms, to publicly articulate them – even to use them to differentiate themselves from those who do not follow them. Ultimately, as traditional distinctions between professional and popular communicators become less clear in this open, participatory, interconnected media environment, ‘‘professional’’ journalists will not be distinguished by the products they produce nor the processes through which they do so. Rather, their norms will become increasingly definitive. (2007, p. 90)

Singer’s recognition that Web 2.0 spaces may be changing communicative practice and principle serves to scaffold the final section of this literature review.

Privacy and Digital Space

Conceptions of privacy, and space, inform this study. For example, several study participants addressed the question of whether they considered their online activity public or private. Clay Shirky (2008) in *Here Comes Everybody* argues that just because people are expressing personal content on the internet does not mean they are trying to "broadcast" their views in the traditional sense. "Much posting," writes Shirky, "is not for the public" (p. 90). Shirky suggests rather that a lot of posting is done by friends, for friends. In writing about inconsequential posts, Shirky concludes “it’s easy to deride this sort of thing as self-absorbed publishing – why would anyone put such drivel out in public?” he asks, but then immediately answers, “They’re not talking to you. We misread these seemingly inane posts because we’re so unused to seeing written material in public that isn’t intended for us” (p. 85). Granted, while exchanges between individuals might not be intended for wider audiences, when such exchanges occur in public areas of social media sites, they can and do *go viral*. This happens when interactions are captured, archived, and repeatedly shared with much bigger audiences. An illustrative example occurred in 2009 when National Post technology reporter, David George-Cosh, engaged in an online altercation with a source. The embroiled exchange, which unfolded

on Twitter, resulted in the reporter tweeting the words, "Fuck you" to his source, a marketing spokesperson. The exchange was captured and archived by a Toronto media relations company (www.mediastyle.ca) and remains on that company's site. Following the exchange, the National Post (www.nationalpost.com) described the reporter's behaviour as unprofessional and issued an online apology that read, "We hold – and will continue to hold – all our reporters to a higher standard in how they address anyone, in any forum. We apologize for the reporter's conduct" (NP Editors Notes from the Newsroom, para. 3). The case raises important questions about the degree to which the reporter understood the digital space in which he was fighting with his source, whether the reporter and source would have engaged in a similar exchange had it taken place within the confines of an office, and what such an exchange would have looked like had it been carried out via e-mail. While such questions to difficult to answer, and obviously outside the scope of this study, they are asked as a means to draw attention to the significance of what impacts digital spaces have on communications, the subject of which Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) skillfully addresses in his award-winning book, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior.*

Theoretical Framework

Space and social behavior are major themes investigated by Meyrowitz (1985) who examines the impacts of electronic media, particularly television, on social behaviour. Drawing on sociologist Erving Goffman's theory of situationalism, as well as communications theorist Marshall McLuhan's conceptions of media effects, Meyrowitz fuses key ideas from both camps to produce a theory broader in scope and well suited for the study of electronic communications. He posits that once "widely used, electronic media may create new social environments that reshape behavior in ways that go beyond the specific products delivered" (p. 15). While

Meyrowitz's focus in 1985 was on the impacts of television, his framework offers a unique perspective with which to examine the effects of digital media such as SNS, on the behaviors, roles, and norms associated with journalism practice in 2010. What follows is a review of Meyrowitz's medium theory, including why he felt a new medium theory was needed, his main theoretical influences, a snapshot of a case study from his book, and an explanation of how his theory will be applied to this study.

Meyrowitz begins his analysis by criticizing the too narrow approach he believes many media scholars have taken with regard to media studies in the twentieth century. He suggests the fixation on message content associated with specific media has been especially problematic.

> Like the person perusing the television listings in a newspaper, those who focus only on media content are more concerned with what media bring into the home than with the possibility that new media transform the home and other social spheres into new social environments with new patterns of social action, feeling, and belief. (p. 15)

Meyrowitz takes issue, not only with media content analysts, but also with classic medium theorists. Many, he argues, have faltered because while they "describe how media reshape large cultural environments," they say little about how "media reshape specific social situations or everyday social behaviors." This critique led Meyrowitz to theorists who do in fact concentrate on social situations. But here too, he finds deficiencies. The "situationists," he argues, have spent too much time describing face-to-face interactions and "situational behaviors" without addressing "how and why situations evolve" (p. 33). Despite the criticisms of medium theorists and situationists, Meyrowitz insists both groups offer valuable perspectives to understanding media and behaviour.

Recognizing the usefulness of both medium theory and situationalism, Meyrowitz (1985) develops a theoretical framework that bridges the gap between media and situations. From the

medium theorists, he accepts that "changes in communication patterns are one very important contributant to social change" (p. 18). From the situationists, he accepts that people and groups that experience successful socialization do so because of the ability to recognize and navigate social situations. Meyrowitz's premise is firmly rooted in the belief "that a broad, seemingly chaotic spectrum of social change may be, in part, an orderly and comprehensible adjustment in behavior patterns to match the new social situations created by electronic media" (p. 9). Put another way, his theory proposes, "…once invented and used, media affect us by shaping the type of interactions that take place through them. We cannot play certain roles unless the stages for those roles exist" (p. 329). The reference to "stages" is significant because it flags a vital element of Meyrowitz's theory, which is linked to the influential twentieth-century writings of sociologist and situationist, Erving Goffman.

As explained by Meyrowitz, Goffman contends that people present themselves to different audiences in different ways, based on where they are and with whom they are with. Goffman's use of a dramaturgical metaphor views the communicator as an actor, and the space in which the actor is communicating, a theatrical stage. To illustrate Goffman's model, consider a journalist who has just learned that an international sporting figure has been committing adultery. The journalist, as actor, would speak differently about the sports star depending on where the journalist was situated, and with whom she was interacting. If talking to colleagues in the corner of the newsroom, she might call the figure, "a cheating dog." However, if discussing the transgressions with a source, such as a relationship expert, the journalist is likely to present a different more professional self by choosing more conservative words to describe what she knows about the disgraced athlete. The journalist's informal conversation with peers in the newsroom would, according to Goffman, be considered backstage or back region behavior, while

the journalist's more formal rehearsed interaction with the relationship expert would be considered onstage or front region behavior. One limitation of Goffman's theory is that it is place-bound. It considers human interaction in physical spaces. Meyrowitz adapts the theory to incorporate electronic spaces where a shared physical location is no longer a prerequisite for human interaction to occur. To illustrate Meyrowitz's interpretation of Goffman's theory, we can take the journalist scenario a step further. At the end of the day, she finds herself at home feeling somewhat disgusted by what she has uncovered about the cheating sports star. She creates a status update on her Facebook page that states cheaters should burn in hell. By sharing her status update, the journalist's opinion is instantaneously made available to her entire Facebook network, including long time friends and mere casual acquaintances. Some will respond with comment, seeking clarification about why she's blogging about cheaters. Others will read, and say nothing, but might still note that the journalist feels strongly about adultery. Her post is arguably an example of back region behaviour. For example, never during a live broadcast would she suggest anyone burn in hell. Nonetheless, this backstage comment has been revealed to her expansive Facebook network that includes far more people than her inner circle of closest friends and colleagues.

When thousands of professional journalists engage in active opinion-sharing within digitally mediated spaces, what happens? Meyrowitz provides scholars with a unique set of theoretical tools with which to examine such questions, especially concerning what happens to social behavior, rules, and norms. He states "electronic media may begin to blur previously distinct group identities by allowing people to 'escape' informationally from place-defined groups and by permitting outsiders to 'invade' many groups' territories without ever entering them" (p. 57). In other words, new media can alter where and how communication is taking

place, and thus may "rearrange a society's group identities by offering new ways of revealing or hiding the backstage behaviors of many groups" (p. 56). To illustrate the effects of revealing backstage behaviors, Meyrowitz shares a number of case studies with readers, one of which will be detailed here, in order to further demonstrate the application of his theory.

Meyrowitz offers a detailed summary of the various stages of socialization, stages that sociologists have traditionally linked to physical places. The first stages of a child's socialization are confined to informationally restricted places. Whether the kindergarten classroom, or the familial kitchen, access to certain types of information is tightly controlled. As a child passes from one stage to the next, these places expand in size and number, as does the correlating access to information. So where a 10-year-old daughter might be denied access to her mother's bathroom, which contains, among other things, birth control pills and books about sexuality, an 18-year-old daughter is no longer shielded from the physical place, or the social information associated with the two objects. Meyrowitz, in examining the impacts of television on social behavior, argues that electronic media "bypass the isolating characteristics of place and they thereby blur the differences between people at different stages of socialization and between people in different socialization processes" (p. 157). Television, he contends, provides children much more information than they traditionally had access to, and subsequently blurs the traditional distinctions between childhood and adulthood. One need not look far to see evidence of this blurring. An eight-year-old boy unabashedly asks his mother if she and his father *do it*. A 10-year-old girl, without reservation, declares to her family at the breakfast table that she's *into* the gothic lifestyle. Meyrowitz details several case studies about the impacts of television on social roles and norms. For example, he argues that television has served to expose and demystify political hierarchies by bringing back region interactions and behaviors of politicians

into public view. Over time, Meyrowitz contends the public has come to view politicians differently because the public has gained access to information that was traditionally out of reach.

Relative to this study, Meyrowitz's framework is useful in generating insights about the effects of digital spaces, such as SNS, on the behaviours and roles of professional journalists. He argues that electronic media have the power to reshape everyday social behaviours. This viewpoint facilitates the exploration of the possible effects of journalists' engagement with social media. For example, if professional journalists are routinely revealing to the public their backstage behaviors through their engagement with SNS, Meyrowitz's theory would contend the group is likely losing both power and status. Where information is power, former information gatekeepers lose their monopolies when new groups have new views into the inner workings of the upper echelons of social, political and information hierarchies. With many scholars writing about the transformative effects of web 2.0 technologies on journalism, Meyrowitz offers a compelling way to think about the impacts of the digital space itself. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, are viewed as places that shape potentially new types of interactions between the professional journalist, the employer, the citizen journalist, and of course, their many audiences.

