The Convergence of Social Media and Public Policy:

How Key Policy Actors Perceive the Role of Twitter in Shaping Alberta's Bill 10

Legislation

By

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Disclaimer

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Abstract

This research examines the perceptions of social media's role in public policy deliberation from the viewpoints of those who were either engaged with or influenced by Twitter during the development of provincial legislation. This case study examines the development of Bill 10 and includes a content analysis of Twitter activity that occurred during the bill's development and interviews with stakeholders representing government, news media, and advocacy groups to better understand the role that Twitter played in influencing the bill's creation. The goal of the research was to better understand the role Twitter played in the deliberative process and its role in the development of public policy. The findings touch on Twitter's role in the intertwined agenda-setting nature of the news media, the role of news media in amplifying and giving voice to affected citizens, and the ability of advocacy groups and concerned citizens to counter and reposition government's initial framing of policy. Findings suggest that social media can play a significant role in policy discourse and may play an increasing role in future policy development. The role of social media may represent a changing dynamic for government around developing public policy or agendas through those engaged in the organic conversations inherent in social media.

Keywords: government, public policy, Bill 10, legislation, governance, news media, journalism, advocacy, Twitter, social media, education, agenda setting, public sphere, policy discourse, deliberation, issue framing, Alberta, gatekeeping

Introduction

As a communications professional with nearly 15 years of experience working at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels of government, I am acutely aware of the interplay between public policy and communication. During my career, I have found it fascinating to watch the advent of social media tools, and then to be part of organizations grappling with how to integrate those tools into their communications strategies and day-to-day operations. Over the past several years, I have been able to witness some of the potential ways in which those social tools are inevitably influencing government decision making and public policy. This ultimately led me to the Master of Arts in Communications and Technology program at the University of Alberta. I was keen on further enhancing my understanding of how the communications and public policy functions of government were evolving to respond to a technological landscape that has fundamentally changed how citizens engage with each other and their democratic institutions. The days of simply issuing a press release and allowing news media to carry forward a certain set of messages no longer appeared to be the only way to convey an organization's story, nor fully reflective of my professional commitment as a communicator to listen to and learn from the public and interested stakeholders. I wanted to delve more deeply into understanding how technology was affecting the relationship between communication and public policy outcomes, which is how this study emerged. These considerations continue to resonate in my current position as a senior communications advisor at the City of Edmonton. City government is arguably the one order of government that citizens often feel most strongly connected to, and my experience engaging with social media at the City of Edmonton continues to suggest that social and digital tools have had a lasting impact on how citizens receive and

engage with information, express their concerns and feedback, and articulate their vision for certain policy outcomes.

Within the context of provincial government, one such example is Bill 10—controversial legislation designed to govern the establishment of gay–straight alliances (GSAs) in Alberta schools. Introduced in December 2014, the legislation sparked significant controversy because of the way in which it dealt with the process for students to establish peer-support groups in schools vis-à-vis the rights of school boards and parents. More information about the legislation and a timeline of developments are provided later in this section. At the time of the legislative debate, I was a public affairs officer team lead at Alberta's Ministry of Education. It was illuminating to see the potential of social media to be central in public policy discourse, rather than a merely one-way informational tool used to promote good news or respond to day-to-day transactional inquiries from citizens (as useful as those functions may be). As a mechanism for citizens to provide immediate feedback to the government, social media also seemed to contribute to the compression (speeding up) of the entire policy evolution, including the introduction of two amendments to the legislation and what seemed to be a rather quick announcement of a pause in between for stakeholder consultations. I felt at the time, as I still do, that there is much potential for governments and citizens/civil society alike to leverage the potential of social media to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships that have the potential to lead to more responsive, innovative governance practices. This is not to say that I view social media as a panacea for improving communication between government and citizens. For instance, I am cognizant of the concerns that political observers have raised about social media in relation to issues such as misinformation or political meddling—concepts that speak to the undermining of liberal democratic institutions and public trust. Furthermore, I also remain mindful of other

important ways in which governments can and do engage and connect with citizens, whether it is through public consultations or effective storytelling. Nonetheless, I remain particularly intrigued by the potential of social media vis-à-vis public policy formation. With this in mind, I embarked on this research study, which focuses primarily on how public policy actors—particularly in the fields of government, news media, and advocacy—perceive the role of social media in Alberta's public policy landscape.

Against this contextual backdrop, my interest was in exploring how key policy actors perceive one social media tool in particular—Twitter—in influencing Alberta's public policy debate concerning Bill 10. Through this exploratory analysis, I am especially keen on examining topics at the cross-section of media studies and public policy deliberation—including agenda setting, narrative, framing, gatekeeping, public opinion, and the expression of marginalized public spheres—and how these components of public policy discourse materialized through the use of Twitter and dialogue surrounding Bill 10.

Rethinking Public Policy Development

From the Arab Spring protests to the Occupy Wall Street phenomenon, social media have, over the past several years, entered the popular imagination as tools for mobilizing citizens, strengthening civil society, and supporting democratic movements. As a researcher, my perception is that prior to the advent of social tools, policy makers and governments made attempts to potentially empower citizens in decision making through various tactics, including town hall meetings, paper-based surveys, and even plebiscites. Yet, as a researcher, I perceive these tactics as sometimes having been highly formalized and structured, and perhaps also deployed in some cases at the discretion of government strategists—particularly in relation to deciding when and how, and on what policy topics, to initiate the deliberative process with

citizens. However, in the age of mobile phones and social tools, citizens can not only instantly

and proactively express their views and ideas in relation to any given topic or issue; they can also

collaborate and coordinate action towards influencing the outcome of particular causes or

movements. With new communication technologies having the potential for influencing those

responsible for creating any given policy (thereby potentially influencing the policy itself),

institutions and organizations of all kinds have had to rethink how they operate and interact with

citizens or customers. Moreover, with public policy being the raison d'être for government, the

potential impact of social media on public policy development is very important.

Genuine People Power

The notion of citizens more directly influencing public policy is by no means a new

phenomenon (e.g., letters to the local newspaper editor and phone calls to ministerial offices

have long been hallmarks of liberal democracies). However, what *is* relatively new is the

capacity for citizens to more directly interact with policy issues and the speed at which they can

do so. This marks a change from the notion of limited participants deliberating complex policy

issues behind closed doors. That is, while policy makers may have previously worked in

isolation, with citizen feedback arriving via traditional means, such as public hearings or other

feedback or input mechanisms (which certainly still exist), new methods are also now available

for the public to more directly engage in the process and influence the thinking of policy makers.

To this end, former British Prime Minister David Cameron has noted, "We are now living in a

post-bureaucratic age where genuine people power is possible" thanks to the Internet and

information technologies (Cameron, 2010, 5:50). In this regard, Alberta's debate on Bill 10

piqued my interest as a researcher, as it provides an interesting example of a situation where a

public policy issue was a trending topic on social media and was inherently fluid in terms of its

development and evolution. Indeed, the legislation stood out for me as an example worth exploring.

Alberta's Bill 10 Debate

The question of gay–straight alliances. Introduced in December 2014, Bill 10: An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children sparked significant controversy because of its perceived focus on limiting the ability of Alberta students to establish GSAs in their schools (typically at the secondary or lower secondary levels). GSAs are essentially school-based clubs that "are partnerships between sexual minority and heterosexual students with the purposes of … supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender [and queer or questioning] (LGBT[Q]) students and their allies, and promoting positive change in the school climate" (Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, as cited in Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009, p. 892). Indeed, a primary way of conceptualizing the importance of GSAs is through the lens of student safety. Studies and anecdotal evidence reveal a picture of LGBTQ youth as being at increased risk of suicide attempts, as well as "prejudice, discrimination, violent behaviour, and language assaults" in schools and in the community at large (National Education Association, American Psychological Association, & Partners, as cited in Grace & Wells, 2001, p. 141). Lee (2002) goes so far as to describe LGBTQ youth as an "invisible minority" who "are not receiving the same educational opportunities as their straight peers" (p. 13). Through a qualitative study involving focus groups and interviews with LGBTQ students, Lee has noted that students who associate with GSAs experience increased academic achievement, an improved ability to interact with others, and an overall sense of empowerment—all of which lead to the conclusion that "educational policy makers must … recognize the positive impact that belonging to a GSA can have on students" (p. 24).

Bill 202 is introduced. Alberta's public debate around GSAs started with the tabling of Bill 202, the Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act (2014), by Liberal Party Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) Laurie Blakeman on November 20, 2014. At the time, Blakeman was a member of one of the Opposition parties, and Bill 202 was introduced as a private member's bill. Prior to Bill 202, schools and school boards were not compelled to develop policies to address students requesting to form a GSA, with some advocates arguing that students were being denied the right to form GSAs. For example, a *Calgary Herald* article at the time indicated that while 665 diversity clubs and 637 anti-bullying clubs existed in schools across the province, there were only 94 GSAs, and the "disproportionately lower number of gay–straight alliances demonstrates the need for legislation protecting the right of students to establish school clubs" ("Lukaszuk Lone Tory," 2014, para. 18).

Many advocates therefore applauded Bill 202 when it was introduced as a private member's bill because the legislation would have ensured all students had the right to form student-led GSA clubs in their schools. Bill 202 also sought to remove a section of the Alberta Human Rights Act that "require[d] teachers to notify parents or guardians when discussing issues of sexual orientation in the classroom" (Wood, 2014, para. 3).

Political maneuvering: Government responds to Bill 202 by introducing Bill 10. Initially, the government appeared to take a somewhat neutral stance on Bill 202, with then premier Jim Prentice indicating that government MLAs would have a free vote on the legislation (i.e., MLAs would be allowed to vote according to their personal values or conscience rather than having to adhere to the party line), with the premier himself indicating that he had not decided on his voting intention (Wood, 2014). However, within approximately one week of Bill 202 having been tabled, media reports began to emerge indicating that the premier planned

to introduce the government's own legislation on GSAs. This legislation would seek to "strike a balance between students who want to start a gay–straight alliance, parents who want to choose what their child learns at school and a school board's ability to make decisions" (Dykstra, 2014, para. 1). The government's tabling of Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children (2014), on December 1, 2014, meant that Bill 202 was dropped from consideration in the legislature, and Bill 10 became the focus of elected officials.

The first version of Bill 10. The early version of Bill 10 was relatively modest in its focus and intended outcome. While it proposed to move forward "incrementally" on LGBTQ rights by allowing students to form GSAs in schools, it provided schools with the final say on whether to allow such student-organized clubs ("Alberta Tories Kill Bill," 2014, para. 5). Had a school disallowed the formation of such a club, the only recourse for students would have been to appeal the decision in the courts. This position on GSAs was derided by one prominent media columnist as legislation that "pretends to protect students from bullying … but in effect … gives any school board that wishes to suppress discussion of LGBTQ issues and identities in its schools the power to ban any proposed [GSAs]" (Simons, 2014, para. 7).

Subsequent amendments. This first iteration of the bill soon gave way to two subsequent amendments and, in between, a "pause" in the legislative process by then premier Jim Prentice to allow for consultations. The first amendment to the bill seemingly attempted to strengthen the government's support for GSAs by outlining a commitment on the part of government to set up GSAs (if schools refused) *off* school grounds. Yet, this incremental approach to supporting GSAs appeared to backfire once more, with Calgary mayor Naheed Nenshi arguing Albertans would be labelled "hillbillies" if the legislation were to come to fruition, and other critics claiming that "forcing students off school grounds to set up a GSA was

akin to segregation" in the mid-20th century United States ("Nenshi Says Gay–Straight," 2014, para. 10). Following the outcry, government subsequently put the legislation on hold, finally swaying to public and media demands in March 2015 by amending Bill 10 for the second time so that *any* students who wanted GSAs could establish them *on* school property ("Bill 10 to Allow," 2015).

Key Milestones in the Bill 10 Debate

The following is an outline of some of the significant milestones associated with the legislative life cycle of the Bill 10 debate.

- **November 20, 2014:** Liberal Opposition MLA Laurie Blakeman introduces Bill 202, the Safe and Inclusive Schools Statutes Amendment Act (2014). If passed, the bill would have required schools to allow the creation of peer-support groups, known as gay–straight alliances, when requested by students. The bill would also have removed from the Alberta Human Rights Act the discussion of sexual orientation as a reason to remove children from classrooms (Giovannetti, 2014).

- **November 25, 2014:** Then premier Jim Prentice announces that government MLAs will be allowed a free vote on Bill 202 (Bennett, 2014).

- **November 27, 2014:** The premier announces his intention to introduce his own legislation (Bill 10) to better balance the rights of students, parents, and school boards.

- **December 1, 2014:** Government MLA Sandra Jansen introduces Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children (2014). The introduction of this bill essentially removed from the order paper Bill 202, the private member's bill introduced by MLA Blakeman. Bill 10 and Bill 202 differed substantially. This first iteration of Bill 10 would have allowed students to form GSAs but would have given

schools the final say on whether to allow them. If a school refused, the only recourse for

a student would have been to appeal to the school board or to the Court of Queen's

Bench. However, like Bill 202, Bill 10 would have revoked the right of parents to pull

students out of class during discussions of sexual orientation ("Alberta Tories Kill Bill,"

2014).

- **December 3, 2014:** Following a public outcry and intense media scrutiny, government

  MLA Sandra Jansen introduces an amendment to Bill 10. Speaking about the

  amendment, MLA Jansen stated at the time that

  > [a] student now does not have to go to the court, they come to the Alberta ministry of
  > education and we provide that GSA for them, and hopefully within the school
  > environment … but if that is impossible, we'll make sure they get that GSA regardless.
  > (Cournoyer, n.d., "December 3, 2014")

  Under this amended iteration of the bill, students no longer had to appeal decisions in the

  court; however, critics argued the amendment would have segregated students by moving

  GSAs off school grounds.

- **December 4, 2014:** Continued criticism of the government leads then premier Prentice to

  put Bill 10 on hold until further consultations are completed.

- **March 10, 2015:** Then education minister Gordon Dirks tables the revamped and

  amended Bill 10. The Alberta legislature passes the amended Bill 10, which ensured

  students could form GSAs in both public and Catholic schools. The final legislation

  allowed students to meet on school property and name their peer-support group what they

  wished (e.g., gay–straight alliance or queer–straight alliance). The legislation also added

  sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, and gender expression to the Alberta Bill of

  Rights ("Bill 10 to Allow," 2015).

- **March 19, 2015:** Bill 10 receives Royal Assent and comes into force (Bill 10, 2014).

Bill 10 as a Focus Area

The evolution of Bill 10 certainly provides legal scholars and political scientists a rich opportunity to study policy and legislative amendments. Yet, what is equally remarkable about the legislation is the extent to which it was shaped by an active and engaged public—one that utilized social media to seemingly frame the debate as a human rights issue, ensure sustained and ongoing traditional media coverage, and maintain pressure on legislators. In this way, the process leading up to the finalization of Bill 10 requires further exploration to make sense of the various ways in which social tools (particularly Twitter) are capable of informing, influencing, and initiating public policy decisions, as well as changing existing communication and policy processes. Ultimately, the broader goal of any research of this kind is to contribute to the strengthening of institutional civil society and communication processes that are at the heart of liberal democracies. These processes are anything but mere formalities; rather, they represent a visceral connection between citizens and the communities or jurisdictions to which they belong. Research of this nature, if it is to be relevant to other scenarios involving public policy and social media, is also built on an assumption that there is a critical mass of citizens who may be interested in becoming a part of the policy process on a regular basis, and also that citizens in a liberal democracy should be afforded the opportunity to become active contributors to shaping a more responsive and connected democratic framework by which to govern themselves. The study of communicative dynamics surrounding Bill 10 reflects that assumption and is meant to contribute to scholarly research in the field of social media and public policy.

Literature Review

Introduction

  This review of the current literature reveals a growing interest on the part of scholars

from the fields of both communications and public administration in exploring the intersection of

social media and public policy. With much of the scholarship having originated (or at least

formally published) over the past five to six years, research in this area appears to be an

emerging trend that stems from a shared sense of realization among scholars that social media is

indeed having a profound impact on policy development and democratic processes. However,

given the diverse range of perspectives through which scholars examine the topic, it is beneficial

to regard the literature as part of two broad conceptual frameworks or assumptions. The first

framework appears to rest on an underlying assumption that, on some level, governments may be

looking for ways to hear from citizens, with social media presenting a potentially useful means

for doing so. The second framework conceptualizes social tools as a means for empowering

citizens to proactively organize and collectively exert influence on government, regardless of the

latter's intent around soliciting input or even gauging public opinion. Therefore, while the first

conceptual framework incorporates a strong institutional element into the research focus, the

second appears to position citizens themselves as the drivers of democratic change.

  Against the backdrop of these two conceptual frameworks, the literature can be further

divided into six broad categories—all of which can either straddle *both* conceptual frameworks

or gravitate towards one or the other. These six broad categories include the following: the

background or context around the role of social tools in evolving and transforming the public

policy development process; challenges and barriers to using social media in a public policy

context; the role of institutions in adapting to new realities; issue framing and public opinion; agenda setting; and activism, protest, and the public sphere in the age of social media.

Theoretical Context

  The public sphere and subaltern counterpublics. The notion of the public sphere was first introduced by sociologist and philosopher Jurgen Habermas as a way of conceptualizing a space or "theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk" (Fraser, 1990, p. 57). Nancy Fraser (1990) has described this space as being distinct from the state and focused on "debating and deliberation rather than … buying and selling" (p. 57). Yet, while Habermas conceptualized the public sphere as a space for public opinion formation and elite discourse sustained primarily by the bourgeoisie, Fraser has argued for the acknowledgement of "subaltern counterpublics" that function in parallel to Habermas's public sphere and where historically marginalized groups—including women, visible minorities, workers, and sexual minorities—"circulate counterdiscourses" (p. 67). Fraser's concept of subaltern counterpublics appears particularly intriguing in the age of social media, whereby public discourse is realized using ubiquitous Internet technologies that allow for real-time conversations and the expression of alternative perspectives on any given topic among diverse publics. However, a key challenge in the public policy realm is that a government "which pays attention to all these diverse voices has never existed" (Fraser, as cited in Papacharissi, 2002, p. 11).

  Agenda setting. Agenda-setting theory focuses on the role of the mass media in ultimately exerting "a considerable impact on [citizens'] judgements of what they [consider to be] … the major issues" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 180). The underlying premise of agenda-setting theory is that the mass media play an instrumental role in shaping and giving rise to

public opinion by "telling its readers what to think about" (Cohen, as cited in McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 177). As a result, agenda setting can ultimately have a direct and tangible impact on government's approach to public policy development and policy outcomes. Furthermore, in the era of social media, agenda setting also encompasses the relationship between social tools and traditional media. In other words, the central tenet of agenda-setting theory is evolving from "what issues the media tell people to think about to what issues people tell the media they want to think about" (Chaffee & Metzgerber, as cited in Luo, 2014, p. 1291).

Setting the Stage (Context and Background)

The 21st century as a digital landscape. One of the key drivers for needing to understand social media's role in shaping public policy—and indeed the impetus for governments themselves to more strategically employ social media in their policy processes—is the reality that Internet technologies are now ubiquitous in the lives of citizens in liberal democracies across the globe. As Internet scholar Clay Shirky has stated,

> there's no democracy worth the name that doesn't have a transparency move, but transparency is openness in only one direction, and being given a dashboard without a steering wheel has never been the core promise a democracy makes to its citizens. (Shirky, 2012, 16:18)

Margetts (2009) of the Oxford Internet Institute has noted that "Internet-based networks … span the whole value chain of all but the smallest of businesses in the developed world" (p. 3) and that "political and interest group mobilization has also shifted onto the Internet" (p. 4). In her analysis of the "implications of the Internet for policymaking," Margetts used an analytical device known as the "tools of government approach" (p. 5), which essentially provided a framework for defining public policy within the context of four tools or levers that governments

have at their disposal: the capacity to disseminate information, the possession of legal power, financial and monetary possessions, and organizational capacity.

Against the backdrop of a digital and networked landscape, public policy development processes—particularly in relation to the four levers in the "tools of government" approach—would appear to be a logical next step as an area for exploration vis-à-vis Internet transactions and citizens' use of social media. Indeed, as Margetts noted in 2009, the "information seeking behavior" of citizens has undergone a fundamental shift whereby the Internet is now the "first port of call for any information seeking task" (p. 4). Although information seeking, in itself, may not be an act of shaping public policy, it nonetheless represents a "reshaping of state–citizen relationships" (p. 7). And while some pundits or public policy traditionalists may attempt to dismiss the need for governments to adjust to this evolution in how citizens expect to be interacted with, perhaps one of the most compelling arguments for new approaches to formulating policy is the notion of institutions needing to remain relevant and responsive. As Margetts puts it, the risk for any government that chooses not to make use of new policy production methods is nothing less than a "weakening [of its] capacity vis-à-vis society" (p. 8).

Generational shift. Despite the many challenges and barriers to effectively using social media in policy development, there is little doubt among many scholars that social media is significantly influencing governments—especially with "a new generation of young people … entering into positions of power and using social media for instrumental purposes related to power" (Auer, 2011, p. 714). Auer (2011) has conducted an analysis of social media through the lens of leading political scientist and communications theorist Harold Lasswell's notion of "policy-oriented communicators" (such as journalists and diplomats) to elucidate the role of social media in the "professional lives of … policy-oriented professionals" (p. 730). In his

analysis, Auer concludes that while "skillful users of [social media] are recruited by powerful

elites" who have their own political interests at stake, the potential benefit of social media in

"promoting human dignity for all" rests primarily in the "widespread mastery of the technologies

themselves" (p. 730).

With the generational shift associated with social media has come a fundamentally new

way of conceptualizing public policy, with some scholars arguing that "'creativity' and

'openness' [are] where social media strengths are most apparent, including in policy arenas"

(Auer, 2011, p. 720). While Benkler, Shaw, and Hill (n.d.)—as part of their review of literature

examining the challenges of harnessing the "collective intelligence" of social tools—believe that

peer production tools such as wikis are "better at producing functional works like … software

and encyclopedias" than more creative endeavours such as policy (p. 18), there is nonetheless a

sense among scholars such as Auer (2011) that the dialogic and collaborative capacity of social

media can in fact help address public concerns (though even Auer acknowledges the challenges

of "sorting critical information from junk on social networks" [p. 723]).

Challenges and Barriers

Twitter users' perceptions as a moving target. Within the context of social media

channels, Twitter may enable certain affordances in relation to how it is used for public policy

purposes. Scholars have explored some of the dynamics and considerations that influence how

Twitter users express their views on public policy topics or issues. For example, scholars at the

Pew Research Center conducted a survey of more than 1,800 adults and their use of the Internet,

focusing on the issue of Edward Snowden's 2013 revelations of government surveillance of

American citizens' personal records (Hampton et al., 2014, p. 3). The researchers noted a

phenomenon called "the spiral of silence," whereby social media users are more likely to self-

censor when they feel their audiences may disagree with them (p. 23). The study concludes that "the broad awareness social media users have of their networks might make them more hesitant to speak up because they are especially tuned into the opinions of those around them" (p. 4). Along similar lines, albeit in a different socio-political context, Chen (2018) used two-wave panel data from Hong Kong and found that the level of publicness in a social media user's network can "discourage expressive behaviours and encourage withdrawal behaviours" (p. 3931). According to Chen, this fear of isolation associated with speaking out against what is perceived to be the majority results in a willingness to self-censor. However, Chen notes ways to mitigate this phenomenon. For example, when social media users have a lower level of publicness on their social media accounts and can "narrowcast their opinion to a certain group of people," the fear of social isolation is reduced, and the "spiral of silence process on social media" is alleviated (p. 3931).

Motivation and trust. Although new communications technologies present unique opportunities to affect how public institutions and citizens interact with each other, they can also open the door to new challenges to meaningful and reciprocal communication. From a motivational standpoint, for instance, some research has shown that group collaboration among citizens is hindered by the fact that "only a minority of users contribute actively to online groups with actual content" (Lampe, LaRose, Steinfield, & DeMaagd, 2011, p. 7), thereby calling into question the effectiveness of social platforms such as wikis. Lampe et al. (2011) conducted a case study analysis of an initiative known as AdvanceMichigan—an attempt to "crowdsource feedback from stakeholders" to help shape the policies of a branch of Michigan State University—and discovered that "social media systems are notoriously difficult to get more than

a fraction of an audience to contribute to, and sometimes those contributions are angry or abusive

posts" (p. 7).

From the quality of the contributions to the cognitive implications of citizens publicly

voicing their views and ideas in a social forum, serious questions remain as to whether social

tools can be deployed for more than simple novelty purposes in policy circles. Issues of trust and

the "risk of exposure" on the part of citizens, in particular, are further heightened by the fact that

a "Wiki-Leaks stylized gotcha mentality is real" and that governments inherently operate within

a "culture of risk mitigation and political spin" (Roy, 2012, p. 69). Compounding the issue of

trust even further is the reality that popular social tools are often operated by private companies.

This has led Clay Shirky to ask, "How much can these entities be expected to support freedom of

speech and assembly for their users?" (Shirky, 2011, p. 21). On the other hand, Beth Noveck,

author of *Wiki Government*, remains optimistic about the potential for using social tools and has

argued that communicators and policy makers can overcome challenges such as those identified

in the AdvanceMichigan initiative by following some simple key steps—including, for instance,

asking the right questions and "dividing work into roles and tasks" (Noveck, 2009, pp. 171-172).

In the words of Noveck, "many more people would get involved in government if they knew

exactly what to do" (p. 172).

Entrenching existing networks. Conversely, some scholars have noted that even among

stakeholders who are motivated to contribute to policy development, the reality is that the

Internet may further entrench the existing networks of stakeholders who engage with public

policy, rather than expanding the policy development process to a larger audience (Rethemeyer,

2007b, p. 265). Rethemeyer (2007b) collected data from two policy networks, or case studies,

that focused on adult basic education policy and mental health policy, with the data focused on

the nature and type of communication within the network, survey responses from individuals in

affected organizations within the network, and interviews with members of the organizations "to

probe their attitudes towards … the Internet for political and policy purposes" (pp. 266-267). In

contrast to notions of social tools serving to enhance citizens' access to—and participation in—

the policy process, Rethemeyer's findings indicate that the downside of Internet-mediated

technologies is the risk of making social capital "less expensive" among those who are already

embedded as advisors or consultants to governments (p. 265). As Rethemeyer (2007a) has noted,

"group members [within a network] tend to have strong affinity for one another" (p. 208), which

inevitably leads to the question of whether a collaborative spirit can be fostered among diverse

citizens with varying degrees of knowledge, expertise, and experience regarding policy issues.

