

**To tweet or not to tweet: An investigative analysis of the
Government of Canada's social media practices**

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In memory of Claire Janin Duranleau

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Table of contents

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. BACKGROUND	2
1.2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES	3
1.3. METHODOLOGY	4
1.4. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS	5
CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1. DEFINING SOCIAL MEDIA	8
2.2. JOURNALISTS USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA	10
2.2.1. INTERNATIONAL PRESS	11
2.2.2. CANADIAN PRESS	12
2.3. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND E-DEMOCRACY	12
2.4. BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA	14
2.5. HOW GOVERNMENTS USE SOCIAL MEDIA	16
2.6. GOVERNMENT OF CANADA USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA	20
2.6.1. CONTROLLING THE MESSAGE	24
2.7. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY	25
CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY	31
3.1. OVERVIEW	31
3.2. QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS	32
3.3. SAMPLE SIZE	36
3.4. TRANSCRIPTION	36
3.5. ANALYSIS STRATEGY	37
CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS	39
4.1. DATA ANALYSIS	39
4.2. FINDINGS	41
4.2.1. MOTIVATIONS FOR USE	41
4.2.2. STRUCTURES, BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES	48
4.2.3. VALUE AND TRUST	53
4.2.3. CREDIBILITY AND RELATIONSHIPS	54
4.2.4. PRESENCE OF CONVERSATION	57
CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION	61
5.1. VALIDITY OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	61
5.2. PERTINENCE OF LITERATURE REVIEW	66
5.3. KEY FINDINGS	70
5.4. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE STUDY	74

6. CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSION	82
6.1. FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES	87
6.2. EPILOGUE	88
REFERENCES	91
APPENDIX A – CONSENT FORM	103
ANNEXE A – FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT	106
APPENDIX B – LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS	109
ANNEXE B – LETTRE AUX PARTICIPANTS ÉVENTUELS	110
APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW GUIDE	111
APPENDIX D – ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE	114

List of figures

- Figure 1. Area of study
- Figure 2. The United States government website features social media
- Figure 3. The United States White House website features Twitter
- Figure 4. The Australia government features social media on their site
- Figure 5. The Government of Canada’s open data website
- Figure 6. The Government of Canada’s homepage
- Figure 7. Adopter Categorization of the Basis of Innovativeness
- Figure 8. Twitter statistics on sites of participants
- Figure 9. Environment Canada’s Twitter account, which hosts a verified account certification
- Figure 10. Future area of study

Abstract

The concept of social media is top of mind for Canadians today. Decision makers, such as the Canadian government, try to identify ways in which they can benefit from tools such as Twitter. This thesis is an investigative analysis that studies how the Canadian government currently uses social media networks. Based on the conceptual framework of Rogers’ diffusion of innovations (2003) and Qualman’s socialnomics theory (2013), the study aims to define how members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery use the Government of Canada tweets. Through a series of interviews with members of the press and government communications executives, a themed analysis was conducted to demonstrate how Twitter is being used and if a dialogue exists between federal institutions and reporters. The research unveiled that the Government of Canada uses social media as a one-to-many broadcasting channel, not actively engaging in online dialogue with members of the press. Conversely, journalists use Twitter as a wire service to obtain instant information, and to gain insight from the consumers. However, they are not interested in conversing with the public service on social media as they want to protect the exclusivity of their story, and they criticize the anonymity of the government corporate accounts as having an impact on its credibility.

Keywords: Government of Canada, Twitter, social media, public sector communications, conversation, journalists

Chapter One – Introduction

In 2013, online social networking and application sites are mainstream talk. People, young and old, are using technology at unprecedented levels and frequency to connect. This worldwide virtual communication channel has contributed to produce powerful outcomes for humanity such as the Arab Spring, the increase of active citizenship in North American politics and an unsurpassed worldwide connection that has never been seen. Social media brings us possibilities that seem endless. Many are profiting from this new platform: businesses, customers, politicians, citizens and all walks of life.

In an era where content is omnipresent, accessibility and digital information are at the heart of transactional activities in all areas including financial, cultural, educational, technological and social. More specifically, social media, their applications and implications, are now seen as the hottest attraction on the Internet.

This study was motivated by the researcher's proximity to the communications field as she has worked close to 20 years in government communications. Lately, social media and the government's response to those new technological applications have transformed how communicators plan and strategize for government announcements. In the initial stages of the research, a few revelations came to light. Few academic articles were available on the Government of Canada's use of social media. The paucity of research in this area is startling. How the media, particularly members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery in Ottawa, perceive the Government's use of Twitter is deemed a relevant area of research since most government communications activities are directed first and foremost at the press, which then acts as a relay mechanism to disseminate the information to the public. This is why Twitter will be a specific area of interest for this study.

1.1. Background

Newspaper reporters themselves are in the midst of a huge transition period as the news business struggles to modify its current supply model. Participatory journalism is affecting the way they conduct their business and the speed at which the public expects news updates. Although it is still a work in progress for some, media organizations are, for the most part, nimble in incorporating new technologies into their profession and are embracing the shifting period relatively well (Hermida, 2010 and 2012).

Social media have allowed the press to increase its news stories reach. When producing news, not only are news reporters competing with one another other but also with members of the public. Citizens have, at their fingertips, the tools they need to access and share a plethora of information, broadcast a video or tweet breaking information to a potential audience of thousands of people. They also enjoy reading their news via digital means as 39% of Americans get their news online (PEW Research Centre, 2013). Likewise, members of the press have embraced the trend. According to the Oreilla PR Network annual study of global digital journalism (2013), close to 60 per cent of reporters have generated information using a personal Twitter handle. Any online news site includes the main social media tools to foster more clickthroughs in order to boost revenues. In short, news organizations are adapting their business models to include the electronic goliath that is social media. Clearly traditional media are continuing to maneuver their transition to digital platforms efficiently.

Public organizations are also interested in joining the evolution of social media as they are incorporating them into their strategic planning. This allows Canadians to engage actively on social media, which they are doing on daily basis with much fervor (Pilienci, 2012). Two in three Canadians use social media feeds (Media Technology Monitor, 2013). Around the world, many governments have a presence on social media forums but when was the last time they answered any question on Twitter? For the most part, their

transition is slow and on-going, as they use the tools more for broadcast purposes at this stage, in line with traditional media such as press releases or announcements.

The political wing of government does use social media effectively. For example, Minister Tony Clement (@TonyclementCPC), President of the Treasury Board, is considered a leader when it comes to showcasing the benefits of Twitter. Elected officials are free to indiscriminately tweet information they consider relevant and feel the desire to share instantaneously. With close to 35,000 followers, Minister Clement tweets several times a day, seven days a week, on a variety of subjects of interest to his constituents and Canadian citizens. Although this facet of the governing arm is interesting, this study is focused on advancing knowledge relating to the public sector’s use, as it is less prevalent in academic research.

Specifically, this thesis is interested in examining the Government of Canada’s propensity to tweet and how members of the press subsequently use that information. It also aims to increase the body of knowledge on the ramifications of the government’s relatively slow adoption of the tool. That resistance can have an impact on the perception of the transparency of government bodies. “You’re somewhere where the costs of staying where you are become greater than the costs of moving to something different, perhaps something radically different. And we need to change and open up all our institutions. So this technology push, a demographic kick from a new generation and a demand pull from a new economic global environment is causing the world to open up” (Tapscott, 2012).

1.2. Theoretical perspectives

The theoretical context of this thesis is two-fold. Over 50 years ago, Rogers (2003) proposed five (5) perceived attributes to determine the extent to which an innovation will be adopted. These characteristics, which include relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, triability and observability, “as perceived by individuals, help to explain [the] different rates of adoption” (ibid, p.15). As governments are labeled as laggards when

adopting new technologies, there is merit in establishing how the Government of Canada is doing at this juncture, more than seven (7) years after the launch of social media tools such as Twitter.

Also, Qualman (2013) recently issued theories around what he calls socialnomics, defined as “the value created and shared via social media and its efficient influence on outcomes. Or, simply put, it’s word of mouth on digital steroids” (p. xvii). This is what he refers to as distribution of information, which leads to social production through “world of mouth”. In the age of networked intelligence, there is a benefit to evaluate the results of the digital methods used by the Government of Canada when engaging with citizens. Social media is defined by its porousness, fluidity and directness, causing the world to demand traditionally opaque government institutions to open up and allow collaboration, instilling progress and empowerment to its people and society.

In order to validate if the Government of Canada is effectively adopting social media, it begs the question: *how do print media use Government of Canada tweets?*

1.3. Methodology

In order to obtain answers to the research question, we opted to conduct a qualitative study comprised of 12 individual interviews. They involved representatives from two (2) groups relevant to this study: six (6) Government of Canada communications executives and six (6) Canadian print news reporters. As the title of the thesis suggests, this investigative analysis benefits from the data obtained from the participants as “in-depth interviewing, with its affinities to conversation, may be well suited to tap social agents’ perspective on the media [...] and one that people habitually relate to the technological media” (Jensen, 2002, p. 240).