More than 10 years after writing *No Sense of Place*, Meyrowitz continues to call for a more holistic approach to studying the effects of media technologies. The ways in which Meyrowitz's more recent writings (2008) informed the design of this study, particularly the interview script, are outlined within the methodology section, however it is important to note that his recent writings informed the entire study. Meyrowitz (2008) encourages media scholars to embrace multiple theoretical lenses in their investigations. In addition to medium theory,

Meyrowitz cites the many benefits of employing the uses and gratifications approach, as well as the critical tradition, both which were used to help design interview questions and frame the study discussion. Just as scholars in the uses and gratifications arena are interested in what individuals *do* with media, scholars in the critical tradition ask important questions about the effects of computer-mediated communications on the balance of power in society. And so, guided by Meyrowitz's theoretical approach, the study attempted to operationalize a number of perspectives, both in the study design, and the subsequent discussion.

Methodology

Interpretive Description

The desire to make a contribution to journalism practice is what drew me to scholar Sally Thorne's methodological framework, Interpretive Description, the tenets of which are captured in her recent book of the same name (Thorne, 2008). Developed out of the applied research realm, Interpretive Description "exists as a coherent methodological framework within which a fairly wide range of options or design decisions can be enacted and justified" (p. 75). Interpretive Description hinges on two important sources, the first being an actual "practice goal" and the second being "an understanding of what we do and don't know on the basis of the available empirical evidence …." (p. 35). Although much of Thorne's methodology is aimed at nursing scholars in health sciences, it still offered a good fit for this study because of its ability to give me the opportunity to strategize and design a study for "professionally motivated knowledge generation" (p. 27) within the practice of journalism.

A possible limitation of Interpretive Description was that it did not cite the generation and advancement of theory as a main goal. Thorne (2008) describes this framework as

'atheoretical' (p. 68) and subsequently urges the researcher to avoid going into the study attempting to find and note observations that confirm a theoretical perspective. Because of my interest in viewing study results through Meyrowitz's theoretical lens, I felt it important to examine an even closer reading of Thorne, after which I concluded she neither eschewed nor dismissed all theoretical influences. Instead, she asked the researcher to handle such influences with great care, which led me to believe that her methodological approach could dovetail quite well with both Meyrowitz's theory, and his holistic way of viewing communications phenomena from a variety of theoretical positions. Thorne made specific reference to Sandelowski (2000), who suggested there is nothing wrong with borrowing "hues, tones and textures" from other qualitative methods, such as grounded theory or narrative studies (p. 337). I therefore decided to structure the study in a way that allowed me to, as suggested by Meyrowitz, leave the door open to a theoretical reading of the findings. A more detailed overview of Meyrowitz's holistic approach to media studies is found later in this section. Upon much reflection and study, I decided to use Interpretive Description (Thorne, 2008) as my methodological framework. Aspects of this framework will be elaborated upon in upcoming sections. However, it is important for me to first briefly explain the genesis of this study, and convey as transparently as possible, my relationship to this project.

Role of the Researcher

As a working journalist, journalism educator, and user of Facebook and Twitter, I have observed with growing interest how journalists have engaged with various social media platforms. Some individuals, who are part of my Facebook network, have posted provocative statements about issues or people in the news. For example, one news reporter posted negative comments about the political party he was covering during an election. At the time, I wanted to

know: (a) what prompted him to make these comments on Facebook (b) whether his employer and sources reacted to the comments (c) whether he considered the comments private or public, and (d whether he worried in hindsight that such commentary might affect his credibility.

Another Facebook development that caught my attention involved the creation of a Facebook group called *Sluts and Vermin* (www.facebook.com). The group was open to journalists interested in tracking and pondering the "fate of former press baron Conrad Black" who at the time was awaiting trial on charges of fraud and obstruction. I joined the group, as did dozens of other mostly Canadian journalists. The *sluts and vermin* reference was a poke at Black's wife who reportedly referred to journalists covering her husband's trial as, "vermin" and a particular female journalist, "a slut" (Bone, 2007, para. 2). I immediately questioned my decision to join the group because I felt my membership could raise questions about own objectivity or neutrality should I one day have to cover a story involving the Blacks. This incident left me in the difficult situation of having to reconcile my own decision with my belief that daily news reporters run substantial risks by publicly commenting on issues and people in the news. While my position could be viewed as less than objective, I made a concerted effort throughout this study to approach research with "eyes open" and the assumption that I knew nothing about the issue at hand (Asselin, 2003, p. 100). Qualitative researchers Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle (2009) advise the researcher to adopt neither an insider nor outsider position, but rather to occupy "the space between" (p. 54). As for my opinions and values, Singleton Jr. and Straits (2005) suggest the requirement for value-free ideology "is no longer tenable" because of the recognition that values do in fact influence the research process, and that surrendering or silencing ones' values has potential to place value control in the hands of others, such as funders (p. 532). While aware of my own biases, I was also committed to bracketing my views and

assumptions as I designed and implemented this study, an approach similar to one I had applied many times before in my work as an investigative journalist. The overarching goal with this study was to expand understanding of how journalists were engaging with social media. Such understanding, it was hoped, would contribute to a more informed conversation about how journalism norms, such as objectivity and transparency, were being interpreted in the context of the cyber-information age in which we live.

Data Collection Overview

To explore my research questions, it was essential for me to have access to journalists who use SNS, such as Facebook. I conducted six face-to-face and two telephone interviews, using professional audio recording equipment, with individuals who were part of my own Facebook network of contacts. Integral to the study as well was for me to gain access to documents that revealed how traditional industry norms were being articulated by media organizations. Therefore, I reviewed a variety of codes of ethics in use by Canadian media organizations. I also reviewed numerous Facebook postings and profiles, including those of participants in this study.

Sampling. I conducted a theoretical sampling of journalists which Thorne (2008) contended was especially well suited to Interpretive Description. Theoretical sampling is a grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) where sampling decisions are made as a result of developing theoretical variations emerging from data analysis through the course of the study. Silverman (2005) defines three features of theoretical sampling: (a) choosing cases that relate to the study, (b) choosing ‘deviant’ cases as a means to check emerging themes, and (c) changing the sample size as a result of the researcher’s ongoing interaction with data through the course of the study.

Choosing cases. My initial sample was drawn from 52 journalists whom I had access to via my own Facebook network. Of those, 22 worked primarily as journalists working in a daily news environment. They represented a variety of media organizations, and markets, including national, regional, and local. Three of eight participants worked as radio journalists, two worked for major market television news programs, one worked for a regional television program, one worked for a large Canadian daily newspaper, and one worked for a community newspaper. Convenience sampling was employed as I had access to most of these individuals through my own Facebook network, and therefore used the site to send messages to possible participants (Appendix A: Contact Letters). I also employed snowball sampling, which involved asking participants to recommend other potential participants for the study. This resulted in the addition of one participant whom I had not known prior to the study. While critics might consider me too close to the majority of study participants, I would argue this closeness increased participants' willingness to talk openly with me about their online opinion-sharing practices.

Besides choosing participants from a variety of media markets, I also chose participants to reflect a range of age, experience, and gender. Two participants were in their twenties, one was in his mid-fifties, while the remaining four were in their thirties. Industry experience was also broad ranging. Two participants had less than five years experience. Two had five to 10 years experience, two had 11 to 15 years experience, and two had more than 15 years experience. In terms of gender, three participants were men, and five were women. I anticipated certain themes and patterns might arise from my initial sampling. Recognizing the limitations of an eight-person sample, I informally checked on themes and patterns as they emerged through the six-week course of interviews. Concerned the data might contain accounts too similar, I remained open to the idea of searching out additional participants, or "deviant" cases to mitigate

my initial case selection (Thorne, 2008; Silverman, 2005). At the same time, I recognized there was no standard with which to compare. In the end, I felt the sample selection and size were both adequate and served well the purposes of this study.

Validity checks. As indicated, my sampling, which included interviews with eight participants, raised concerns about credibility, sample size, as well as representativeness of sample. However, academic researchers (Creswell, 2009; Thorne, 2008; Silverman, 2005; Singleton, Jr. & Straits, 2005) present a multitude of strategies to mitigate these issues. While I had already operationalized some of these strategies, such as committing to finding cases that represented discrepant information and themes, I also implemented other validity checks, such as providing study participants with an opportunity to review my first-draft findings section so that they could offer comment. In doing so, four of eight participants responded, indicating their stories and insights had been interpreted accurately, and fairly. I also took guidance from Thorne (2008) who suggests, "There is no fundamentally right way to sample, but rather an essential requirement that we conduct our study on the basis of some transparent sampling logic and report on our findings in keeping with what we understand our sample to represent" (p. 89).

Interviewing

As previously stated, I used semi-structured interviews that were based on approximately 20 primary questions with journalists who were also Facebook users (Appendix B: Haney Interview Script). Six interviews were done with journalists face-to-face, and two by telephone. The interviews ranged in length from twenty minutes to 41 minutes, with five of eight interviews exceeding 30 minutes. Silverman (2005) outlines the merits of interviews, including the fact they can be done relatively quickly and provide an efficient means to review people's accounts, attitudes and experiences. However, Silverman also criticizes this popular method and suggests

researchers "need to look twice at the unthinking identification of the open-ended interview as the 'gold standard' of qualitative research" (p. 240). Silverman cautions what participants *say* is not necessarily what participants *mean* or *do* (my emphasis). Thorne (2008) cautions about the interview, as does Nunkoosing (2005) who identifies potential problems, including power differentials between researchers and participants, authenticity of participant accounts, and issues of consent (2005, p. 698). However, Thorne (2008) still accepts the interview as "a useful core for the development of knowledge" (p. 79), especially when the researcher commits to giving the participant every opportunity to articulate her knowing without the researcher's passion or values getting in the way. In addition to interviews, focus groups and surveys were also considered for this study. I decided focus groups might not fit well with my goal to generate rich description of factors influencing individual journalists' online opinion-sharing practices. I ruled out survey research for similar reasons. I chose interviews because of my comfort level and skill with interviewing, as well as my desire for thick rich description, which is essential in laying the groundwork for a deeper understanding of journalists' engagement with social media.