Partisanship and visibility. Within a distinctly Canadian context, there are also

challenges associated with Canada's federal construct, in which there are at least three separate

orders of government—all of which are positioned differently vis-à-vis citizens. To elucidate

these challenges, Jeffrey Roy (2012) conducted an analysis that drew upon "both conceptual

argumentation and an examination of recent and current experiences in Canada" (p. 64). Roy

notes that local governments such as municipal and provincial organizations "benefit from closer

proximity to community constituents and are better able to blend online and offline processes"

(p. 69). Roy also contends that the more partisan and adversarial nature of politics at the federal

level means there are "localized advantages" when it comes to using social media in public

policy discourse (p. 69). With a particular focus on the unique characteristics of the federal

government, scholar Amanda Clarke (2012) conducted a qualitative content analysis of the

Government of Canada's use of Twitter, coding tweets into the three broad categories of

informational, participatory, or "amicable ties" (p. 10) (which Clarke describes as neither

informational nor soliciting participation). The results indicated an "extremely low number of tweets supporting public participation" (p. 11). Furthermore, Clarke also initiated approximately 30 interviews with Government of Canada employees across a wide range of positions (up to the level of assistant deputy minister) and found a "well-established clash between … public sector bureaucracies and the demands of democratic participation" (p. 2) in many federal government organizations. According to Clarke, an example of this clash is the tendency for "bureaucrats [to] avoid public engagement because they believe that policy processes become too slow, costly, and unwieldy" (p. 5).

Role of Institutions

While most scholars touch on the tangible impact that the Internet and social media are having on public sector institutions, none of the scholars identified in the literature review have called for a redefining of the role of government institutions. That is, there appears to be recognition of the continued importance of maintaining public institutions and their roles as a centrepiece of a networked policy apparatus involving citizens. To this end, Panagiotopoulos, Gionis, Psarras, and Askounis (2011) have developed a "deliberation ontology" to elucidate the public policy deliberative process as one that is inherently tied to the ability of various stakeholders to "overview the process and the related arguments, interpret complex legal information and form better quality opinions" (p. 296). The authors conclude that "efforts of collaborative public decisions do not necessarily imply a shift towards direct models of participation," but that "decision support tools" need to be further developed so that citizens and society at large are enabled to make more informed contributions rather than becoming entrapped within the mechanics and processes of policy making (p. 296).

Some scholars also appear to have taken a sense-making approach to understanding how, when, and why tools such as social media can be intertwined with existing policy-making structures. Linders (2012), for example, examined the multitude of "terms and conceptualizations" related to e-government and "Internet-facilitated citizen co-production" (p. 447) and developed a typology and categories to classify different stages in the government–citizen relationship. While the extreme end of the spectrum includes a "do it yourself government" (p. 477) (regarded by Linders as citizens self-organizing without traditional government involvement), Linders notes that one of the key limitations and risks is to think of co-production as "offloading government functions to the public" rather than "redesigning government" to better harness the contributions of citizens (Lam, as cited in Linders, 2012, p. 452).

When one considers the ramifications of social media intersecting with public policy, research indicates that there are varying degrees to which social media can play a role in policy development—ranging from attempts to simply improve public sector transparency to the co-creation of real-life policies. In their development of a "maturity model" for social media engagement, Lee and Kwak (2012) describe five distinct levels at which governments can operate, depending on their policy development goals and objectives. At the most intense level, "ubiquitous engagement," governments and citizens essentially form a "sustainable ecosystem and a virtuous cycle for effective engagement" (p. 499). Lee and Kwak validated their model based on their research study involving five case studies with U.S. health care administration agencies. The study involved gathering data through semi-structured interviews with agency staff (focusing on topics such as Open Government initiatives, challenges, risks, and metrics) and

analysis of archival data such as social media sites, websites, white papers, and strategic plans (p. 493).

Although it may be unrealistic to expect "ubiquitous engagement" at all times, the idea of a maturity model may afford some flexibility to governments in deploying social tools in ways that are appropriate to particular circumstances and contexts. Bekkers, Edwards, and de Kool (2013) used a multiple case study approach to examine the "practices of social media monitoring in four Dutch public organizations" (p. 335), with two of the cases focused on "social media monitoring in the context of policymaking" and the other two focused on "social media monitoring in the context of policy implementation and service delivery" (p. 338). Specific research techniques included both "desk research and semi-structured interviews" with public servants (p. 338). In their study, the scholars suggested that even the act of monitoring social media for the purposes of channelling information to policy makers or embedding results into policies could enable public sector organizations to be strategic, transparent, and responsive to citizens (p. 339).

Along similar lines, Ferro, Loukis, Charalabidis, and Osella (2013) have noted that comments posted by citizens on various social media channels can enable the "identification of … values of citizens with respect to … policy" (p. 365). Ferro et al. based their conclusion on a study of a 2008 regional government consultation campaign in Italy, for which they gathered data such as "view" statistics on the regional government's social media sites (to assess the "reach" of the messages), as well as textual comments posted by citizens on those same social platforms, citizens' responses to a web questionnaire, and government staff responses to face-to-face semi-structured interviews (p. 364). Further examining the role of government institutions and their evolutionary process towards integrating and adopting social media tools in policy

development processes, Mergel and Bretschneider (2013) note that "unlike other types of ICT

[information and communications technology] adoption in the public sector, social media

adoption is often not a top-down, conscious decision sanctioned by higher-level management"

(p. 393). Based on government organizations' experiences with communication technologies,

Mergel and Bretschneider constructed a "staged model that focuses on adoption and

implementation" of social tools (p. 390), noting that political directives to civil service bodies

(such as Open Government initiatives) can serve as a "unique motivation for social media

adoption in a more hierarchical manner" within government organizations (p. 398).

Issue Framing and Public Opinion

One of the key influencers of social media, and particularly Twitter, in shaping public

perception of an issue—whether public policy or event-driven—is manifested through the use of

frames (ways of positioning an event for the purposes of cultural or popular perception). In

examining the frames found on Twitter during the Vancouver Stanley Cup riots of June 2011,

Burch, Frederick, and Pegoraro (2015) used a textual content analysis to shed light on the ways

in which Twitter served as a "source of news and information, and also an outlet for shaping

public opinion and cultural perception" (p. 399). Using a coding protocol based on the definition

of frames as "mental schemas that facilitate the processing of information" (p. 402), the

researchers conducted an extensive analysis of tweets related to the events of the 2011

Vancouver riots, ultimately concluding that social media have the ability to create "more

immediacy in the framing process" (p. 413). The researchers acknowledge that the act of framing

is fundamentally similar to the framing process resulting from traditional media; however, social

media enables framing to "enter new territories"—whether it be within a sporting context or

large-scale political movement (p. 413).

In examining the relationship between framing on Twitter and through traditional media, Guggenheim, Jang, Bae, and Neuman (2015) focused on mass shooting incidents in the United States. Their study collected publicly available tweets and online news stories that mentioned select phrases or terms (such as *mass shooting*, *Sandy Hook*, and *Newtown*) over a two-year period. This daily media content was categorized using a second set of keyword phrases to correspond to certain issue frames (e.g., the shooter/victim event frame or the gun control/gun rights frame) (p. 213). Findings of the research conclude that the "dynamic relationship between traditional and social media mass shooting frames challenges the notion that traditional media sets the agenda" (p. 221). Indeed, the notion that traditional media framing is influenced by public framing on Twitter (and vice versa) led the authors to conclude that "policy-makers should consider multiple messages and frames of an issue within the broader media environment" (p. 221).

An analysis of Twitter conversation during the 2012-2013 drought in Nebraska conducted by Wagler and Cannon (2015) provides insights into the significant role that Twitter played in relation to public opinion, largely because of Twitter's ability to serve as a news outlet for timely and relevant information. Using a qualitative case study analysis approach, Wagler and Cannon reviewed conversations on Twitter during a one-year span in which Nebraska experienced extreme drought conditions, coding approximately 2,800 tweets "to identify emergent themes" (p. 49). While the findings were partly expected in terms of Twitter serving as a "news outlet for information on drought status" (p. 51), the authors also discovered that numerous additional themes emerged in relation to public opinion, including discussions related to climate change, alternative energy technologies, increases in food bills, and even proposals of solutions (pp. 51-55)—all of which led the authors to conclude that considerable opportunities

exist for institutions to use social media as a way to "think personally and attempt to frame conversations [with citizens] in more personal ways" (p. 57).

Within the context of a crisis situation, such as the explosion of a major storage facility in the town of Moerdijk in the Netherlands in January 2011 (known as the Chemie-Pack plant explosion incident), researchers van der Meer and Verhoeven (2013) found that the public based its "crisis frames on personal speculations (terrorist attack) prior to extended news coverage" (p. 231). In other words, Twitter made possible a "rapid mass self-communication" that resulted in a "public crisis framing based on assumptions" (p. 231). As part of their study, the authors analyzed public and media frames by conducting a content analysis of more than 38,000 tweets and more than 70 news articles, with a focus on mapping the "strength of associations between key words in texts" (p. 230) in order to assess the dynamics of crisis and framing. The results reveal two distinct phases that unfolded in the heat of the crisis: an initial phase in which public framing via Twitter concentrated on words such as *terrorist*, *attack*, and *panic* (the panic/terrorism frame), and a second phase in which the public frame was on "general crisis information" (p. 230), thereby highlighting traditional media's role in having a "soothing effect on public panic" once extended media coverage and analysis were generated (p. 231).

Agenda Setting

Role of mass media. When considering the impact of social media on public institutions, it may at first blush be tempting to view the effect as inherently novel or even revolutionary. In this regard, it can be beneficial to understand the work of researchers who have focused on examining the role of *traditional* mass media in shaping public policy, as their findings have helped establish a framework for understanding *social* media's impact as being an evolutionary process that stems from new communication technologies. Even against the backdrop of today's

social tools, traditional "media's voice … [is] an especially important mediator for public issues, such as education, because the media can have a direct impact on voters as well as politicians, and is often a broker in the exchange of ideas … between the two groups" (Parker, 2011, p. 62). To reach her conclusion, Lana Parker (2011) used document analysis of a purposeful sampling of newspaper reports and also document analysis of a sample of Ontario government reports (pp. 4-6) to elucidate the impact of traditional media "in promoting a 'curriculum of accountability'" (p. iv) in Ontario's Ministry of Education.

On the other hand, Wolfe, Jones, and Baumgartner (2013) have argued that while "media attention and policymaking activities can become intertwined in complex feedback systems" (p. 179), whereby increased media coverage of particular issues (such as crime) can lead to increased policy activity, the media attention does not in itself "have a direct impact on the probability of the [policy] outcome" (p. 179). In other words, Wolfe et al. contend that "simple cause-and-effect relationships are difficult to establish" (pp. 179-180)—a conclusion that they ultimately reached by reviewing two research programs (namely, media and policy studies of agenda setting) and mapping out their differences and "impacts on understanding the policy process" (p. 175).

What becomes clear is the sense of connection between the realms of communication and public administration. Indeed, political scientist Peter Mortensen's (2010) research into agenda setting in European politics involved "using public spending as a measure of public policy" in order to empirically evaluate "public spending attitudes, public spending and the political agenda covering six issues from 1980 to 2003" (p. 357). Through his research, Mortensen has shown that the "amount of … attention devoted to a given issue by … policy makers matter[s] to the allocation of public spending" (p. 373).

Relationship between mass media and online platforms. Despite the difference in findings between Mortensen (2010) and Wolfe et al. (2013), the literature concerning agenda-setting concepts and attempts to understand the impact of mass media represent valuable precursors that shed light on the study of social media's role in public policy. Amidst the realities of the present media landscape—one in which both mass media and social media operate side by side and potentially have a reciprocal impact on news content—scholars Groshek and Groshek (2013) conducted a time series analysis of the agendas of two prominent traditional media outlets (*The New York Times* and *CNN*) with stories and topics appearing on social media sites (Facebook and Twitter) in order to understand the reciprocal agenda-setting effects of different media platforms (p. 15). Their findings reveal empirical evidence that social media tools have varying degrees of impact on political agendas formed by traditional media, and vice versa—much of which depends on the specific tool and topic in question. Interestingly, the study has suggested that coverage of cultural issues on Twitter "was the one category of coverage where a social media channel set the agenda for a traditional one" (p. 25). Indeed, if one regards Twitter as essentially a form of blogging (i.e., micro-blogging), Wallsten's (2007) research—which "tracked media coverage and blog discussion of 35 issues during the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign" (p. 567)—is also salient. Wallsten has determined that "there is a complex, bidirectional relationship between mainstream media coverage and blog discussion"—with the two platforms tending to influence each other "immediately rather than after a lengthy time delay" (p. 581).

Intermedia agenda setting. Rogstad (2016) has further explored intermedia agenda setting between Twitter and mainstream media. By conducting a content analysis of tweets and mainstream media publications in Norway over a three-week period, the author compared top

news stories that received the greatest volume of attention on both platforms to compare agendas and correlation. Rogstad concludes that "Twitter in fact had an independent agenda" and that this represented a "fundamental change in the opportunities for organizations to draw public attention to issues without having to pass through mainstream media 'gatekeepers'" (p. 153). While the researcher's findings indicate that this independent agenda (and the type of issues and topics that this agenda entails) correlates with "news that traditionally preoccupies politically interested people with sympathies to the left," the conclusion specific to intermedia agenda setting is that there is "little doubt that mainstream media affects Twitter agenda more than the other way around" (p. 153). Research also elucidates considerations around the speed of agenda setting as it relates to old and new media. Also using a content analysis of both Twitter and newspapers, this time during the 2016 presidential primary season in the United States, Conway-Silva, Filer, Kenski, and Tsetsi (2018) determined issue emphasis on both platforms and then used a "time series analysis … to determine the strength of relationships between the overall Twitter agendas and those of newspapers" (p. 472). Their findings suggest that "issues may be transferred from Twitter to other media at a quicker rate than that of newspapers to Twitter" (p. 478).

Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002) further reaffirm the strong connection between the agenda-setting processes of traditional mass media and online tools—though it should be noted that their study was conducted in 2002. The scholars conducted a time series content analysis of traditional media coverage found in prominent American outlets (e.g., *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, and *CNN*) of four issues and corresponding Internet discussions to determine whether the time series correlations revealed a mass media influence on Internet discussions and "time lag for agenda-setting effects to occur" (Roberts et al., 2002, p. 458). Their results indicate that three of the four issues examined "showed a clear agenda setting relationship between media

coverage and Internet discussions," which is to say that "media coverage provided a stimulus for discussion of issues on the Internet" (p. 459).

Within an international context, scholars Lee, Lancendorfer, and Lee (2005) focused on the 2000 general election in South Korea to understand the influence of Internet bulletin boards on newspaper coverage. Using a content analysis approach involving cross-lagged correlation analyses, the scholars focused on the first and second levels of agenda setting, with their findings indicating that the "Internet funnels and leads public opinion as well as [affects] the coverage of other media" (Lee et al., 2005, p. 57). The scholars specifically focused on six issues in their study and discovered that at the first level of agenda setting, newspapers influenced the opinions posted by "netizens" on Internet bulletin boards (p. 57). At the second level of agenda setting, findings indicate that Internet bulletin boards influenced newspaper coverage (p. 67). Similarly, Ceron, Curini, and Iacus (2014) focused on analyzing a case study involving political debates around "reform of public funding of parties that took place in Italy between April and July 2012" (p. 1). Using a methodology that involved collecting both tweets (based on keywords related to public funding) and newspaper articles corresponding with the same time period, the researchers conclude that "traditional media still retain the first-level agenda setting power … [but] their ability to exert a second-level agenda setting seems limited and social media may frame news differently from traditional media" (pp. 19–20).

While concepts around agenda setting in relation to mass media and social tools are often grounded within the context of liberal democratic frameworks, studies that have focused on more closed political systems, such as the one found in China, can also reveal valuable insights into the role of Internet technologies in shaping the agenda-setting process. For instance, journalism scholar Luo (2014) found "bidirectional agenda-setting influences … between the online public

agenda and traditional media agenda" (p. 1289). Luo conducted a content analysis of newspaper articles and online forum posts to examine the impact of online public opinion on both the media and government agendas. While the findings indicate that online public agendas "were not likely to influence the policy agenda" in China, they do nonetheless suggest that online public opinion has become a "competing agenda-setting force in contemporary China" (p. 1289).

Although the interplay between social media and traditional mass media channels suggests a dynamic relationship in terms of agenda-setting effects, research conducted by Lee, Kim, and Scheufele (2016) focused on agenda setting solely within the domain of the Internet— with particular attention on the "relationship between online searches and individual's [*sic*] perceptions of the 'most important problem'" (p. 440). Indeed, the "most important problem" (MIP) phenomenon is central to the notion of agenda setting because it can make "people more vigilant about issues … motivating [them] to keep closer track of one issue or another" (p. 442). Using a case study approach that focused on the 2008 financial crisis, the scholars examined the relationship of Google Trends data on economic issues (as indicated by select keywords and search terms reflecting select economic issues) with daily survey data on the proportion of U.S. citizens who considered the economy as being the MIP. The scholars found that online searches related to economic information "can serve as an indicator of economic salience" (p. 450) or, to put it another way, that "online search trends can signal changes in political perceptions in the general population" (p. 452).

Agenda setting and civil rights movements. In examining California's Proposition 8, a 2008 ballot initiative to eliminate the right of same-sex couples to marry, Sayre, Bode, Shah, Wilcox, and Shah (2010) tracked content regarding the proposition in top California newspapers, Google News search results, and YouTube videos, with the intent to examine agenda-setting

relationships. Research results confirmed that YouTube "both reflected and shaped news coverage of Proposition 8," which essentially means that YouTube users were able to "help drive—and at times lead—public discourse on socially relevant and politically important issues" (Sayre et al., 2010, p. 26). Furthermore, research by Guo and Saxton (2014) shines light on a sample of 188 civil rights and advocacy non-profit organizations; Guo and Saxton argue that the power of social media advocacy lies in its potential for "public education" rather than as a "mobilization tool"—particularly when considering that tweets used to "facilitate public events, direct action, and grassroots lobbying [are] less frequent than might be expected" (p. 17). In reaching their conclusions, the researchers used a methodology involving quantitative content analyses that examined the prevalence of certain advocacy tactics already identified in current literature, as well as qualitative inductive analyses to identify previously unidentified categories of "communicative and advocacy practices" (p. 6).

Twitter as a tool for journalists. In exploring the interplay between Twitter and mainstream journalism, Ahmad (2010) has noted that journalists' perspectives are inevitably shaped through the use of Twitter, "both for ideas and to provide evidence for all branches of news" (p. 151). Ahmad's research involved gathering empirical data through a methodology focused on socio-anthropological reportage based on the researcher's first-hand experience at *The Guardian*, a British national daily newspaper, with a particular focus on the newspaper's coverage of the G20 protests in 2009 (p. 149). While acknowledging the role of Twitter in allowing *The Guardian* to "cover an all-day news event in real time" (p. 151), Ahmad contends that Twitter was fundamentally transforming the role of the journalist into one focused "as much [on] filtering as [on] gathering and garnering of information" (p. 152).

Also exploring Twitter and its influence on journalists was John Parmelee of the University of North Florida, who conducted 11 in-depth interviews with political journalists to decipher how journalists "use Twitter for story ideas and sources, interaction and branding" (Parmelee, 2013, p. 297). Journalists involved in the study indicated that Twitter was "the main social media platform they use[d] to do their job" (p. 297), with Twitter regarded as an "awareness system" and a tool for crowdsourcing stories and ideas (p. 303). Revers (2014) also explored the notion of transparency around Twitter, noting that "journalists' discussion partners on Twitter are mostly insiders, which raises … questions about its significance as a public sphere" (p. 823). Revers's research involved interviews with 31 journalists and political reporters and 300 hours of observation at the New York State Capitol in Albany between April 2009 and June 2011 (p. 810). The researcher also expanded his ethnography in 2010 to "closely" monitor the Twitter feeds of 25 reporters and news bureaus and "casually" monitor 45 Twitter feeds of officials, aids, lobbyists, and former political reporters (p. 810). A dichotomy ultimately emerged between traditionalists and "intense tweeters," with the former *not* regarding "tweets as news" and the latter regarding "a tweet as a segment within a flow of news discourse" (p. 822).

Activism, Protest, and the Public Sphere

Public sphere and citizenship. One of the most prominent linkages between social media and public policy relates to the notion of activism and protest. Within an educational context, Rheingold (2008) has argued that citizens are increasingly seeking to contribute to public discourse as a result of "digital natives"—a generation of citizens "for whom the Internet is not a transformative new technology but a feature of their lives that has always been there" (p. 99)—gradually entering the realm of civil society. Scholars such as Rheingold (2008) and Bennett (2008) have examined numerous examples of youth across the globe participating in

social networks and online initiatives aimed at encouraging digital citizenship and social change. In light of these examples of civic engagement, Rheingold (2008) has stated that participatory media education, including new media literacies in using tools such as blogs and wikis, "can draw [students] into positive early experiences with citizenship that could influence their civic behavior throughout their lives" (p. 102). With citizens now having the ability to be "participants in a conversation" (Benkler, as cited in Rheingold, 2008, p. 103), it seems only natural for education to also evolve in how it prepares students to "interact with their democracy and experience their role as citizens" (p. 103).

Furthermore, in examining the changing nature of citizenship in the digital age, Bennett (2008) elucidates the natural proclivity of youth towards online activism because of the post-industrial shift away from the "dutiful citizen model … to an actualizing citizen model favoring loosely networked activism to address issues that reflect personal values" (p. 14). To this end, researchers June, Hong, and Sung-Min (2011) note that in jurisdictions such as Korea, the need for competencies such as "critical and creative thinking" in relation to enabling citizens to contribute to policy development through social tools ultimately requires a "rethinking of the education system as much as it does the policy making process" (p. 129).

While critiques of online activism may focus on the "reductive question of *does it work or not*," Freelon (2014) has argued that online activism needs to be conceptualized around the question of "*where does it fit* among a broader repertoire of tools and tactics" (p. 197). Indeed, in analyzing the protest of two legislative bills in the U.S. Congress—the Protect Intellectual Property Act (PIPA) and the Stop Online Piracy Act—O'Leary (2012) examined the Twitter accounts of U.S. senators and stated that Twitter and Facebook both "played a significant role in

rousing opposition and facilitating direct communication among legislators" about the bills and,

particularly, PIPA (p. 64).

The education debate. In relation to Twitter's role in mediating debates concerning

education and curriculum, Supovitz (2015) notes that "for the first time, education policy is

playing out on social media as much as it is in statehouses and school board meetings" (p. 21). In

his research into the curriculum debate playing out in the United States, Supovitz collected

approximately 190,000 tweets "from 53,000 distinct actors using the Twitter hashtag

#commoncore … from September 2013 through February 2014" (p. 21). Findings indicate that

"while many topics tend to trend and quickly disperse on Twitter, the #commoncore debate is a

persistent and active network," and the existence of "three distinct structural subcommunities"

within the social network ultimately reflects on the Common Core debate as being a "proxy war

about broader cultural disagreements over the future direction of American education" (p. 23).

Indeed, in further exploring the public sphere through the education lens, Kelly (2011) used an

ethnographic content analysis that focused on media coverage of the development and rollout of

social justice curriculum in British Columbia. Within the context of the public sphere and Nancy

Fraser's democratic theory concerning "subaltern counterpublics" (Fraser, as cited in Kelly,

2011, p. 185), Kelly's finding reveals that niche media, in particular, play a critical role in

enhancing "the participation of people who … have been subordinated in the wider, stratified

society" (p. 196), which in turn counters mainstream media's focus on neutral coverage that

merely tallies "different groups' policy preferences rather than … a rich exchange of views"

(p. 196).

Event-driven responses. While social media may often be regarded as a source for

breaking news and real-time information about key events, scholars have also examined the

precise nature of Twitter volume (number of tweets on a day-to-day basis) in response to key events. Jang and Pasek (2015), for example, collected both social and traditional online media data for a two-year period (between 2012 and 2014), with a total of 46.3 billion public tweets and 194 million traditional news stories analyzed (p. 7). After regressing "the daily volumes of Twitter and news coverage into the prevalence of key events" (p. 15), the scholars conclude that "not every key event increases Twitter traffic" (p. 17)—which may ultimately imply that Twitter's "ability to guide public attention is limited" because of the "hierarchical structure [of social media] where only a few elite Twitter users draw large numbers of daily followers" (p. 18). The notion of hierarchy and a limited number of users dominating online activity is further echoed by Xu, Sang, Blasiola, and Park (2014), who conducted both network and content analyses of Twitter activism in the case of the Wisconsin recall election, finding support for their initial hypothesis that "more connected and involved users were more successful in influencing information flow within Twitter networks" (p. 1286). Yet, despite the hierarchical network structure engendered by Twitter, the potential of the network to continually expand is significant. For example, with a specific case study focused on the Occupy Wall Street movement and a methodology involving content analysis of tweets using the #OWS hashtag, Gleason (2013) has suggested that one of the key attributes of Twitter was that it supported "informal learning" about the protest—especially through the use of hyperlinks that led users to thematic information such as the protests' rationale, tactics, and connections to other social movements (p. 977). In other words, Twitter served as a platform for both content creation and learning purposes (p. 978).