Qualitative interviews are best suited when people are called on to describe their experiences and self-understanding. Lindlof (1995) calls the respondent interview a stand-alone technique that “achieves greater efficiency of information gathering” (p. 172). The interviewer had the opportunity to probe or ask follow up questions during the meetings, enabling a conversation style of exchanging. Interviews are generally easier for respondents as what was sought for this study were opinions or impressions of the participants.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

This thesis contains six chapters. Chapter 2 sets out a literature review detailing key aspects relevant to this research. The chapter starts with defining social media and outlines how journalists from the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada use social media in their daily work. An outline of how citizens participate in the social media dialogue with the government and the impact that the engagement can have on e-democracy is summarized. Benefits and limitations of using social media are laid out, followed by how some G20 government bodies are using the tools such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The literature review then frames how the Government of Canada uses Twitter, the policies that are currently in place to support the use of social media and the state of the relationship between government communicators and members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery. This chapter ends by presenting the theoretical framework for the study based on Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovations model and Qualman's (2010) social media conversation model.

The methodology chapter provides the details of the qualitative analysis and defines how the interviews were conducted. Interviews took place in the summer of 2013 in the National Capital Region. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed based on regrouping the answers into main themes outlined in more detail in Chapter 3 on the methodology. A section describes the sampling method chosen and justifies the number of interviews that were done to ensure that the results were representative of both groups being studied. We

then explain how transcriptions of each interview were conducted. Finally, we outline, through the theoretical framework, how the analysis will be carried out to validate the results.

In Chapter 4, the results of the key findings obtained are presented. The analysis of the data was conducted by creating a grid, which served to sort the collected data into themes. "The researcher constructs theories of how and why things happen, doing so by combining separate themes that together explain related issues" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 57). Once the analysis was completed, results were produced and key findings were extrapolated from the data using the established theoretical framework as the backbone to validate the results. At the outset, some quantitative data is included to illustrate the participants' presence and the level of activity on Twitter. Results are categorized in five (5) sections: 1) motivations for use; 2) structure, benefits and challenges; 3) value and trust; 4) credibility and relationship; and 5) presence of conversation. The findings illustrate that members of the press and Government of Canada communications executives use Twitter differently and have disparate purposes and objectives in mind. Both groups see improvement opportunities with its use: civil servants generally agree that the rules are too rigid to allow for engagement on Twitter while some reporters feel that even if the information posted on Government of Canada Twitter accounts is credible, they resent the anonymity of the faceless Twitter pages.

The discussion chapter exposes the validity of the theoretical framework and literature review that were chosen. The researcher confirms that most of Rogers' (2003) innovation attributes are validated as well as Qualman's (2013) theory of socialnomics and the influence of social media on democracy. Key findings illustrate that there is a significant difference of perception of the Government of Canada's use of Twitter by government communication executives and members of the press. Furthermore, the way Twitter is utilized is polarized which could contribute to the two parties' challenging relationship. A section on the strengths and weaknesses of the study is included as well as a series of

recommendations for the Government of Canada to elevate its use of social media and possibly even positively influence its relationship with members of the Canadian press.

Finally, Chapter 6 reflects on the insights gained from the study and provides recommendations for future research. This research contributes to social science studies aimed at increasing knowledge on how the Government of Canada uses social media.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1. Defining social media

As technology evolves on a quasi-permanent basis, so do the definitions of social media. Traditionally, the latter is defined as a form of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas and messages (Waters & Williams, 2011; Nah & Saxton, 2012; Bonson et al., 2012). It allows peer-to-peer communication, is a channel for many-to-many discussions, creates dialogue, is a marketers’ dream, device agnostic, instantaneous and ever powerful.

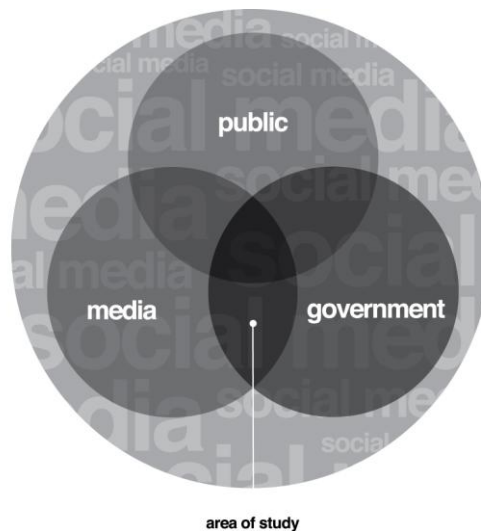
Social media builds on many of the same concepts outlined in Web 2.0 such as the creation and exchange of user-generated content (O’Reilly, 2007). “Web 2.0 concept is most often applied to online participatory culture, and to the rise of blogging, photo and video sharing, music file-sharing, collaborative writing and editing, and social network media” (Meikle & Young, 2012, p. 65). boyd and Ellison (2007) define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Some define it as an activity, a software tool and a platform (Newman, 2011). We use it every day to connect and converse. It brings us closer together, allows us to be informed on a second-by-second basis.

Online proponents see social media as the latest mecca of technology. In 2013, close to 1.1 billion users worldwide are accessing Facebook (www.facebook.com) regularly, although there are indications that number of users has reached a plateau. Founded in 2004, this trailblazer is the first social media company to have gone public and in the Fall of 2013 was trading in the low \$40, similar to stock prices of established brands such as Loblaw, Rogers and Banque Laurentienne. There are 18 million Canadians on Facebook – more than half the population – and over 12 million daily visits. On a per-capita basis, Canada has the highest number of Facebook users in the world (Pilioci, 2012).

Twitter (www.twitter.com) defines itself as “the fastest, simplest way to stay close to everything you care about”. With over 500 million users and 400 million tweets per day, it is on its way up. In September 2013, the company tweeted that it filed for initial public offering of stock (Goldman, 2013), making it the largest United States technology company since Facebook to go public (Macmillan & Levy, 2013). Launched in July 2006, Twitter is a “real-time network that allows users to share information through private and public messages that are organized chronologically on a particular user’s account” (Waters and Williams, 2011). Dick Costolo, the CEO of Twitter, defines it not as a media company but rather as a many-to-many conversation model aimed at distributing traffic (Costolo, 2012). Users can share “tweets” of 140 characters or less and follow Tweeters or subjects of interest by using “hashtags”. The latter are used as a naming convention to allow for tracking and groupings of discussion topics. Although Twitter has structural limits affecting the length of the content, it makes up in speed at which news can be distributed.

To illustrate our research question: *How do print reporters use Government of Canada tweets?*, we will examine key pillars such as how journalists use social media; how they impact citizen participation; their influence on e-democracy; how governments use social media and the status of the Government of Canada’s efforts in this regard. The graphic below (Figure 1) illustrates our area of study.

Figure 1. Area of study



2.2. Journalists use of social media

Journalists use social media in their profession for a plethora of reasons including gathering information, validating ideas, making corrections and dialoguing with news consumers. Close to two online Canadians out of three (63%) use social networks to get news – 62% are on Facebook whereas 12% are on Twitter. Twitter users are avid news buffs as 37% of them consume news via Twitter versus only 30% of all social media users combined (Media Technology Monitor, 2013).

In addition, reporters incorporate social media in their work for sourcing information and distribution. According to a recent digital journalism study, “social media have become firmly established in the journalistic arsenal. Journalists are treating social media channels, like Twitter, as sources of news. More than half reporters said they drew on social media posts from sources they knew when looking for story ideas or angles.” (Oreilla PR Network, 2012). It also states that North American journalists use social media sources more heavily than the rest of the world (62% microblogs, 64% blogs) compared to Europe (59%, 53%) and BRIC countries (60%, 42%).

Print media have been generally successful in integrating social media to compete and remain credible in their field. “The real time nature of Twitter holds particular appeal for print reporters as it offers a way to compete online for audiences with the immediacy of live broadcast coverage of news” (Hermida, 2012, p. 663). Other traditional media outlets such as radio, television and magazines are also adapting their business models by giving social media center stage when making news available to Canadians. Through Twitter, the public is able to participate in breaking news, making active dialogue and social media increasingly linked. “Social media and breaking news can no longer be separated. Technological innovations have enabled the public to document and share breaking news, a role once held exclusively by traditional media” (Pearson, 2013).