Participant Risks and Benefits

I was diligent about establishing interview times and conditions that were convenient, comfortable and agreed upon by participants. I promised anonymity to all participants, and in some cases changed identifying small details that might have otherwise identified participants to readers of the study. At various points in the findings, participants' industry experience were indicated as follows: Those with less than five years experience were sometimes referred to as "least experienced" while those with five to 15 years of industry experience were referred to as "more experienced." Participants with more than 15 years experience were referred to as "most

experienced." Pseudonyms, outlined in the following illustration, were also employed for this study, as both a way to infer gender, and to aid readability.

Least experienced	More experienced	Most Experienced
Serena (20s) Radio Fiona (20s) Newspaper	Helen (30s) TV Libby (30s) Newspaper Craig (30s) Radio Yolanda (20s) Television	Ross (30s) Radio Samuel (50s) Radio

Figure 1. Participant backgrounds, ages, and gender.

To further protect participants, I also offered to sever my Facebook connections with any who worried their online connection to me could potentially identify them as a participant in my study. I also ensured participants understood they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point during the process, without having to provide an explanation to me as to why they wanted out. I further assured participants that my goal was to treat their answers as objectively and respectfully as possible. Lastly, participants were encouraged to at least consider keeping their involvement with this study confidential so as to ensure they would face no repercussions or judgments by colleagues or employers (See Appendix C: Consent letter). In order to clearly approximate interview tone and content, I utilized a professional audio recorder during all interviews. I stored, in a secure place, all primary and back-up copies of all digital recordings and subsequent transcripts. I also deleted any references to participants' full names in transcripts.

Data Analysis

Patton (1990) reminds the researcher, "The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data" (p. 432). Because naturalistic inquiry is more fluid than measurement-driven experimental design, it does not delineate so clearly between data collection and analysis. In this project, ideas and themes arose along various points of the study's trajectory. Adopting Patton's advice, I let those emergent ideas and themes lead me to "follow"

where the data led, and then in later stages, attempted to "bring closure by moving toward confirmatory data collection" that backed up or refuted earlier identified patterns (p. 436). I also borrowed from grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in my effort to seek common themes through the continual comparing of my data results. While I had considered using grounded theory as my overarching research methodology, my reading of Thorne (2008) suggested it would be difficult and impractical for me to wholly adopt all of grounded theory's associated "rule structures", especially given my interest in generating practice-based knowledge. My decision to use Thorne's interpretive description methodology better positioned me to further develop questions and ideas more suited to theory building.

Theorizing and Methodology

This investigation was further guided by more recent work from Meyrowitz (2008), which encourages media scholars to draw on pluralistic analyses of media. His essay, *Power, Pleasure, Patterns: Intersecting Narratives of Media Influence,* is outlined here, rather than the literature review, because of the work's influence on the development of this study, and in particular, the interview script for this project. Meyrowitz (2008) encourages media scholars who are examining communications phenomenon to draw on a pragmatic blend of perspectives, including but not limited to: (a) the critical tradition or what Meyrowitz coins "the power and resistance narrative," (b) the uses and gratifications approach or "the purposes and pleasures narrative", and (c) Meyrowitz's medium theory, or "the structure and patterns narrative" outlined earlier in this paper (p. 660). Meyrowitz suggests when asking questions of, "What media do to us or for us?" scholars from each camp typically offer isolated analyses that ignore, attack, or dismiss interpretations from other camps. He argues for a more holistic theoretical approach:

> Ultimately, employing a more complete toolkit for media analysis would enhance the credibility and the goals of all research camps. Undesirable traits that have resulted from inbreeding within isolated camps – such as blind spots, methodological provincialism, obscure vocabularies, and exaggerated claims – could be minimized. The same argument for drawing on multiple epistemologies and methodologies could and should be applied to other nonmedia content areas within the broad domain of human communication. (p. 661)

This broader approach invited a correspondingly broader set of questions. The uses and gratifications approach was especially useful in developing several interview questions aimed at understanding journalists' choices relative to their social media activities. From this perspective, social media are seen as vehicles that people actively choose as a platform to support their "personal and social needs and desires" (Meyrowitz, 2008, p. 642). Meyrowitz continued, "…humans have the remarkable ability to think about and describe how and why they make the choices they make" (p. 649). Because participants in this study were viewed as "conscious and goal-oriented users of media" (p. 650), questions were designed to gain a deeper understanding of how journalists felt their wants and needs were being met through their use of SNS, such as Facebook. This perspective further allowed for the development of questions meant to increase understanding of why participants valued specific social media functions and applications over others. Like Meyrowitz, Ruggiero (2000) views the uses and gratifications approach as a powerful way to examine new communications technologies. And like Meyrowitz, Ruggiero also embraces a holistic approach that suggests, "to truly understand new media technologies, critical scholars should learn to embrace multiple levels of analysis" (p. 25). With Flaherty, Pearce, and Rubin (1998) concluding motives for computer-mediated communication ranged from informational to interpersonal, it was felt employing the uses and gratifications approach was necessary to securing a foundational understanding of journalists' choices and motives, before turning to important questions of implications and impacts.

Explored earlier, Meyrowitz's medium theory also informed the development of this study. Meyrowitz (1985) contends that the "widespread use of a medium may stimulate different modes of thought" (p. 654). Medium theory also contends that changes in media "can encourage new forms of content and interaction" (p. 654). This perspective informed the development of questions about impacts of social media practices on social roles and situations. For example, querying participants about whom they were interacting with in online spaces, opened the door to further questions about the meanings participants attached to these various online social interactions. For example, most participants were asked about their Facebook group affiliations and how they viewed those affiliations. Meyrowitz's theory also informed questions that probed participants' understandings of public versus private activities and spaces. Gaining understanding of whether journalists viewed certain online spaces as public or private was pivotal to examining the impacts of digital spaces on social behavior.

To a lesser degree, the critical tradition informed this study. This tradition typically views media institutions as holding much power, and as giving a disproportionate amount of coverage to those in society who already hold the power (Manoff & Schudson, 1987). The critical perspective helped inform some questions about how professional journalists reconciled their personal use of social media with journalistic norms and employer expectations. Other questions informed by this tradition attempted to take into account that Web 2.0 technologies may have potential to afford everyone the power to not only express opinion, but publish it for broader audiences. Some embrace this power-sharing shift and suggest good things may come from web-enabled collaboration and democratization (Shirky, 2008; Weinberger, 2007). Others, such as Keen (2007), argue the erosion of professional information gatekeepers' power will only bring harm to society. The critical tradition offered a valuable means with which to examine the

evolving journalism model which, for good or bad, is creating more bi-directional conversations between media organizations and their publics (Pavlik, 2000; Sweetser, Porter, Chung, & Kim, 2008). Participants in the study were invited to share and critique their employers' social media policies or directives. Participants were also asked about the degree to which institutional norms, such as journalistic objectivity, should carry into their personal lives. This tradition further influenced several questions that explored the ease with which Facebook allowed journalists quick access to both sources and audience members.

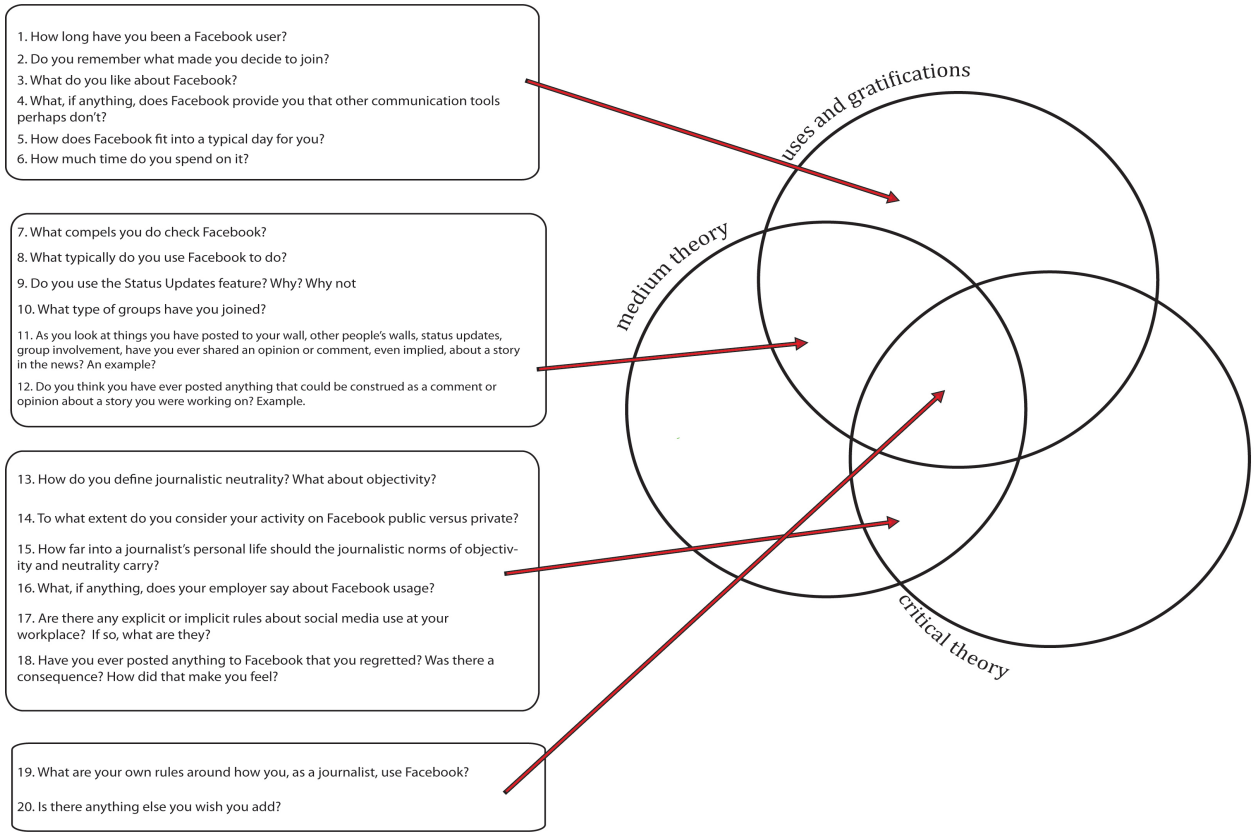

Figure 2. Interview questions informed by three theoretical lenses

The preceding figure illustrates an approximation of how interview questions were informed by Meyrowitz's approach to studying communication phenomenon from various theoretical perspectives. As illustrated, while some questions drew on one perspective, others were influenced by two or more perspectives. The crafting of some questions in the interview script was informed by all three theoretical perspectives. For example, the question – *What are your own rules around how you, as a journalist, use Facebook?* – was designed to: (a) Reveal any tensions or frictions between self-determined rules by employees, and prescribed rules by employers, on social media engagement (critical tradition), (b) Discover how participants chose to engage with social media (uses and gratifications), and, (c) Gain understanding about how participants governed their activity in social media spaces based on their conceptions of those spaces (medium theory). In a broader sense, Meyrowitz's three-part framework offers the media scholar more "textured and nuanced understandings of media through multiple root narratives" (2008, p. 661).