Spain's anti-austerity movement and Twitter. Over the past several years, numerous event- or issue-specific protests have emerged as case studies for better understanding the role of

Twitter as a vehicle for instigating change—whether it is political, social, economic, or cultural. In assessing the interplay between protest movements and social media in three specific political movements (the 2011 Indignados movement in Spain, the 2011 Occupy movement, and the 2013 Vinegar protests in Brazil), Bastos, Mercea, and Charpentier (2015) tracked 100 Twitter hashtags associated with the movements and 100 Facebook groups "dedicated to the events" (p. 325). Focusing on the "Granger causality between social media streams and onsite developments" at the events (p. 320), the researchers debunk the notion of "slacktivism" or merely symbolic protest action among social media users, instead discovering that "Twitter and Facebook are likely to have amplified demonstrations through continuous networked communication that feeds into the process of participant recruitment" (p. 334). Along similar lines, Ferre-Pavia and Perales Garcia (2015) conducted an exploratory, quantitative, and qualitative study based on content analysis focused on *indignados* (p. 25). Their research indicates that while there was not "much originality in the data and facts flowing on Twitter," it can nonetheless serve as a "powerful network … [to] initiate identity and solidarity flows that complement traditional information" (p. 32). Indignados was also the focus of research carried out by Gonzalez-Bailon, Borge-Holthoefer, and Moreno (2013), who observed Twitter data based on 70 keywords and "reconstructed two types of networks"—one focused on "basic infrastructure for information flow" and the other formed by "the more direct communication channels that users create by mentioning, or targeting, other users in their messages" (pp. 952-953). Gonzalez-Bailon et al. note in their findings that communication structures on social media were "centralized and hierarchical" (p. 960), and that the diffusion of information was ultimately shaped by "the number of people who already joined the process and the exposure of actors who did not yet join to those already participating" (p. 961).

Environmental protests. Merry (2013) focused on the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico as a case study for assessing the role of Twitter and environmental advocacy, with data consisting of content analysis of "all tweets of [26 U.S.-based national-level environmental organizations] about the Gulf oil disaster between the date of the blowout … [and] when the well was officially sealed" (p. 311). According to Merry's results, Twitter can enable environmental advocacy groups to "keep policy issues alive in the systemic agenda" (p. 319) while also mobilizing "supporters in the aftermath of focusing events" (p. 320). Keeping with the environmental theme, Segerberg and Bennett (2011) focused their research on protests surrounding the 2009 United Nations Summit in Copenhagen. In assessing random samples of tweets that used two hashtags (#thewave and #Cop15), the scholars note that the 2009 Summit protests involved "different protest ecologies"—with #thewave having been "successfully harnessed as an amplifying mobilization and publicity resource by a set of central actors," and #Cop15 reflecting "how more self-organizing streams may seek resources in different ways from organization-centred ones" (Segerberg & Bennett, 2011, p. 212).

Crisis escalation. In an exploratory case study investigating five crises involving large private sector companies (Dell, Domino's, United Airlines, and Southwest Airlines) and a Singapore politician, Pang, Hassan, and Chong (2014) examined a wide series of sources as part of their data collection, including blog postings, Facebook comments, and Twitter updates (data set one); news reports from major news publications (data set two); online posts and press announcements from the organizations or individuals involved (data set three); and financial statements from the organizations involved (data set four) (pp. 102-103). The researchers' conclusions indicate that while social tools have empowered citizens to "air their grievances," mainstream media ultimately integrate stories into reporting only if they "are able to fulfill the

inherent newsworthiness criteria of the newsroom" (p. 112). Similarly, in exploring the diffusion

of information and agenda-setting effects in the formation of crises, Sung and Hwang (2014)

carried out a content analysis of online and traditional media coverage of a local incident in

South Korea involving allegations of a restaurant employee physically attacking a pregnant

woman (p. 249). Sung and Hwang note that Twitter, in particular, was a "leading outlet of crisis-

related reports in terms of both volume and content," thereby highlighting an "inter-media

agenda setting phenomenon" and revealing that tweeters and bloggers "played a critical role in

diffusing *new* [emphasis added] information to the public, whereas traditional news …

disseminated … information to a *wider range* [emphasis added] of the public" (p. 255).

Summary of Literature Review

While there are likely many unanswered questions needing further examination, the

existing literature provides a solid foundation for understanding the multiple ways in which

social media, and particularly Twitter, can play a role in shaping public policy if policy makers

are paying attention. One challenge with concisely summarizing a review of literature

concerning Twitter and public policy is that scholars appear to approach the subject from two

separate yet interrelated viewpoints: one focused on viewing the subject through a government or

institutional lens (e.g., examining how institutions should respond to the new Internet-enabled

political landscape), and the second focused on understanding the social media phenomenon

through a citizen-centred lens (e.g., examining how citizens and advocacy movements are

employing social media to effect change). Nonetheless, the literature review does highlight that

social tools and public policy outcomes are becoming inherently linked, with significant

implications for traditional public policy actors such as advocacy groups, not-for-profit

organizations, and journalists and their mainstream media platforms. Common conclusions

suggest that issue framing and public opinion (e.g., setting of the public policy agenda) now entail a reciprocal relationship between online and traditional media, but the extent of the relationship may vary depending on the media tools and issues in question. Moreover, in examining specific protest movements, scholars appear to have reached similar conclusions in relation to the power of Twitter in helping to create broad-based awareness of issues through information dissemination, though some scholars appear to differ in their views on whether Twitter can effectively encourage direct action. Conclusions aside, much of the methodology in the research has focused on case study approaches involving content analyses of tweets, online materials, and traditional news to determine relationships.

Finally, despite the significant amount of literature that deals with the intersection of social media and public policy, the biggest gap is the lack of analysis pertaining specifically to case studies focused on topics of human rights within a Canadian legislative context, particularly in terms of how social media can challenge public policy and help move policy towards change. This research, therefore, seeks to further contribute to the study of social media and public policy by focusing on the education policy niche (e.g., Bill 10) within an Alberta context. In using a case study approach, this research may also help elucidate the role of Twitter in other policy-driven debates and scenarios.

Research Design and Methodology

Research Question

The primary research question is as follows: Within the context of a major public policy or legislative initiative, what is the perceived role of a specific social media tool in the public discourse? In order to address this research question, the researcher is seeking an in-depth understanding and examination of the perceptions of different actors, including their rationale and thinking on the factors that may have contributed to their decision-making processes in relation to aspects of discourse surrounding a particular piece of legislation and public policy.

Rationale for a Case Study Approach

The research question for this study is inherently focused on understanding a phenomenon in a way that attempts to elucidate the perceptions and experience of key stakeholders. Therefore, the research question is intended to delve deeply into investigating the experiences of participants and to fully appreciate their unique vantage points as representatives of news media, government, and advocacy (*advocacy* in this case refers to an individual or group seeking a certain policy outcome on behalf of a cause or mandate). For this to occur, the researcher is proposing a case study approach in order to focus on a very specific example of a major public policy or legislative initiative in some depth.

This research may be useful in understanding the role of social media for other controversial legislation; however, the focus of this study is to provide a full description of what happened in relation to a particular case. Indeed, a primary rationale for the case selected for this study is that it exemplifies the type of policy issue that can occur and evolve when there is a significant level of public interest expressed through social media, and especially when there is an element of controversy and there are existing groups already engaged in the process.

Thoroughly understanding a phenomenon. Although a significant amount of literature deals with the intersection of social media and public policy, to date, there are a limited number of case studies regarding education policy (specifically the concepts of bullying and tolerance) debates. Studies in education have included the role of mass media in Ontario's curriculum debate (Parker, 2011), the role of Twitter in the United States' Common Core curriculum debate (Supovitz, 2015), and British Columbia's social justice curriculum (Kelly, 2011). There may be a need to thoroughly understand specific organizations or events in order to enable a more in-depth analysis of a given public policy and social media phenomenon. In this respect, a case study is a good way to collect such information and provide relevant analysis because of how it can help enable a thorough understanding of the perspectives of different stakeholders involved in the discussion.

A qualitative approach. In addition, a qualitative approach is an appropriate approach for this study, given that it can be effective in examining detail and understanding the reasons behind attitudes and behaviours. Atieno (2009) notes that qualitative research is appropriate "if the purpose is to learn from the participants in a setting or a process the way *they* experience it, the meanings they put on it, and how they interpret what they experience" (p. 16). In this way, the researcher is seeking a richer and more descriptive account of how key policy actors perceive social media in influencing a controversial moment in Alberta's sociocultural and educational landscape, which is why this study uses a qualitative approach. As Atieno alludes, the benefit of a qualitative approach is that it enables the researcher to "understand phenomena deeply and in detail" and in a way that enables a "discovery of central themes and analysis of core concerns" (p. 16). Qualitative methods are generally better suited to understand detail (e.g., depth).

Instrumental case study. An instrumental case study is one that examines a particular case "to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory," with the case itself being "of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else" (Stake, 1998, p. 88). In this sense, the case being examined in this study is to serve as an instrumental case study in two ways. First, the specific public policy issue at hand is ultimately secondary to the primary interest of the research, which centres on exploring the role of communication technologies in affecting the legislative and policy development process. This research focuses on the role of social media vis-à-vis public policy, and to carry out this analysis, the researcher studied the specific instance involving a specific social media tool and a specific public policy issue. Second, the researcher's intent was to conduct the study carefully and diligently, insofar as others may be able to use it in some capacity. In other words, it is hoped that this study contributes to research around understanding the way social media can influence public policy. In this way, the particular case in this study helps to establish some broad parameters for the researcher's interests while nonetheless allowing for flexibility to more generally understand the relationship between social media and public policy—without getting bogged down in every nuance and peculiarity of public policy issues being explored.

Data-Gathering Method

Within the context of this research and the case study in question, it is important to note that Twitter was a frequently used tool, with a large number of topic-related tweets created by many individuals interested in the issue. The intent of this case study is to learn about tweets related to the specific public policy issue (e.g., the nature of the arguments, the major themes, the framing techniques, the public policy critiques and who they were directed towards, etc.), and then understand three distinct perspectives related to the case. In other words, the researcher was

seeking two types of information, including the ability to analyze the tweets themselves and to gain an understanding of the thinking of some of the key players. With regard to the former, content analysis enabled the researcher to closely examine tweets for common patterns and themes, identify lines of argument and frequency, and ultimately report on these aspects using aggregate numbers and percentages to provide a picture of the type of activity that occurred on Twitter. The second part focused on understanding key participants. To this end, this case study had two components: the first part focused on content analysis of a sample of tweets and Twitter discourse, and the second part focused on interviews with participants.

Content Analysis

Krippendorff (2013) describes content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 24). In this way, the researcher wants to be able to describe the phenomenon, and carrying out a content analysis of tweets can help facilitate this process. An examination of the tweets provided raw data—data that is not dependent on recall or a retroactive perspective— within the time frame selected for the study. However, it is important for the researcher to acknowledge that it was not practical to examine *all* the tweets associated with the case study because of the number of posts. Given the qualitative nature of this research and the fact that the researcher was primarily interested in exploring some of the significant or dominant themes and dynamics that emerged on Twitter in relation to the case study, a convenience sampling method was used.

Convenience sampling. The convenience sampling method for the qualitative content analysis section, while based on the assumptions of the researcher, served to provide a set of examples of publicly available Twitter messages expressed by different actors. As Krippendorff

(2013) has noted, "a convenience sample is motivated by analytical interest in an available body of texts that is known not to include all texts of the population" (p. 121). For this study, the researcher's focus was on collecting a sampling of tweets associated with Bill 10 (e.g., tweets that use the #Bill10 hashtag) and then use that sampling to shed light on some of the salient aspects of the tweets—such as who was tweeting, to whom the tweets were directed, what themes and arguments were being brought forward, and so on. However, given the literally thousands of tweets using the relevant hashtag, the researcher proposed a quasi-random approach to acquire a manageable number of tweets to analyze. The tweets that the researcher did not include in the study are those that may be considered offensive (e.g., those that are racist or homophobic in nature) and therefore beyond the reasonable sphere of discourse focused on the public issue. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this study, tweets involving satire and critique (i.e., tweets focused on aspects of the policy issue rather than personal attacks) were considered reasonable to include in the analysis.

By integrating a chronology of milestones and a content analysis method, the researcher strove to provide a relatively detailed description of the way in which the Bill 10 debate progressed within the realm of Twitter. The intent of describing key examples of messaging and statements used on Twitter is to encapsulate the types of communication that occurred through social media. In addition, by focusing specifically on Twitter, as opposed to other social media, this study remains focused on a specific new medium of communication and its role in public policy. Twitter was specifically chosen in this case based on its extensive use during the Bill 10 debate and the ability of anyone to retrieve publicly available tweets for analysis using Twitter's search mechanism and an appropriate hashtag. Ultimately, this front-end, qualitative aspect of the research enabled the researcher to attempt to understand the phenomenon in a way that is

anchored to real time (i.e., tweets representing actual data that occurred during the Bill 10 debate).

Data for content analysis. In terms of the process for the content analysis, the researcher utilized the search mechanism on Twitter's website, using the #Bill10 hashtag to identify tweets issued between December 2014 and March 2015. In terms of choosing tweets for the analysis, the research is intending to focus on using the #Bill10 hashtag, with the assumption that tweets associated with the hashtag are or were relevant to the case. Individual tweets were selected using a quasi-random count (e.g., every 10 tweets) that appeared in a publicly available timeline on Twitter. This quasi-random sampling of tweets was used by the researcher to provide a description of some of the salient issues and underlying arguments covered through Twitter (e.g., the rights of students, the impact of bullying in schools, references to values, links to empirical evidence, etc.).

Definition of pro-/anti-legislation and descriptors used for tweets. In terms of identifying pro or anti-legislation tweets, the researcher used the following criteria to assess the sample tweets (it is important to note that the criteria was based on the time of the tweet, given that there was a possibility that an individual could potentially change orientation at different times during the debate). It should also be noted that the researcher had expectations of a shift in pro- or anti-legislation sentiment based on changes in the government's legislation. This means that while citizens' views on the public policy issue likely remained constant in this case, government's shifting perspective (as represented by different versions of the bill) were likely to result in changes to the pro- or anti-legislation stance.

- *Pro-legislation* tweets were defined as those that supported government's legislation or

  had an overall supportive view towards government. These could include, for example,

  an explicit or implied statement in support of the legislation at any stage in the debate.

- *Anti-legislation* tweets were defined as those that criticized or argued against

  government's legislation and approach to GSAs. These could include explicit or implied

  statements to critique government, or arguments, statements, or messages in support of an

  alternative policy approach to the one espoused by government in relation to GSAs.

- Finally, *neutral perspective* tweets were defined as tweets that did not necessarily make

  an explicit argument, or any implied statement visible to the researcher, either for or

  against the legislation, but instead presented some form of basic information or a non-

  rhetorical question.

  Note: Tweets from media columnists, media reporters and media outlets are categorized

  separately, with pro- or anti-legislation perspectives identified using the same criteria.

  Tweets from media columnists (who were presumed to have expressed more subjective

  views outside of Twitter) are assessed based on the tweets themselves—that is, they are

  based on whether there is an explicit anti- or pro-legislation stance, or whether the

  information sharing appears to be neutral, in the actual standalone tweet.

Interviews with Participants

As part of this study, the researcher planned to engage directly with participants to gain a

rich and in-depth understanding of the perspectives and views of key players who sought to

make an impact on the Bill 10 debate. The researcher wanted to understand three distinct

perspectives of disparate individuals. Interviews are well suited to collecting this type of

information because they allow the researcher to engage with (and probe) participants in a

confidential manner, allowing them to safely express their thoughts, feelings, reactions, and perspectives. In this way, face-to-face interviews with a cross-section of policy actors would allow the researcher to acquire this in-depth understanding. While the interviews did not necessarily refer back to the minute details of Bill 10, the intent was to include references to certain milestones or communications that occurred during the discourse (e.g., a quote or policy amendment) to allow participants to express their present-day thoughts and perceptions about the occurrence, as well as to facilitate the analysis of the responses. Care was taken to ensure the conversation with participants was more conceptual and less personal in order to minimize participants' sense of being compelled to be defensive about their perspectives or views. To put it another way, open-ended questions were designed to enable participants to feel free to go in the direction they wanted, rather than feeling obliged to defend their actions or statements as they occurred during the Bill 10 discourse.

Appreciating different understandings of the same event. The researcher anticipated that all participants in the study would, to varying degrees, have a potentially different understanding of the variables and events that unfolded as part of the Bill 10 debate. That is to say, not only were participants' perceptions likely to be different and unique depending on their roles and vantage points, but their understanding of the actual events may also have differed based on factors such as the information and arguments to which they were exposed during the discourse. Given these differences, some flexibility was needed for the researcher to explore in some depth certain aspects of participant views while nonetheless keeping each participant within the parameters of a common frame of reference that would allow for analysis such as comparing and contrasting participant views. With this in mind, the researcher believed that semi-structured interviews would be well suited for this study.

Semi-structured approach. Semi-structured interviews provide a balance between ensuring a consistent set of questions and parameters for each interview, while also enabling the researcher to ask follow-up questions that delve more deeply into a certain line of thought that may be unique to the particular position and perspective of the interviewee (i.e., they provide a common set of questions but allow flexibility given the different perspectives of the participants). Barriball and While (1994) note that semi-structured interviews are "well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers" (p. 330), while also acknowledging that "varied professional, educational and personal histories of … [a] sample group" can prevent the effective use of a "standardized interview schedule" (p. 330).

Participants were provided the option of refraining from answering any question (for any reason) and of reviewing transcripts prior to their being published as part of the research study. Furthermore, a sampling of the questions (see Appendix C for full interview guide) were provided to participants in advance of the formal interview in order to allow them the opportunity to formulate initial thoughts around the topic. Generally speaking, the questions were intended to address current perceptions of how Twitter was viewed as a channel for engaging in public policy debate, the advantages or limitations of a tool such as Twitter, and the interplay between Twitter comments and real-life events or milestones within a legislative process. The purpose of the questions was to understand how participants felt about the advantages and disadvantages of relying on Twitter to engage with public policy topics, how the tool differs from other channels (including other social tools and more traditional channels such as phone calls and letter writing campaigns), how participants would use Twitter today in comparison with how they used it at the time of the Bill 10 debate, how participants interpreted

tweets during the discourse, and how the role of Twitter may have evolved from the start of the debate compared to near the end of the discourse.

The interview itself was planned to consist of 10 main questions, 7 of which were used consistently for three participants, with 3 additional questions tailored specifically for each interviewee depending on their policy role. Finally, it was anticipated that participants' perceptions may in fact evolve during the interview itself; therefore, a goal of the interviews was to enable participants to reflect without their feeling threatened or judged on their current perceptions of past events.

A note on timelines. It is important to note that at the time this research study was being developed, Bill 10 was still making media headlines through ongoing demonstrations on the part of those who both supported and opposed aspects of the legislation. To keep the scope of this research study focused, the content analysis was focused on the specific time period of December 2014 to March 2015, as this was the period during which the intensity of social media activity was greatest, and when many of the most contentious aspects of the Bill 10 debate unfolded in both traditional and social media.

Interview data based on three unique perspectives. For the purposes of this study, the researcher chose to carry out three interviews, with the primary rationale for the number of interviews being that it would allow for an exploration of three unique perspectives—each probably with a different agenda and set of insights related to public policy—through the lens of mass media, an advocate group, and government. The researcher intended to select these three participants based on their specific roles and regarded them as key actors in the public policy mix given their ability to influence (either directly or indirectly) a policy agenda or outcome. The government representative, for instance, was a key piece of the puzzle given that the ultimate

decision point for public policy is usually the government. Moreover, traditional news media play an integral role in mediating and serving as information gatekeeper to government's messaging about policy decisions, as well as to the views of advocates and interested stakeholders, who may be putting forward their opinions on what government should do in relation to any given policy issue. An advocate perspective is also critical to understanding a stakeholder perspective, particularly as it relates to strategies or approaches used to potentially compel government to adapt or change a policy stance. An *advocate* in this context refers to an advocate for LGBTQ rights, which means the advocate participant represented a direct stakeholder perspective or that of someone who was the focus of the legislation. In other words, the advocate is someone whose cause would have been directly affected by the legislation.

However, the researcher does acknowledge that this relatively broad categorization of the three sectors may preclude a further segmentation of individual participants. Nonetheless, while there certainly could be opportunities to engage additional participants by further segmenting each of the broad categories as they relate to government, media, and advocacy, the focus of this research is on providing an exploratory insight into how participants in these three broad sectors perceived the role of a particular social media tool in relation to a specific public policy case (not on representing the specific views of the participants on a public policy itself).

Study Population and Sampling Method

Within the context of the case study of focus, the researcher contends that three types of perspectives were important to explore: those of a senior public service member from the Government of Alberta, a news media representative, and an advocate. These three perspectives reflect three of the key pillars of any public policy-making and deliberative process: government writes and implements policy and works directly with or for the political party in power; news

media has a dual responsibility to inform the public and reflect on the public's reaction, which in turn has the potential to impact how the public views any policy initiative; and finally, the advocate can be directly impacted by government policy but can also act in a lobbying capacity and try to directly influence government policy, as well as interact with media to promote their views beyond their local stakeholders. Therefore, within this context, the planned study population consisted of three individuals who could each provide a unique perspective on the role of social media in the Bill 10 debate:

- a senior civil servant from the Government of Alberta who was familiar with communications and Bill 10 legislation (e.g., someone who worked for a government department and was independent of political parties);

- an Alberta news media representative who could provide insights, thoughts, and commentary on their perspective of the process surrounding the role of social media in the Bill 10 debate; and

- an advocate for the LGBTQ community who had been supportive of GSAs.

The unifying criteria guiding the selection of each of these individuals included their familiarity and understanding of the Bill 10 debate, as well as their ability to articulate perspectives and thoughts in relation to Twitter and the discourse surrounding the legislation that ultimately materialized at various points in the Bill 10 discourse.

Key Considerations

Avoiding retrospective questions. One of the primary challenges with research of this nature (i.e., research that focuses on the observations of individuals involved with a particular historical event) is that the perceptions of those involved is likely to have morphed and further evolved with the passage of time—which means the challenge for the researcher may be to

collect information that is as accurate as possible (i.e., information that reflects the opinions of participants when the event occurred). The information provided by the participants should also accurately reflect what occurred vis-à-vis social media and public policy, but the challenge is that there may not be any way to verify the participants' perceptions. As such, it is important for the researcher in this scenario to limit asking retrospective questions, where recollection errors are more likely. For example, Nickerson (1998) notes that "a problematic aspect of human reasoning" is confirmation bias, which refers to "unwitting selectivity in the acquisition and use of evidence" (p. 175). Eysenck (2001) further notes that confirmation bias "occurs when what is remembered of an event is influenced by the observer's expectations" (p. 224), and that even beyond the notion of confirmation bias, memory of any given event "is easily distorted by post-event information" (p. 229). Another possible factor to consider is that the role of social media during the Bill 10 debate may not have been well established and could easily shift, so there was little to anchor participants' early thoughts and opinions. To help mitigate this challenge, the research design for this study involved assessing and analyzing the *current* perceptions of participants in relation to what happened in the past, with the milestones encompassing Bill 10 (along with the tweets that occurred at certain milestones) simply meant to provide a common focus and tangible scenario in which participants could ground their views and thoughts vis-à-vis Twitter and public policy. One other consideration relates to changes that might have occurred with the participants themselves since the time of the Bill 10 debate (e.g., taking on new roles or responsibilities).

A present-day lens. In other words, in dealing with participants' perceptions, the focus was on how they viewed the debate through their present-day lens. This contrasts with the alternative approach of pushing participants to recall their actions and thoughts as they occurred

at the time of the event itself. With either approach, some significant disadvantages and

advantages should be noted. Because of concerns about the quality of participants' recalled

perceptions, the researcher decided to focus on participants' present perspectives. By focusing on

present-day perceptions of participants in relation to an actual historical event, this research

remains grounded in a concrete, "real" event that participants could reflect on, including

milestones and incidents against which participants expressed their current perceptions. In

addition, this approach also reflects that other events or public policy issues could also affect the

participants' views of Twitter (e.g., while Bill 10 could have had an impact on forming the

perception they were explaining, so too could other events or public policy issues where Twitter

was used). Finally, to keep the task specific and defined so that all participants would be

discussing the same thing, the research also involved asking participants to provide their

interpretation of a sample of Twitter posts associated with milestones that were part of the scope

of this study, thereby enabling participants to focus on something concrete.

      Triangulating the data. Where possible, the researcher attempted to triangulate the data

from both the interviews and content analysis to better understand the perceptions concerning

Twitter and Bill 10. The researcher compared and contrasted certain observations expressed by

participants to the content analysis. To ensure triangulation, the "process of using multiple

perceptions to clarify meaning" (Stake, 1998, p. 97), the researcher examined the data to look for

common themes across the different interviews for the purpose of contributing to an

understanding of the role of social media in public policy. Furthermore, Bill 10 was used as a

specific frame of reference in order to be a foundational anchor, with the participants then able to

express their individual perspectives on what happened in the discourse. In other words, there are

factual aspects where triangulation is possible.

Bill 10 as the Case Study

For this research study, Bill 10 provided the case study to be examined, while Twitter was the social media tool of focus. To be more specific, the study strove to zero in on the way in which key policy actors, including those in the fields of advocacy, journalism, and government, currently perceived the role of Twitter in influencing a specific public policy outcome. The researcher acknowledges that the recall of previous perceptions may be a "moving target," in that participants' current perceptions at the time of the interviews were likely different than they were prior to the Bill 10 debate having unfolded, and were likely to also further differ from specific participants' perceptions or views that developed while the legislation was being debated (see "Literature Review" for related findings on considerations regarding how and when social media users express their views—specifically research by Hampton et al., 2014; Chen, 2018).

Indeed, because of the nature of Twitter, the tool is well suited to examine participants' perceptions as they related to public policy and how participants perceived the Bill 10 debate to have unfolded. Twitter is mobile, can allow for an instant expression of views and interaction with other users, and is ubiquitous among elected officials and within government departments—thereby enabling citizens to direct their posts at (or engage with) policy makers in a direct way. This study focused primarily on present-day perceptions in relation to the time at which the Bill 10 debate was in the process of unfolding and the legislation was being introduced, amended, and ultimately finalized. Twitter can offer perspectives that are relatively close to being in real time, which means that by assessing tweets from the time of the debate, a researcher can potentially acquire a more accurate sense of the discourse and thinking at the time of the event. Moreover, the research methods and approach are also intended to allow space for the researcher to shed light not only on the learnings experienced by participants in relation to the

Bill 10 debate (as viewed through a present-day lens), but also to provide preliminary insights in

relation to the role of social media, as seen through Twitter, in future debates that are relevant to

participants or their organizations.