2.2.1. International press

Thompson Reuters encourages its staff to use social media while marking out the inherent risks and pitfalls of these tools – especially when it comes to protecting their brand and reputation (Thompson Reuters, 2012). Protecting sources is sacrosanct. Reporters at Reuters are expected to maintain “a posture of open-mindedness and enlightened scepticism” (ibid). This is difficult to demonstrate in the social networks’ thinking-writing-posting in real time state. But maintaining this posture is critical to their credibility and reputation. “When in doubt about [an] ... action on social networks, we must enlist a second pair of eyes, even at the cost of some delay” (ibid). Media is encouraged to adopt a common sense approach when dealing in the digital realm, factoring in time as important but not as absolute.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has a 19-chapter document on editorial guidelines. It contains a section on social media but omits to discuss how reporters should use social media. Framed under the premise of “don’t do anything stupid”, the BBC social media guidance document states “the golden rule for our core news, programme or genre activity is that whatever is published – on Twitter, Facebook or anywhere else - **MUST HAVE A SECOND PAIR OF EYES PRIOR TO PUBLICATION**¹. A second check might well avoid you saying or linking to something unwise which could land you, or the BBC, in trouble.” (BBC, 2011).

The Washington Post posts its digital publishing guidelines online and has a social media section. It focuses on maintaining credibility and avoiding conflict. It also asks if it is appropriate to follow partisan organizations or people on social networks. “When individuals or organizations make newsworthy statements on social networks relevant to our journalism, we may consider referencing those as a way of curating social news, always taking care to provide context and attribution.” (Washington Post, 2011).

¹ Block letters are used in the publication to illustrate emphasis.

2.2.2. Canadian press

Revised in June 2011, the Canadian Association of Journalism outlines key ethical guidelines that reporters should abide by, focusing primarily on accuracy. They script a small section on digital media, where “ethical practice does not change with the medium” and “the need for speed should never compromise accuracy, credibility or fairness. Online content should be reported and edited as carefully as print content” (Canadian Association of Journalism, 2011). The association encourages the use of social networks defining it as core work for reporters, while cautioning that information gathered online must be properly sourced.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/Radio-Canada has a one-pager brief social media policy, available online. It instructs their employees “when using social media as an information-gathering tool, we apply the same standards as those for any other source of newsgathering.” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, n.d.).

The Montreal Gazette’s social media policy (2012) is succinct, consisting of plain concepts of how to use the tool, insisting on verifying sources and using it appropriately. “Credibility and influence in social media are tied to your ability to actively participate.” (ibid.)

The policies listed above establish that news organizations trust their employees to use judgement when using social media tools. While a *faux pas* could have immense implications for the company’s credibility, social media and news reporting are now intrinsically joined and have learned to co-habit productively. This is key notion that will be addressed in Chapter 5 of this paper.

2.3. Citizen participation and e-democracy

While governments continue to play a role in priority setting and are accountable for outcomes of policy decisions, striking a balance between citizen engagement, direct

decision-making and representative democracy continues to be a challenge. “How governments respond to the opportunities and challenges brought forth by these technological advances will certainly have an impact on the prosperity and well-being of our country as well as its standing in the world” (Policy Horizons Canada, 2011).

According to Barney (2005), there are some questions about communication technology that have existed since the telegraph, including the democratic imperative to ensure access but most importantly, the liberal imperative of free expression in communication. As Canadians are using social media more and more and as it is one of the most connected countries in the world (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012), it could be advantageous for the government to use these tools to dialogue with Canadians and engage their participation in public administration decisions. “In a democracy, citizens ought to be able to participate meaningfully, as equals, in decisions about the conditions and priorities under which they live together as a society, about how common goods ought to be distributed, and about content and enforcement of public interest” (Barney, 2005, p. 68).

For Coleman and Shane (2012), a more democratic life rests on the “actualizing citizen”, who is “a social actor characterized by multiple connections, weak ties, a reflexive approach to identity and belonging, a post deferential attitude toward authority, and a sense that political communication is a two-way street, entailing more than a flow of top-down messages from rulers to ruled” (p. 17). Governments wishing to engage with this new form of social actor “need to adopt strategies and technologies that can draw on people’s eagerness to define their own relationship to society and its relationship to them” (ibid, p.17).

An important aspect: a government making information available is not necessarily fostering modern public policy and a commitment to e-democracy. Providing access to information does not constitute democratic engagement (Novak, 2012; Barney, 2005).

Canada has paid little attention to the potential of new technologies to mediate new forms of citizen participation in policy development. “The Canadian government’s efforts in relation to electronically mediated forms of citizen engagement in policy development and decision making have been more limited, and more ambiguous, than its decisive embrace of electronic service and information delivery” (Barney, 2005, p. 118).

2.4. Benefits and limitations of using social media

There are benefits for government to be active on social media. First, social media can find ways to innovate on content and management of information. In 2010, Fyfe and Crookall conducted a roundtable with Canadian stakeholders and government officials. The authors concluded that government needs to use social media. The challenge is with the management and its hierarchy culture, which has not adapted to the opportunities for more partnerships and information sharing. Budget strapped governments will have to innovate to deliver increased public value (Linders, 2012).

Second, engaging with social media improves efficiency, increases public sector transparency and improves policy-making (Bonson, Torres, Royo, Flores, 2012). It can also lead to “pro-active problem solving and positive public relations that lead to greater political efficacy and public trust” (Kavanaugh et al., 2012, p. 480).

Third, using social media shapes the narrative and increases citizen participation in the policy debate. Picazo-Vela et al. (2012) state “governments need to start using [electronic social networks] to have a more active participation in shaping new ways of interacting between individuals and organizations, changing power relations, governance and democracy” (p. 510).

For governments, the impetus is there to jump into the digital jungle. Although scholars have determined that social media have become a central component of e-government in a short period of time (Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen, 2012; Bonsón, Torres, Royo,

& Flores, 2012; Snead, 2013; Tapscott & Williams, 2010), using it to ask questions, comment or converse is still a work in progress for most. The United States Federal Chief Information Officer, Vivek Kundra, said “governments are unprepared because they don’t know how to thrive in the social era. Corporations are also all trying to figure out what to do” (Novak, 2012).

Bertot, Jaeger and Hansen (2012) argue that government agencies are engaging with citizens using social media without having the regulatory aspects in place such as privacy, security, accessibility and governance, to name a few. They also state “social media has the potential to simultaneously make government more reachable, available, and relevant, while offering users more opportunities to become actively engaged in government” (ibid, p.37).

Internet can contribute to increasing democratic citizenship, or e-citizenship, but policies need to be generated to make the initiative successful. “The ability of citizens and non-state actors to use social media channels to get their message out quickly, efficiently and effectively will have varying implications for governments, who will need to keep up pace” (Policy Horizons Canada, 2011). Coleman (2012) suggests that further work is needed to understand how public e-conversations can escape excessive government control and an unmanageable volume of opinions.

The concept of conversation in this context implies that when asking a question or engaging with a government department through social media, a response will be provided. Acknowledgements that comments have been received are also used by organizations to indicate their attentiveness and recognize citizens’ needs. An “organization should make sure that it replies to or acknowledges others’ comments to and about the organization within 24 hours of being posted” (Waters and Williams, 2011, p.360) and offer opportunities to engage audiences in conversation. In fact, when studying public affairs’ use of interactivity on Twitter, “government agencies primarily relied on one-way

communication that sought to inform and educate rather than two-way symmetrical conversations” (ibid, p.353).

These authors agree that there is a role for government in the social media sphere, although it is not yet sharply defined. Let us examine how some G20 governments, domestic and international, currently use social media.

2.5. How governments use social media

Lee & Kwak (2012) argue that “social media-based public engagement is an uncharted territory and government agencies generally lack experience and knowledge about implementing social media” (p.492). For Coleman and Shane (2012), many governments still use the Internet as a form of broadcasting, ignoring its potential for interactive feedback. They suggest that if a government wants to engage in actualizing citizenship, it would invite people to produce content and would respond to it “in ways that demonstrates a democratic sensitivity to public concerns” (ibid, p.388).

In 2008 and 2012, social media was at the heart of Barack Obama’s campaigns for President of the United States. For the United States government, social media is an integral part of its communications with the public and the media, and has been for some time. Its policy (United States Department of Interior, 2010) encourages members of government to communicate with the public via these channels. It targets approved tools (Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube and tumbler) indicating they “are powerful and effective means to communicate quickly and broadly, share information, and interact with colleagues and the public” (ibid). The United States government homepage promotes the use of social media (Figure 2). The White House homepage specifically promotes Twitter (Figure 3).