Findings

Interviews for this study were conducted over a six-week period in late 2009. A professional transcriber prepared verbatim transcripts within several days of the completion of each interview. I reviewed transcripts in their entirety several times early in the process, taking care to jot down questions and notes in the margins about what I felt I might be seeing in terms of emergent similarities and differences within the data set. Thorne's analytical framework discouraged me from several practices, such as prematurely applying an elaborate coding framework, paying too much attention to colorful anecdotes, or downplaying seemingly mundane quotes or observations. As a formally trained journalist, this was no small feat. Therefore, I spent much time with the transcripts in hand, reviewing the data, and scrawling

notes in the margins that ranged from big bold asterisks to specific questions, such as, “Why do employers seem to have the most to say about social media policy when their own corporations are being discussed in online spaces?” Throughout this period, I avoided trying to force elements into some kind of preconceived structural arc, instead opting for a fairly intensive but free-flowing period of developing “analytic memos” (Thorne, 2008, p. 153). Eventually, I felt I was in a position to re-review the entire data set with help from qualitative data analysis software, WEFT QDA. This process allowed me to carefully review the transcripts by highlighting sections, and importing them into categories created and assigned by me throughout this particular process. The software also supported multiple coding. This meant I could easily copy and paste specific data elements into one or more categories, which helped me in some cases see connections between data elements, which earlier in the process had appeared disparate. After this categorizing exercise, which took place over the course of a couple of weeks in early 2010, I reviewed, again, all transcripts in whole paper form, continuing my search for and refinement of themes, and then compared them to the themes associated with the more condensed transcripts associated with the WEFT software categorizing process. It should be noted that I elected not to use the advanced query or search functions associated with the WEFT software. These advanced functions support statistical analysis of data. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interview questions, as well as the small sample size, there seemed little value in a statistical rendering of the data. Rather, I relied on this software as another way to view data, identify themes, and track personal reflections and insights along the way.

The following section of the paper represents a distillation of what was uncovered during semi-structured interviews with eight Canadian journalists who were also users of Facebook. The question protocol was designed in such a way to gain insights into the following areas: (a)

reasons for joining Facebook (b) Facebook usage by study participants, and (c) Social media practices and principles.

Reasons for Joining Facebook

Data revealed the majority of study participants joined Facebook for reasons mirroring why most people presumably join SNS – friends or family members invited them to join their networks. Most said they recognized that accepting such invitations would give them access to desired content, ranging from online photo albums of relatives to funny quips on friends' walls. Ross said he chose to "jump onboard" because it seemed "really cool" but added he did not, at the time, think of Facebook as a professional tool but rather a distraction that was more "social than work." Similarly, the majority of participants said they did not initially view Facebook as a journalistic tool that could aid in the tracking of sources and story developments. Serena, a less experienced journalist in the study, discussed her decision to join in terms of something she called, "FOMO - the fear of missing out."

> [Y]ou want to make sure that you didn't miss anything, like, did somebody get engaged or did somebody post, you know, really fun pictures from the weekend, from a party they went to or … do something really cool that you can see on their status updates or are there really interesting pictures on there? You just want to check in … it's nosy really.

Once participants revealed why they joined Facebook, interview questions turned to the subject how they engaged with this social media site.

Facebook Usage by Study Participants

All study participants were asked about their engagement with Facebook. Questions were designed in a way to better grasp how journalists used Facebook, why they used it, including identification of benefits and concerns. While broad ranging, participant data concerning how they engaged with Facebook was reviewed and eventually categorized under the following

headings: (a) time spent on Facebook (b) ease of use (c) sharing of self, and, (d) monitoring of others. Even though the issue of Facebook being used as journalistic tool could have been discussed within the context of some of these aforementioned headings, a fifth category, (e) Facebook as a journalistic tool, was created to address the volume of content that dealt with participants using social media, such as Facebook, to *do* journalism.

Time spent on Facebook. Participants reported markedly different levels of engagement, particularly when asked to quantify time spent on the site. Participants with least industry experience reported spending the most time on Facebook. Television reporter Yolanda was most *connected* to Facebook. Describing her engagement as "constant," she estimated spending a few hours each day checking and using her Facebook account. Community newspaper reporter Fiona also reported she continually checked Facebook, many times each day. Radio journalist Serena also reported high level of involvement. Each of these participants, all in their twenties, described their Facebook usage as an important part of their work and social routines, with Yolanda describing her involvement as follows:

> I'll use it for personal reasons just, you know, to, to talk with friends. I'll use it to track down stories; I'll use it to do research for stories; I'll do it just to pass the time, you know. If … I need a quick little break … I always joke that, you know, a lot, we have a lot of smokers in our newsroom; 'Well I'll have my little Facebook break while you guys have a cigarette.'

Other participants reported checking the social media site daily, though a majority of participants added daily time spent on Facebook activities had decreased since first joining. Radio journalists Samuel and Craig, reported spending the least amount of time spent on Facebook. Furthermore, both viewed Facebook as neither a must-have journalistic tool nor important to their lives outside of work. Thirty-year news reporter Samuel summed up his lack of engagement in terms of having rejected what he called, "the Facebook lifestyle." Similarly, Craig remarked the social

media platform was a not a good fit for him, saying he preferred keeping his communication with contacts in his networks more direct.

Ease of use. Seven of eight participants said they found Facebook easy to use, fun, intuitive, and not as time-consuming as regular e-mail. At least three participants suggested communicating on SNS offered a less intense, less confrontational means to engage with people. All participants reported enjoying being able to easily view friends and family's photos. Several also reported they liked Facebook's easy-to-use applications that helped with the organizing of social gatherings, such as parties, and sporting events.

Sharing of self. Participants reported sharing of self on Facebook took many forms, including but not limited to the sharing of personal comments, photos, videos, links to websites of interest, and Facebook group affiliations. All participants articulated if and or when they shared personal views on Facebook, they risked violating traditional journalism norms such as objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality. The ways in which participants viewed and navigated these norms relative to social media usage will be addressed later in the findings section. This section aims to address sharing of self in a personal context, as opposed to professional one. The majority of participants spoke enthusiastically about Facebook giving them the opportunity to promote or share many things about themselves with their friends and colleagues. Participant Fiona equated her posting of online personal quips to being able to put a version of her *real* self into her digitally connected community.

> I like to put funny things in there, and, and it's great because you, people comment and it's like having a conversation with your friends but not actually having to be sitting in the same room and your, it's sharing like the same joke or… I think of it as sort of like a presence, like my Facebook account is me in the electronic world, like on the Internet.

The majority of participants uploaded some personal information or content that gave their network a closer view of their day-to-day personal and or professional lives. Ross recalled a specific status update in which he described an extremely busy workday in which he had flown to many locations across the country. He regarded the post as, "a *show-offy* thing" – a way of saying, "Look what I'm doing." Participant Serena, whose job sometimes involved interacting with famous people, reported occasionally sharing her brushes with fame with her Facebook contacts. Referring to a famous political couple that visited her news organization, Serena wrote about her exchange with them in a status update because Serena said wanted to share her experience with friends and family.

In addition to updates about goings-on at work, the majority of participants indicated they also derived some value in sharing news of personal well-being with their Facebook contacts. However, all said they had concerns about too much personal information being shared with others, with three participants citing instances of their personal photos being circulated on Facebook without their express permission.

Monitoring of others. All participants indicated they used Facebook in a "social" context to monitor their friends' and relatives' activities. For example, all described enjoying looking at their contacts' photo albums. The majority of participants also indicated they used Facebook in a "professional" context, for example to gain information for stories. This "professional" monitoring of others will be addressed later in the findings section.

Whether professional or social in nature, most monitoring was described by participants as relating to their curiosity about others. All described Facebook as providing a useful means to monitor people, especially those in extended networks of whom they would otherwise have lost track. Helen viewed this ability to connect with people in extended networks as providing an

opportunity to form unique friendships. To explain, she outlined that some of her Facebook contacts had died recently, and while she had not known them extremely well, she looked back at her Facebook involvement with these people, and appreciated being able to know *something* of their lives, even though this knowing had taken place primarily online.

While participants saw value in monitoring others, several expressed they did not like how often their contacts posted dull, inconsequential information - what many described as, "minutiae."

Facebook as journalistic tool. Six of eight participants said they were enthusiastic about Facebook's potential as a journalistic tool. These same participants viewed Facebook and other social media, including Twitter, as necessary tools of the journalistic trade, though some participants felt social media tools worked better for some stories and beats, than others. What follows are some of the ways which participants in this study used Facebook and other social media sites to carry out their professional work.

Story idea generation. Two of eight study participants said they regularly used Facebook to generate story ideas. Generating ideas usually involved monitoring activity and updates posted by Facebook friends. Yolanda said she regularly checked the *newsfeed* feature, which provides Facebook users with a current listing of updates from people in their networks. She described how using this function resulted in a story idea.

> … a friend of mine posted something about a survival competition that his friend was involved in and, you know, I, I took a look at it and e-mailed it to our sports department and they were doing a story on it, you know, twenty minutes later, so it just allows you to kind of see what's going on…

Tracking sources. The majority of participants recognized Facebook as a "powerful tool" for researching stories, and tracking potential sources. Several participants suggested Facebook was especially useful when trying to find people during breaking news stories. Helen

recalled searching for people who lived in a distant location where a shooting had taken place. Using her Facebook status update, she wrote a couple of sentences, telling her Facebook friends what had happened, and then asked anyone who knew people residing near the shooting location to message her with information. Two of her more than 400 contacts replied with helpful suggestions. She discussed the usefulness of Facebook in these terms: "You know, we always say, 'What did we do before Google?' You know? But it's true; it's getting to the point where, what did we do before Facebook?