Summary of Research Design and Methodology

The topic of social media and public policy inevitably opens the door to a countless

number of research pathways. However, by proposing to take a qualitative case study approach,

through the use of content analysis and semi-structured interviews to provide a descriptive

analysis of the perceptions of key public policy actors in relation to Twitter and Bill 10, this

research design is intended to help further advance communicators' understanding of the

implications of social media, as well as the considerations and nuances of the ways in which

social tools are affecting the narrative.

Findings

Overview of the Findings

The findings are presented with the content analysis in the first section, followed by the interview data. Prior to presenting the data for each of these two sections, an overview and some brief context are provided regarding the researcher's approach to the data collection.

Collecting sample tweets. The purpose of this content analysis is to elucidate the role of Twitter in contributing to the public discourse surrounding Bill 10 through a descriptive analysis of tweets issued during key milestones associated with the legislation. Bill 10 was a trending topic on Twitter when the legislation was introduced in early December 2014, with some reports indicating that there were more than 16,000 tweets over a 24-hour period with the hashtags #Bill10 or #ableg, and that the hashtag #abpride ranked as high as fourth in Canada (Geddes, 2014). For the purposes of carrying out the following descriptive analysis, the researcher used the hashtag #Bill10 to conduct a search (using Twitter's search mechanism) of tweets that appeared on Twitter's publicly available timeline on December 28, 2016.

The number of tweets selected. All tweets were selected as they appeared on Twitter's publicly available timeline on December 28, 2016. The approximate total number of tweets that met the researcher's criteria for each milestone is also provided as part of the analysis. The breakdown is as follows:

First milestone (December 1-2, 2014)—Introduction of Bill 10 legislation:

- A total of 80 tweets (7% out of a total of approximately 1,080 tweets) were selected for December 1, 2014, the day on which Bill 10 was introduced by the government in the Alberta legislature and the day the government effectively removed Bill 202, the previously introduced private member's bill, from the order paper. The researcher chose

80 as a number that would provide a reasonable picture of the tweets for the period or

day. In this way, it was largely an arbitrary number. The first tweet with the #Bill10

hashtag appearing on Twitter's timeline for December 1, 2014, was selected, and then

every 10th tweet was selected until a total of 80 tweets were accumulated (i.e.,

progressing from the earliest tweet issued on December 1 to every 10th subsequent tweet

issued that day [going into December 2] until a total of 80 tweets were accumulated).

This approach for selecting tweets became the researcher's model and standard for

subsequent milestones.

Second milestone (December 3, 2014)—Amendment to Bill 10 introduced and passed:

- Using the same approach, beginning with the first tweet with the #Bill10 hashtag and

  selecting every 10th tweet, 80 tweets (5% out of a total of approximately 1,775 tweets)

  were selected for December 3, 2014, the day the first amendment to Bill 10 was

  introduced by the government in the Alberta legislature.

Third milestone (December 4, 2014)—Day after amendment was introduced and passed:

- Using the same approach described above, 80 tweets (4% out of a total of approximately

  2,275 tweets) were selected for December 4, 2014, the day after the first amendment was

  introduced by government.

Fourth milestone (December 4-5, 2014)—Legislative pause announced:

- To capture the reaction on Twitter to the government's announcement of the legislative

  pause later in the day on December 4, 80 tweets (6% out of a total of approximately

  1,325 tweets) were selected: These included 40 tweets towards the end of the day on

  December 4 (starting with the last tweet issued with the #Bill10 hashtag on December 4,

  and then by selecting every 10th tweet issued prior in the day until a total of 40 tweets

were accumulated) and 40 tweets on December 5 (progressing from the earliest tweet

with the #Bill10 hashtag issued on December 5 and every 10th subsequent tweet issued

during the day until 40 tweets were accumulated).

Note: While the retrieval of tweets using Twitter's timeline did not allow the researcher

to identify the specific times at which each tweet was posted (though the tweets did

appear in sequential order), the researcher made the assumption that because the first set

of 80 tweets on December 4 included no reference to the legislative pause, they may have

been posted prior to the premier's announcement. Therefore, by selecting 80 tweets closer

to the end of day on December 4 and the start of the day on December 5 (tweets that did

not overlap with the first set of tweets), a reasonable assumption could be made that the

tweets were likely posted after the announcement of the legislative pause, as tweets

posted later in the day appear to reference the pause, unlike ones issued earlier in the day.

Fifth milestone (March 10, 2015)—Introduction and passing of final amended Bill 10

legislation:

- Finally, a total of 50 tweets (8% out of a total of approximately 655 tweets) were selected

  for March 10, 2015, the day on which the government introduced and passed the final

  amended Bill 10. These 50 tweets were compiled in the same way as the previous sets of

  tweets (i.e., starting with the first tweet with the #Bill10 hashtag appearing on Twitter's

  timeline for March 10, 2015, and then by selecting every next 10th tweet until a total of

  50 tweets were accumulated). A total of 50 (rather than 80) tweets for this milestone were

  selected using the same criteria for selecting tweets (i.e., selecting every 10th tweet)

  given the smaller overall number of tweets and the researcher's focus on a minimum

  number needed for carrying out the planned analysis. While the conversations about

GSAs continued well after this period, the frequency of tweets decreased following the passing of the final amended Bill 10. Furthermore, once the bill was passed, the discourse around Bill 10 could no longer affect the outcome of the legislation.

To recap, there were thousands of tweets with the #Bill10 hashtag that appeared on Twitter's timeline. The researcher estimates there were more than 7,000 tweets for just the time frames associated with the five milestones (5% of which are the focus of this content analysis) according to the search results appearing on Twitter's publicly available timeline. Furthermore, this number may in fact be a conservative estimate given that Twitter's search tool may not necessarily display every tweet that used the hashtag, or that people commenting on Bill 10 may not have always included the specific #Bill10 hashtag.

While search results reveal that literally thousands of tweets using the hashtag were available publicly for perusing, this study uses a quasi-random sampling of a total of 370 tweets associated with key milestones that occurred in the legislative process. This involved selecting a set number of tweets for each major milestone (80 tweets for the first four milestones and 50 tweets for the final milestone). The reason for this approach was that the researcher thought 80 tweets should be appropriate in most cases and representative for conducting the planned analysis. This quasi-random design may provide some insights and an overview of the nature of the public dialogue occurring via Twitter, particularly in relation to key milestones associated with the legislation.

How the Content Analysis Findings Are Presented

The content analysis findings are reported based on the major milestones for which sample tweets were collected. Within each milestone, a similar structure for presenting the findings is used. First, a table is presented to outline general aspects of the tweets, including

whether tweets were pro- or anti-legislation, as well as three key aspects for the tweets: the

interaction with elected officials, the interaction with journalists and media outlets, and the most

frequent themes or arguments specific to the Twitter discourse at the time of each milestone. In

addition, an approximate total number of tweets that appear for each milestone is also provided.

The reason for focusing on the interplay between Twitter users and elected officials and

media representatives is to elucidate the potential role of Twitter in shaping public opinion and

influencing policy outcomes. Furthermore, highlighting the most frequent themes or arguments

apparent in the sample set of tweets may shed light on the way in which certain aspects of the

legislation were prominent or the centre of attention as the legislation evolved from its initial

introduction through to its final passing. The most frequent themes that emerged for each

milestone are identified based on the observation of common topics in tweets that appeared to be

more numerous in each sample set.

Finally, in terms of identifying the number of unique Twitter users for each sample set,

one should also be mindful of potential algorithms used by Twitter. Without knowing the

specific algorithms that would have influenced the publicly available search results, the number

of unique users appearing in each sample set should be interpreted within the context of the

idiosyncrasies of Twitter's process for showing tweets when searching a hashtag.

Content Analysis

Milestone #1: Introduction of Bill 10, December 1, 2014

When Bill 10 was first introduced in the Alberta legislature on December 1, 2014, a barrage of tweets was issued by individuals concerned about the legislation. Table 1 provides an overview of the general aspects of the sample tweets. The introduction of Bill 10 would have allowed GSAs, giving schools the final say on whether to permit them. Students who were denied a GSA would have had to appeal to the school board or the courts.

Table 1

Aspects of Sample Tweets Associated with the Introduction of Bill 10

No. tweets selected for sample	No. tweets in the sample specific to Alberta's Bill 10 debate[a]	Pro-/anti-legislation[b]	Total no. unique Twitter users appearing in the valid sample set[c]	No. tweets that reference or tag specific MLAs in relation to Bill 10[d]	No. tweets that reference or tag news media representative or media outlets[e]	No. tweets from traditional news media (outlets, reporters, columnists)	Most frequent themes and patterns	Approx. total no. tweets appearing for this milestone (i.e., #Bill10 tweets on December 1-2, 2014)[f]
80	72 (90%)	Anti-legislation tweets: 69 (100%) Pro-legislation tweets: 0 (0%) Neutral tweets: 0 (0%)	61	20 (28%)	9 (13%)	3 (4%) Pro-/anti-legislation: all neutral (e.g., providing live coverage or promoting their coverage to come)	Tweets that reference or tag Bill 202 as a comparator or benchmark for Bill 10: 19 (26%)	1,080

Notes. MLA = Member of the Legislative Assembly. Percentages are based on the number of tweets specific to Alberta's Bill 10 debate (the 72 relevant tweets that appeared in the sample set). [a]As apparent to the researcher through references to gay–straight alliances, Alberta political figures, and related themes centred on student or school rights. [b]Not including tweets from news media outlets/reporters/columnists, which are categorized in a separate column. [c]Specific to those who tweeted about Alberta's Bill 10 legislation, including users who posted more than once. [d]Does not include tweets issued by MLAs themselves; percentage calculation includes decreased denominator to account for one MLA tweet. [e]Does not include tweets issued by news media outlets/reporters/columnists; percentage calculation includes decreased denominator to account for three media tweets. [f]May potentially include tweets that would not qualify as Alberta Bill 10–related tweets if they were more closely examined.

Aspects of the Tweets

Of the 72 tweets specific to Alberta's Bill 10 debate, all were anti-legislation in tone in that they criticized government's stance on GSAs and the legislation. In total, the sample set reveals 61 unique Twitter users contributing to the discourse, including those whose tweets appeared multiple times and those whose tweets appeared only once in the sample for this milestone.

Engagement with Elected Officials

One aspect of the sample tweets observed was the initiation of messages and references to elected officials on the part of citizens concerned with the legislation. For example, of the tweets specific to Bill 10 for this specific milestone, approximately 30% of them tagged various MLAs, including then premier Jim Prentice, various government MLAs, and Opposition party members. This means the tweets included an MLA's Twitter handle or referenced MLA names.

Encouraging dissenting government MLAs. In relation to government members, a few of these tweets were positioned to critique government's policy position by encouraging dissenting government MLAs to maintain their opposition to the legislation. One such tweet seemingly encouraged a government MLA to continue his support for GSAs by commending this particular MLA's courage to support students' access to GSAs, thereby potentially alluding to MLAs traditionally voting along party lines.

Disappointment at MLAs supporting the legislation. Other tweets also expressed disappointment at MLAs who supported the legislation. For example, one Twitter user referenced her Indigenous ancestry, indicating her disappointment with an MLA who is also of Indigenous heritage with a rhetorical question asking whether the MLA understood the feeling of being marginalized. In another example, some Twitter users directed their frustration directly at

the premier. By tagging the premier's Twitter handle, one individual asked the premier to

demonstrate leadership, while another expressed dissatisfaction by indicating that citizens expect

elected officials to be a conduit for citizen voices, but that the premier had silenced those voices.

Directing attention at the Opposition. Tweets were also directed at members of the

Opposition. In one tweet, a user provided a real-time update on the debate in the legislature by

citing how an Opposition MLA was naming other jurisdictions in Canada that allowed GSAs in

schools and the argument that no religious freedoms had been violated in those other

jurisdictions. Furthermore, in what may have been an attempt to further highlight government's

perceived lack of credibility on Bill 10, one tweet expressed amazement at how the official

leader of the Opposition (who was then a member of the right-of-centre Wildrose Party)

indicated even she would be voting against the government's legislation because it did not reflect

the values of Bill 202 that had been introduced by a competing Opposition party as a private

member's bill.

Directing comments at political parties rather than MLAs. Moreover, another

technique used by some Twitter users to engage MLAs was the use of hashtags associated with

the political party identified with the government—namely, the #PCAA hashtag, which

represents the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta. For example, one Twitter user

indicated that if he were a #PCAA MLA or member, he would be "ashamed" because of the

proposed Bill 10 legislation; another user posed a rhetorical question asking how #PCAA

supporters could possibly be in favour of such a bill. This approach, which involves

acknowledging but not necessarily speaking directly at government members, may potentially

have been an attempt to further compel the government's political and electoral base to force a

change of course.

Engagement with Traditional News Media

In the sample set, nine tweets tagged a specific Twitter handle for either a reporter, journalist, columnist, or media outlet. For example, in one tweet, a Twitter user directed a message to a media columnist, thanking the columnist for a recent piece in which the columnist appears to have "called out" the premier's approach to Bill 10 as "political maneuvering"— possibly alluding to the way Bill 10 superseded Bill 202 for debate in the legislature. In another tweet, a different user acknowledged a recent article by yet another columnist, thanking the columnist for a blog post on the "unreasonableness" of Bill 10 and then linking to the blog post itself. In addition to reaching out to columnists, citizens were also seen interacting with other media members; one former political staffer and GSA supporter suggested that local media outlets may be biased in government's favour, and another GSA advocate made a more general but direct plea to all Alberta media to cover the essence of Bill 10 by emphasizing the real impact that the legislation would have on the safety of children.

Most Frequent Themes and Arguments

For this sampling related to the introduction of the Bill 10 legislation, a common theme was the comparison of Bill 10 with Bill 202.

Bill 10 compared against Bill 202. In about a quarter of the tweets, there were comparisons between Bill 202 and Bill 10. In one instance, an infographic (link to sample tweet) was used to highlight the differences between the two bills, highlighting that Bill 10 differed substantially from Bill 202 in that the former would preclude students from starting GSAs where and when they wanted. A tone of defiance also came through in some of the tweets, with one from an Opposition MLA proclaiming that the legislative battle had not yet ended, and including the #Bill202 hashtag.

Milestone #2: Introduction of the First Amendment to Bill 10, December 3, 2014

Similar to when Bill 10 was first introduced, the government's first amendment to Bill 10 triggered a swift response from citizens on Twitter. Table 2 provides an overview of the general aspects of the sample tweets associated with the introduction of the amendment. The amended bill meant that students would no longer have to appeal decisions on GSAs in the courts but could instead go to the government, which would then ensure the set-up of a GSA either on or off school grounds.

Table 2

Aspects of Sample Tweets Associated with the Introduction of the First Amendment to Bill 10

No. tweets selected for sample	No. tweets in the sample that were specific to Alberta's Bill 10 debate	Pro-/anti-legislation[a]	Total no. unique Twitter users appearing in the sample set	No. tweets that reference or tag specific MLAs in relation to Bill 10[b]	No. tweets that reference or tag news media representative or media outlets[c]	No. tweets from traditional news media (outlets, reporters, columnists)	Most frequent themes and patterns	Approx. total no. tweets appearing for this milestone (i.e., #Bill10 tweets on December 3, 2014)
80	80 (100%)	Anti-legislation tweets: 73 (96%) Pro-legislation tweets: 1 (1%) Neutral tweets: 2 (3%)	61	34 (43%)	4 (5%)	4 (5%) Pro-/anti-legislation: all neutral (e.g., providing live coverage or promoting their coverage to come)	Tweets that represent real-time comments, coverage, or reaction to the debate unfolding in the legislature: 24 (30%) Tweets that allude to or explicitly reference concepts of segregation, establishing GSAs off school grounds, or discrimination: 13 (16.25%)	1,775

Notes. MLA = Member of the Legislative Assembly; GSA = gay–straight alliance.
[a]Not including tweets from news media outlets/reporters/columnists, which are categorized in a separate column; percentage calculation includes decreased denominator to account for four media tweets. [b]Does not include tweets issued by MLAs themselves, which in this sample set was nil. [c]Does not include tweets issued by news media outlets/reporters/columnists; percentage calculation includes decreased denominator to account for four media tweets.

Aspects of the Tweets

Of the 80 sample tweets selected by the researcher as part of the sampling associated with the introduction of the first amendment to Bill 10, all were related to Alberta's Bill 10 debate. Furthermore, nearly all had an anti-legislation tone towards Bill 10 and the amendment introduced by government. The minor exceptions (three tweets in total) were mostly neutral in that they posed basic informational questions, such as whether one particular MLA was for or against Bill 10; another simply indicated that the debate was about to reconvene in the legislature. A few tweets did not follow the dominant trend. For example, one tweet could be construed as pro-legislation insofar as it argued the notion that parents ought to be deciding questions of values, while schools should be focused on "teaching" (hence potentially drawing a parallel to government's argument for balancing responsibilities and rights). However, ultimately, the tone in this sample of tweets appeared to be a continuation of the tone established by the tweets during the first milestone (the introduction of Bill 10).

Engagement with Elected Officials

While the first sample set (associated with the first milestone) revealed 28% of Twitter users referencing or tagging MLAs in their tweets, the sample associated with this second milestone (government's introduction of the amendment) indicates that more tweets referenced or tagged MLAs in their posts, with 43% doing so. Similar to those included in the first sample set, these tweets included some references to MLAs, either by tagging a direct Twitter handle or referencing an MLA's name as part of the post. The tweets themselves were positioned in various ways, with some making direct comments at MLAs and others simply referencing MLAs within the context of their political positions on the legislation and their voting intentions.

Paraphrasing and quoting MLAs. An interesting phenomenon appearing in the sample tweets was the pattern of Twitter users paraphrasing or sometimes directly quoting MLAs as the debate around the legislation and amendment was unfolding in the legislature. In other words, a kind of real-time account of the debate was happening as it was occurring in the legislative assembly. In this way, the content of many tweets that included references to MLAs were within the context of what any given MLA had been saying in the assembly. Examples include tweets that proclaimed that a certain MLA would or would not be supporting #Bill10 or the amendment (and then offering a corresponding praise or critique), tweets that indicated that the debate was about to resume and that a certain MLA would soon be speaking, and tweets quoting MLA statements.

Calling out government MLAs. Another notable aspect of the tweets associated with the government's introduction of the amended Bill 10 that appears to share a strong similarity to the tweets associated with the introduction of the legislation is the notion of calling out or criticizing government MLAs for their continued support for Bill 10. This calling out of government MLAs could be seen in numerous tweets. In one instance, a citizen criticized a government MLA and cabinet minister by contrasting the MLA's comment around supporting Bill 10 with the MLA's claim around fighting for the rights of LGBTQ students in the MLA's constituency. Another Twitter user appeared to be critiquing the same MLA's comments in the legislature by expressing disbelief at the MLA's argument that the legislative process was working effectively.

Encouraging dissenting government MLAs and the Opposition. Some of the tweets provided words of encouragement for MLAs still opposed to Bill 10, such as tweets mentioning two prominent government MLAs refusing to vote along party lines, as well as Opposition

members. The critiques themselves took different forms, ranging from blunt statements indicating lost votes in the next election to more nuanced assessments, such as a tweet from a prominent media personality that tagged the premier's Twitter handle with a message indicating that Bill 10 did not necessarily represent malicious intent but rather an element of ignorance related to facts, an error in judgement, and a sense of political panic.

Engagement with Traditional News Media

In contrast to the first set of sample tweets (associated with the introduction of the legislation), this second set, associated with the amendment, indicates a decrease in the number of tweets that tagged or included a reference to journalists or media outlets. In total, about 5% of the tweets included a journalist or media outlets as part of their posts, which is a decrease from 13% in the first sampling.

Most Frequent Themes and Arguments

In terms of the most frequent patterns or themes seen in the sampling of tweets, the data point to two in particular: the notion or critique of the government's amendment as institutionalizing a form of segregation or discrimination against LGBTQ students (e.g., by virtue of the amendment forcing GSAs off school grounds if schools refuse to allow them), and the phenomenon of Twitter users providing real-time coverage and commentary as the debate was unfolding in the legislative assembly.

Concepts of segregation, establishing GSAs off school grounds, and discrimination. Over 15% of the tweets alluded to or explicitly referenced concepts related to discrimination and separation, which may have been a critique of government's approach to facilitating the creation of offsite GSAs in cases where schools or school boards disallowed them (rather than simply mandating schools to allow them). One prominent media columnist, for example, quoted an

Opposition MLA asking how GSAs would work in smaller communities; other tweets used language such as *separate but equal*, *segregation*, and related concepts such as *marginalizing*, *discrimination*, *different* (as in treating children differently based on sexual orientation), and *equality*. In one such tweet, a citizen asked whether government's legislation would set up GSAs at the local diner, while another queried whether football practices and games would also take place offsite, claiming perhaps facetiously that sports were offensive to the Twitter user's religion.

Criticizing school boards. In light of the notion of students appealing to the minister of education if a school board were to deny a GSA (the essence of the amendment), a theme that also emerged in the tweets was the role of school boards and power being granted to the boards in relation to having the first right of allowing or denying GSAs for students who request them. Some tweets directly referenced school boards or school trustees, largely with a critical tone towards their role as outlined in Bill 10. One Twitter user argued that school board autonomy cannot be protected if it means discrimination against students; another used an element of sarcasm in critiquing the role of school boards by indicating that discrimination was seemingly acceptable from government's perspective if and when it is done locally (alluding perhaps to the lack of a centralized government mandate for school boards to allow GSAs).

Bill 202 no longer a focus. One interesting observation was that the focus of the tweets in this sample set appeared to be moving towards more strongly focusing on Bill 10 rather than positioning the legislation in relation to Bill 202. While the #Bill202 hashtag still appeared in some of the tweets, it was not a frequent theme like it was in the first sample set, where it accounted for more than a quarter of the sample tweets.

Twitter users providing real-time coverage and commentary as the debate unfolds.

Finally, an interesting aspect of the sample was the phenomenon that more than a quarter of the tweets (30%) seemed to represent real-time comments, coverage, or reactions to the debate unfolding in the legislature. The tweets that reflected this phenomenon in the sample set often ranged from simple information sharing, such as tweets that indicated which MLA was speaking or when the debate would resume, to critiquing the rhetoric of MLAs supporting the legislation or, conversely, praising that of those who were opposed.

Milestone #3: The Day After the Introduction and Passing of the Amendment to Bill 10, December 4, 2014

Table 3 provides an overview of the general aspects of the sample tweets associated with the introduction and passing of the amendment to Bill 10. The nature of the bill had not changed from the previous milestone.

Table 3

Aspects of Sample Tweets Associated with the Day After the Introduction of the Amendment to Bill 10

No. tweets selected for sample	No. tweets in the sample that were specific to Alberta's Bill 10 debate	Pro-/anti-legislation[a]	Total no. unique Twitter users appearing in the sample set	No. tweets that reference or tag specific MLAs in relation to Bill 10[b]	No. tweets that reference or tag news media representative or media outlets[c]	No. tweets from traditional news media (outlets, reporters, columnists)	Most frequent themes and patterns	Approx. total no. tweets appearing for this milestone (i.e., #Bill10 tweets on December 4, 2014)[d]
80	80 (100%)	Anti-legislation tweets: 79 (100%) Pro-legislation tweets: 0 (0%) Neutral tweets: 0 (0%)	73	25 (31%)	7 (9%)	1 (1%) Pro-/anti-legislation: anti-legislation	Calls for organized collective action—including sharing of and calls to sign petitions, links, and contacting MLAs, or attending protest events under way or being organized (or sharing of photos of such protests): 18 (23%)	2,275

Notes. MLA = Member of the Legislative Assembly.
[a]Not including tweets from news media outlets/reporters/columnists, which are categorized in a separate column; percentage calculation includes decreased denominator to account for one media tweet. [b]Does not include tweets issued by MLAs themselves, which in this sample set was nil. [c]Does not include tweets issued by news media outlets/reporters/columnists; percentage calculation includes decreased denominator to account for one media tweet. Also does not include several tweets that tagged the host of a popular parody news program who was anti-legislation. [d]Includes tweets during the first half of December 4 (prior to the announcement of the legislative pause).

Aspects of the Tweets

Of the 80 sample tweets selected by the researcher as part of the sampling associated with

the day after the introduction of the amendment, all were anti-legislation; 73 unique Twitter

users appeared in this sample set.

Engagement with Elected Officials

This sample set of tweets revealed that nearly one third of the tweets (31%) engaged with

elected officials by including a reference to either a specific MLA or their Twitter handle. This is

a decrease from the previous milestone, where 43% of tweets represented some kind of direct

engagement with MLAs. Nonetheless, the positioning of the sample tweets that engaged with

elected officials followed a similar pattern as the last milestone, with tweets calling on

government MLAs to pull their support for the legislation or indicating Twitter users' voting

intentions in the next election as a result of a given MLA's stance on Bill 10. At the same time,

no tweets from MLAs appeared in the particular sample set, a phenomenon alluded to by a tweet

from a local municipal councillor who referred to the lack of MLA activity on Twitter (as it

relates to Bill 10) as a "shame."

Targeting specific MLAs. One of the patterns that could be seen in this sample set was

the targeting of specific MLAs, and particularly those in influential positions within the

government, with criticisms related to their stance on the legislation. Some tweets were

positioned in relation to the emergence of a #killBill10 hashtag, such as that by one Twitter user

who tagged an MLA and identified as a local constituent with a request to #killBill10 and

support #LGBTQ youth. Other tweets targeted both the premier and the minister of education,

particularly alluding to the former's absence from the legislature during a debate on the

legislation and the latter's lack of participation in the debate, even though the legislation fell

within the purview of the minister's portfolio.