Figure 2. The United States government website features social media www.usa.gov

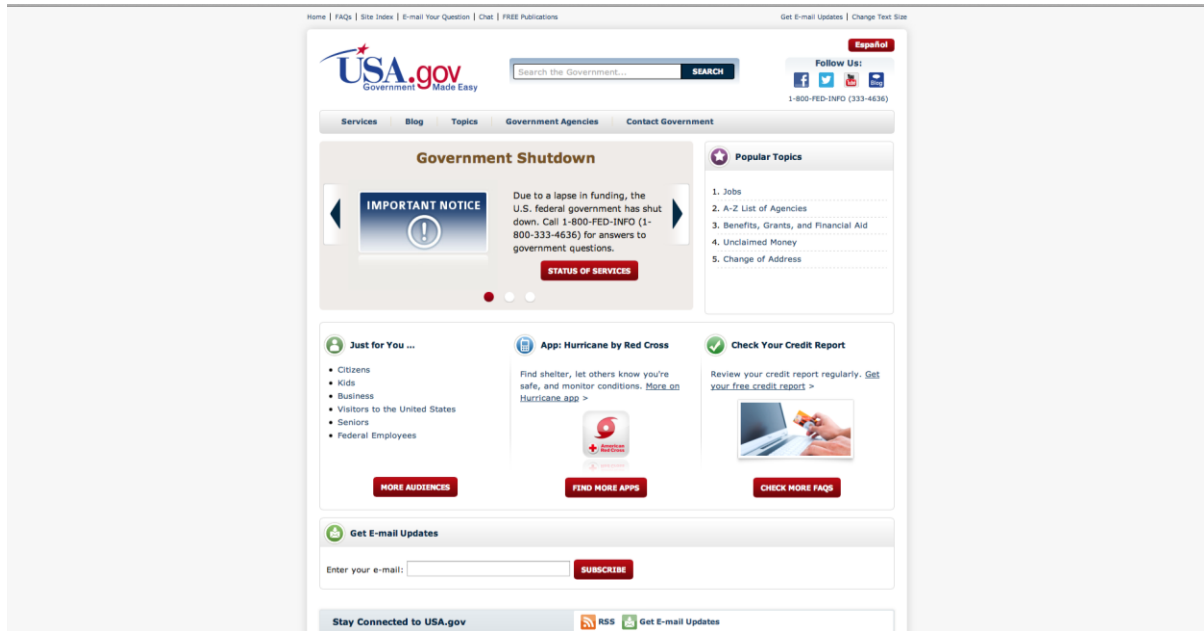


Figure 3. The United States White House website features Twitter www.whitehouse.gov



In times of crisis, public officials and government agencies are turning to social media to get their message out. When hurricane Sandy hit New York in 2012, Governor Cuomo used Twitter to provide updates on power restoration and share photos of damage (Stelter & Preston, 2012). Where social media used to be considered optional, they are now

essential to connect with citizens in times of emergencies and quick response – valuable to both citizens and journalists.

In his *Smarter Government* speech in December 2009, former United Kingdom (U.K.) Prime Minister Gordon Brown framed the government's use of the web via social media as a tool to “enable citizens to compare local services, lobby for improvements, choose providers and demand changes in service delivery – with the web as a powerful new tool for sharing customer experience – in the same way that social networking sites provoke debate and discussion and mobilise opinion” (Office of the U.K. Prime Minister, 2009). Characteristics of this reform include increasing transparency and accountability through more access to public information, using public service performance data as a benchmark, investment in digital inclusion and moving more transactions online in the next five years (Cabinet Office, United Kingdom, 2012). Bob Kerslake, Head of the Civil Service, points to the role that social media will have in changing ways of working. “The workplace of the future will have to be less rigid, less hierarchical and a lot more flexible. Participating in social media is a good way to learn how a modern workforce engages and communicates.” (Coleman, 2012).

In 2009, the government of Australia posted its draft report *Engage: Getting on with Government 2.0*. (Australian Government 2.0 Taskforce Report, 2009) for the public to interact with its authors who posted some 200 comments. Australia wants to learn from industries how to use games and social media to engage with the community, according to the Chief Information Officer for the Australian Treasury. In his speech at the eGovernment forum (Alexander, 2011), Peter Alexander indicated the government was watching trends in technology convergence, social media and gamification in order to figure out ways to improve its policies and to engage with citizens. “With social media, there is so much opportunity for government to engage with people. We can look at what people are talking about. With Twitter, we can look at the current trends and hot topics.” (Karena, 2012). The Australian government has a social media page on its Internet site as well (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The Australia government features social media on their site australia.gov.au/news-and-media



Finally, although not a G20 country, Iceland is tearing up the rulebook by drawing up its new constitution through crowdsourcing². As the country recovered from the financial crisis, it used social media to get its citizens to share their ideas as to what the new document should contain (Murphy, 2012). While the Irish government does have active Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter accounts, it does not feature them on its homepage. We were also unable to locate its social media policy online, except for a small mention of how public servants should respect their workplace when commenting online (Government offices of Ireland, 2012).

The work of these countries and authors relates to some of the social media uses by the Canadian government such as preliminary stages of crowdsourcing and open government practices. Let us turn to the Canadian government position and policies that currently exist.

² **Crowdsourcing** is the practice of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people, and especially from an online community, rather than from traditional employees or suppliers (Webster, 2013).

2.6. Government of Canada use of social media

The *Government of Canada Communications Policy* (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2006) outlines ten key principles to guide government interaction with Canadians. There are several that can be applied when considering engaging them through social media, namely:

- provide the public with timely information about its policies;
- ensure that institutions of the Government are visible and accessible;
- consult, listen to and take account of people's interests; and
- encourage the public service to communicate openly with the public when developing policies and programs.

In November 2011, it released a policy document for use by all departments titled *Guideline for External Use of Web 2.0* (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2011). The policy encourages approaches that reflect the participatory nature of web 2.0 platforms. The document briefly outlines the rules of engagement, the links to existing legislation and recommended practices when planning to use the tools available (e.g. official languages and ethical issues). It also indicates that it is appropriate to respond to queries in 24 to 48 hours.

Still in its early stages is the *Draft Guideline on Official Use of Social Media* (Treasury Board of Canada, 2013), posted on GCpedia (an internal Government of Canada's intranet site, similar to Wikipedia). Of note is the desire to include an index of official Government of Canada social media accounts, annual updates of departmental social media strategies and concrete performance measures such as metrics and qualitative data.

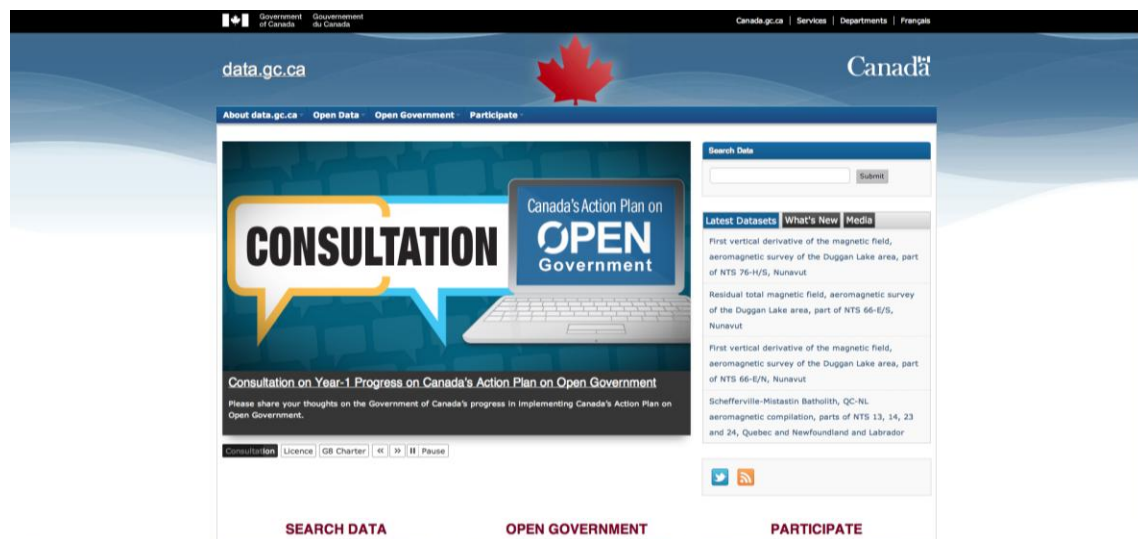
The Government of Canada and its institutions currently host 278 Twitter accounts, 120 Facebook pages and 85 YouTube pages (Zegov.ca, 2013), which is significant in number considering that there are just over 90 federal departments, agencies and crown corporations. These high numbers could be explained by the fact that some government

institutions currently have several Facebook or Twitter accounts. For example, Environment Canada has a departmental Facebook page and a climate change page.

Tony Clement, President of the Treasury Board since 2011, stated that in order to modernize its services, “the Government is encouraged to use productivity enhanced Internet-based tools and services that allow people to share information, engage in a dialogue and cooperate” (Clement, 2011). He is also interested in “social media’s ability to ‘crowdsource’ – making an open call to the public for assistance in determining the direction of government” (Galloway, 2011).

Using digital technology is part of the Government of Canada’s plan to communicate with the public. To enhance its accountability and transparency, the Government of Canada is maintaining an *Open Government* (www.open.gc.ca) web portal (Figure 5) to share information and engage with citizens. Its primary aim is to make data available and create dialogue through Web 2.0 technologies and to “provide Canadians with greater opportunities to participate in the Government, the economy and the democratic process” (Open Government, 2013).

Figure 5. The Government of Canada’s open data website data.gc.ca.