Facebook was described by half of the study participants as being especially useful to reporters covering "breaking news." For example, journalists in this study reported that when someone died, they or colleagues routinely searched for that person in Facebook, and sometimes made contact with the deceased person's Facebook friends in an effort to gain quotes, interview clips, photos, or background research. Yolanda recalled her newsroom reaching the family of a crime victim before the police had made contact. Referencing the social media site's capacity to quickly connect people, she commented, "it's pretty powerful … startlingly so sometimes." Several participants reported Facebook was a useful way for their newsrooms to follow local gang activity, because of some gang members' active participation on Facebook pages. Other uses included tracking on-going stories. For example, two participants referred to the case of a missing person. Updates about the missing person, search locations, and search times, were provided through a Facebook group set up and administered by friends and family of the missing person. One study participant who followed the story described the Facebook group as providing far more reliable and useful information than anything that had come through official police channels.

Participants further reported that Facebook provided them with excellent opportunities to gain photos and videos of people in the news. One participant recounted a case in which the sibling of a child who died of flu complications had set up a Facebook group which featured "a whole bunch of photos" of the dead child, some of which the participant's media outlet used in its coverage of the story.

Half of the participants also reported using Facebook as a means to "call out" to contacts when they needed a certain type of source for a particular story. This technique was used when participants needed to find unique individuals impacted by stories already in progress. An example included a health reporter asking Facebook contacts for help in finding a person with a particular disease that was being reported on.

Despite being viewed by most participants as a powerful journalistic tool, four of eight participants reported rarely using Facebook to track sources for stories. These participants, whose industry experience ranged from 10 to 30 years, cited concerns such as journalists relying too heavily on Facebook to do their jobs, as well as credibility and reliability issues of online sources. Craig and Samuel said they were concerned about inexperienced journalists who rushed to deadline with content from Facebook that had not been verified. "The farther away you get from looking someone in the eyes," said Craig, "the less reliable the information probably is. So I don't know if I have hard and fast rules, I just, I'm always very wary …"

Other uses in the professional context. A minority of study participants identified other ways they were using Facebook for their professional work, including promoting their stories, monitoring the competition, and gauging public reaction to their stories. Three participants indicated they had used Facebook and or Twitter to promote stories by writing headlines for upcoming stories, or providing direct url links to completed stories. Fiona, a newspaper reporter

with less than five years experience, said social media freed her paper from the restraints of weekly publishing by being able to "actually turn around and get information out to people at any time whatsoever…" Libby stated she worried, however, that some journalists were spending too much time promoting their stories on social media sites, instead of actually doing them.

> … to do enough interviews to, to do a good story and to spend enough time writing it. Like that's a full-time job in itself … [some journalists are] spending too much time on things like mainly Twitter actually but yeah, you're Facebook updating constantly … these things are, are wasting your time.

Two participants said they also monitored other journalists' Facebook and Twitter pages to glean information about what competitors' were working on. Fiona complained that another reporter from another media outlet once "scooped" her story because of a "tip" that was on Fiona's Facebook wall. She said the incident made her more careful to configure her privacy settings so that potential "lurkers" could be stopped from seeing certain content.

Social Media Practices and Principles

All study participants, in discussing their own personal social media sites, indicated they generally tried to keep their opinions about public issues and newsmakers muted to some degree. However, as participants discussed specific posts, half provided examples where they had offered personal commentary about an issue or person in the news. When asked to explain their "personal rules" around social media engagement, some of the journalists offered detailed and definitive explanations, while others in the study expressed less certainty about such rules. Participants were also asked about the extent to which their employers offered advice and or policies on social media usage. Most participants said no formal policies were in place. Finally, the study also explored with participants how they defined journalistic objectivity, and what, if any impact this norm, and others, such as neutrality and impartiality, were having on their social

media practices. What follows is a summary of: (a) participant views on employer policy regarding social media usage, (b) participant discussion of self-defined principles and practice, and (c) social media practices fit with traditional journalism norms.

Messages and policies from employers. The majority of journalists interviewed for this study reported their employers were offering almost no formalized guidelines or policy on the subject of social media usage by journalists. For most, employer direction came in the form of memos or e-mails warning journalists to keep opinions about issues in the news off their personal social media pages. The majority of participants viewed their employers as lacking in the area of social media policy. Ross, an experienced television journalist with a national news organization, described his employer as playing catch up:

> They're like - what are our employees doing? Are you serious? We had a situation where a producer's been twittering and nobody in management knew. They watched some of the tweets and they were like, "That's, you can't say that, you can't do that," and they kind of freaked, so … I would call it the correction from management's side, you know, which I, I don't think is an unhealthy thing.

When asked whether employers were offering specific advice or direction to journalists about social media practices, most participant answers suggested there was little specific direction, as indicated by comments from five different participants.

- "My employer has never said anything about it…"
- "I remember being warned in an e-mail just to be careful, but no, nothing specific."
- "There ha[ve] been memos sent out about its use journalistically but as far as personal use, I think it just falls under your personal conduct policy … you can't do anything to disparage the reputation of the [employer]."
- "My editor thinks [social media] is stupid."
- "We have no memo; we have no policy, nothing."

Three participants commented that their employers had been more specific with advice relating to social media use. Samuel said management was actively encouraging journalists to join Facebook in order to gain access to potential newsmakers' accounts. Helen indicated her employer sent a detailed memo to employees about social media usage. The memo had been sent to employees shortly after the employer had experienced widely publicized financial difficulties. Helen indicated up until that point, many staff had been commenting on their Facebook and Twitter pages about the corporation's economic problems. She said the memo asked employees to keep their opinions about the company's money troubles off their personal social media pages, and instead, "in the family." A third participant, Ross, said he thought a policy on social media existed somewhere in his organization, but he was not certain of its whereabouts or contents. He added, however, that his organization had become increasingly cautious, informally telling reporters to "keep their heads down" and "stay out of trouble." This same participant was the only journalist in this study who reported having had to remove content from his social media pages because of a request from a manager. His tweet included a comment about a news story, which his supervisor insisted was "opinion." He was told to "take it down." The journalist described the manager's response to his tweet as an "overreaction" but decided to remove the tweet because he did not have "the energy to fight."

Finally, the majority of participants in this study struggled to provide definitive explanations of their company's positions or policies on social media use by journalists. Reasons ranged from there being no clear policy, to participants not having taken the time to read existing guidelines or policies.

Self-defined principles and practice. All participants in this study indicated they joined Facebook for "social" reasons such as wanting to connect with friends and or relatives. The

majority of participants also indicated it was not long before they were also using their Facebook accounts for professional reasons. Participant Yolanda called her Facebook dealings "strange" because she felt she was "merging" her professional and personal life in one online space. Other participants discussed this merging of personal and professional activity as posing special challenges. All were asked how they dealt with these challenges – specifically whether they had developed any personal rules or guidelines to govern their own social media use relative to their professional work as journalists. Following is a brief review of some problems and issues identified by study participants, as well as participants' approaches or responses to these problems and issues.

Making comments. While all participants cited general privacy concerns about posting personal content on social media pages, such as Facebook and Twitter, they also identified more specific concerns about posting material that could potentially harm them professionally. Most participants indicated they were careful about not posting personal opinion, especially about issues or people in the news. As Ross put it, "… I wouldn't post anything saying, you know, 'Boy, Tiger Woods is really horny' or, something that … I may end up covering, so I've always got an eye on that." Ross insisted he did not want to add content to his social media pages that might potentially thrust him into the spotlight. He said, "I don't want to make news … you have to strike a balance between being interesting and not getting yourself in trouble." But striking a balance, he admitted, was not always easy. For example, when covering an election, he shared with his Facebook contacts a status update indicating that he felt that a particular political party was in trouble. When asked whether that statement crossed the line, after some thought he concluded it had not. He responded the statement was supported by evidence, and was something he may well have said in the body of a news report. He characterized his status update as "fair

comment." However, he also acknowledged that since that posting, his employer had become more aware and cautious about what journalists should be saying on their personal social media pages. As a result, Ross said he doubted he would post the same comment given the change in his employer's views on social media.

Helen said she too was being more careful with her online posts since her employer seemed to be paying more attention to the social media scene. She discussed some of her previous status updates and wall posts, which had contained what could be regarded as opinion about people in the news. Most of these posts, she said, were meant to be humorous. Examples included ongoing jabs about American presidential candidate Sarah Palin, and a critical comment about the Canadian prime minister's clothes. None of the comments, she said, were serious "journalistic commentary that I'd want others to actually judge by." This participant, along with others in the study, said one way she protected herself was by actively managing her privacy settings to restrict some of her Facebook contacts from seeing certain posts. She said, "I'm well aware of the privacy settings and … I actually have some Facebook friends who are in political life … in office right now and I restrict them completely." In further detailing her own social media rules, she added she would never write anything about politicians if she were reporting on them.

As participants further discussed how they managed their private and public selves online, it should be noted that two participants, one an active Facebook user with the least industry experience, and the other, an infrequent user with the most industry experience, shared a nearly identical approach:

- … my barometer first and foremost is like would my Mom be proud if she saw this, and …would I be perceived as being, you know, biased and I

> think I was always really aware that, you know, employers look at your Facebook.
>
> - I don't put anything on Facebook that I wouldn't broadcast or I wouldn't say to my mother or that I would regret in 15 years.

Others expressed similar versions of this view of guiding one's behavior based on having a mother, or an audience, present.

Joining groups. Participants disagreed about the significance of joining a Facebook group. Some joined very few groups, while others belonged to several. The majority of participants considered joining certain types of groups – political or advocacy - as ethically problematic, as articulated by Craig.