   Providing a bigger perspective on MLA voting patterns. Another aspect of this

sample set of tweets was the perspective provided by some Twitter users on the overall voting

landscape within the legislature, particularly through circulation of a list showing which MLAs

were voting for which side. In other words, these tweets outlined which specific MLAs were in

favour of the government amendment and which were opposed. The listing was accompanied by

Twitter comments from individual users identifying the fact that 38 MLAs voted in favour of the

amended legislation and urging citizens to call the MLAs. Along similar lines, other Twitter

users could be seen showing the text of their messages to specific MLAs or indicating their intent

to pull their votes in the next election for any given MLA who was supporting the legislation.

Those Twitter users who refrained from including a specific MLA's Twitter handle but

nonetheless reached out to MLAs could be seen doing so through more general statements; for

example, one user argued that MLAs were remaining neutral at a time of social injustice.

Engagement with Traditional News Media

   A total of seven tweets in this sample set (9%) show a direct engagement with news

media. Tweets encouraged and complimented one particular news media personality as part of an

anti-legislation stance. Tweets encouraging this particular news media personality, such as one

from a user who indicated she was the individual's "new biggest fan" and another from a

different user who thanked the individual for "standing up" for LGBTQ youth, were a highlight

of this sample set. A tweet from this particular news media personality also appeared in the

sample, with the individual questioning the perceived segregating implications of the amended

legislation by asking whether gay students would be permitted to use the water fountains at

school upon returning from an offsite GSA. Finally, though not included in the categorization of media tweets, several tweets nonetheless reached out to a well-known host of a parody news program (also opposed to the legislation), with one Twitter user suggesting the celebrity should make the topic a centrepiece of an upcoming episode on national television.

Most Frequent Themes and Arguments

In assessing the frequent pattern associated with this sample set of tweets, one evident theme found was the notion of coordinating a real-world call to action through, for example, participating in a demonstration or protest, signing a petition, telephoning or writing MLAs, and generally sharing images or other words of encouragement related to actions being taken to oppose the legislation. In this sample set, 18 tweets (23% of the total sample) reflect this phenomenon.

Encouraging peaceful protest. Some of the tweets related to coordinated action encouraged citizens to attend a peaceful protest at McDougall Centre (a symbol of the provincial government in Calgary), providing relevant logistical information; also included were various photos of the protest using the hashtag #abpride and links to a Facebook page with information about the protest. Similarly, in one photo, a political staffer for an opposition party could be seen tweeting a photo of a protestor with a sign in support of GSAs.

Online petition websites and information on how to contact MLAs. Also appearing in this sample set of tweets were various links and messages (from outside government) that focused on facilitating direct outreach to MLAs, as well as words of encouragement. One Twitter user shared a form that citizens could use to express their opposition to Bill 10, while other tweets counted the number of times the same form had been used with calls for citizens to continue using the online site.

Milestone #4: Announcement of Legislative Pause, December 4-5, 2014

   Table 4 provides an overview of the tweets associated with the government's

announcement of a legislative pause, which put Bill 10 on hold to allow the government to carry

out consultations.

Table 4

Aspects of Sample Tweets Associated with the Announcement of a Legislative Pause

No. tweets selected for sample	No. tweets in the sample specific to Alberta's Bill 10 debate	Pro-/anti-legislation[a]	Total no. unique Twitter users in the sample set	No. tweets referencing or tagging specific MLAs in relation to Bill 10[b]	No. tweets referencing or tagging news media representative or media outlets[c]	No. tweets from traditional news media (outlets, reporters, columnists)	Most frequent themes and patterns	Approx. total no. tweets for this milestone (i.e., #Bill10 tweets December 4-5, 2014)[d]
80	80 (100%)	Anti-legislation tweets: 71 (93%) Pro-legislation tweets: 0 (0%) Neutral tweets: 2 (2.6%) Indecipherable: 4 (5%)	72	23 (29%)	14 (18%)	4 (5%) Pro-/anti-legislation: all neutral	Tweets that call for, or allude to, the need for citizens to continue the fight for GSAs and student rights despite the legislative pause: 12 (15%)	1,325

Notes. MLA = Member of the Legislative Assembly; GSA = gay–straight alliance.
[a]Not including tweets from news media outlets/reporters/columnists, which are categorized in a separate column; percentage calculation includes decreased denominator to account for four media tweets. Also, as with previous milestones, pro-/anti-legislation refers to sentiment towards the legislation that government had put on hold (rather than government's announcement of a legislative pause). [b]Does not include tweets issued by MLAs themselves, which in this sample set was two; percentage calculation includes decreased denominator to account for two MLA tweets. [c]Does not include tweets issued by news media outlets/reporters/columnists; percentage calculation includes decreased denominator to account for four media tweets. Also does not include several tweets that tagged the host of a popular parody news program who was anti-legislation. [d]Includes tweets near end of day December 4, 2014 (the point at which tweets acknowledging the legislative pause started appearing), to all tweets on December 5, 2014; hence, there may be some overlap with the number indicated in Table 3.

Aspects of the Tweets

Of the tweets specific to this sample set, 71 (over 90%) appeared to be anti-legislation, with the remaining tweets being either neutral or unable to categorize in relation to their pro- or anti-legislation stance. One observation is that with the addition of a new variable not related to the legislation itself (namely, government's announcement of a pause rather than a further amendment), the sample tweets continued to be anti-legislation in nature, which is a pattern consistent with previous milestones. This sample contains a total of 72 unique Twitter users.

Engagement with Elected Officials

In terms of engagement with MLAs, 23 tweets (about 30%) in this sample set tagged or referenced specific MLAs. This is relatively consistent with the sample tweets associated with the previous milestone. This sample also included two tweets by MLAs (at the time, both were members of the Opposition and anti-legislation), both using the term *fight* to describe the continued struggle against the legislation.

Engaging the premier. In this sample set, of the tweets that tagged MLAs' Twitter handles or referenced specific MLAs, many were in relation to the premier. Some of these tweets could be categorized as providing commentary around political positioning rather than providing a direct message to the premier. Examples include a critique of the premier's recent visit with an American state governor ("Gov. Chris Christie," 2014) and the political parallel between the premier's and the governor's position on parental rights, views related to the premier's loss of political capital resulting from Bill 10, as well as tweets from what appears to be a parody Twitter account for the premier that provides satirical commentary on the premier's approach to GSAs and Bill 10 (i.e., a Twitter account made to appear as though the premier himself is tweeting but which in fact is used to critique the premier's policy stance on GSAs).

Critiquing rhetoric. Further building on references to the premier, some tweets also seemed to be critiquing statements or political rhetoric used by the premier in announcing the legislative pause. One example was the premier's apparent statement related to a lack of consensus on Bill 10: One Twitter user argued that there was in fact consensus, though not the consensus the premier desired. Along similar lines, another Twitter user argued against the premier's assertion around rights being "difficult"; another alluded to the premier's remarks around rights not being absolute and argued that the premier needed to learn about leadership in relation to Bill 10.

Engagement with Traditional News Media

A total of 14 tweets in this sample set, or under 20%, tagged or referenced specific news media or reporters.

Profiling front-page news and headlines. An interesting phenomenon appearing in this sample set of tweets is that several included an image of the front page of a local newspaper, which depicted a pun on popular culture: In it, the premier is holding a sword alongside the title, "Kill Bill 10" (link to sample tweet). In addition to Twitter users circulating the image through their posts, two news media representatives also used the image in their tweets. Other similar newspaper headlines were also profiled, particularly ones with commentary critical of the legislation (e.g., references to Bill 10 being "bad legislation" or "under attack from all sides").

Thanking media personalities. There was also some interaction between Twitter users and the media around needing to continue advocating for student rights and GSAs. A few tweets, for example, reached out to a news media personality who had been vocal about criticism related to Bill 10, thanking this news media figure for advocating for GSAs. In addition to the direct outreach to specific news media columnists, other tweets shared links to news articles that

included information about GSAs and why advocates saw them as being important for students,

as well as comments on government's decision to halt the Bill 10 legislative process.

Most Frequent Themes and Arguments

A primary frequent theme or pattern, as shown by 15% of the tweets in the sample set,

was the message around needing to continue advocating for GSAs despite the legislative pause

for Bill 10. For example, some tweets shared links for citizens to continue contacting their

MLAs, photos of protests and acknowledgement of Opposition MLAs who attended these

protests, and messages pertaining to the importance of maintaining pressure on government to

allow student-led GSAs during this period of pause.

Too soon to celebrate. Some of the tweets alluded to the legislative pause but

encouraged citizens to continue advocating for student rights and to maintain the momentum that

had been generated. One citizen, for example, issued a tweet to a newspaper columnist,

supporting the columnist's assertion that advocates for GSAs shouldn't "celebrate just yet"

because the fight for GSAs would be a longer-term process or campaign; other messages alluded

to how the legislative pause did nothing to further the safety of at-risk students. Another citizen,

while expressing satisfaction with the legislative pause, indicated doubts around government's

intent to revise the legislation prior to the next election. Others also alluded to the consultations

that the government indicated it would carry out as part of the pause, with one municipal

councillor (positioned as an advocate for GSAs) expressing an interest in wanting to be part of

the consultation. Images and an acknowledgement of the role of real-world protest also appear in

some of the tweets.

Milestone #5 (Final Milestone): Introduction and Passing of the Final Amended Bill 10, March 10, 2015

Table 5 provides an overview of tweets associated with government's introduction and passing of the final amended version of Bill 10, which legalized the right of students to form GSAs as they wish.

Table 5

Aspects of Sample Tweets Associated with the Introduction and Passing of the Final Amended Bill 10

No. tweets selected for sample	No. tweets in the sample specific to Alberta's Bill 10 debate	Pro-/anti-legislation[a]	Total no. unique Twitter users in sample set	No. tweets referencing or tagging specific MLAs in relation to Bill 10[b]	No. tweets referencing or tagging news media representative or media outlets[c]	No. tweets from traditional news media (outlets, reporters, columnists)	Most frequent themes and patterns	Approx. total no. tweets appearing for this milestone (i.e., #Bill10 tweets March 10-11, 2015)
50	50 (100%)	Anti-legislation tweets: 0 (0%) Pro-legislation tweets: 36 (78%) Neutral tweets: 10 (22%)	44	15 (30%)	7 (15%)	4 (8%) Pro-/anti-legislation: all neutral	Tweets that express thanks or appreciation for MLAs, media, or other advocates: 13 (26%)	655

Notes. MLA = Member of the Legislative Assembly.
[a]Not including tweets from news media outlets/reporters/columnists, which are categorized in a separate column; percentage calculation includes decreased denominator to account for four media tweets. [b]Does not include tweets issued by MLAs themselves, which in this sample set was one; percentage calculation includes decreased denominator to account for one MLA tweet. [c]Does not include tweets issued by news media outlets/reporters/columnists; percentage calculation includes decreased denominator to account for four media tweets.

Aspects of the Tweets

Of the tweets in this sample set, associated with the introduction and passing of the final amended Bill 10 (which finally put in law the right of students to form GSAs as they wish), nearly 80% appeared to be pro-legislation, with the remainder being neutral. This reversal of numbers, whereby the majority of tweets were now pro-legislation rather than anti-legislation, stands in contrast to previous milestones, in which the vast majority of tweets were classified as anti-legislation. The reversal in stance associated with this milestone is perhaps the most significant difference between this sample set and those associated with previous milestones.

Engagement with Elected Officials

A total of 15 tweets, or approximately 30% of the tweets in this sample set, tagged or referenced specific MLAs. This number is relatively consistent with the sample tweets associated with previous milestones. This sample set also included one MLA tweet. Numerous tweets that tagged or referenced specific MLAs in this set did so with an element of thanking those MLAs for having passed a version of Bill 10 that put in law that students have the right to form GSAs in their schools. Even the tweets that did not necessarily thank an MLA per se nonetheless provided positive remarks in relation to Bill 10 while still tagging an MLA on any given side of the political spectrum.

Engagement with Traditional News Media

With a total of seven tweets, or 15% of the sample, tagging or referencing specific news media or reporters, the pattern for engagement with news media appears to be relatively consistent with previous milestones. The nature of the engagement with news media appears somewhat varied in this sample set, with some tweets calling on people to view a particular news

broadcast for more information, and others thanking certain media personalities for having

supported the right of students to form GSAs and critiquing earlier versions of Bill 10.

Most Frequent Themes and Arguments

A key frequent theme associated with this sample set of tweets was the expression of

gratitude and appreciation towards MLAs, advocates, news media representatives, and other

Albertans regarded as having contributed to government's introduction of the final version of

Bill 10. Slightly more than a quarter of the tweets in this sample set reflected this element of

gratitude towards specific players in the Bill 10 debate.

Summary of Content Analysis

In summarizing the content analysis, it is important to note and reiterate that the sampling

is not meant to be a generalization or full representation of the Twitter activity that occurred in

relation to Bill 10. Rather, a content analysis using an exploratory random sampling of tweets

associated with key milestones during the Bill 10 debate potentially reveals some of the aspects

of the Twitter dialogue and messaging. Tweets prior to the fifth milestone were opposed to the

government's approach to Bill 10, and some of the more frequent themes appearing during the

different milestones touched on comparisons between Bill 10 and Bill 202, references to

concepts related to segregating LGBTQ youth, and calls for collective action. However, the pro-

/anti-legislation stance shifted with the final milestone, when government introduced and passed

the final amended version of Bill 10, with tweets more frequently expressing appreciation to

some elected officials and advocates for GSAs, and pro-legislation tweets starting to appear.

Participant Interviews

The crux of this study involved interviewing participants from across news media, government, and advocacy to ascertain perceptions of Twitter's role in public policy discourse. More specifically, interviews were geared towards enabling the researcher to assess and reflect on how key policy actors, specifically those in the fields of advocacy, journalism, and government, currently perceive the role of Twitter in influencing public policy outcomes in Alberta, with Bill 10 as their frame of reference. Overall, what was planned in relation to the interviews (as indicated in the methods section) is what largely played out during the data collection process.

Study Participants

The interviewees. The researcher interviewed three participants from May to July 2018. As intended, these participants represented news media, government, and advocacy (*advocacy* in this case refers specifically to LGBTQ rights in relation to GSAs). As was planned, participants had a familiarity with Bill 10 and were able to articulate thoughts, perspectives, and insights in relation to Twitter's role in affecting the Bill 10 discourse and its legislative life cycle. Broad general descriptors of the participants include the following:

- For the news media representative, the researcher interviewed a well-established and highly experienced news columnist (who was well-versed in public policy topics) working for a long-standing print media outlet in Alberta.

- For the government representative, the researcher interviewed a former senior member of the Alberta Public Service (the non-partisan, permanent administrative arm of the Government of Alberta) who had a direct understanding of, and involvement in, Bill 10 from policy and legislative development perspective. In terms of clarifying the term *non-*

partisan public servant, Canada's Public Policy Forum (2015) has stated that "the public service plays a core role in our Westminster system of government. It is non-partisan, professional and permanent, serving governments of any political party with equal loyalty and effectiveness." (p. 6). However, it also notes that this traditional role of a non-partisan public servant may be evolving, given that the public service is "in danger of becoming an 'administrative service' whose sole task would be to execute the orders of politicians and their aides without informed policy advice, question, or discussion" (p. 6). Although the Public Policy Forum is assessing and commenting on the state of the Canada's federal public service (not specifically the Alberta Public Service), it does nonetheless elucidate both the traditional and evolving role of a non-partisan public service in the Westminster system of government.

- Finally, the researcher also interviewed an advocate representative who had been actively engaged in the Bill 10 debate on Twitter and through other means. The advocate participant was part of a youth organization (under the umbrella of municipal government), which ultimately took a firm policy stance in support of student rights in relation to GSAs.

The nature of the interviews. Interviews with each of the participants took approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete and were carried out over telephone or in person, depending on each participant's preference (due to either logistical considerations or personal preference). Telephone interviews occurred with both the government and media representatives; the advocate representative took part in an in-person interview. The semi-structured guide allowed the researcher to further probe on certain topics as needed (e.g., by requesting participants to elaborate on certain comments or observations). Furthermore, for two of the

questions asked of all of the participants, the researcher read out three sample tweets associated

with certain milestones in the Bill 10 debate: the first introduction of the Bill 10 legislation and

the introduction of the first amended version of the legislation. The researcher indicated to

participants that the tweets were reflective of those posted in response to these milestones and

asked participants to comment on their perception of what was happening on Twitter.

Participants answered all of the questions posed to them during the interviews. The

researcher recorded and transcribed each interview and also shared the transcript of the interview

with each participant in case they wished to make any further edits or changes.

Identifying Major Themes

After examining the transcripts, major themes were determined and grouped into

categories of ideas expressed by participants during the interviews. Direct quotes are provided on

occasion to facilitate clarity and understanding of the data.

Participants' Past Perceptions of Legislation as a Frame of Reference

Revisiting Bill 44. One aspect that all three participants touched on was the notion of

having a past frame of reference against which they conceived and conceptualized Bill 10 in

relation to Twitter. In this regard, the media participant expressed the most thorough grounding

in past legislative and policy initiatives, citing Bill 44 (Human Rights, Citizenship and

Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009) as government legislation that had been introduced in

2009 by then premier Ed Stelmach. The participant cited Bill 44 as "the law that was for the first

time … going to include same-sex orientation in Alberta's human rights legislation," but which

was ultimately undermined by "people in [Premier Stelmach's] caucus and cabinet who were

vehemently opposed" and who compelled government to include a provision in Bill 44 to ensure

parental rights protections (e.g., ensuring parents would need to give permission prior to children

learning anything about sexual orientation in schools) as a way of offsetting the inclusion of

sexual orientation in human rights legislation. Indeed, the media participant cited this experience

with Bill 44 as having foreshadowed the use of Twitter in relation to Bill 10, with the latter being

somewhat reminiscent of the type of discussion that occurred on Twitter when Bill 44 played out

back in 2009 (realizing that Twitter then might be different from Twitter now in how mainstream

and ubiquitous it has become). For the media participant, the use of Twitter for the purposes of

interfacing with public policy making and discourse in Alberta seems to have had its genesis in

the Bill 44 debate:

> Media participant: [Bill 44 was] the first time that I used Twitter in a really meaningful
> way to cover a big political story into the night, and to sort of get a lot of attention …
> from what I was doing. And Twitter I think was really important to the Bill 44 debate, but
> Twitter at that time was still a nascent media platform, and so it didn't have the kind of
> heft, so … what was fascinating watching the Bill 10 debate was to put it into
> juxtaposition to what happened during Bill 44 because in many ways, the Bill 10 debate
> was a repetition of what happened with Bill 44 but with far greater consequences because
> by that time there were far more people using Twitter … and people had gotten better at
> it.

In a sense, from a media coverage and media commentary perspective, the media participant may

have been expressing how Bill 10 was almost akin to a second go-around at a similar topic, but

on a scale that involved "far greater consequences" in relation to Twitter's influence on the

discourse.

Bill 202 and giving students full rights for GSAs. While the government and advocate

participants did not express the same level of historical fluency as the media participant in

relation to past legislative debates surrounding sexual orientation in Alberta, both nonetheless

cited previously proposed legislation as having influenced their (or their organization's) thinking

on Bill 10, particularly in relation to Twitter. More specifically, the government and advocate

participants both cited Bill 202, the private member's bill (introduced by the Opposition Liberal

Party) that immediately preceded (and some may argue prompted) government's introduction of

Bill 10, as having played a role in ultimately shaping the Twitter response to Bill 10. In

reflecting on Bill 202, the advocate participant cited it as "a good piece of legislation," stating

that it "was very simple—kids have a right to form GSAs." The full granting of student rights

under Bill 202 (and the perceived diminishment of those rights under the subsequent Bill 10)

was, according to the advocate participant, such that "any way of walking back from that [on the

part of government] … was always going to look really bad for them":

> Advocate participant: It had already been primed [for government] that they had shot
> down like what sort of a good piece of legislation would have looked like, so I think that
> the chronologicalness [*sic*] of that was really unfortunate for [government] because the
> good piece of legislation was already there and it was very simple—kids have a right to
> form GSAs.

In reflecting on the first iteration of Bill 10, where "schools would not have to allow" GSAs, the

government participant described Bill 202 as having perhaps contributed to a set of competing

demands on government, which may have included political considerations related the

Opposition's proposed Bill 202 legislation combined with government's "hope of placating some

of the private schools that were very religious-based" (these schools were presumably opposed to

student rights in relation to forming GSAs):

> Government participant: I think government did feel the heat, but I also believe that
> government was just trying to mediate to get where they needed to get to as well because,
> if I remember correctly, some of this initial work came out of the Liberal caucus prior to
> … So as a result, I think there was … the political pressure on one side … to address that
> … [government was] being responsive.

While the advocate participant seemed to view the Opposition's proposed Bill 202 legislation as having been the benchmark against which government was ultimately criticized, the government participant presented the relationship between Bill 10 and Bill 202 as indicative of government's focus on needing to mediate different viewpoints; however, even the government participant ultimately acknowledged the impact of criticisms on social media, indicating that "those kind of tweets drove, I think, government into a direction they had to go in the first place."

Twitter as a Public Forum

Garnering public attention. All of the participants, in one way or another, touched on the public nature of Twitter and cited this characteristic of Twitter as something that makes it particularly compelling in relation to influencing or discussing public policy. Some of the participants, for example, cited how Twitter differed from other forms of communication, such as letter writing, phone calls, and email, by virtue of the fact that it was inherently visible and easily accessible to the public at large, thereby making it a unique and sometimes effective method for engaging in public policy discussions. The advocate participant articulated thoughts around the potential capacity of Twitter to lead to attention in other forms of media (e.g., traditional news media outlets), as well as the ability to exert pressure through Twitter to compel policy actors, particularly elected officials, to be clear about their stance on a given issue:

> Advocate participant: [Twitter] is public, it's common … I do think that letters and emails to politicians and phone calls do work, but I think that like when you're trying to get the media's attention about something, when you're trying to get important people to comment on something … forcing people to go on the record [through Twitter] … can be really effective.

The media participant referred to how Twitter is used in newsrooms, including engaging with readers, acquiring story ideas, and sharing stories with readers. However, as a columnist who is

able to express opinions (unlike traditional reporters) or, as the media participant put it, "an

advocate for common sense and common decency in public policy," this participant indicated

that Twitter is a way of going beyond the confines of a column to instead engaging in debate and

dialogue, especially given their view that it is the columnist's "job to critique legislation from a

… point of view that's from a non-partisan perspective":

> Media participant: Sometimes there [are] stories, as with Bill 10, you know, where I'm
> not at the legislature, [and] it's not my job to cover legislative debate … Twitter is a bit of
> an outlet for me to be part of the debate even when my column doesn't allow me to.

In terms of government's perception of the public nature of Twitter, the government participant

expressed a slightly different nuance in that the ubiquitous nature of Twitter means that policy

makers need to pay heed to public sentiment, with the monitoring of Twitter during the Bill 10

debate having represented one such way of doing so:

> Government participant: I think essentially the issue was [that] we were forced to pay
> attention to [Twitter] because public policy, … or impending future public policy, was at
> the centre … but I suspect it probably was … used as much as a thermometer to test the
> temperature, the willingness and the readiness of people across the province, but also
> where the hotspots were, in order to be able to determine next steps.

To recap, while all three participants alluded to how the public nature of Twitter made it a tool

with certain characteristics in relation to shaping Bill 10, each expressed a different way of

leveraging the public aspect of Twitter. While the advocate participant acknowledged the ability

to compel those in political power to take a stance "on the record," the media participant focused

on the ability to engage in debate and further augment traditional journalistic tools. And finally,

the government participant touched on how Twitter was used as a "thermometer" to monitor

public sentiment and inform "next steps" in the Bill 10 debate.

Direct access to elected officials in government. As an extension of the visibility of

Twitter and tweets to the public at large, participants also acknowledged the ability to directly

reach and connect with elected officials as a powerful mechanism for gaining a foothold in

public policy decisions or discussions. For example, the advocate participant, while

acknowledging the ability to tweet at politicians, also acknowledged the possibility of not

receiving a response, which can in turn lead to advocates adjusting their approach:

> Advocate participant: That sort of direct line of communication … is really unique in that
> you don't really get to call out people in power in such a direct way in other sort of
> mediums … and when they don't respond and when they block you, it's very
> illuminating … you sort of force their hand in a way to comment or to act.

The media participant touched on how the notion of citizens being able to connect with elected

officials is a unique aspect of Twitter but nonetheless looked at the idea through a slightly

difference lens given that they did not necessarily play the role of an advocate, per se. In other

words, rather than advocating, there is an opportunity to be "an intermediary or … the

eavesdropper":

> Media participant: You can get somebody who in a previous world would never have had
> access to a cabinet minister. They can have a conversation with a cabinet minister, and I
> can be their intermediary or I can be the eavesdropper, you know, and eavesdropping on
> conversations is almost as intriguing as being a part of them.

The perspective of the government participant, as a former senior civil servant, was slightly

different, perhaps given the non-partisan lens through which comments were provided to the

researcher. This participant's perception was that Twitter affords an opportunity for elected

officials to provide and share information about their activities:

> Government participant: From my perspective, I really saw it as the good news story tool for the minister—"I'm off presenting here" or "I'm off meeting with this particular group" … I mean, it certainly sent out the information that we're moving in this direction; we looked to the Premier's Office tweet versus a Minister's Office tweet—it actually provided clarity in terms of, you know, what the government's direction was, but I don't think it was used to enter into any kind of foray or debate or discussion.

In providing comments through a government lens, the government participant perhaps elucidated a limited approach to government's use of Twitter in relation to Bill 10 and the response to citizens, media, and advocates.

The next section delves more deeply into perceptions around government's response on Twitter as Bill 10 was unfolding.