At a closer look, the dialogue function of the website is reserved for providing information on consultations with the Canadian public, including posting notices of when meetings are being held and making results available. Interestingly, we were unable to identify an instance when a dialogue is being held online or a forum where people that are not engaged in the consultation per se can see and “hear” the on-going conversation. Estes (as cited in Sniderman, 2011) said “governments are using social media as a kind of customary service tool to handle negative sentiment while at the same time humanizing the face of government. The goal is to give the illusion that social media is making the government more open while the government still retains control over their message.” The Open Government site suggests this, as there is no dialogue present between the Government of Canada and its citizens.

In a recent report to the Prime Minister of Canada, Wayne Wouters, Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, highlights the importance of expanding citizen engagement with government through Web 2.0 technologies:

“So much innovation in the 21st century is being made possible by well-developed communication technologies. Yet many public servants are frustrated by a lack of access to the Web 2.0 and social media tools that have such potential for helping us transform the way we work and serve Canadians. Public servants should enjoy consistent access to these new tools wherever possible. We will find a way to achieve this while at the same time safeguarding the data and information in our care. I also encourage departments to continue expanding the use of Web 2.0 technologies and social media to engage with Canadians, share knowledge, facilitate collaboration, and devise new and efficient services.” (Privy Council Office, 2012).

The report also highlights the work that the Canadian Border Services Agency is doing to inform Canadians via Twitter about waiting times at the all border-crossing stations across Canada. However, there is no mention in the report about how the government is actively conversing with Canadians online. Nor is there any social media portrayed on the www.gc.ca site (Figure 6).

Figure 6. The Government of Canada’s homepage www.gc.ca.



In 2013, the Government of Canada released its Blueprint 2020 strategy, aimed at opening up a dialogue with current employees in order to gather insight on their vision for Canada’s future federal public service (Privy Council Office, 2013). One of its key guiding principles is fostering “an open and networked environment that engages citizens and partners for the public good” (ibid, p. 4). In it, federal employees are encouraged to make their views available through a wide range of media including using GCPedia, Twitter or attend meetings in person to exchange ideas in a effort to pursue improvement for the public good.

In his most recent speech titled “Engaging in real-time, for the future”, Mr. Wouters outlines new ways of doing business in a modern public service and focuses on themes relating to innovation, collaboration and co-creation. He created the Deputy Ministers’ Committee on Social Media and Policy Development, which uses Twitter as a principal tool to communicate and engage with Government of Canada employees with. To date, 227 tweets have been issued to over 650 followers. When it comes to social media, employees are encouraged to use them, as there are recognized benefits by senior management such as the opportunity to obtain feedback and communicate messages. “We need to be present

on social media and in web 2.0 spaces as professional public servants. Yes, there are risks to working in this space, but the greater risk is missing out on the opportunities it offers.” (Wouters, 2013, p.8). Working in the online public sphere, however, must be undertaken with caution. “We need to tap into the good that they [social media] offer, but we cannot compromise our ability to provide professional, non-partisan advice to the government.” (ibid, p.7).

2.6.1. Controlling the message

Press reporters do engage public servants directly on Twitter, asking direct questions or commenting on policy. No responses from the Government of Canada were observed in the instances listed below found on press reporters' Twitter accounts.

Elizabeth Thompson @LizT1, 5 Sep

Why is it when governments change things to become "more accessible" they often become less accessible. #cdnpoli #frustration

David Akin @davidakin, 22 Aug

Q for govt depts: Why put the name of the comms person who is on holiday this week at the bottom of your press release today?

Marie Vastel @M_Vastel, 19 Aug

Premier jour de retour des vacances, suffit de 5h pour retrouver ce doux sentiment de frustration face aux non-réponses du gouv...

Even if some of these questions may be deemed as rhetorical, they are examples chosen to illustrate that there is a real desire from journalists to engage with government officials on Twitter and a favourable predisposition to interact. These non-responses can be perceived as being in line with the current government's desire to control the message. Recognizing the benefit to encourage civic engagement and both create and curate participatory opportunities (Noveck, 2012), an approach where comments are responded to and where exchanges on policy developments are encouraged with Canadians, is still out of reach. Some would contend that this stems from the government's desire to centralize

and control the information provided to the public and members of the press (Hannay, 2013; Galloway, 2013, Rychewaert, 2013).

It has been reported that there has been a significant reduction in government officials' ability to respond to questions from reporters (Mancini, 2013; Semeniuk, 2013). This, along with other steps aimed at limiting and controlling media access, has forced an on-going conflict with national media. As a result, the relationship between the government and the press gallery is less than desirable. This extends to the one with public servants as well which will be addressed later in Chapter 5. When thinking about engaging citizens into a dialogue with departments using social media, no doubt it could suppose putting the Government of Canada in a vulnerable position. The adoption of social media tools for public sector organizations does present some risks such as the perceived loss of control and the possible impact on the policy-setting agenda.

The review of the literature suggests that government use of social media has not been thoroughly studied and there are gaps in the understanding of the Government of Canada's use of Twitter. Further analysis can clarify if social media are a channel that reporters use and trust when communicating with government.

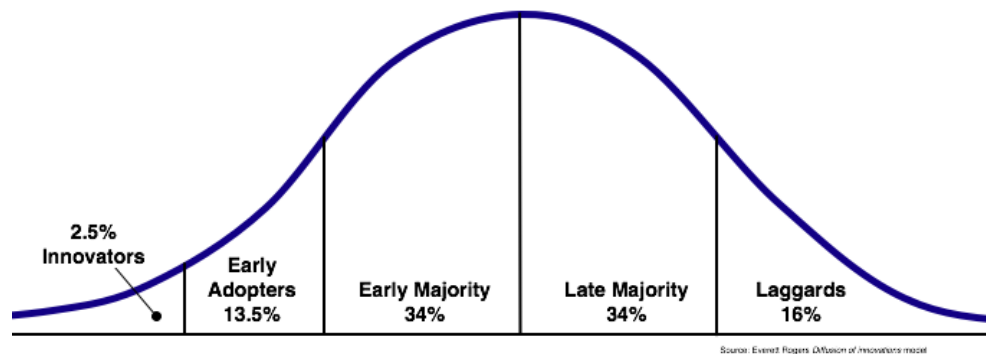
2.7. Conceptual framework and rationale for this study

Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 2003) is an appropriate model to explain government engagement in social media. This theory establishes how new ideas and technology spread and get adopted among members of a defined social structure. Rogers' model was chosen as it serves as an effective model to study the adoption of innovation. Through its perceived attributes of innovation, we are able to focus on the users' adoption of Twitter. While using Rogers' organizational structure variables could have been well suited to study our paradigm, our empirical study was more focussed on criteria relating to how Twitter is used more than elucidating the attributes of the organizations themselves who adopt the tool.

Two aspects of the theory are relevant for the public service: a) types of adopter and b) rate of adoption.

The type of adopter is defined as a classification of users within a social system via the basis on innovativeness (ibid). According to the theory, the Canadian government would be late majority or even laggard, as it is often adopting technologies after the average member of society or even one of the last groups to adopt (Figure 7). Industry Canada, for example, just started tweeting from their corporate account in late September 2013. When it comes to technology, governments generally do not innovate easily. The wide array of the Government of Canada’s activities and the demanding processes required to manage and implement these activities can serve to explain this tendency. The intricate bureaucratic machine that is needed to sustain an active presence on social media demands considerable investments related to continuous development of content and maintenance through significant human and financial resources. Other influences such as the government’s desire to exert control over both the nature and the ways in which government officials disseminate information, detailed later in Chapter 4, are seen as explanatory factors in the Government of Canada’s level of innovativeness adoption.

Figure 7. Adopter categorization of the basis of innovativeness (Rogers, 2003, p. 281).



The rate of adoption is defined as the speed with which members of a social system adopt innovation, measured by the length of time required for a certain percentage of

individuals to adopt an innovation (ibid). All innovation necessitates change. However, change can bring unpredictable and unwanted consequences on social values and institutions. Governments could benefit from citizens' ideas obtained through dialogue and direct engagement on policy development. Furthermore, the complexity in understanding an innovation can have an effect on the adoption of the tool (Dadwal & Syed, 2013).

“Almost no innovation comes with no strings attached. The more important and the more technologically advanced an innovation is (and therefore the more the change agent desires its rapid adoption), the more likely its introduction is to produce many consequences—some of them anticipated, but others unintended and latent. A system is like a bowl of marbles: move any one of its elements and the positions of all the others are also changed” (Rogers, p.448).

To help explain the rate of adoption, Rogers' theory proposes five (5) perceived attributes of innovation.

1. *Relative advantage*: Innovation is perceived as better than the idea that supersedes. What are the motivations behind the use of Twitter for the Government of Canada and journalists?
2. *Compatibility*: Innovation is perceived as consistent with existing values, past experiences and needs of potential adopters. What is the value for both groups to use Twitter?
3. *Complexity*: New ideas that are simpler to understand are adopted more rapidly. What are the current policies and processes in place when tweeting content? What are the benefits and challenges to using Twitter for the government and reporters?
4. *Triability*: Innovation that is testable represents less uncertainty for the adopter and may be experimented on a limited, “learn by doing” basis. Is a climate of trust present to allow iterations to take place?
5. *Observability*: The more the results of innovation are visible to others, the more likely they are to adopt the tool. When using Twitter, how credible is the Government of Canada and does its relationship with reporters' impact those results?