> I'm not a member of any political parties. You won't see me in any rallies. You won't see a political sign on my front yard. You won't see me publically endorsing anything that could even be perceived as a policy that might be supported by a party. I'm certainly not going to join the Free Tibet group on Facebook regardless of whether or not I think Tibet should be free. That's my own personal thing but in my position, I think it undermines my ability to do my job if people know what I think. If I'm interviewing you, you shouldn't know what I think; it shouldn't matter.

While Craig indicated he would never join a political group on Facebook, he had joined other groups on Facebook, including charities run by some of his friends. Asked if he could foresee any problems arising from affiliating himself with a charity, he replied, "…we're talking about a group of friends that started a grass roots organization that [helped] kids … I can't imagine how joining that organization would ever come back to bite me in the ass." He had also joined *Sluts and Vermin*, a Facebook group initially created to track newspaper baron Conrad Black's fraud trial in court. When the trial concluded, the group changed its focus and became a general discussion board for journalists, though it remained open to anyone wanting to join. Craig stated he never viewed his participation in that group as taking a stance against a newspaper mogul, viewing it instead as a way to connect with journalists in a social setting.

> …if you were to question the integrity of all the journalists on that particular site…you'd have about two reporters left in this city … I find that [Sluts and Vermin] is probably maybe a racy name for what 25 years ago would have been called the, the Media Club…

Several other participants discussed their "rules" around joining groups. The majority indicated they were careful about which groups they joined, and like Craig, avoided political and advocacy groups. One participant, however, took a markedly different approach. With more than 600 people in her Facebook network, Yolanda, a TV journalist in her twenties, said she joined Facebook groups without giving much thought to how those affiliations might be perceived by others. She added, if invited, she usually joined. She associated joining groups with expanding her network of potential contacts who could give her access to information and sources. Though Yolanda said she had not joined any political groups, she stated she did not see problems with doing so, adding, "I wouldn't think that someone was a New Democrat because they … joined a New Democrat Facebook group...." She insisted the benefits of joining far outweighed the risk of appearing biased or impartial.

Most other participants indicated they were more discriminating about which groups they joined. As Helen put it, "I'm very careful about not joining any groups that are affiliated with any political group or any sort of advocacy groups." She added, however, that she did belong to a Facebook group advocating for a journalist's right to protect sources. She said one way she tried to protect herself professionally was by managing her privacy settings so that many of her Facebook contacts were restricted from seeing her group affiliations. She said, "I'm very restrictive in my Facebook … once I figured out how the privacy settings worked … about three-quarters of my [Facebook friends] are restricted in terms of what they can see."

Other participants shared similar strategies that involved changing privacy settings to restrict contacts' access to personal content. Despite having this ability to restrict people from seeing certain content, the majority of participants said they viewed their online activity as public as opposed to private, with one participant indicating anyone who thought otherwise was a "fool."

Friending friends. Participants offered varying accounts of how they responded to people's requests to be their Facebook friends. Libby said she had struggled with accepting friend requests from politicians for fear of being seen as connected to them, or biased. Her solution was to accept a variety of requests from politicians representing different parties, adding, "… maybe this is twisted logic but … if you're friends with all those parties, you can't be exposing a bias one way or another." Another participant worried less about appearances of bias. Yolanda indicated she accepted invitations from everyone, including viewers – people whom she had never met. She said she had not considered that onlookers could conceivably view her friend or group affiliations as evidence of bias or impartiality. She replied, "I never even thought of that … Having a Facebook friend to me doesn't mean that I'm friends with you or even that I support you; it means that I want access to your page ...." This participant's explanation for *friending* so many people was similar to why she accepted so many group invitations. She reiterated, expanding her network was key.

Social media practices and traditional journalistic norms. The findings section concludes with a brief overview of participants' articulations of traditional journalistic ethics. All participants were asked how they defined the journalistic principle of objectivity. This question was asked in hopes of better understanding journalists' conceptions of how their social media practices fit with their understandings of such norms. Asked to define objectivity in the context of practicing journalism, the majority of participants revealed they were troubled by the notion of

objectivity in journalism. The following comments serve to reflect participants' discomfort with, and in one case, rejection of the norm.

- … there really is no objectivity or neutrality …
- Journalistic objectivity is probably bullshit to a certain degree. I mean, you cannot leave all the baggage at home when you're doing a story.
- … we do have our opinions that come out

Several participants said they were more comfortable with notions of fairness rather than objectivity.

- …my test is never objectivity or neutrality; my test is fairness.
- I don't believe there is such a thing as objectivity 'cause we're not objects, we're subjects… we have subjectivity so I look at it as really just having an open mind and willing to talk to everyone and listen to all sides and facts and then, and then you come at it.
- I don't think it exists … we're all participants in the story, however more or less we feel about it.
- I think it's being fair to all sides, to inform without judgment, to not let your personal opinions cloud … whatever story you're trying to tell.
- I think it's almost like being in a jury where you have to just kind of put your own biases aside and work towards what the story is about….

These data elements suggest the majority of participants did not find traditional concepts of objectivity to be especially useful to them in terms of governing professional practice. Most discussed their social media practices in terms of trying to walk the line between personal and professional, public and private. Serena, the least experienced journalist in the study, expressed her own uncertainty about opinion-sharing, stating, "I'm not experienced enough to know what the line is and so I try not to cross it but colleagues of mine do, I feel, cross the line…." Serena, along with the majority of participants, stated she knew and disapproved of colleagues who

shared opinions about stories in the news, or stories that they were covering. In talking about those who did cross the line, Samuel, the most experienced journalist in the study said of colleagues who offered opinion on their social media sites, "perhaps they just don't feel it's publishing it or broadcasting … it's a separate entity from their professional life but, you know, I've always felt journalism is a 24/7 job so."

While the majority of participants criticized others for sharing opinion, at least one participant said her opinions drove a number of decisions she made when doing journalism. Fiona stated, "I'm not a stenographer … you have to come at [journalism] with … understanding of how it works and knowing our issues … your opinions play into; it's just not letting them run the show…." It should be noted that Fiona was the only participant in the study whose job required her to sometimes write editorials, in addition to "straight" news stories.

Discussion

The study employed semi-structured interviews with eight Canadian journalists including three men and five women, of varied age and industry experience. Before commencing with the discussion of study findings, it is important to acknowledge some limitations. The sample was not large enough to generate generalizable results. The sample was also geographically limited to journalists practicing in three Canadian provinces – Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario. Despite such limitations, the semi-structured interviews generated rich data that will be useful in generating informed discourse about the potential impacts of social media on journalism norms within the Canadian context.

Initial Takeaways from the Data

Journalists in this study recognized social media as providing them with a useful means to expand their personal networks, and in some cases, professional networks. Insofar as using

social media, such as Facebook, to *do* journalism, participant opinion was wide-ranging, with initial analysis suggesting those more likely to tout Facebook as a must-have journalistic tool were younger journalists with less industry experience, while those less likely to advocate Facebook in journalism practice were older and more experienced. However, a closer look at the findings quickly revealed conflicting reports. For example, 13-year news veteran Helen championed social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as offering a robust means to quickly find sources within large networks. As already stated, the study was too small to explore the degree to which age or industry experience affected attitudes and usage patterns relative to social media usage.

The findings did, however, open the door to exploring the connection between journalists' specific job functions and their needs to engage with SNS such as Facebook or Twitter. For example, participants such as Serena and Helen, whose jobs often kept them physically bound to their newsrooms, expressed great value in being able to activate large digital networks to find remote sources. Both producers worked for programs that required them to quickly secure local, regional, national or international interview subjects for broadcast programs. Conversely, journalists such as Libby, Ross, and Craig, identified far fewer reasons to use Facebook as a journalistic tool. These participants' jobs routinely required them to leave the newsroom to engage in regular face-to-face interviews with sources and other contacts. As a result, these reporters regularly visited the same physical spaces, such as city hall and the legislature, to carry out their work. These participants suggested the less mediated the communication between reporter and source, the better. These participants further indicated they had worked hard to cultivate close relationships with sources whom, as Craig stated, would expect to be contacted in-person, by telephone, possibly by e-mail, but never through a social

media post on Twitter or Facebook. Of his sources, Craig concluded, "They don't operate that way on a *real* level." The data, however, raise important questions about the ways that many journalists are operating in online spaces, spaces that some participants articulated as both real, and significant in their day-to-day lives. Study participants made several references to these online spaces, which according to Meyrowitz's theory form a critical element when discussing the impact of electronic media on social behavior.

Conceptions of Space

In a 2001 conference paper that praised McLuhan's contributions to the media ecology field, Meyrowitz, in reviewing medium theory, summarized "that electronic media may be fostering the creation of new and multiple sites where people gather electronically for social and political purposes, even while they are physically isolated from each other at work, at home, or elsewhere" (2001, p. 19). This section of the discussion explores some of these social digital spaces by viewing the study findings through Meyrowitz's framework. To re-cap, Meyrowitz (1989) contends that electronic media, when used by many people over time, can create new social spaces. These new spaces can alter social behaviors, and ultimately impact societal roles and norms due in large part to the loss of information control. Meyrowitz draws on theories of socialization that suggest groups and individuals lose status and power when others have easy access to what was once tightly controlled information. Electronic spaces, he contends, tend to reveal back region or backstage behaviors of people, and therefore degrade the ability of individuals and groups to control the types of information and behaviours needed to preserve power in informational hierarchies.

The real me. Fiona, a newspaper journalist with less than five years of industry experience, described some of her Facebook interactions as having conversations with friends

without being tied to a physical room. An avid Facebook user, Fiona explained, "… my Facebook account is me in the electronic world." Fiona said she sometimes used this space to "vent" about personal and professional issues. A review of her Facebook profile suggests she often engaged in what Goffman called back region, or backstage interaction. For example, when local politicians failed to make a decision about a specific issue, Fiona criticized them on her Facebook page, despite the fact she was covering the issue as a news reporter. In situations such as these, Meyrowitz asks us to consider the impacts of the medium, in this case, the SNS Facebook, on social behavior. Fiona views her electronic interactions as being primarily for the benefit of her and her friends. She is also aware, however, that broader audiences, including readers of her newspaper, may have direct or indirect access to her online activity, despite the fact Fiona tries to configure her privacy settings to ban certain individuals. If broader audiences are accessing what used to be more private backstage behaviors of journalists such as Fiona, what effect does this have on how the journalist's role in society is perceived? It would seem unlikely that traditional journalism norms such as objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality, can maintain much traction if audiences continue enjoying this relatively new and easy access to journalists' personal opinions and back region behaviours. Facebook walls are not the only places where journalists are presenting their backstage selves.