Government's Response on Twitter

Barriers at the civil service level prevent nimble communication with citizens. In terms of their perceptions of the role of government in Twitter discourse during the Bill 10 debate, participants expressed different points depending largely on their vantage point. In the case of the government participant, considerations included the process for approvals for speaking out on public policy within a civil service context, as well as the use of Twitter for official communication purposes at an individual civil servant level. Indeed, this barrier to issuing tweets and providing clarity on policy decisions (at the non-partisan level of government—e.g., civil service) may have hindered two-way communication on Twitter as Bill 10 was unfolding, according to the government participant:

> Government participant: As you know, though, as a government employee … we were discouraged to tweet ourselves, so … I had a more of a path of involvement in tracking … and at least following the discussion and debate.

While the actual use of Twitter as a tool in representing government is cited as a barrier by the

government participant, the other challenge cited by this participant in relation to public policy

communication was the lack of nimbleness in being able to swiftly engage citizens on significant

public policy issues without some form of approval, presumably by or at the level of elected

officials, of the potential content and message of a tweet:

> Government participant: The problem that I think government has is it's difficult to be
> responsive when everything that is involved in the [policy] position requires high-level
> … permissions or whatever in order to be able to make those kind[s] of statements. And
> that makes it sometimes a bit regressive because we can't respond quick enough to …
> public discourse … because it's also changing directions continuously as well, as more or
> less people enter or exit the debate.

While the government participant highlighted the fluidity of conversations on Twitter related to

public policy issues, some key challenges for government, at least at the civil service level, are

also highlighted in relation to both the personal use of Twitter by non-partisan public servants

and speaking publicly about government's policy position.

Despite these limitations, the role of Twitter in influencing public policy or at least

prompting government to delve further into particular problem areas identified by citizens

appears to still be significant. For example, in reflecting on Bill 10, the government participant—

while acknowledging government's limited response on Twitter—nonetheless indicated that

government (e.g., elected officials) was still compelled to request the support of the civil service

and specific ministry policy areas that were under the direction of the government participant

during Bill 10:

> Government participant: The [heads] … of all those different areas … [xx government
> policy group and xy government policy group] worked together to work alongside
> different [advocacy] groups that had issues, and of course a lot of the issues were
> identified vis-à-vis social media, things like Twitter.

In a sense, while the government participant acknowledged the potential shortcomings in using

Twitter as a communication tool to engage citizens during Bill 10, there are nonetheless some

important takeaways in relation to government's integration of Twitter in the policy development

process. These include using Twitter as a thermometer to gauge public sentiment, identifying

areas where further work or engagement may be needed, or prompting elected officials to request

the support of particular policy or operational areas within the civil service "to work alongside

different [advocacy] groups" to address concerns.

      A curated response by government. From an advocacy perspective, the advocate

participant appeared to have largely substantiated the perception of government not having

engaged citizens on Twitter in relation to Bill 10. This participant's perspective was that while

there may have been some limited Twitter communication from elected officials within

government, the tweets themselves were largely reflective of the "carefully curated" profiles of

politicians:

> Advocate participant: I think it was a lot of everyone else kind of freaking out to a pretty
> sterile and like, you know, well-crafted … [professional communication] type of tweet
> about the issue from a politician, and then sort of like this outrage from a more grassroots
> type … and it probably was best for [government] to just not say anything and to just
> monitor and sort of watch it.

It is interesting to note that in the quote above, the advocate participant alludes to the idea that

government's engagement in the debate may not have been beneficial anyway, insofar that the

level of outrage on the part of concerned citizens meant that the prudent approach for

government was likely to "just not say anything and to just monitor."

Perceptions of government in listening mode. While the media participant did not

directly touch on government's communication about Bill 10 via Twitter, their comments did

nonetheless appear to reflect that government's lack of presence on Twitter largely mirrored its

sense of vulnerability in relation to the early iterations of Bill 10:

> Media participant: I mean the Bill 10 debate on Twitter, which happened so quickly and
> so vehemently and so effectively, is what caused the government—because I mean they
> had a majority, they could have passed the bill without question, but they didn't because
> of the blowback on Twitter … I think Twitter was absolutely key for them to take the
> temperature and go, uh oh, this is going to be a problem.

While the media participant cited Twitter as a driving force that compelled government to hold

off on pushing through early iterations of Bill 10, the advocacy perspective represented by this

participant appears to speak more to the role of traditional news media in ultimately having a

significant influence on government's decision to back away from passing the first iterations

Bill 10:

> Advocate participant: Because the media uses Twitter, I think the government was very
> concerned with how the discussion was going down on Twitter for that reason. The story
> became, "you're homophobic," which is the last thing that government wanted to be, only
> because it was a sort of illuminating moment I guess in Alberta politics that the general
> public … weren't there and weren't willing to take it.

When the government participant was provided a set of sample tweets posted by citizens in

response to the initial version of Bill 10 (see the second question in the interview guide—

Appendix C) and asked to reflect on what was happening on Twitter, they expressed a sense of

the tweets reflecting a "silent majority across the province" and a sense of there having existed a

widespread consensus on social media that government had to make GSAs mandatory, or else

schools and school boards would not be compelled to allow them in any circumstance:

> Government participant: I think those tweets were representative of what I consider the silent majority across the province, because one of the things that was clear was that there was a lot of backlash, and the social media became the way of promoting that backlash against government—saying, listen, if you don't require GSAs, you know you won't have them anywhere, no school will have them.

Despite the limited response on the part of government, as reflected in comments by the advocate and media participants, the government participant acknowledged the backlash that appeared through Twitter.

Issue Framing

All of the participants touched on the notion of "framing" the debate or the issue. In the case of the media participant, comments were focused on government's attempt to frame the initial version of the legislation as being favourable towards students in their quest to form GSAs in schools, but in reality, the final decision on whether to allow GSAs was actually in the hands of schools, despite government's attempt to frame Bill 10 as being conducive to student rights:

> Media participant: Right, so the way it was framed right, you know, when [government MLA] Sandra Jansen presented the bill, and the government … they said, look this bill … [is] going to allow GSAs … and then you realize drilling down that no, in fact, you know, what the bill says is that it's in the hands of the schools … I mean, it purported to be a law to allow them, but it was in effect a law that could ban them.

While the government participant did not specifically touch on how government may or may not have attempted to "frame" the legislation to ensure a favourable public perception, they did nonetheless touch on how tweets directed at government were effective in framing the legislation as being inherently unfair to students. During the interview, the researcher read out a set of sample tweets that had been posted in response to government's first amendment to Bill 10 (see question 7 in the interview guide—Appendix C), which essentially meant that students who were

denied a GSA by their school could appeal to government and have a GSA set up off school

grounds. One of the sample tweets referenced "separate but equal Jim Crow laws," which the

participant cited as having been particularly poignant at the time:

> Government participant: I mean, the tweets that you shared … really in my opinion are
> really trying to force the shape and how the policy itself—how its end result is
> interpreted. I think government is responsive to that. I remember the Jim Crow one
> specifically, actually, as you read that I remember[ed] … shuddering a little bit because
> we knew that was a good response. But at the same time, if you follow the journey of
> Bill 10, we ended up in a good place—very … similar to other progressive areas in North
> America, and I think Twitter helped us get there.

It is interesting to note that in response to the same set of tweets read to the government

participant involving the theme of segregation and Jim Crow, the media participant noted from a

media perspective that one could "see the evolution or the devolution of the Twitter debate at this

point, as people were getting considerably more pent up." In the case of the advocate participant,

comments earlier in the interview alluded to government's susceptibility to being framed as

unjust towards students, largely given the widely perceived distinction between "right and

wrong"—which is to say that the right thing was for government to have allowed students to

form GSAs without students needing to request school board permission or having to set them up

off school grounds:

> Advocate participant: The PC [Progressive Conservative] government made a huge …
> mistake or just really misjudged where that community was at, and the backlash, and so
> … it was almost an easy story to kind of spin … it was sort of such a matter of right and
> wrong—do we want kids to be able to form support groups or not?

Overall, the topic of how Bill 10 was framed was highlighted in the comments by all

participants. Interestingly, while the media participant spoke about a media perspective on

government's attempt to frame the legislation, the government participant spoke about the way in

which advocates and citizens were able to frame government's proposed policy by evoking

concepts such as segregation, which appear to have been poignant for policy makers.

Lending Credibility to Public Policy

A salient aspect of the comments provided by all participants relates to the notion of

credibility—namely, the credibility around certain policy approaches and messaging that results

when third parties or key influencers on Twitter begin to weigh in with comments and

statements. In the case of media, for example, the media participant cited Twitter as a key source

of information pertaining to what was "problematic" about the Bill 10 legislation as a result of

well-known advocates raising concerns on Twitter, with there being an "amplifying" effect

resulting from other advocates who further augmented criticism of the legislation:

> Media participant: I became aware of what was really problematic on Bill 10 via Twitter, from Twitter feeds like [xy advocate], which I think was one of the first ones to really home in on what was wrong here, and then [yz advocate] amplifying that.

From a government perspective, particularly in terms of mitigating pushback against GSAs and

promoting the notion of GSAs being a tool that schools could foster as a way of supporting

student well-being, the government participant cited the important voices that emerged from

schools that had successfully integrated GSAs into their environment and the resulting impact on

keeping children in school, reducing bullying, and creating a supportive atmosphere for students.

From the government participant's perspective, these school voices, as expressed on Twitter,

helped create "traction" for the legitimacy of GSAs in Alberta's school system:

> Government participant: When all of a sudden you have schools … that were being very successful and … could begin to tell their story … all of a sudden credibility would come forward through the tweets … and so all of a sudden, you know, it started to get traction. You started to hear children's stories about … [how] these GSAs are important [for

children] to stay in school, for anti-bullying, all these types of things. All of a sudden it begins to change the conversation.

In the case of advocacy, the advocate participant noted the importance of voices in the community "to represent the needs of people" who had the potential of being adversely affected by initial versions of Bill 10, with Twitter having been a key channel through which those voices emerged:

Advocate participant: I think … it is good … for there to be voices in the community that are ready to sort of comment when these things happen that are legitimate and that actually sort of represent the needs of people who are actually being affected.

Ultimately, the intertwining of credibility and Twitter messages took on different nuances for each of the participants—whether it was credibility in relation to information sources related to Bill 10, credibility in relation to the overall thrust towards creating acceptance of GSAs within the school system, or the credibility that results from voices on Twitter representing the needs of individuals who may be affected by government legislation and policy.

Twitter is Not a Substitute for Governance

Policy versus on-the-ground realities. Participants also expressed the idea of Twitter not being a panacea for effecting real-life change in the lives of children and students. The notion of high-level policy such as Bill 10 being synonymous with compliance around the creation of GSAs was also challenged by participants. For example, the advocate participant highlighted the challenges that students face in creating GSAs, despite the passing of the final amended version of Bill 10, which on paper ensured students could form GSAs without school or school board permission. This participant also touched on the need for "material resources" that have an

impact on improving the conditions of students who may rely on the support of a GSA in the first

place:

> Advocate participant: I do think legislation like this is important and sort of like the raising of consciousness of young people in terms of what their rights are … but in terms of like the actual work of supporting queer kids who are getting messages from their school admin and teachers all the time that they're not welcome and not allowed to ask to form a GSA regardless of whether the law says that's ok or not … policy like this is very great for politicians … [but] how much sort of funding or actual material resources does that really change?

Similarly, the government participant also highlighted the issues around compliance, but cited

Twitter as a means to emphasize the true implications of Bill 10 in relation to mandating schools

to adhere to government policy (whatever that policy may be):

> Government participant: As I recall, there was a fair bit of, you know a few people just outright saying, "We're not going to do this, so what are you [government] going to do about it?" You know, not realizing the legislation required they comply. So it was almost … you know, basically daring government—"Once you've passed it, what are you going to do about it?" … But I think … Twitter enabled that dialogue to occur, [for schools and boards] to realize, yeah, the government will do something because it will be required to do something about it.

The notion of on-the-ground skepticism and the possibility of schools or school boards not

complying with government policy is an interesting aspect that comes through in the government

participant's comments.

Real work happens behind the scenes. Further building on the notion of Twitter not

necessarily being synonymous with the notion of governance, the advocate participant expressed

the idea from an advocacy perspective that the true positive impact on students happens "behind

the scenes," citing a local GSA coordinator who "doesn't get a lot of credit but is constantly

supporting kids." In other words, while there may not be a significant degree of public

recognition (via Twitter) of this type of work, it remains nonetheless critical to supporting

students:

> Advocate participant: I think the real work is often behind the scenes, so people like [xx name], who is the GSA coordinator at [xx organization], … [don't] get a lot of credit but [are] constantly supporting kids all the time.

From a news media perspective, the media participant, while not directly touching on the notion

of substantive work in support of GSAs often being done behind the scenes and without

significant acknowledgement on Twitter, did nonetheless speak to the notion of Bill 10 (in its

earliest form) hindering civil society and placing an unrealistic burden on students wishing to

fight any school board that denied them a GSA. For instance, when the researcher read out loud a

set of sample tweets associated with the first iteration of Bill 10, the media participant felt the

tweets "showed … how hollow the initial draft of Bill 10 was and how little it did functionally to

help kids in real time who were dealing with homophobia":

> Media participant: These tweets [posted in response to the first draft of Bill 10] point out one of the big flaws in Bill 10, which is that it put the onus on the schoolchildren to fight for their right to a GSA … I mean, if you're in Grade 10, by the time you got an answer from the court, you might well have graduated, never mind the fact that … junior high and high school students don't have the resources or expertise to launch that kind of legal battle.

Comments from both the advocate and media participants alluded to the complexity of public

policy that may potentially lie beneath the surface of a tweet or set of tweets. While the advocate

participant cited the lack of acknowledgement on Twitter of a key supporter of GSA, the media

participant touched on how a set of tweets in relation to Bill 10 pointed out significant perceived

flaws in the public policy around GSAs.

A perceived lack of nuance. Given the limitations of the amount of content that can fit into a tweet (i.e., 280 characters), one of the areas that participants touched on was the question of nuance and Twitter's limitations in relation to public policy discussions. The advocate participant alluded to what may perhaps be a perceived lack of nuance on Twitter by touching on the tool's limited user base:

> Advocate participant: I think that Twitter is limited to a certain sort of social class of people … I have a younger sister, for example, who, like, loves Twitter, and it's very much more comedy and raunchiness and humour and memes, that type of thing … When I think of Twitter, I think of a pretty specific clique of people in the Canadian, sort of— and like I mean North American, but especially there's a Canadian sort of community of like—the hashtag #ableg … it's like … the same sort of things all the time.

When asked if Twitter was too limited for having a thoughtful public policy discussion, the government participant indicated "no," explaining that tweets can be used as a "little taste of something that will pull [readers] back in." Nonetheless, the government participant did cite the lack of "intelligent things" being said on Twitter:

> Government participant: 280 [characters in a tweet], I'm hoping that we can say some intelligent things in there, because most of the tweets I see don't, and that's one of the issues. But I think what it does do, though … it enables at least the beginning of a story to be told … We begin to at least tell the story, and then we can bring you back to the web page … in order for the reader to come back and get the whole version.

Of the three participants, the media participant is the one who addressed the issue of nuance in the most direct way, indicating very simply that "you can't have a deeply nuanced conversation" on Twitter. This participant also compared the tool to Facebook, which they cited as potentially being a more effective platform for "a longer discussion":

> Media participant: Well, I mean, certainly the trouble with Twitter is you can't have a deeply nuanced conversation. I also used Facebook a lot during the Bill 10 debate, where

you can have much more … conversation … So you know, if you wanted to have a longer discussion, Facebook was probably the better social media platform.

In addition to the lack of ability to express more in-depth thoughts on Twitter, the media participant also pointed out the risks of being able to quickly disseminate information through Twitter—namely, that "one of the horrifying things about Twitter is that it can spread false news and false information at [the] speed of lightning."

Twitter as a Source of Information and News

In terms of using or regarding Twitter as a source of news or information, each of the participants approached the topic from their unique vantage point. For example, in the case of news media, the media participant touched on one of the caveats or cautions associated with using Twitter as a source of information—namely, the question of credibility:

Media participant: The downside of Twitter is that you have to judge the credibility of each tweet and that false information can spread virally in a way that is very difficult to put genies back into bottles.

Nonetheless, in reflecting on Bill 10, the media participant alluded to how the nature of the legislative debate (e.g., stretching into late hours) meant that Twitter remained a key conduit for information:

Media participant: A lot of things that happened in the Bill 10 debate were foreshadowed by what happened in Bill 44—long debate that went into the night where the only way the news could be communicated was on Twitter.

In relation to government, the government participant indicated that "because of the size of our communications departments [in government], we were able to both monitor the social media [and] also engage in that." Furthermore, looking at Twitter as a disseminator of information, the

government participant also touched on the importance of government and the broader public

sector using Twitter to "get the good news story out there" as a way of ensuring a balanced

public perspective on issues:

> Government participant: We use [Twitter] all the time to get the good news story out
> there because, I mean, part and parcel of it is that, in my opinion, too often everybody
> listens to the negative side—the glass half empty—and I truly believe that we have not
> used it often enough to tell how the glass is half full, so we need to be doing that far
> more.

In this regard, the government participant also acknowledged the speed at which Twitter enables

citizens to contact government, and how that speed of communication has potentially compelled

government to use Twitter as a communication tool:

> Government participant: I also believe government is doing it now because … it's that
> whole nanosecond response: it used to be an issue came up and I could anticipate that I
> wouldn't get a letter for a week … now I get a tweet or I get an email minutes after a
> decision is made and communicated. [Twitter] has changed the way we do business, and so
> if we're going to be responsive, we need to use these tools.

From an advocacy perspective, the advocate participant reflected on how Twitter can serve as a

tool for sharing and learning about the specific aspects of legislation, particularly as the

legislative debate is unfolding:

> Advocate participant: Talking about the idea of introducing an amendment … and the
> timelines … and that it's up for debate for an amount of time, and that you're able to get
> these reactions and these takes and these analyses really quickly from people who were
> paying attention are great. I think it's really useful for that.

Overall, all of the participants were able to use Bill 10 as a frame of reference in describing the

role of Twitter as a source for news and information, though each focused on a certain aspect of

information and news-sharing dynamics based on their role. While the media and advocate

participants focused on the legislative information sharing enabled by Twitter, the government

participant appeared to express more general comments on the speed of information sharing and

the potential for governments to harness Twitter to disseminate information that reflects

positively on their policy initiatives.

      Allowing for voices of marginalized groups. Participants also touched on how Twitter

can perhaps enable otherwise marginalized individuals and groups to express their voices in the

public sphere. The researcher asked each of the participants, if Bill 10 were unfolding today, and

knowing what they knew about how the debate unfolded, whether they would do anything

different in relation to Twitter. The media participant positioned their response by touching on

the ability to "amplify new and interesting voices" of people with "lived experience":

> Media participant: I would continue my practice of trying to tweet out fresh voices so it's
> not just all the same people we hear from all the time. You know, I would try and amplify
> new and interesting voices and voices of people who actually have lived experience of
> what we're talking about. And I try to do that whether the issue is gay rights or
> Indigenous issues or … Islamophobia.

In relation to the government's perspective, the government participant echoed the notion that

Twitter at least has the potential to bring non-traditional actors to public policy discussions,

whether it be "dissonant or support":

> Government participant: [Twitter] gives voice, it brings voice to the table of those who
> might otherwise not speak out … I truly believe that it … whether dissonant or support, it
> doesn't matter, it becomes part of the public discourse.

Along similar lines, the advocate participant touched on the notion of authenticity that comes

through in Twitter discourse when voices "represent the needs of people who are actually being

affected":

> Advocate participant: I think … it is good … for there to be voices in the community that are ready to sort of comment when these things happen that are legitimate and that actually sort of represent the needs of people who are actually being affected by this … The faults of Twitter or the fact that it's a small group … doesn't mean that it's not a useful tactic.

While the advocate participant offered the caveat that Twitter users may ultimately represent only a "small group," there nonetheless appeared to be an acknowledgement of the value that voices on Twitter bring to public policy discourse.

Real-world action. In terms of translating tweets into so-called real-world action, where activity materializes beyond simple online discourse, participants shared differing perspectives. The advocate participant regarded Twitter as an effective tool for "backlash and anger," particularly through the platform's ability to condense topics or issues into "shareable bite-sized quotes" and a "simpler form." However, by the same token, the advocate participant expressed some doubts in relation to the usefulness of Twitter in mobilizing citizens for real-world protest actions:

> Advocate participant: I don't necessarily know how good Twitter is, for example, like, [in] mobilizing people to take real action. I don't know … It seemed very much like a very media-centred platform … [and] because the media uses Twitter—I think government was very concerned with how the discussion was going down.

The emphasis that the advocate participant put on Twitter being a "media-centred platform" was further elaborated on by the participant indicating that the media and political classes may not be engaged in "throwing protests" or instigating and mobilizing direct action in a real-world sense:

> Advocate participant: I think that the … demographic[s] of people on Twitter—it's a very bureaucratic or sort of like media class of folks who aren't, you know, going to be throwing protests necessarily … I know around Bill 10, they disrupted the Christmas ceremony at the legislature … I don't think the people who were doing those sorts of

actions were the type of people who had big followings, or followings really at all, on Twitter.

Indeed, for the advocate participant, much of the reason for Twitter not necessarily resulting in significant real-world action relates back to the participant's perception of who is using Twitter. In the words of the advocate participant, "it seems too often that it's the people on Twitter who are talking about what's happening and are behind sort of closed doors often making decisions and writing articles or whatever." In this way, it is interesting to juxtapose the comments of the advocate participant with those of the media participant, as the latter articulated a perception of Twitter as a tool to "shape opinion":

> Media participant: I use Twitter as a tool to communicate with people. I use Twitter as a tool to help shape opinion in the community and to share my opinion … But I am very cognizant of the fact that the Twitter environment right now, the ecosystem is different than it was during the Bill 10 debate.

If by "real-world" action, one is to surmise a form of physical protest or mobilization of coordinated action, neither the media participant nor the advocate participant directly articulated a view of Twitter discourse in relation to Bill 10 as being central to protests, rallies, or marches; rather, both articulated their views of Twitter in relation to opinion formation and public perception of government.

Perceived demographics of Twitter users. Participants each had a certain perspective on the perceived demographics or nature of individuals who are active on Twitter. The media participant referred back to an in-person encounter with a Twitter follower to highlight how some followers of traditional news media may in fact be digesting news content through Twitter rather than through traditional formats such as newspapers:

> Media participant: There are all kinds of people who are never [going to] read my column, who are just not newspaper people but who are going to read what I say on Twitter … It was a wake-up call for how important tweets are not just for the entertainment value for the kid on the bus, but as a way in which public discourse happens now.

To further continue along the theme of youth, the government participant also emphasized the role of smartphones in making tools such as Twitter an invaluable part of the lives of those who were arguably most affected by Bill 10—students themselves:

> Government participant: If we take a look at our young people today, smartphones are ubiquitous across all youth … We need to come out and use that … in order to garner dialogue and discussion with that group.

In contrast to the media and government participants, the advocate participant appeared to express a view of Twitter as being somewhat more limited to a smaller demographic of users:

> Advocate participant: I would say a group of maybe two or three hundred folks who are likely very, very active, and that would include maybe … local sort of mainstream media, MLAs, and some others [who] are, like, commentators in Edmonton … but what was different about the Bill 10 stuff was that … [it] then exploded into … the people outside of that political bubble.

It is interesting to note the advocate participant's juxtaposition of the perspective that Twitter users are from the political and media classes with the perspective that Bill 10 "exploded" that user base into a group of Twitter users beyond the traditional "political bubble."

Twitter as Part of Communication Strategy

Getting news media to pay attention. The interplay between traditional news media and Twitter, particularly in relation to triggering public attention on any given topic or public policy issue, was a key theme that emerged in the findings. In the case of news media, the media

participant cited how journalists not only use Twitter "to break the news" but also to "get story

ideas" and "stay on top of … breaking news stories":

> Media participant: It's become really important to our practice as journalists. We use
> Twitter to break the news … and we have dedicated editors whose job it is to stay on top
> of those breaking news stories … We have reporters in the newsroom who use Twitter to
> cover live news, to break news, and engage readers, get story ideas, to share out their
> stories.

From a government perspective, the government participant contrasted the "political value" of

traditional news media with the notion of being able to use Twitter to potentially tell a different

perspective or angle on a public policy issue "from [government's] reality":

> Government participant: There's always a political value placed on the message that
> media brings out … At least tweeting allows me to begin to tell the story, … whether it's
> government or a school district or whatever, from their reality. It begins to get the
> message out.

In terms of advocating for a certain public policy outcome, the advocate participant emphasized

the perceived demographic of those who use Twitter (e.g., news media) to highlight how many

of the media interactions during Bill 10 "came from Twitter" and that Twitter enabled this

participant to play an active role in putting forward comments:

> Advocate participant: It's a very specific audience that uses Twitter, and so you would
> use it for specific purposes. So yeah, like media for example is on Twitter … so many
> contacts and stuff came in that situation and in others came from Twitter. When you're
> trying to get at the forefront, using Twitter is really great because media is [*sic*] framing
> that issue and you want to be able to have first comment.

Indeed, the advocate participant came back to the issues of framing and messaging, indicating

that Twitter is "really good for framing … for the message that you want the media and the

politicians to receive."

Carrying the conversation forward. In terms of the nature of Twitter discourse, participants offered their views on how a public policy debate or discussion such as Bill 10 evolves and their potential roles (or that of their organizations) in the conversation. In reflecting on the role of social media in strategic communications planning, the government participant cited a current organizational priority in the participant's current organization (outside of the civil service) as being a need for having a "proactive plan to get information out," but in a manner that helps continue the public policy dialogue in a positive way:

> Government participant: Probably more so today than it was a few years ago … is that whole issue of the role of social media's place. I think that we would certainly need to keep, or at least develop a … proactive plan to get information out there but also work with other groups within organizations to move the tweets forward in order to keep the dialogue positive and alive.

From a journalistic standpoint, the media participant appeared to focus on the role of a columnist in relation to advocating not for any particular group, but rather advocating for what the participant referred to as "common sense and common decency in public policy":

> Media participant: I'm in an interesting position—I am a journalist, but I'm not a reporter. I give opinions, and not all journalists have a licence to do that … So it's not my job to be an advocate for LBGTQ [*sic*] kids except in the sense that I'm an advocate for common sense and common decency in public policy.