The results of our interview questions will allow us to validate whether Rogers’ attributes of innovation are applicable to the successful use of Twitter by the Government of Canada. Ostensibly, no theoretical model is perfect when applying it to pioneering communications practices. Much of the criticism addressed at Rogers’ theory relate to the fact that adoption of technology is far from being a static attribute (Wolfe, 1994). Often, theoretical models cannot be applied in their entirety to practical, empirical research studies, particularly when they were conceived and developed in a pre-digital era. Since Twitter is based on a participatory model, Qualman’s (2013) theory is deemed in many respects a better fit to study engagement on social media.

Erik Qualman proposes that through social media, word of mouth goes world of mouth (2013). For centuries, we have relied on reporters to act as filters for the government to communicate its message to citizens. Thanks to social media, that filter is less needed. In July 2013, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced the names of the new Cabinet via Twitter, making the information available to the general public instead of using traditional media channels.

Stephen Harper, @pmharper, July 15

Proud to be naming four new strong, capable women to the Ministry later on today.
#shuffle13 #cdnpoli

Qualman (ibid) also discusses how return on investment is a key pillar of being able to quantify the success of social media tools. Specifically, he identifies how digital consumers rely on people’s comments to purchase goods and services, as people don’t believe advertisers. Although the government doesn’t sell any commodities, it does want to provide services to Canadians and strives to get people’s support for its various decisions and initiatives. For example, informing them of the hours of operation of a national park or the latest changes to their pension cheques. If the government is not on social media, it cannot be part of the conversation and available to engage with its citizens, participating in the “world of mouth” phenomenon as brought forward by Qualman that only exists on

social media. We will assess if and how the Government of Canada is currently conversing with citizens and members of the press through our interview protocol by establishing if conversations do, in fact, occur on Twitter and the nature and extent of those discussions.

The literature review reveals that there is a gap in understanding the way the Government of Canada uses social media and how effective it is at using those tools. Therefore, we postulate that if:

- Social media are being used increasingly as a tool of choice by reporters to obtain information;
- Governments are increasingly using social media which in turn shape the public administration agenda and leverage e-democracy;
- The Government of Canada has expressed an interest in communicating with citizens using social media tools;

...it then becomes legitimate to understand the Government of Canada's influence using social media and the impact of online conversation with Canadian citizens.

Given the evidence in the literature review, we thus hypothesize that the Government of Canada is hesitant to fully converse with citizens and promptly respond to queries on Twitter despite its expressed interest to engage with Canadians using social media tools.

The primary objective of this research is to understand the ways in which the Government of Canada is currently using social media. Thus, we plan to study:

- a) how some traditional print media organizations and the Government of Canada use Twitter;
- b) if the Government of Canada's use of Twitter is perceived by media as being credible;

- c) if some traditional print reporters and senior executives in the Government of Canada mutually use it to get information and to what end; and
- d) if a dialogue exists between the parties, and how important it is.

In the context of competing agendas between engaging citizens online via social media while controlling the message, this study questions the implications of using Twitter for the Government of Canada and how members of the media perceive its use by asking *how do print media use Government of Canada tweets?* As it may not be possible to draw wide ranging conclusions due to the relatively small number of interviewees, the results may be used as a springboard for further study on government best practices relating to social media. The findings may serve to inform future strategy for the communications community on how to use Twitter to achieve the desired results.

Chapter Three – Methodology

3.1. Overview

A series of 12 qualitative interviews were conducted in the summer of 2013. They involved two (2) groups relevant to this study: six (6) Government of Canada communications executives and six (6) Canadian print news reporters.

Six (6) federal institutions were chosen based on the number of followers on their respective English departmental Twitter accounts. In line with Roger’s diffusion of innovations theory on the type of adopter, we identified government departments with the most followers as innovators and the ones with the least followers as laggards. The three (3) leading departments (innovators) were Health Canada (75,412 followers), Environment Canada (70,191 followers) and Statistics Canada (62,418 followers). The three (3) departments that had the least followers on Twitter (laggards) were from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (5,376 followers), Veterans Affairs (9,082 followers) and Industry Canada (438 followers). Although a detailed content analysis was not conducted for the purposes of this study, an overview of the general types of individuals who follow departments include members of the general public, opinion leaders, stakeholders and politicians. The Ottawa-based senior public servants who were interviewed had either current direct supervisory experience in social media functions or had working knowledge of the tools in a professional context.

Similarly, six (6) Canadian media organizations were chosen: La Presse, Le Devoir, Postmedia, Globe and Mail, Canadian Press and a freelance journalist. The chosen interviewees are all members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery in Ottawa, Ontario. The reporters write either for national publications (Postmedia, Globe and Mail), wire outlets (Canadian Press), French newspapers in Québec (Le Devoir and La Presse) or are a freelancer for publications such as iPolitics. Reporters were selected as a reference group because they use social media in their profession on a daily basis. They can provide insight into the tools not only as frequent users but also as opinion leaders who inform the public

about government business. We chose to focus on print media instead of broadcast to get an in-depth profile of that particular reporting medium.

On May 3, 2013, the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board approved the research protocol (#03-13-02, Appendix D) and validated it for one year. Each interview was prefaced with instructions including:

- a reminder that the respondents’ name would not appear in any documentation that is produced as a result of this research;
- if there is a question they would prefer not to respond to, it would therefore not be asked; and
- an opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time.

Participants were sent an initial letter explaining the parameters and the scope of the interview (Appendix B). Once they agreed to participate, interviewees then reviewed and signed the consent form (Appendix A). Both documents were authorized for this research by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board.

3.2. Qualitative interviews

In order to pursue the research question and evaluate current social media trends in government, we collected data through a qualitative study. This method allows us to expand our understanding of Twitter and the perception of how it is being used by the Government of Canada employees and by Canadian print journalists. “Interviewing is one of the most widely used data collection methods, also in media and communication research” (Jensen, 2002, p. 240). Qualitative interviewing “refers to in-depth, semi-structured or loosely structured forms of interviewing” (Mason, 1996, p.38). It allows an understanding of experiences, how and why things change (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Interviews are a proven research method that lets researchers develop a relationship of confidence with interviewees and obtain a solid foundation for tangible

results. "Like any scientific enterprise, a qualitative study is committed to carrying out an analysis whose elements, procedures and stages are explicit, documented and can be argued about" (Jensen, 2002, p. 245).

Field interviews are generally characterized by their informal style. This format generates more in-depth data as it allows the subjects to be comfortable to speak freely as they are given enough time to express their view. What makes the in-depth interview an efficient mode of investigation is that it permits a dialogue, or active conversation, to occur. "Field interviewing as a qualitative research method is a semidirected form of discourse or conversation with the goal of uncovering the participant's point of view" (Keyton, 2011, p. 284).

We conducted 12 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. They were conducted by the researcher in May, June and July 2013 and lasted between 40 to 60 minutes each. They took place either in a coffee house, restaurant or occasionally subject's work place or home. These locations were comfortable and easily accessible for both the researcher and participants alike. Permission to record the interview was sought and obtained in writing while filling out the Appendix A form.

The interviewer must demonstrate sound knowledge of the topic at hand in order to get beyond "track talks" - or previously used messaging - to challenge statements, which could lead to new insight (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Semi structured interviews were conducted, as the researcher was able to use her discretion in how the questions were asked and prompt the respondent if she needed to dive deeper into a theme or move on to a different one.

An interview guide was developed, helping focus the interview process on the topic at hand without compelling interviewees to a particular sequence of questions. The interview process remained flexible to accommodate for interviewee's views such as explaining

events, patterns or constraints, and forms of behaviour. This method allowed interviewees to verbalize what they feel or think about how government and reporters use social media. Structural and descriptive questions were prepared in order to solicit details both from reporters on their perception of how the Government of Canada uses Twitter and how government employees perceive journalists’ use of their Twitter messages. Open-ended questions such as “how do you use Twitter” and “what structures or practices are the most helpful when using social media” allowed the researcher to let the interviewee describe current practices that are relevant to the study. During the interviews, the researcher would rephrase the data or ask additional questions to probe for more detailed information from the interviewee. Those follow-up questions were not prepared in advance, nor should they have been. As Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) tell us:

“With a conception method as a mechanical following of a set of rules, the production of knowledge through the personal interaction between interviewer and interviewee is clearly not a legitimate scientific method” (p. 82).

Two (2) sets of questions were developed for each group of participants. Some general questions specific to each group such as “how do you use Twitter” and “do you rely on Twitter to obtain information” were posed to both members of the press and government executives. Other specific questions relating to the Government of Canada’s Twitter expertise were asked to both groups relating to credibility and nature of responses to queries and extent of engagement on Twitter. For a complete list of questions, see Appendix C.