The smoke room. Participant Yolanda suggested that her time on Facebook was similar to her colleagues' smoke breaks. Using Meyrowitz's framework, this description provides another useful way to view interactions in online spaces. Some smokers claim that they know a lot more about what's going on in their organization than non-smokers because of the time they spend with others during their informal (read: back region) smoke breaks. Designated smoke rooms and spaces facilitate informal interactions, often between people from disparate

backgrounds. For example, the janitor and the CEO, if both smokers, might find themselves in the same space, discussing impacts of the company's latest vision statement. In Yolanda's case, Facebook is similarly giving her access to hundreds of people from backgrounds different from her own. From a journalistic norms standpoint, it is important to at least ask whether the costs associated with expanding one's informal network offset the risks associated with inviting so many people into personal digital spaces. Emphatic about continually expanding her network of sources and contacts, Yolanda was one of the few study participants who said she accepted almost all Facebook requests to join groups and be friends with people, some of whom she had never met. Paradoxically, among study participants, Yolanda reported that she applied the weakest privacy settings on Facebook, but allowed the most people unfettered access to her profile. When she decided to begin accepting Facebook invites from everyone, she took some steps to protect her personal privacy, including reducing her many photo albums to just a few photos. She also said she became more diligent about avoiding posting controversial comments. She said she tried not to say anything she wouldn't say on air. However, as with most other study participants, her profile contained some posts that she likely would not want to discuss during a live broadcast. For example, in one playful post, she indicated a romantic interest in a famous person. In another much more critical post, she lashed out against media outlets that she accused of repeatedly airing gratuitous video clips. In terms of violating journalistic norms, few would argue that much harm could come from the first playful post. On the other hand, the second post illustrates Yolanda grappling with an ethical issue that newsrooms worldwide face on a regular basis – the right to publish contentious content. Sometimes, media outlets find themselves in court fighting to publish content that many members of the public do not want aired. If Yolanda's station were in the position of having to fight for the right to air disturbing video clips

in the name of freedom of the press, Yolanda could find herself at odds with her organization, and many other professional journalists for that matter, who strive to maintain the right to publish and broadcast content, especially when others want it suppressed.

The press club. Anyone who has ever done any degree of partying with journalists, be it at the local bar or media club, knows well that most journalists routinely express personal opinions about a variety of issues. Location and context, however, are key. The study data suggest journalists are careful about talking publicly to people about contentious issues, such as politics and religion. But some environments, such as the local press club, or the hotel lounge at the annual journalism conference, offer reporters and producers a relatively safe place to talk with other journalists about matters ranging from incompetent politicians to bizarre religious practices. To utilize Meyrowitz's framework, the lounge or media club, with its physical walls, is an informationally protected environment where journalists can engage in backstage behavior with little threat of being judged by their audiences as biased or partisan. This is where passionate debates about politics and policy can evolve without fear of reprisal. When these interactions, however, move to more transparent digital spaces, for good or bad, audiences gain access.

Mentioned earlier in this study, *Sluts and Vermin* is a Facebook group that was initially created by journalists to track and comment on the trial and fate of press baron Conrad Black. During the court proceedings, reporters posted acerbic barbs about Black and his wife, as well as information about a local "sentencing party." When it was all over, the site was transformed into an open discussion board for journalism issues. However, few journalists posted anything to the site after the proceedings concluded. Examples of more active Facebook journalism groups include those operating through the Canadian Association of Journalists. As of March 2010, the

national CAJ site attracted more than 700 Facebook users. While the site is open to the public, the only place to comment is on the site's wall. Administrators for the national CAJ Facebook group have not activated the discussion board feature. Regionally, the Calgary CAJ site is closed to the general public, but has activated both the wall and the discussion board features of the page. These decisions to open or close Facebook spaces are significant as they may impact whether a professional journalist feels safe to engage in back region talk with other professional journalists.

A much different journalism Facebook forum has attracted much more attention than any of the aforementioned Facebook groups. The site, *Overheard in the Newsroom*, encourages newsroom staff to post quotes of conversations they have overheard while at work. The quotes, while typically humorous also offer a somewhat realistic view into newsrooms, which can be quirky places where people say bizarre things. Though impossible to know if the quotes are based in reality, the associated website (http://overheardinthenewsroom.com/) has nearly 70,000 fans, and was recently bestowed the "best openweb award" by mashable.com, evidence perhaps that people are enjoying access to what they believe are the back region activities of working journalists. Such sites, however, may well serve to entrench the public's already negative view of journalists. With the credibility of journalism already in question, one wonders whether it may be further eroded by the creation of spaces that encourage the ongoing exposure of back region behavior. Meyrowitz (1989) suggests when the back region behaviors of information gatekeepers are exposed, these powerful groups can lose status as hierarchies become demystified, and roles become blurred.

Changing Practice Changing Norms

At a time when technology is blurring the work of the professional and non-professional communicator, Singer (2007) makes the point that one of the few ways professional journalists will define themselves is through the articulation of and adherence to closely defined norms. Based on the results of this study, much confusion exists around journalism norms. Few participants, for example, were able to clearly define objectivity, with many expressing concern that the norm is outdated, lofty, and impossible to achieve. Rather, participants appeared much more comfortable with notions of fairness, balance, and to a lesser degree transparency.

Several participants expressed challenges in trying to operate in online spaces that had merged their private and public activities, as well as their personal and professional lives. The study revealed some participants struggled with how to use social media in a way that aligned with journalism principles. Because most participants felt their employers had offered little in the way of reasonable social media advice or policy, many had devised their own ad hoc solutions by activating privacy settings to keep certain people, including audience members and in some cases, employers, barred from specific areas of their social media sites. In Meyrowitz's terms, this manipulation of privacy settings could be seen as individuals and groups trying to protect backstage regions where they could interact both personally and professionally, without risking being seen or heard by employers or audience. Of all participants in this study, Yolanda was most transparent on her Facebook pages in that she accepted virtually all friend and group requests. She reported her entire network had access to her entire site. Yolanda said in going completely public with her Facebook profiles, she made a conscious decision to expose her site to anyone wanting to see it. In doing so, she said she began censoring more of what she said in her posts, making sure not to say anything too "negative." She also culled here Facebook photo albums in an effort to make the entire site public-friendly. By removing any potentially

inappropriate content from her Facebook site, and then, by revealing it to all, Yolanda actively chose to present her "electronic" self in a way that fit with her professional needs. In Goffman terms, it could be argued that by cleansing the site of her most personal content, Yolanda has come to regard the space as an onstage venue. A majority of other study participants viewed their SNS spaces as places where they wanted to engage in both backstage and onstage behaviors. Some participants, acknowledging the difficulty in trying to balance social and professional needs in one digital space, tried to protect themselves by restricting certain Facebook contacts from seeing all of their content. However, the problem of course is that within porous social media spaces, what one friend sees can easily be shared with another. Despite the confusion around how best to navigate these social media venues, the majority of participants felt expanding their digital networks of potential sources and contacts countered the associated risks.

Unprecedented access to sources and audience is giving journalists opportunities to incorporate new voices and perspectives instead of returning to the 'usual suspects' – a practice whereby newsrooms repeatedly interview the same sources for the same types of stories. At least two study participants discussed enjoying being able to sidestep official police and public relations channels to get what one participant considered more timely and accurate information directly from news sources. While social media platforms offer the professional journalist highly penetrable spaces and nearly instant access to all kinds of digital content, there are of course ethical implications of garnering so much material from so many different people within a mediated space. For example, while the professional journalist can almost instantaneously track and download a photo of a dead child, taken from a tribute Facebook page administered by the dead child's relatives, what does that journalist lose by forgoing the traditional face-to-face meeting in which the journalist asks for the photo, explains how it will be used, and then awaits

the family's informed decision? With the 24/7 news cycle, the need for instant content has never been higher, but it is difficult to imagine a set of journalism norms that would support these instantaneous and unauthorized information grabs from digital spaces. Many journalists pride themselves in "getting it right," but the constant push to "get it first" raises concerning questions about the accuracy and ethics associated with mining mediated spaces for the type of content that used to sit in bound paper-based photo albums within people's homes.

Considerations for Policy Development

Important to this discussion is the postulation that new media has power to expose backstage behaviors, and thus may "rearrange a society's group identities by offering new ways of revealing or hiding the backstage behaviors of many groups" (Meyrowitz, 1989, p. 56). Helen relayed instances of backstage behavior making its way to the public pages of Facebook when she and her colleagues discussed the state of their employer's financial troubles. It wasn't long before the employer became unhappy with employees taking their water cooler complaints to their social media pages. Within a few days, employees received a memo advising them to keep their complaints "in the family" and off their social media pages. Drawing on Meyrowitz's medium theory, this scenario highlights the employer's recognition that discussions of the money troubles were seeping from the walled work environment to the more transparent spaces of employees' Facebook and Twitter pages. When groups lose control of their backstage knowledge and information, argues Meyrowitz, they can also expect to lose their power and their status.

Meyrowitz further contends that social media spaces are changing behavior, roles, and norms. In the journalism context, if the audience no longer views the professional journalist as performing a unique role in society, then the role will likely change. If professional journalists, on the other hand, are to maintain an important role in society, then much work will need to be

done to not only preserve but to re-invent what it is they do. Journalism organizations would be wise to recognize SNS such as Facebook and Twitter as real spaces, where journalists are engaging in real and meaningful backstage behaviors. Social media policy must be developed by journalism organizations, not as a knee-jerk response to having been criticized within, but through an education process in which journalists and their employers are given time to think about how they navigate in open digital spaces. Meyrowitz's framework offers some useful concepts that could help journalists and journalism organizations better understand what might be required to not only preserve their roles as professional communicators, but to play a part in constructing new roles. Journalists who understand the degree to which they are engaging in backstage behavior will be in a position to better protect those private spaces and make informed ethical decisions about not only their own behaviors, but also about who has unfettered access to these spaces, and who does not.