In reflecting on the role of social advocacy in Bill 10, the advocate participant touched on the goal of establishing youth advocacy in the Bill 10 conversation as a "go-to for a youth perspective" and the importance of maintaining visibility in media reporting through the placement of comments and quotes:

> Advocate participant: I think what we just tried to do was really sort of like be consistently commenting and having quotes in any sort of story about this; we kind of established ourselves as the go-to for a youth perspective on the issue.

In addition, the advocate participant also alluded to the ability to leverage a visible presence in the Bill 10 public policy discourse through the engagement of additional players in the debate:

> Advocate Participant: And then our tactic of using what we could, which was like going to City Council … and getting City Council to publicly contradict the provincial government in a matter that had absolutely sort of nothing to do really with municipal policy.

Each of the participants ultimately expressed a certain view that reflected their perspective and role in the Bill 10 conversation, which is interesting to note from the perspective of how they potentially conceptualized and saw themselves (or their organizations) within the evolving dialogue surrounding the legislative discourse unfolding on Twitter.

Future of Twitter's role in public policy. Ultimately, as participants reflected on Bill 10, they also inevitably expressed views and thoughts on the future of public policy discussion vis-à-vis Twitter as a communication platform. The media participant appeared to express a certain element of ambivalence when speaking of Twitter in relation to public policy. On one hand, this participant regarded Twitter as "critically important" for Bill 10:

> Media participant: I think Twitter was critically important in shaping the public discourse and hence the public policy debate.

Yet, by the same token, the media participant also cited the decline in the quality of Twitter discourse, expressing a sense of it having changed in a "post-Trumpenian universe":

> Media participant: I mean it's sad to say that since the Bill 10 debate, Twitter discourse has really degraded. I think Albertans were able to have a really good debate about

Bill 10 on Twitter in a way that I'm not sure in a post-Trumpenian universe would be possible today. Twitter has become so much more toxic—there are so many more weaponized trolls.

The media participant also noted that "there are smart voices who have left Twitter and are no longer there because they just quit or [have] given up on the platform," but that Twitter is "still a really important instrument for public policy." Along similar lines, the government participant echoed the sentiment that Twitter remains an important tool for public policy discussion and formation. For instance, when asked to provide a response to a set of tweets posted in reaction to the initial version of Bill 10, which would have put power in the hands of school boards to allow or deny a GSA, the government participant alluded to the way that such tweets ultimately led to a certain policy outcome:

Government participant: The backlash of those kind of tweets drove, I think, government into a direction they had to go in the first place.

Indeed, in looking forward to future public policy discussion, the government participant also touched on how Twitter plays a role in the "strategic positioning" of stakeholders:

Government participant: As we become more mature in the use of social media, Twitter continues to play an increasingly important role in the strategic positioning of where groups [lie] and want to communicate.

Perhaps on a somewhat more skeptical note, the advocate participant touched on the notion of Twitter as appearing to lack substantive debate on public policy, and also flagged a potential risk associated with becoming "radicalized":

Advocate participant: It's like reality TV almost, it's the drama, it's the gossip, it's sort of the performative debate in a way, political posturing … I don't really find it a place of

genuine debate or change-making, although I do know a lot of people who have definitely become radicalized through Twitter as well.

In trying to provide an explanation for the notion that Twitter may not be an effective platform for policy debate, the advocate participant referred specifically to the change in government and the New Democratic Party (NDP) later assuming power since the time of the Bill 10 debate:

> Advocate participant: So many people who served the role of the outside of civil society, who are critiquing government and who are providing recommendation on policy, … are now, like, sort of in [government].

Ultimately, in reflecting on the overall role and potential of Twitter for the making and discussion of public policy, participants touched on various dynamics. Whether it was the media participant touching on how Twitter was critical to Bill 10 but that the landscape for Twitter has since changed, the government participant recognizing the role of Twitter in elucidating the public policy positions of organizations and stakeholders, or the advocate participant acknowledging the shift that later occurred in Alberta politics whereby those who previously critiqued government then became a part of the government (as subsequent members of the governing party following an election), the future of Twitter in public policy was an important theme across all responses.

Discussion

The discussion section has been structured to assess and delve deeper into the potential meaning of the findings and how they relate back to the focus of the research, which is on identifying how key policy actors perceive the role of Twitter vis-à-vis public policy deliberation. In this way, the discussion brings together some key themes based on both comparable and contrasting perspectives of participants, and in some cases juxtaposes those perspectives in order to highlight core insights and areas of concern articulated by the participants.

Note on Timelines

Interview data were collected during the spring/summer of 2018, and tweets had previously been selected in December 2016. However, various events concerning or related to Bill 10 had taken place since the time of the debate itself in late 2014 and early 2015, and it may therefore be reasonable to expect that current events may have influenced the participants' views on the occurrences that transpired during the time of focus. One such event is the May 2016 clash of protest groups at the Alberta legislature, where one protest "took place to support trans rights while the second was organized to give parents a voice against [Bill 10]" (Lamoureux, 2016, para. 6). Furthermore, since the time of the Bill 10 debate in early 2015, a new government was subsequently elected in the Province of Alberta, with the education minister of that government having carried forward a commitment to "assist school authorities when addressing the needs of individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender expressions, and gender identities" by establishing government guidelines that reflect the policy shifts represented by Bill 10 (Government of Alberta, 2016, para. 1). Furthermore, yet another change in government in the spring of 2019 brought even more considerations related to aspects of Bill 10; however,

this occurred after both the content analysis and data collection, so is out of the confines of this research.

Twitter Perceived as Having Had a Discernible Impact on Bill 10

Policy actors who were interviewed as part of this study perceived Twitter as having had a clear, immediate, and visible impact on the evolution of Bill 10 as a public policy. In the case of Bill 10, despite government maintaining a majority in the Alberta legislature (thereby allowing government to make or amend laws virtually uncontested), the dialogue that emerged on Twitter was perceived by all three participant as having influenced the shape and direction of government policy on GSAs, with the ultimate outcome aligning with the policy position of citizens who were active on Twitter. The notion of the public sphere and subaltern counterpublics is regarded by Fraser (1990) as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses … to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (p. 67). In this respect, the results appear to be consistent with Fraser's assertion that groups beyond the official public sphere (in the case of Bill 10, the official sphere being government) can effectively formulate an opposition in a way that fundamentally counters a dominant narrative (e.g., a government policy).

Differing perceptions on the exact role of Twitter. While the impact of Twitter discourse is perceived to have played a significant role in shaping the ultimate outcome of Bill 10, the participants' interpretation of the nature of Twitter's role differed. It is interesting to note the government participant's perception of Twitter as largely helping to mediate to a final resolution or policy outcome. Indeed, from a government perspective, much of the initial focus of the legislation and political strategy appears to have been targeted at fending off criticism from the right of the political spectrum, including social conservatives and private religious

schools opposed to students having the right to form GSAs. What this finding suggests is that the broader political understanding of the environment might influence or dictate how government interprets information (e.g., the larger political context might provide the lens through which any given government, regardless of whether it is right-leaning, left-leaning, or centrist, interprets citizen reaction to policies).

While on first blush, one could ask whether it would not simply have been easier for government to engage in public consultation rather than a mediated approach to a final policy outcome, Panagiotopoulos et al. (2011) note that "deliberations should not be confused with public consultations," for the latter constitutes "contributions of opinions from the public to authorities … without the need to balance stakeholder arguments for reaching decisions" (p. 284). In this respect, the comments from the government representative in this study would appear to be consistent with the definition of deliberation put forward by Panagiotopoulos et al., which is "interpersonal goal-directed discourses where … conflicting alternatives of public issues are discussed" (p. 284). Within this context, a key benefit of the criticism from GSA advocates appears to have been the notion that government was able to build up the necessary credibility and political capital (particularly through the voice of major schools that already had a positive experience with GSAs) to move the policy along towards a final state that the government participant described as "a good place—very … similar to other progressive areas in North America" (i.e., the final version of Bill 10 that ultimately came to be).

However, what appears somewhat incongruent with Panagiotopoulos et al.'s (2011) findings is the asymmetrical nature of the dialogue around Bill 10, with the vast majority of the Twitter posts being critical of government's approach to GSAs (as reflected in the content analysis) rather than of the political or religious right, against which the government may have

been considering as part of its Bill 10 strategy. In other words, Twitter in itself may not represent

the entire relevant population. Another consideration may be the unique aspects of Twitter: The

discourse may be a reflection of the unique aspects of Twitter and the way it is used (as

compared with other methods of discourse that are beyond the scope of this research). This could

include, for example, tendencies on Twitter to retweet and share posts, the rapid dissemination of

information and viewpoints, and the critical mass that can sometimes develop around a particular

issue or topic.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the advocacy and news media participants, the

description that Twitter enabled mediation of Bill 10 is somewhat less eloquent, and the

government participant's assertion of the process being a gradual and deliberate build-up of

political capital needed to mandate GSAs may seem questionable given that there did not appear

to be a vocal outcry from those opposed to student rights in relation to GSAs (e.g., in traditional

news media or social media channels). Indeed, for advocates, concepts such as the lack of human

empathy contained in the initial versions of the legislation, the absurdities of government's

rationale for allowing school boards to decide on GSAs or setting up these clubs off school

grounds, and the fundamental question of right and wrong that the legislation symbolized would

all suggest that the pushback was against government itself (not the political right, which

government may have been trying to fend against).

In the end, this was an interesting dichotomy between two fundamentally different

conceptualizations not only of the Bill 10 discourse but of the intent of the policy itself. For

government, Bill 10 may have been more about being mindful of the opposition to GSAs (e.g.,

by private religious schools) and moving forward carefully to enable the idea of GSAs to gain

traction and credibility. However, from the media and advocacy perspectives, government

severely misjudged "where people were at," and government's stance on allowing GSAs was a question of right and wrong.

The question of nuance. One of the findings worth exploring further is that all of the participants agreed that Twitter may not necessarily be the best venue for nuanced policy discussion (though participants did acknowledge its importance as a first line of discussion). Indeed, this is despite Twitter having increased its character count limit from 140 to 280 since the time of the Bill 10 debate. This assertion would appear to be consistent with the literature, whereby Guggenheim and Pasek have noted that Twitter's limited character count "does not offer an optimal venue for discussing policy-related social problems, although it is good for disseminating news and expressing emotions" (as cited in Guggenheim et al., 2015, p. 219). Yet, the researcher's view is that the findings of this study point to an interesting consideration around nuance in this regard, given that the findings point to some compelling arguments on Twitter regarding the merits of Bill 10 and techniques to critique political positions and public policy using this social platform. Examples include the way in which critics of early iterations of Bill 10 were able to level critiques using concepts such as Jim Crow and segregation, pointing out legislative flaws such as requiring teenagers to appeal school board decisions in courts, and the indefensibility of school board autonomy vis-à-vis the creation of safe spaces for students. This type of content would all seem to suggest that the nature of Twitter has allowed for measured and sophisticated critiques by users, particularly in relation to a piece of legislation that did not appear to be substantially different in complexity from other forms of legislation or policy (putting aside political views). To this end, perhaps the limited character count compels users into certain efficiencies and care in how tweets are structured. Furthermore, the short form may also help make Twitter content more accessible to a larger audience who would otherwise

not have the time or inclination to absorb media content in longer formats. As the government participant indicated in the interview, Twitter can at least help initiate the conversation around public policy. And if government itself is to rely on Twitter to share its side of the story and counter perceived negativity in traditional news media (as reflected in the government participant's comments), there may be some benefit in government ultimately reciprocating that same sentiment to the legitimate reaction of citizens when a policy is announced.

Shaping Public Opinion Rather than Coordinating Action

Perceptions of Twitter among the representatives interviewed in this study skewed more heavily towards the ability of Twitter to influence public opinion, particularly in relation to traditional news media coverage, rather than influencing activities such as demonstrations, protests, or other forms of coordinated action. Of course, one could ask what might have happened if government had not amended the legislation and instead chose to re-entrench. In other words, if using social media (e.g., Twitter) was an effective means to communicate in the case of Bill 10, then it is possible that other forms of demonstration may not have been necessary. These findings contrast with some of the public perception in relation to social media, which may often focus on its perceived capacity to galvanize citizens to engage in protest or other real-world actions. Shirky (2011), for example, has noted the power of social media "not as a replacement for real-world action but as a way to coordinate it" (p. 20). Granted, this study is focused only on Twitter, whereas Shirky may be speaking about social media more broadly (e.g., the role of Facebook in organizational purposes). Furthermore, the coordination of real-world action may be a spectrum, with protests and action being on one extreme, but with discourse and opinions also being located on the same continuum.

Despite the difference, the participants' views are not entirely inconsistent with Shirky's (2011) conceptualization of a "developing public sphere, where public opinion relies on both media and conversation" (p. 19). Nonetheless, perhaps one reason for participants not homing in on the notion of coordinated real-world action is the nature of the Bill 10 policy itself, particularly in relation to its focus on what is an already vulnerable group of youth (who may be less keen on public visibility), combined also with the legalese and rhetorical emphasis of the debate that allowed for the issue to lend itself more towards discursive elements rather than a more physical manifestation of protest and anger. Furthermore, to enable action, one may also need a considerably larger reach—which is to say that the reach of the Twitter protest surrounding Bill 10 may have been below the critical mass needed for significant demonstrations (but which was nonetheless adequate for influencing policy).

Further, this perception of Twitter not lending itself towards coordinated action during the Bill 10 debate, as expressed rather explicitly by the advocate participant during the semi-structured interview, must also be juxtaposed with the content analysis portion of this research, which does to some extent reflect a focus on coordinating real-world protest at certain points during the evolution of Bill 10. For example, based on the content analysis involving a quasi-random sampling of tweets, nearly a quarter of the tweets associated with the introduction and passing of the amended Bill 10 on December 3 (whereby government offered to establish GSAs off school grounds) reflected a call to action of some kind (or the sharing of such information)—whether the call was to sign a petition, contact MLAs, or attend protest events that were either already under way or being organized (or sharing photos of such protests). However, it is possible that these calls to action were also reliant on other media methods, such as print or television news media, or even other social tools such as Facebook and YouTube. Perhaps one

explanation for this difference between the advocate's perspective and the findings of the content analysis is the geographic scope of the issue, with some of the coordinated action suggested by the exploratory content analysis occurring in a different city within Alberta (i.e., different from that of the advocate participant in this research). For instance, while media may have a local focus and government a provincial scope (in this case), advocacy can be seen as potentially having an even broader scope (i.e., possibly engaging national-level advocacy groups rather than being limited to local action). Furthermore, on a somewhat paradoxical note, the advocate participant also pointed to the political pressure that the participant's organization asserted on City Council, which would indeed imply a form of coordinated action (yet may not be classified as such in the advocate's thinking). Consequently, there may simply be a difference in how the literature and participants conceptualize or define the nature of real-world or coordinated action. Bastos et al. (2015) found a distinct relationship between "online" and "onsite" protest activity insofar as a tool such as Twitter further amplifies demonstrations and "feeds into the process of participant recruitment" (p. 324). In the case of Bill 10, it is likely that the amplification resulted in further online activity rather than onsite activity, particularly given the ease of using Twitter vis-à-vis the logistical demands of onsite activity.

Agenda Setting and Public Attention

In terms of ensuring the public's awareness of the Bill 10 issue, the findings suggest a relatively clear sense that participants were each mindful and conscious of how public opinion could affect the outcome of the debate, particularly vis-à-vis the reach and amplification afforded by traditional news media. From a government perspective, the government participant acknowledged the power of media on political decisions by touching on the political value of media coverage. Moreover, comments from this participant suggest that the Bill 10 experience

may not have necessarily deviated from the way in which government's communication

approach normally works. For example, while the government participant did allude to citizens'

ability to react to policy decisions on Twitter within minutes or hours of a public policy

announcement, government's paradigm for responding on Twitter (or any non-traditional media)

appeared, at least during the time of Bill 10, to have been similar to how it has engaged with

traditional news media, which in turn may pose challenges for government to have any

significant influence over the public's issue agenda and narrative given the quicker, real-time

agenda-setting capacity of new media such as Twitter.

Nonetheless, the government participant's acknowledgement of the power of media

attention on public policy decisions corresponds with the advocacy strategy articulated by the

advocate participant, which includes "trying to get the media's attention" and Twitter's ability to

force "people to go on the record" as an effective means to apply pressure and seek change. The

advocacy focus on placing comments in media and being an active voice for media is aligned

with the media representative's view of Twitter as serving a vital source of ideas for news stories

and, more specifically, a newspaper columnist's perspective centred on amplifying and

expanding the voices of Twitter users who may not have traditionally had a voice in mainstream

policy making (though the columnist was clear about not being an "advocate" for marginalized

groups, per se).

The advocate participant's comments in relation to using Twitter as a means of garnering

attention around the advocacy perspective is also interesting vis-à-vis news media's traditional

gatekeeper role in determining topics newsworthy of traditional media channels. As a Twitter

user, the advocate participant appeared to reflect a sense of being able to put forward ideas and

comments, with little filtering, for a potentially significant audience to view and absorb, with the

media also then potentially becoming interested in what is being said. This aspect of Web 2.0

differs from the traditional approach of needing to write a letter to the editor in order to publicly

state an opinion and then leaving it to news media to decide on whether to include it in the local

newspaper (with no guarantee of such letter being published). On one hand, Twitter users' ability

to call out political figures or policy actors (and, indeed, compelling them to go on the record)

appears consistent with findings from Rogstad (2016), who has found that certain events or

topics can sometimes garner no attention in mainstream media but can be one of the top

retweeted pieces of news on Twitter, suggesting advocates can "draw public attention to issues

without having to pass through mainstream media 'gatekeepers'" (p. 153). On the other hand, the

advocate participant's comments around garnering mainstream media attention also align with

Rogstad's findings that mainstream media can shift their agenda based on Twitter feedback

(though Rogstad ultimately concluded that mainstream media affects Twitter more than vice

versa) (p. 153).

What appeared evident in the advocate participant's perspective was that leveraging

Twitter for the purposes of amplifying a message through traditional news media was a

deliberate approach. However, what is unclear is the extent to which traditional news media have

affected the social media discourse. Ceron et al. (2014) have noted that "despite the rise of social

network sites, traditional mass media still retain the first-level agenda setting power" (p. 19). In

this respect, this study's findings may be inconclusive as to whether traditional news media had a

role in either instigating or further fuelling the Twitter dialogue around Bill 10. If news media

had ignored the Bill 10 debate, would Twitter have had the same impact? However, this assertion

may need to be unpacked further in relation to how new and old media may be interacting. For

instance, traditional news media's outlet is most often through traditional media channels

(though some may contend that this is evolving, with news media's increasing use of digital technologies as the new norm of communication). If we assume that a news reporter or columnist views something potentially newsworthy on Twitter, it is conceivable that the reporter/columnist may potentially decide to develop a story on that topic. However, in such a scenario, Twitter would have a direct effect on the news media story, but the response and potential influence would occur off Twitter (even if the columnist posts a link to the article on Twitter, it would be different than responding through Twitter). This is one area that the researcher could have probed further, or it may be a potential line of thought for future research. Nonetheless, what can be ascertained from the advocate representative's comments in this study is that agenda setting (particularly intermedia agenda setting) was very much part of the consciousness of the advocate voice around Bill 10, and there was a relatively clear recognition of the potential role of traditional news media in helping to deliver the advocate message to the broader public. This perhaps points to the differing roles of participants. While the advocate had a clear activist role around trying to directly influence policy, the columnist had opinions but was likely less interested in directly influencing policy (interested more, perhaps, in influencing readers, who might in turn influence policy). Moreover, the government representative may have been more interested in managing the process and fulfilling the role of the civil service, which is to follow through on implementing government's agenda and ensuring the sitting government is fully supported through advice.

Media looks to Twitter as an information source. Continuing with the theme of agenda setting and the interplay between traditional news media and Twitter, it is interesting to note that the media participant illuminated the vital role of Twitter in serving as a news source for Bill 10. Revers (2014) asserts through his findings that "journalists' discussion partners on

Twitter are mostly insiders, which raises further question about its significance as a public sphere" (p. 823). While the media participant in this study did cite several key sources that were considered credible during the Bill 10 debate (particularly relevant given the same participant's concerns about the frightening ability of Twitter to spread misinformation), there appears little to suggest that the public sphere was somehow compromised by media relying on key sources of information on Twitter. Indeed, in this respect, the media can be a conduit that can sort through the various posts or sources of information and focus on those which are deemed credible or accurate. However, one does perhaps need to look at the discussion as being broader than just Twitter (i.e., there are other sources and channels). Furthermore, Twitter may be an effective tool to start the conversation on a public policy issue, but the conversation may emerge or continue through other forums once there is sufficient momentum. In this way, Twitter could have played an important role in Bill 10, but not a complete role in the process. This is perhaps expected, as the notion of any one media channel playing a complete role in any given public policy discourse is likely to be rare.

  The public sphere. A somewhat significant perception of a risk to the public sphere may have been articulated by the advocate representative, who implied that Twitter's user base is too often limited to a media and political elite. This could be both a strength and a weakness, depending on one's perspective. On one hand, Twitter's effectiveness in public policy discourse may in fact be a result of its use by media and political elites (or if not their actual use of Twitter, then at least other users' following of certain political hashtags or users considered political influencers). If the base grows or becomes unwieldy, Twitter's effectiveness in reaching the media and political elite may be diminished. On the other hand, such a scenario can also increase the influence of Twitter if the size were thought to be representative of the general population, as

the optics of ignoring the population would likely reflect negatively on political figures.

However, a possibility nonetheless exists for specific individual voices being lost through the

sheer number of tweets. Even in such an event, one must consider that if Twitter's user base

remains limited, its role in providing a voice to marginalized groups and individuals may also be

limited. In this respect, the advocate participant's comments and view that Twitter represents a

highly politically engaged elite user base may stand in contrast to the media participant's

concerns about the #ableg hashtag becoming increasingly toxic and degenerative in a post-

Trump era (i.e., an elite user base and racist or toxic discourse would appear to be contradictory

on first blush). However, the advocate participant's comments do appear to be at least somewhat

aligned with Rogstad's (2016) findings from a study in Norway, which indicate that "Twitter

might be contributing to an expanding of the elite, as a media platform for social-minded,

eloquent people who otherwise do not correspond with the traditional political, economic, or

academic elites" (p. 153).

Government's limitations in using Twitter. An interesting assessment of government's

current and future ability to engage with citizens on Twitter during public policy questions or

discussions (or perhaps even to acknowledge citizens' concerns or feedback) came from the

government participant in describing the realities of approvals and permissions when it comes to

the civil service being able to discuss public policy positions on Twitter. One possible

explanation for government's inability to respond on Twitter is that government's existing

communications paradigm is geared largely towards traditional news media. In this respect,

Twitter can perhaps be seen as a paradigm shift that requires government entities to respond far

more quickly to emerging issues, and in a way that acknowledges that the manner in which

information and feedback from citizens is conveyed to government is inherently more organic

and bottom-up on a platform such as Twitter. Further still, some may even contend that government would be resistant to *any* change, not just technological. Yet, government's ability to actually engage in a faster-paced, conversation-based approach (as is inherent to Twitter) may be challenging. For instance, given the sheer number of possible tweets directed at government on any given topic or issue, one option for government communicators is to simply choose which Twitter user to respond to—perhaps based on factors such as the user's number of followers or the number of retweets or likes that a particular tweet has received. However, this may raise questions of fairness and equity (e.g., from a citizen perspective, does one's popularity determine whether one can expect to receive a response when submitting a query to government?). Another option could be for government to simply add more communications professionals or social media experts to help government keep up with the number of comments, suggestions, ideas, and questions being submitted by citizens on Twitter, but this would still be largely reactive in nature. Furthermore, this approach could also be problematic if one considers the scrutiny that government is always under by those in news media and the public at large, who are suspicious of government's ever-expanding communications teams and cynical of government's intentions when it comes to trying to push or "spin" its message.

On the other hand, the government participant did acknowledge the role of Twitter in serving as a thermometer to gauge public sentiment. This approach aligns with a study of public sector organizations carried out by Bekkers et al. (2013), who found that "the main goal of social media monitoring is to gain a better insight into the relevant sentiments within … target groups" (p. 341). However, as elucidated by the government participant, the civil service is constrained severely in its ability to openly discuss public policy topics with the public via Twitter. A significant challenge for government may involve determining whom to respond to, given that

virtually anyone with an electronic device is capable of tweeting at or with government entities. One can speculate that such discussions can and should be led by elected officials or their operatives; however, by the same token, one may also ask whether a responsive and connected government could at least have acknowledged the concerns that were brought forward by citizens on Twitter when Bill 10 was unfolding (even through some broad, general message broadcasted on Twitter, rather than replying to each individual Twitter user).

Alas, the restrictions on Twitter usage for the civil service in relation to public policy issues on the scale of Bill 10 are largely consistent with Clarke's (2012) findings, noting that "civil servants' pre-occupation with impartiality and professionalism limit social media's potential as a tool of public engagement" (p. 16)—though Clarke further asserts that "it may be beneficial to allow individual program officers to use social media in a professional capacity … to tap into the expertise of those outside government" (p. 16). This latter suggestion may be particularly poignant when considering that both the advocacy and media participants cited the direct line of communication with government officials as being a key benefit of Twitter during debates such as Bill 10, and that the response by elected officials during Bill 10 was largely hollow and highly "curated." In this respect, further research on the perceptions of policy actors regarding Bill 10 could perhaps include a government representative at a political level (e.g., a political staffer to complement a civil servant perspective) to provide a fuller picture of how Twitter is perceived in the deliberative process.

The researcher's own observation through the content analysis is that the vast majority of tweets in the Bill 10 discourse appeared to be from members of the public (and entailed a kind of "protest" feel). There were a handful of tweets from news media representatives and a few from MLAs (though none that defended the legislation from a government perspective). However,

overall, no tweets appeared to be issued by traditional government sources (e.g., ministries, ministers, or the premier) to give any context or rationale for Bill 10. The researcher's assumption is that this side of the equation (i.e., the government's side of the story) was largely communicated via traditional news conferences and press releases, thereby leaving the public to react and critique on Twitter.