Scheduling the interviews was done rather informally as the author had direct access to most of the participants through the work place or as contacts. All the participants who were approached for this study agreed to be interviewed. Questions were shared up to a week in advance of the interview to allow the subjects to familiarize themselves with the nature of the questions covered in the study. Some interviewees indicated that despite this

measure being taken, although appreciated, they were not able to review material in advance of the meeting due to busy schedules.

Willingness for candidates to answer the questions was generally a non-issue except for one government official who was not comfortable answering on the topic of relationships between the reporters and the communications staff, even though his/her statements would be anonymous. Confidentiality was not a key factor for the reporters however as most indicated they had no objection in being named in the study. Out of precaution for the privacy of all the participants, names are not disclosed.

To supplement the research obtained through the interview process, some anecdotal knowledge was used which was beneficial as the researcher is established in the *milieu* as she has worked in government communications for a number of years. This is especially relevant as one of the groups, the press, can be considered elite (Lindlof, 1995; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). When entertaining sessions with elite groups, it is important to ascertain a certain familiarity of the subject in order to establish credibility with subjects and create sound results.

Without time or resource constraints, the researcher would have employed a two-pronged qualitative analysis method. One being conducting the interviews described above, the other being a content analysis of the nature of current Government of Canada tweets. This could have produced results about the nature of the messages being tweeted, which is a facet that was discussed by our journalist participants.

Another aspect that could have been studied is the perception of Canadian citizens who are subscribers to Government of Canada twitter accounts. This could have allowed the view of an important group of participants in the social media arena who are affected by news reporting and Government of Canada policies. Incorporating these results could have offered a broader perspective on how citizens and media alike view their

government’s information and validate the type of occurring conversations, if any, with members of the general public and the press alike.

3.3. Sample size

A sample within a narrow group of respondents, in this case the written press reporters from the Parliamentary Press Gallery and the Ottawa-based communications executives in Government of Canada departments, allows for enhanced credibility for that specific sample. “The credibility of your findings is enhanced if you make sure you have interviewed individuals who reflect a variety of perspectives” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p. 67).

In the present study, the sample was assembled using a network sampling methodology. Keyton (2011) defines network sampling as actively selecting individuals who fit the profile relating to the analysis. As this thesis is considered exploratory research, the size of the sample was determined based on reaching a saturation point (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Deacon et al, 2010). “Stop gathering information once the research reaches saturation point (where data collection stops revealing new things and the evidence starts to repeat itself” (ibid, p.45). After six (6) interviews in both target groups, the researcher determined that more interviews would not contribute significantly to the results of the analysis, which are presented in Chapter 4.

3.4. Transcription

The discussions were digitally recorded and notes were taken by the researcher to annotate important quotes. Some participants asked to review their transcripts for validation of their interviews.

Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher proceeded to transcribe the verbatim recordings. It is recommended that the author transcribe the interviews

personally, as it assists with interpretation of the dialogue and allows the researcher to get acquainted with the content for analysis purposes (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Approximately 106 pages of verbatim written transcripts resulted from the interviews.

3.5. Analysis strategy

A thematic approach was chosen to analyze the data generated from the interviews. “Thematic coding represents an attempt to identify, compare, and contrast meaning elements, as they emerge from and recur in several different contexts” (Jensen, 2002, p.251). Those categorizations of data can support readings and deductions to create knowledge. The data will be analysed following Rogers’ (2003) perceived attributes of innovation and incorporating Qualman’s (2013) concept of influence through comments and conversation by online citizens on social media.

These results will serve as a springboard to determine “dos and don’ts” for the Government of Canada when it comes to social media use. This will allow an informed strategy to be developed consisting of a list of potential opportunities and threats for the government to engage further in the digital conversation model. This will also allow us to submit recommendations for how the Government of Canada can optimize its social media tools and use.

For analysis purposes, the researcher created an analysis grid that served to chart the data obtained during the fieldwork. Themes were extrapolated from the answers provided during the interviews and grouped using a colour coding method. Larger categories were split into smaller ones while themes that did not solicit many records were eliminated. The final categories, or themes, will in turn be used to evaluate the relevance of Rogers’ and Qualman’s edicts, comparing and contrasting the respondents’ answers by highlighting the main consensus and differences. “Analysis entails classifying, comparing, weighting, and combining material from the interviews to extract meaning and implications, to reveal

patterns, or to stick together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p. 201). The themes, as outlined in the literature review, are:

- Motivations for use
- Structures, benefits and challenges
- Value and trust
- Credibility and relationships
- Presence of conversation

This data will produce evidence that will feed and build the academic knowledge in this field, which according to our preliminary research is slim, particularly relating to Canadian studies. These findings are detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four – Findings

This chapter presents the results of the 12 interviews from our two groups of respondents; six (6) Government of Canada communications executives and six Canadian print news reporters. The chapter also contains two (2) subsections. A first on how the data was analyzed and a second on the specific findings, described in sections related to key themes stemming from the interviews.

4.1. Data analysis

As the methodology chapter states, the interviews were recorded digitally and the researcher took detailed field notes. The exchanges were then transcribed and analyzed using colour codes. The latter were attributed to themes that came up during interviews. The themes relate to 1) motivations for use; 2) structures, benefits and challenges; 3) value and trust; 4) credibility and relationships; and 5) presence of conversation.

Once the transcripts were analyzed, close to 34 pages of significant quotes were retained for the purposes of this analysis. The analysis compares and contrasts the respondents’ answers, at times within the same group, at others between the two groups. By highlighting the main consensus and differences, it allows us to get an in-depth understanding of the material collected during the interviews. This includes the identification of any elements that were not raised by either of the groups as being variable in this exercise.

Below is the number of Twitter followers and the number of people our participants are following (Figure 8). As outlined in Chapter 3, the number of Twitter followers was used to select the government departments. The number of followers served as a key criterion to choose the departments. While other factors were considered, such as the establishment dates of accounts or the number of tweets posted, the number of followers played a primordial role in our selection process as it demonstrates a perceived interest from the

audience toward the specific governmental organizations or the field of activity by users. Using the most followed and the least followed allowed for a more significant comparative study of motivations, behaviours and relevance. For example, one would not be surprised to have Health Canada be followed by a larger segment of social media users as it touches a wider segment of the population, compared to Veterans Affairs, which may be far more specific and of interest to a smaller segment of the general population.

Of interest is the very low number of people that the organizations are following. For two thirds of the participants, the ratio of following to followers is less than 1%, this is similar to other government organizations listed in Chapter 2. By comparison to some Canadian companies however, it is very low. Taco Bell Canada (36%) and Sears Canada (15% ratio) seem to place a high importance on what their clientele is saying on Twitter.

Also of note is that only a third of our participants have a verified Twitter account. Verified accounts are “used to establish authenticity of identities of key individuals and brands on Twitter” (Twitter, 2013). The impact of this verification mechanism will be referenced later in this chapter.

Figure 8. Twitter statistics on sites of participants

Participant	Followers	Following	Ratio	Verified site	Tweets
La Presse	300,773	200	0.06	Yes	32,100
Globe and Mail	259,687	202	0.07	No	177,404
Le Devoir	86,812	427	0.4	Yes	19,438
Canadian Press	45,125	134	0.3	No	6,285
Freelancer (iPolitics)	16,193	709	4.3	No	9,122
Postmedia	5,311	117	2.2	No	57,630
Health Canada	75,412	138	0.1	No	2,763
Environment Canada	70,191	222	0.3	Yes	1,108
Statistics Canada	62,418	38	0.6	No	3,402
Veterans Affairs	9,082	15	0.1	No	802
Fisheries and Oceans	5,376	197	3.7	Yes	1,212
Industry Canada	438	32	7.3	No	45

(from Twitter, September 4, 2013)

4.2. Findings

4.2.1. Motivations for use

Overall, when asked what prompted them to use Twitter, the responses from the media representatives were fairly consistent, defining it as an instant news gathering tool, a wire service used for breaking news and an opportunity to interact with news consumers.

Listed below are a few examples of how distribution of information on Twitter is perceived by some members of our media group:

- **Postmedia:** *It [Twitter] is very fast and it allows for seamless distribution of information.*
- **La Presse:** *Twitter nous sert d’outil pour alimenter les textes qui sont produits durant la journée.*

- **Le Devoir:** *C'est plus instantané, c'est plus les trucs de dernière minute que je vais aller voir sur Twitter, comme des scrums de dernière minute, tel ministre va réagir à telle heure, des fois ça va plus vite comme ça.*

Press reporters use Twitter feeds as a wire service. The concept of breaking news used to consist of an article written by wire service outlets (e.g. Canadian Press, QMI) and distributed to subscribers for a fee. These subscribers consist primarily of news organizations, public relations firms and communicators. Now, Twitter acts as a faster means of communicating breaking news as it consists of only 140 characters and anyone in the world can have access, for free.