This study underscored the possibility that many journalists do not have a firm sense of the norms they wish to operate within. Journalism organizations could play a meaningful role in promoting discourse among journalists who are interested in generating social media policy that is grounded in both theory and practice. In *The Invention of Journalism Ethics*, Ward (2004) offers journalists, employers, and journalism educators an ethical framework that is more responsive to the fluid digital spaces in which journalists operate in the twenty-first century. His vision of pragmatic objectivity offers the journalist a more holistic value-guided approach to practice. Additionally, Meyrowitz (1985) offers journalists the analytical hardware required to better understand the spaces in which they operate, and the possibility that existing norms may need to be re-examined in light of changing behaviors and roles. Together, these theorists offer a potentially good starting point for discussions about social practices and principles.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this research has generated some new insights about the effect of social media spaces on journalism practice. The research will hopefully generate important conversation about professional journalists' engagement with social media, and the possible effects of that engagement on their traditional roles. It is also hoped that this study has provided some analytical tools to those attempting to formulate social media guidelines relative to the practice of journalism. Possible future research could include a comprehensive review and analysis of existing social media policies and guidelines, a quantitative survey of journalists' views, attitudes, and practices concerning social media, a study on professional journalists' attitudes regarding new forms of citizen journalism that has accompanied SNS, as well as explorations into social media spaces using other theoretical frameworks to further examine their impacts on power, information, and social roles.

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Appendix A

Contact Letters

Initial Contact with Potential Participants on Facebook

Hello or Hi _____,
Hope all is well.
You may have heard (Or, as you know) I'm working on my master's degree in communications and technology through the U of A. My final project is a qualitative study in which I will interview eight to ten journalists about their online opinion-sharing practices. Participants in my study must be journalists who are doing "straight news" reporting, as opposed to opinion writing.

I'm contacting you because I think your perspective would add to my understanding of how journalists view their involvement with social networking sites such as Facebook.
This study has been designed to protect the privacy of all would-be participants. I will not be using any information that would identify participants.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. I don't want you to feel any pressure to participate, especially given that we know one another. In other words, feel free to say no.
If you are interested, I would like to send you a three-page letter that better outlines the intent of my study, and offers a thorough review of the issues relating to your possible involvement.

Should you prefer to receive this information/consent letter via e-mail, please consider providing me with a non-employment related e-mail address as a means of better protecting your privacy. I can also send the information to you through Canada Post, in which case I would need you to please provide your home mailing address. If you agree to participate, I can collect your consent form at the time of our interview.

Thanks.
Looking forward to hearing from you.

Initial contact letter to the only participant who fell outside the researcher's Facebook contact list:

Hello or Hi _____,
Your colleague _____ _____ suggested I get in touch with you about a study I'm conducting as part of my graduate studies in communications and technology through the U of A.
My final project is a qualitative study in which I will interview eight to ten journalists about their online opinion-sharing practices. Participants in my study must be journalists who are doing "straight news" reporting, as opposed to opinion writing.

I'm contacting you because ____ _____ has suggested your perspective would add to my understanding of how journalists view their involvement with social networking sites such as Facebook.
This study has been designed to protect the privacy of all would-be participants. I will not be using any information that would identify participants.
You are under no obligation to participate in this study. I don't want you to feel any pressure to participate. In other words, feel free to say no. I will not be sharing with (mutual contact) your decision whatever it may be.

If you are interested, I would like to send you a three-page letter that better outlines the intent of my study, and offers a thorough review of the issues relating to your possible involvement. Should you prefer to receive this information/consent letter via e-mail, please consider providing me with a non-employment related e-mail address as a means of better protecting your privacy. I can also send the information to you through Canada Post, in which case I would need you to please provide your home mailing address. If you agree to participate, I can collect your consent form at the time of our interview.
Thanks.
Looking forward to hearing from you.

Appendix B

Interview Script

Haney Interview Script
Interview Script: The goal of these questions is to better understand the online opinion-sharing practices of journalists who use the social media platform, Facebook.

How long have you been a Facebook user?
Do you remember what made you decide to join?
What do you like about Facebook?
What, if anything, does Facebook provide you that other communication tools perhaps don't?
How does Facebook fit into a typical day for you?
How much time do you spend on it?
What compels you to check it?
What typically do you use Facebook to do?
Do you use the Status Updates feature? Why? Why not?
What type of groups have you joined?
What are your own rules around how you, as a journalist, use Facebook?
As you look at things you have posted to your wall, other people's walls, status updates, group involvement, have you ever shared an opinion or comment, even implied, about a story in the news? An example? (I may bring up past posts for discussion)
Do you think you have ever posted anything that could be construed as a comment or opinion about a story you were working on? Example. (I may bring up past posts for discussion)
How do you define journalistic neutrality? What about objectivity?
To what extent do you consider your activity on Facebook public versus private?
How far into a journalist's personal life should the journalistic norms of objectivity and neutrality carry?
What, if anything, does your employer say about Facebook usage?
Are there any explicit or implicit rules about social media use at your workplace? If so, what are they?
Have you ever posted anything to Facebook that you regretted? Was there a consequence? How did that make you feel?
Is there anything else you wish you add?

Background Info:
Initials:
Age:
Years of Industry Experience:
M/F:

Appendix C

Consent Forms

Consent Forms
Letter sent to all participants

Dear _____,

As you may or may not know, I am doing research regarding the online opinion-sharing practices of journalists. My study will involve several interviews with journalists concerning what factors they consider when deciding whether to share personal opinion in online arenas, such as Facebook. You are being invited to participate in this study because (include how contact information was obtained). While I am looking forward to your participation in this confidential study, it is important to stress that participation in this study is completely voluntary. You should feel no pressure to participate, whatsoever. The fact we know one another should have no bearing on whether you agree to refuse to participate.

This research constitutes a capstone project in connection to my work towards a Master of Arts degree in communication and technology (MACT) through the University of Alberta. The purpose of the research is to seek understanding and knowledge from journalists about their decisions to share personal opinions online, particularly opinions about people and issues in the news including the stories journalists may be working on. I am also interested in exploring how journalists' opinion-sharing practices align with the journalism norms and codes of practice operating in their workplaces. The findings from this report may appear in research articles, presentations, teaching materials, and web postings.

In my first stage of research, my intent is to conduct several in-depth interviews with eight to ten journalists. It is important that participants in my study are working in 'news' gathering, writing, reporting, and/or producing capacities. Participants should not be working as identifiable opinion writers or columnists. Interviews will be conducted in a one-on-one setting, at a venue that is convenient to you. Should you decide to participate, we would need to arrange a time for the interview. While I would prefer sitting down with you in-person, I am willing to talk by telephone if distance or schedules are working against us. Depending on emergent themes, I may need to follow up with another interview, although follow-up interviews, if required, could take place via e-mail. Your time is important, which is why I feel it's essential to indicate what would be involved if you agree to participate. I expect initial interviews would range from 30 to 60 minutes. There is a possibility of follow-up interviews that I anticipate would last no more than 45 minutes. Therefore, the minimum time commitment with this study would be 30 minutes, with the maximum being 95 minutes.

It is your right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. It is essential that I protect your privacy. I will do everything in my power to guarantee your anonymity. In the interest of protecting your privacy, I would prefer you use a personal as opposed to work e-mail address when corresponding with me. If you agree to participate, I will also be willing to sever our Facebook connection if and when my study is published, as a means to disassociate your profile with mine. I can assure you I will be the only individual involved with data collection; however, I may hire a professional to transcribe the interviews. I will require the transcriber to sign a confidentiality agreement.

It is important that I state any foreseeable harms and benefits that may arise from your participation in this research. The benefits will likely relate to talking about a relatively new issue which raises more questions than answers about news reporters trying to remain neutral, impartial, and unbiased. The harms relate to any negative experience you may have as a result of participating in this study, such as worrying that an employer, friend or colleague might criticize your views, or worrying that our relationship might somehow be

compromised because of your involvement with this study. I am dedicated to securing your privacy, and urge you to think about how and if you will protect your own privacy should you agree to participate.

Research studies, like journalism features and documentaries, produce volumes of material. While I will remain in control of all documents and transcripts produced for this study, I also want to ensure the accuracy of all content. Therefore, if you participate, it is my intention to return a synopsis of our conversation to you, in an effort to verify information, and check my observations. If at any point during the data collection period, you want to withdraw from the study, I will immediately comply, and take steps to immediately destroy all transcripts or records relating to your participation. It is your right, as a participant in this study, to withdraw at any time, without prejudice to continuing and meaningful opportunities for deciding whether or not to continue to participate. It is your right to opt out without penalty and to have any collected data withdrawn from the study. As I hope to submit the study to my academic supervisor in February 2010, the deadline for withdrawal is January 30, 2010.

It is your right to safeguards for security of data. I am required to keep your data in a secure place for a minimum of five years following completion of the research project. However, I am considering doing a follow-study in the next five to ten years. If I have not done a follow-up study by January of 2020, I will at that point destroy all data associated with the study. The destruction of data will be carried out in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality. 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 either by e-mail shaney@mtroyal.ca, or by phone or confidential voicemail 403 440-5957.

Should you agree to participate in this study, please fill out the remainder of this information/consent form. I have attached an extra copy. Please keep it for your records, while returning this signed copy to me, either in the stamped self-addressed envelope provided, or at the beginning of the interview. 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. Gordon Gow, Associate Professor in the Graduate Program in Communication and Technology (MACT) at the University of Alberta. Dr. Gow's e-mail address is gordon.gow@ualberta.ca and his phone number if 780-492-6111. My contact information can be found on the first page of this letter.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB at (780) 492-3751.

Again, if you have any questions or concerns about the study, or any issues I have raised in this letter, please contact me through Facebook, my work e-mail, my home, work, or cell numbers located in the upper right corner of this letter. Thanks again for your time and interest in this study.

Sincerely,

Sally Haney

Consent form signed by all participants

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign below and return all three pages of this form in the envelope provided.

I, (please print name) _____, on this date of _____, have read the aforementioned information letter, and consent to participating in this study of the online opinion-sharing practices of journalists.

_____ _____

(signature) (date)