The affordances of Twitter in relation to public policy discussions. Real-time, instant communication continues to be central to tracking legislation according to both the media and advocate participants. This line of perception would likely align with findings from other research, which reveal that tweeting for social change often focuses heavily "on providing information to stakeholders[,] … building an online community, and then calling that community to action," with Twitter actually being "less prevalent in its role as a mobilization tool … used to facilitate public events, direct action, and grassroots lobbying than might be expected" (Guo & Saxton, 2014, pp. 17-18). Yet, this ability to track and share information instantaneously as political debate or policy developments materialize may also be a significant disadvantage for government. In the case of Bill 10, one could ask whether government had a grasp on citizens' ability to instantly post their reactions to proposed public policy (and to react and provide commentary simultaneously during live debates in the legislature, no less) and the interplay between conversations on Twitter and the content reaching citizens during the evening news and in the next day's newspapers. Indeed, according to the government participant, part of future examinations of social media in government is a need to acknowledge the capacity of citizens to react immediately following a policy announcement and the demands of keeping up with citizen comments on Twitter. In the researcher's view, this perceived necessity, as expressed by the government participant, may potentially reveal the need for government to take a more deliberate

social media engagement approach when announcing major public policy initiatives, with one

possible approach being the maturity model for social media public engagement, as outlined by

Lee and Kwak (2012), in order to "avoid unnecessary risk [and] build their open government

capabilities" (p. 502). To this end, the relatively reactive approach on the part of government in

relation to Bill 10 is perhaps a curious phenomenon in this day of digital tools; however, further

examination of other policy initiatives beyond Bill 10 is needed to better gauge the Alberta

government's maturity level in relation to social public engagement.

Issue Framing and the Impact of News Media

        Deliberate positioning on all sides. One of the interesting findings from the interview

data is the impact of issue framing—there appeared to be a somewhat deliberate focus on

framing the Bill 10 issue through a certain lens and the corresponding reaction on the part of

government. The media participant, for example, felt that government was trying to frame the

initial version of Bill 10 as purporting to allow GSAs, but in reality, it was "a law that could ban

them." Similarly, it is revealing that government, at least at the level of civil service policy

deliberations, was dealt a blow by the framing of the legislation by critics, particularly the way

critics framed Bill 10 as being akin to separate-but-equal Jim Crow laws, which the government

participant still remembered as an effective retort at the time of the debate. Indeed, from an

advocacy perspective, the advocate participant recalled Bill 10 as "an easy story to … spin"

because it was, quite simply, "a matter of right and wrong." Indeed, the prevalence of the

#Bill202 hashtag in the early tweets following the introduction of Bill 10 may be indicative of

how Twitter users were benchmarking the merits of Bill 10 against the previously introduced

legislation, as well as how they were potentially creating broader public awareness of the

dichotomy. In this respect, the advocate perspective would appear to align with the notion that

the "event driven nature of the news provides issue advocates opportunities to introduce and/or

amplify new frames or definitions to the issue agenda, especially if the focusing or triggering

events are dramatic or troubling" (Wolfe et al., 2013, p. 181). To this end, the media participant

noted from a media perspective that the tweets related to segregation and Jim Crow began to

reflect a more agitated and pent-up frustration with government's handling of Bill 10, which is

perhaps reflective of what Wolfe et al. refer to as events and issues being linked "due to the

journalist practice of contextualization and the imperative for interpretation" (p. 181). In this

instance, the "event" was government's amendment that would have seen GSAs potentially set

up off school grounds, with the corresponding issue framing and contextualization centred on

concepts of segregation and discrimination.

Government's framing efforts were one-dimensional. In terms of how Twitter was

either used or perceived as part of this framing, it is intriguing that both the advocate and media

representatives appeared to have a stronger connection to using Twitter to call out government's

rhetoric surrounding Bill 10 (or, indeed, providing a counterframe, as in the case of the Jim Crow

analogy), whereas government framing of the legislation appeared to be through the introduction

of the legislation itself, rather than engagement or positioning on social media. Could this have

perhaps been a natural result of government's own behind-the-scenes admission of holding an

untenable position on the issue of GSAs, an inherent inability to be nimble and responsive on

Twitter, or simply a deliberate strategy to allow the Twitter critique to unfold as a way of

building the necessary political capital for mandating GSAs (and, by extension, building a

defense against the religious right)? This study, due to its scope, can only hint at some of these

possible explanations, but what the government participant made clear was that government was

"forced to pay attention" to the Twitter conversation around Bill 10 because a major public

policy initiative was at stake. Sung and Hwang (2014) note in their analysis of crisis

communication management that as information spreads, people-based media (such as Twitter)

and conventional news media differ insofar as the former are more effective in diffusing new

information to the public, while the latter can disseminate information to a wider public (p. 255).

In this respect, while government's introduction of an amendment to appease critics of the

legislation may have relied heavily on traditional news media (e.g., announcing it to the

legislature press gallery), its lack of presence on people-based media platforms such as Twitter

(in relation to Bill 10) likely hindered its ability to be a first and primary source for context or

policy interpretation. However, further elucidating this phenomenon would likely require

research that delves more deeply into a broader range of communications channels that were

used by government during the Bill 10 debate.

Summary of Discussion

The findings resulting from the interview data provide rich content for analysis. Some of

the key themes that provide for interesting discussion relate to the Government of Alberta's

overall political positioning on Bill 10 and a conceptualization of the debate as a process of

mediating between different ends of the political spectrum. The conscious strategy of using

Twitter to tap into the reach and credibility of traditional news media is also intriguing when

looking at Bill 10 from an advocacy perspective. Perceptions of issue framing on the part of all

participants, and the conceptualization of a media columnist's role as amplifying (but not

necessarily advocating for) the voice of marginalized groups, are also revealing in relation to the

intricate dynamics that contribute to policy making in Alberta.

Limitations. In terms of learning how the study could have been enhanced, one area that

may have been worth exploring more fully is the role of networks and how participants

perceived Twitter in relation to interacting with different players. To this end, it may have been

beneficial for the researcher to have provided the Twitter handles to participants when reading

out the sample set of tweets that formed the crux of two questions (specifically questions 2 and 7,

Appendix C) in the interview guide (all three participants, to varying degrees, speculated on

where the tweets came from or expressed interest in wanting to know the Twitter handles when

the researcher asked those two questions). In addition, another potential fruitful approach could

have involved interviewing participants while the debate itself was occurring, thereby mitigating

any potential tendency for participants to try to recall aspects of the Bill 10 debate. While this

would have been ideal, it is unlikely that the researcher could have anticipated this research when

the issue emerged; therefore, a more practical approach may include finding an emerging issue

(on any given public policy topic) and tracking the topic as early in the process as possible—

recognizing this would require considerable flexibility on the part of the researcher. Interviewing

dissonant voices may also have provided a fuller picture of the different angles of the debate—

though the challenge with this approach is that dissonant voices on Twitter (e.g., groups opposed

to GSAs) were not readily visible to the researcher for the time frame and scope used in this

study.

Conclusion

The impetus for this exploratory research study was to answer a question—namely,

within the context of a major public policy or legislative initiative, what is the perceived role of a

specific social media tool in the public discourse? For this particular study, Alberta's Bill 10

legislation was used as a frame of reference and case study, while Twitter was the social media

tool of focus. This study used both content analysis (using a quasi-random sampling of tweets

associated with various milestones in the Bill 10 legislative life cycle) and interviews with

representatives of government, news media, and advocacy to explore the perceptions of these key policy actors in relation to Twitter and public policy deliberation. These three perspectives were deliberately chosen given their roles within any public policy discourse. Explored were the role of government in mediating the public policy process and balancing competing interests and trade-offs, the role of media in assessing and analyzing aspects of public policy (including unintended consequences of policy decisions), and the role of advocacy in lobbying government for a certain outcome and leveraging media to help shape public opinion; each of these three perspectives adds a critical component to understanding the role of a specific social media tool in policy deliberation.

Ultimately, this study intended to explore how Twitter was used in relation to a specific public policy initiative. Based on the findings, it may be possible to suggest how a tool such as Twitter could benefit communications and public policy practitioners. First and foremost, there appears to be a clear relationship between the role of Twitter discourse and the progression and ultimate outcome of Alberta's Bill 10 legislation. On one hand, the content analysis appears to demonstrate an overarching pattern whereby Twitter commentary kept pace with legislative developments in Bill 10, offering compelling critique and commentary related to specific aspects of the legislation that Twitter users felt were harmful to the interests of LGBTQ youth.

Yet, by this same token, the conversation on Twitter was also largely one-sided, which is to say that it was overwhelmingly anti-legislation until the point at which government finally introduced legislation that put full power in the hands of students to form GSAs. Other dynamics appearing in the content analysis, such as citizens interacting or directly communicating with (or at) elected officials and news media, as well as using framing techniques to further strengthen the

critique of the legislation, were further reflected in the interview participants' comments as they touched on Twitter's ability to enable such interactions and issue framing to occur.

What is perhaps most revealing is the different conceptual frameworks that each participant articulated in relation to Twitter and public policy. Notwithstanding certain comparisons and similarities—such as an acknowledgement of Twitter's ability to give voice to marginalized voices and the challenges associated with having nuanced conversations—some differences emerged. For instance, government's positioning appears to have centred largely on regarding Twitter as a mediating platform to balance off-policy critiques from different ends of the political spectrum, presumably through channels other than Twitter and as part of a journey that helped bring diverse stakeholders (with differing views on GSAs) along a path towards ultimately supporting student rights in relation to forming GSAs. This would suggest that the larger political context plays a major role in determining how government interprets information on Twitter, as well as when and how it chooses to act upon it. Furthermore, the fact that government may have felt *compelled* to listen to the Twitter conversation is perhaps indicative of how it likely lacked a deliberate and intentional approach to incorporating Twitter dialogue at the onset of the Bill 10 legislation. By extension, government may also be struggling to adapt to a new deliberative paradigm where fast-paced, organic conversation takes place on Twitter rather than through mediated platforms such as traditional news media. This may suggest that government will continue to struggle in driving the public policy agenda to any great extent, and may instead need to focus more on recognizing that the traditional paradigm needs to change and that it must determine the role it wants to play. As for what was being expressed specifically on Twitter, the one-sidedness of the comments (in support of student rights to form GSAs) may have had a disproportionate effect on the changes that occurred.

From an advocacy and media perspective, participant interviews suggest an interesting relationship between the strategic use of Twitter for advocacy purposes and a news media mandate. This may stem from the fact that media are able to bridge content from one platform to another (e.g., from Twitter to next day's column in the newspaper), thereby strengthening its influence as an information source. For example, advocacy strategies on Twitter focused on positioning to become a first and significant source of commentary for news media, framing and juxtaposing Bill 10 to previous proposed legislation that more closely aligned with the advocacy perspective, and compelling elected officials to state their positions on the record (or, conversely, elucidating their silence). This would appear in some ways to complement and align with a columnist perspective around amplifying voices that may otherwise be on the sidelines of a public policy discussion, using Twitter as a source of information and insight, and staying abreast of legislative and political developments. All of this may suggest a powerful interplay between media and advocacy (whether deliberate or not) that worked to further ratchet up public opinion and pressure leading to government's final position on allowing GSAs in schools. Indeed, the pace at which this agenda appears to have been established, and the government's inability to respond quickly, may have caught government off guard.

Perhaps an underlying commonality among all participants was an element of ambivalence towards Twitter in future public policy deliberation. While all three participants regarded Twitter as having significant potential as a tool that can contribute to public policy discourse, each also expressed notes of caution—including a perceived degradation of the quality of Twitter discourse since Bill 10 (including a perceived increased toxicity in relation to Alberta politics), limitations on the extent to which Twitter is reflective of the public sphere, challenges with having nuanced discussion points, and the ever-present risk of misinformation.

So where does this leave us in viewing Twitter in relation to public policy? While this study is only an exploratory evaluation of perceptions, its findings may suggest that the existing communication paradigm has not appeared to work effectively for government, perhaps suggesting that change would be appropriate (recognizing that large organizations such as government bodies may need significant time to adapt to new and emerging technologies). That is to say, if it is to be understood that citizens are likely to take to Twitter to articulate grievances, concerns, and indeed insights or recommendations about policy, then government could benefit by recognizing the speed at which discourse can now occur and augment its ability to summarize key aspects of the arguments being put forward—regardless of the platform or social tool in question. This could mean, for example, establishing expectations for how Twitter posts by the public may be aggregated (and deciphered) and used to complement other feedback mechanisms as part of the way in which government inherently formulates public policy proposals. All policy debates may not have such a clear set of coherent demands on the part of citizens, as appears to have been the case with Bill 10, but formally acknowledging the nature or characteristics of Twitter in policy deliberation could at least help government meet its democratic responsibility of governing with responsiveness and consent. In the end, the greatest benefit of such an approach may be to lessen the type of divide between citizens and government that manifested itself during Bill 10, thereby bridging governments and citizens in a way that is potentially more productive and respectful of their mutual interdependency.

Limitations. Research of this nature has inherent limitations. For example, this study examined only one social media tool related to Bill 10, and other social media tools may also have played important roles in relation to the same legislation. However, this was an exploratory study; thus, the focus was on understanding what happened rather than assessing the potential

role of social media around public policy dialogue. This study was also limited to focusing on

three perspectives, and others may have been relevant, such as those of advocates opposed to

students' rights in relation to GSAs. Furthermore, the three participants selected for this study

might not have been fully representative of their respective fields: other participants from those

same fields may have provided notably different findings.

       Future research. Looking forward, numerous avenues exist for future research. Some of

these include taking a more expansive approach to assessing the role of social and traditional

platforms in order to understand their cumulative role in relation to Bill 10 (or aspects of the

GSA debate that continue to persist in Alberta's political discourse), assessing additional policy

initiatives within the Alberta public policy context to draw further conclusions and insights,

seeking the perspectives of additional policy actors, assessing the role of hierarchy and

leadership among the citizens and groups who spoke up during the discussion of Bill 10, and

perhaps also examining whether the overall tone and nature of Twitter discourse since Bill 10

has evolved—for better or worse.

       Future research could also explore the interplay between Twitter and real-life or direct

action to influence public policy, and how such techniques compare to public awareness or

information dissemination. For instance, the literature review (e.g., see Bastos et al., 2015)

indicated differing views on the part of scholars in relation to the role of social media in

encouraging direct action, and the findings of this study suggest that direct action (e.g., in the

form of on-street protests or rallies) may not have necessarily been the driver behind changes to

Bill 10; rather, the interplay between Twitter and news media and the resulting public framing of

the issue may have been the more compelling driver of changes to Bill 10. Therefore, the

question of whether direct action or traditional protest movements coordinated through Twitter

are as effective as public opinion framing in compelling public policy change could be explored

further, particularly within the context of liberal democracies.

Finally, something perhaps remains to be explored in relation to the role of

communication and social media vis-à-vis the public policy development process itself. While

this paper clearly focuses on the communications aspects of a specific public policy case, future

research could delve more deeply into conceptualizing and understanding how communication

can play a more strategic role throughout the life cycle of public policy formation, starting with

the role of communication in helping to identify the policy "problem" or the purpose of a policy

intervention. This future research could include, for example, assessing how social tools can help

contribute to formal public engagement or approaches for understanding public sentiment at the

very start of a public policy initiative, as well as the ways in which communication

considerations can be built into each step of program and policy delivery, including monitoring

and evaluation. Future research of this nature could help to further highlight both the perceptions

and realities of the role of any given social media tool within the context of a major policy

initiative, thereby adding value to the work of communications and public policy professionals

alike.

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Appendix A: Information Sheet to Accompany Consent Form

RE: The Convergence of Social Media and Public Policy: How Key Policy Actors Perceive the Role of Twitter in Shaping Alberta's Bill 10 Legislation

Research Investigator:	**Supervisor**
Rohit Sandhu	Dr. Stanley Varnhagen
Enterprise Square	Enterprise Square
University of Alberta	University of Alberta
10230 Jasper Avenue	10230 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5J 4P6	Edmonton, AB T5J 4P6
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Dear participant:

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Communications and Technology at the University of Alberta, the following study is designed to explore how representatives of government, media, and advocacy networks view the role of social media in influencing public policy discussions. This study focuses specifically on perceptions of Twitter in contributing to Alberta's debate on Bill 10, which was legislation introduced in December 2014 to govern the rules surrounding the establishment of gay–straight alliances in Alberta schools.

This study relies largely on interviews with key public policy actors across different organizations and fields of endeavour—including government, media, and non-profit organizations. The interviews will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

The findings of this research have the potential of benefiting organizations, as well as communication and public policy professionals, to better understand the role of social media in contributing to public policy discourse.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and there will be no reimbursement or any other benefits to participants. Participants are under no obligation to participate and can withdraw at

any time up to two weeks of receiving the interview transcripts for review, by contacting the researcher via email or phone. In the event of participant withdrawal, the participant's information will be deleted from the research and destroyed in full. There are no known risks associated with this research.

Prior to analysis of research data, the interview transcript will be shared with each participant. Upon review of their interview transcript, participants can choose to edit or remove any information they wish.

Interviews will be recorded using an audio recorder. All responses will be strictly confidential, unless participants provide explicit approval for the study to include identifying information such as a participant's name, title, organization, and Twitter handle and tweets (if applicable). If a participant chooses not to approve the use of personal identifying information in the study, only the industry and general nature of the participant's role will be discussed in the analysis of the research.

Responses will be stored in a locked file cabinet and a password-protected computer at my supervisor's office at the Faculty of Extension for a period of five years (in accordance with University of Alberta research guidelines). Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data.

If participants would like to receive a final copy of the findings, the researcher will provide a copy.

To participate in this study, participants are requested to sign a copy of the consent form below at the time of the interview. The researcher will bring two copies of the form to the interview, one for the participant to sign and another for the participant's records.

As mentioned in the initial contact email, please email the researcher, Rohit Sandhu, at niyam@ualberta.ca to confirm interest in participating in this study. An interview date, time, and location that fit with the participant's availability and schedule will then be arranged.

If at any time participants have any questions regarding this study, they are encouraged to contact the researcher or researcher's supervisor.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

Sincerely,

Rohit Sandhu

Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent

Participant Informed Consent
I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above. I understand that I remain free to withdraw at any time.

_____   _____
Participant's name (printed) and Signature   Date

_____   _____
Name (printed) and Signature of Investigator   Date

**I agree to allow the following personal identifying information to be used in this study
(please check all that apply)**
( ) Participant's name
( ) Participant's current/former title (as applicable)
( ) Participant's current/former organization (as applicable)
( ) Participant's Twitter handle and tweets related to Bill 10 (if applicable)

_____   _____
Participant's name (printed) and Signature   Date

_____   _____
Name (printed) and Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix C: Discussion Guide for Semi-Structured Interviews

Question	Audience
Q1. Looking back at all of the debate and public discourse surrounding Bill 10, what are your overall impressions of the role that Twitter played (i.e., between the period of December 2014, when MLA Sandra Jansen [who was then a member of the governing PC party] introduced the first iteration of Bill 10 in which schools had the final say on whether to permit GSAs, to March 2015, when the final version of the bill ensured students could form GSAs)? Prompt: General thoughts or thinking about Twitter and Bill 10?	All participants
Q2. The initial version of the legislation would have put power in the hands of school boards to allow or deny a GSA, and students would have had to appeal in the courts if a school board denied a GSA. There was an immediate reaction on Twitter. I'll read out a few sample tweets that are somewhat reflective of the kind of tweets that were posted in response to Bill 10 when it was first introduced. After I read them, please comment on your perception of what's happening—or how you interpret the tweets (through your lens as a[n] [government official/media representative/advocate]). • Bill 10 will fail to create safe spaces for AB youth. How many bullied kids do u know who have taken their cases to court? • We need to protect our #LGBTQ youth, often FROM their parents & schools. What will #Bill10 do but empower discrimination & put kids at risk? • My Q is what kind of 10yr old will find "legal recourse" useful when they're not allowed to start a club that supports them?	All participants
Q3. If a debate with similar relevance to your organization were occurring at this present moment,	All participants

what considerations would you give to using Twitter to influence or affect the outcome of the debate? Is there a change that might occur in how you use Twitter at the start of a debate, rather than after the debate had progresses for some time? Prompt: If you disagreed with a policy, how could Twitter be used if you wanted to change the outcome?	
Q4. Given your role as a[n] [civil servant/media columnist/advocate], can you provide some thoughts on how Twitter is normally used by your organization? Prompt: How would your organization view Twitter if you had to communicate something?	All participants
Q5. From your perspective, when a contentious public policy issue such as Bill 10 breaks, what makes Twitter (or any social media) different from other ways in which people are communicating, such as writing letters or making phone calls to politicians and traditional newspapers? Prompt: What are your thoughts on the speed of communication using Twitter and the ability of anyone with a smartphone to use it?	All participants
Q6. When you reflect back on Bill 10, what were some of the consequences of relying on Twitter? What were the downsides or advantages *(if not touched on in the initial response)*? Prompt: Do you feel your message got through using Twitter? Were there an appropriate number of participants in the Twitter debate?	All participants
Q7. Do you recall if the Bill 10 debate influenced or changed your (or your organization's) thinking about Twitter in relation to future policy debates and legislation? If yes, how? For example, at one point, government introduced an amendment and announced that students who were denied a GSA by their school could appeal to Alberta	All participants

Education and have a GSA set up off school grounds. There was a significant reaction on Twitter. Here are some of the sample tweets that were posted in response (I'll read them out). • This is absolutely unbelievable. School board autonomy cannot be protected if it allows discrimination against students. • Alberta gay–straight alliance bill akin to "separate but equal" Jim Crow laws. • This amendment is nothing more than segregating LGBTQ kids by sending them OFFSITE for GSAs. This is insanity. Prompt: Is Twitter a tool you would consider using more than you did in the past?	
Q8. Further to the previous question: You may recall the point in the Bill 10 debate where the government appeared to have compromised to various protests and public demands when it announced that students would no longer have to go to court if they were refused a GSA, but could instead come to the ministry to have one set up off school grounds if needed. Then premier Prentice also famously remarked that "rights are never absolute." Would you react and feel the need to use Twitter? If so, how? Prompt: If you felt strongly and wanted to express your view to your followers, government, or other influencers on how the legislation was unfolding, what communication channels would you use?	Media/advocate participants
Q9. If something like Bill 10 were to unfold today, and knowing what you know about Bill 10, how would you use Twitter differently? Prompt: Would you lean towards regarding Twitter as a tool for expressing anger and protesting, or as a tool for providing nuanced policy input?	Media/advocate participants
Q10. In light of Bill 10 and the amount of attention it received through multiple channels, what are your thoughts on Twitter?	Media participant

Prompt: What about the role of Twitter in relation to setting the news agenda for reporters who work in a traditional journalistic role? Are the perceptions of Twitter changing in newsrooms?	
Q11. What is your perception of how other advocates might react if something like Bill 10 were happening today? Prompt: What advice would you give to other advocates? What would your recommendations be in relation to using Twitter in public policy discussions?	Advocate participant
Q12. How do you feel Twitter is currently viewed by the civil service in light of the Bill 10 debate that occurred? Prompt: Assume that the same government was still in place (that of Premier Jim Prentice) for this question—how was Twitter viewed in light of Bill 10?	Government participant
Q13. If you were to look ahead to potential future legislative debates such as Bill 10, what are your thoughts on both the challenges of and opportunities for government's use of Twitter? Prompt: Is Twitter too limited for having a thoughtful public policy discussion? Does it represent a way to get more people involved and interested in policy decisions?	Government participant
Q14. Knowing what you know about the way in which Bill 10 unfolded as a policy debate, what advice would you give to senior government officials in relation to thinking about Twitter's role in public policy development? Prompt: How do you see Twitter currently being used? Is this process currently stable or still in transition? Please describe. Is Twitter part of a mix of communication tools that could be used in public policy development?	Government participant

Appendix D: Key Political Players in the Bill 10 Debate

Key Players in the Bill 10 Debate

The following is a list of key elected officials and decision makers related to Bill 10.

Government side (pro-Bill 10 throughout the legislative cycle):

- Jim Prentice, then Premier of Alberta and leader of the governing Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta.

- Sandra Jansen, then Government MLA and member of the governing Progressive Conservative Party; sponsor for Bill 10 (i.e., responsible for tabling and shepherding Bill 10 through the legislature).

- Gordon Dirks, then Minister of Education and member of the governing Progressive Conservative Party.

- Jonathan Denis, then Minister of Justice and member of the governing Progressive Conservative Party.

Government side (anti-Bill 10 during stages in the legislative cycle while the bill was perceived to limit the right of students to form GSAs):

- Thomas Lukaszuk, then Government MLA and member of the governing Progressive Conservative Party, and the only Government MLA who voted against the original version of Bill 10.

- Doug Griffiths, then Government MLA and member of the governing Progressive Conservative Party, who was one of three Government MLAs who voted against the first amended version of Bill 10.

Opposition party members (anti-Bill 10 during stages in the legislative cycle when the bill was perceived to limit the right of students to form GSAs):

- Laurie Blakeman, then Liberal Party MLA who introduced Bill 202, the Safe and Inclusive School Act, which would have both compelled school boards to allow students to form GSAs and also repealed a section of the Alberta Human Rights Act, which required a parent or guardian be notified if sexual orientation was being discussed in the classroom.

- Rachel Notley, then leader of the New Democratic Party Opposition.

- Danielle Smith, then leader of the Wildrose Party Opposition (the official Opposition at the time).

- Raj Sherman, then leader of the Liberal Party Opposition.

Appendix E: Participant Interview Transcripts

This appendix is available upon request by contacting the researcher at niyam@ualberta.ca or the

MACT program office at mact@ualberta.ca.

Appendix F: Tweets Used for Content Analysis

This appendix is available upon request by contacting the researcher at niyam@ualberta.ca or the

MACT program office at mact@ualberta.ca.