- **Le Devoir:** *Il a beaucoup de « live stream » d'information à Ottawa.*
- **Globe and Mail:** *Twitter sert de fil de presse avant tout pour voir ce qui se passe. Ça fait du « breaking news ». J'ai donc une nouvelle quasi directe mais qui n'était pas à la télé, pas dans un scrum enregistré ou diffusé.*

This can be perceived as giving print reporters an advantage over live television or radio as tweeting now allows them to get the information out first. Filming a live event is less time consuming than verifying the facts, writing an article, editing it, getting it approved by management and either preparing it for print or web production.

Only two (2) out of six (6) reporters mentioned the interaction aspect of Twitter as an opportunity to connect with news consumers or solicit their input, a reference to user-generated content. This is a trend that is widely associated with new digital media platforms.

- **Postmedia:** *...it allows you to provide value added in a sense to people who might think of customers or might think of citizens. It allows you to interact with them.*
- **Canadian Press:** *Sometimes I will actually put out on Twitter an appeal for information.*

On the aspect of engagement, rare were the press participants that envisaged Twitter to help build relationships by interacting with members of the public. In fact, highlighted here is the difference between answering questions on Twitter and actively engaging

people, exchanging ideas and encouraging direct participation through a public forum. The following quotation captures that sentiment:

- **Canadian Press:** *If you are able to engage people...and by engagement, I really feel strongly about not promotion, so not this is our Economic Action Plan and what do you think, isn't it great? But we are thinking of doing this, what do you think? A conversation!*

Government of Canada employees generally tended to have a wider range of responses on how they use Twitter. When communicating with it, the target audience is considered to be the general public, and not members of the media exclusively. As it stands now, the Government of Canada uses traditional communications products such as press releases to inform Canadians on policy changes or services. These releases are written and directed for press, which they then use to create a news article informing the public about the information the Government wants to communicate. The use of social media is an opportunity for citizens to potentially receive unfiltered information without the press interpreting the Government of Canada's messages. It is one of the few communications products that allow that uninterrupted link.

- **Health Canada:** *On n'utilise pas Twitter pour joindre les médias, le « driver » c'est plus d'utiliser Twitter pour rejoindre les Canadiens ou nos publics cibles.*
- **Industry Canada:** *We want to use Twitter to make sure that we reach as many people as we can, directly. Right now, the government depends on media to get its message out to Canadians.*

Another way that Twitter is being used, according to our governmental group, is as a broadcasting tool. Using televised advertising is a way for the government to disseminate messages. Around 17 major advertising campaigns³ were broadcasted in 2011-2012 totalling over \$64 million in cost. Those campaigns do not, however, allow an exchange in dialogue. The participant below makes the distinction between how Twitter is currently used, namely as a wide distribution channel. He suggests that it should/could be used as a

³ Major campaigns are defined as exceeding \$500K in production and media (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2013).

narrowcaster platform. This is in line with consumers' desire to increasingly customize content to better suit their needs. At this stage, it seems that interaction, a key component of emerging broadcast strategies, is not widespread.

- **Veterans Affairs:** *We use Twitter as an envelope; we use it as a broadcast as opposed to narrowcast. It is a broadcast to the public that announces either a media advisory or news release with a link. Every single one of them relates back to the Minister. So it is a broadcast Ministerial communication.*

Commonly used in marketing approaches, the Government of Canada is cognisant of only using the push function of a push pull strategy. In this case, communications employees push (or broadcast) messages out via corporate Twitter accounts to the general public. The pull (or gathering function) refers to how the government could benefit from the public by accepting feedback or interacting in order to obtain inclusive opinions and points of view.

- **Health Canada:** *Tout de suite on l'utilise comme « push ». On ne l'utilise pas comme outil d'engagement, on ne cherche pas des commentaires.*

When asked about the reasons why they are using Twitter, only one Government of Canada respondent spoke about the engagement or dialogue aspect on Twitter.

- **Health Canada:** *Il y a un petit peu de conversation, ça arrive que les gens nous posent des questions auxquelles on peut ensuite répondre aux Canadiens.*

Some government departments do answer questions from the public on Twitter, which we will cover in more detail in section 4.2.5.

Others see it as part of the media landscape, like any other tool that the government is already employing. The characterization here is understood as a listening or monitoring activity, where the public sector is acting more like a transmitter and a receiver, lacking the feedback mechanism involved in a bi-directional communications process. This retroaction aspect, if present, could serve as a dynamic catalyst to modify the Government of Canada's behaviour and potentially influence their future action.

- **Environment Canada:** *[C'est un] outil qui est là, de plus en plus partie du paysage médiatique, faut en prendre conscience. C'est une plateforme comme une autre, c'est important de pouvoir l'utiliser.*

When asked which Government of Canada Twitter accounts the press monitored the most regularly, only a handful were named: Public Works and Government Services Canada, Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Governor General of Canada. One of the reasons cited was the information that was being tweeted was of interest.

When analyzing how reporters perceived the Government of Canada’s use of Twitter, most agree that the tweets are generally unhelpful in their work. Although Twitter is the tool of choice for media when it comes to reporting breaking news, most journalists are subscribed to only a few Government of Canada Twitter accounts and do not perceive them as being effective in their use of social media. Some even go so far as suggesting that it makes no difference for reporters in their line of work.

- **Le Devoir:** *Ça ne changerait rien que le Gouvernement ne soit pas sur Twitter.*
- **Globe and Mail:** *La plupart des fonctionnaires ne rajoutent pas grand chose.*

As the members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery report on news primarily focussed on daily political stories coming out of Ottawa, they are mainly interested in following Twitter accounts owned by politicians and members of their staff.

- **Postmedia:** *I am not going to monitor government accounts below the political level.*

A few reporters even defined Government of Canada Twitter activity as political marketing. The press expects that the information conveyed by the public sector is neutral, void of partisan influence, representing the interests of all Canadians, no matter their political stripe. This perception of interference in the messaging can become a hindrance to the Government of Canada’s credibility when using social media tools.

- **Canadian Press:** *I do follow some [government departments]. I find them completely unhelpful. I just view it as an advertising arm or promotional arm of government.*

Media representatives are also sceptical about the Government of Canada's commitment to the tool. They doubt anyone is reading comments and even less willing and able to respond to questions on Twitter.

- **Canadian Press:** *I am not convinced that an actual person is reading it or would even intend on replying.*
- **Freelancer:** *It does not look like it is actually answered.*
- **Le Devoir:** *Ça m'étonnerait qu'il veuille répondre en profondeur aux citoyens.*

When it comes to process, both groups of interviewees follow their corporate social media policy, when it exists. While the Government of Canada does follow the Treasury Board policy titled *Guideline for External Use of Web 2.0*. (2011), half of the departments in this study have specific social media policies adapted for their needs and their target audiences.

- **Environment Canada:** *On a mis en place une politique il y a un an, un tweet par jour, ça nous a donné un résultat où beaucoup de gens nous suivent.*

Some departments, like Statistics Canada, are more advanced than others in their use of Twitter. This can be explained either because they have been active in the early stages of Twitter (since 2009) or based on the nature of their business. In this case, communicating statistics or updated numbers of general interest to Canadians is low risk as opposed to significant changes in policy direction of environmental issues, for example.

Other departments are still developing their policies and establishing best practices when using Twitter. Only as of mid-September 2013 did Industry Canada's corporate account get activated. This lack of use can have an impact on the way the tool is perceived internally within the organization, instilling misunderstanding and distrust from the employees. This grey area can result in employees avoiding using Twitter altogether as the civil service is normally risk averse when it comes to new technologies.

- **Health Canada:** *Les questions sont continues, les réponses ne sont pas claires. Les gens ne sont pas sûrs de leur coup sur plusieurs de ces questions-là, ils ne sont pas confiants de l'utiliser à pleine capacité.*
- **Industry Canada:** *I remember one department in particular said we won't enable comments on Twitter. I remember thinking "you have no idea what Twitter is".*

Some reporters have a corporate social media policy. Interestingly, they are encouraged to actively use Twitter keeping in mind it is a professional tool, as opposed to a social one. Others tend to use the “common sense” approach to ensure protection of their brand and their credibility towards members of the public.

- **Le Devoir:** *Pour n'importe quel journal, la directive c'est tu dois te restreindre de diffuser des opinions par rapport à ce que tu couvres.*
- **Postmedia:** *I tweet as I want...I have a lot of latitude as a journalist to express myself and that is what people want.*

Some journalists use tweets to promote their articles, therefore influencing the probability of increased readership of their piece. This also increases online traffic to their press affiliation, drawing more consumers to content on the corporate website therefore increasing revenues.

- **La Presse:** *[Les médias sociaux], c'est un élément qui permet de faire la promotion des chroniques des collègues qui sont excellentes et qui méritent d'être lues par d'autres.*
- **Globe and Mail:** *Je tweet sous l'affiliation et l'autorisation...Si je vois des choses que mes collègues ont fait, je vais partager...ça fait partie d'un tout, chez nous il n'a pas de règles. Il en a une [politique des médias sociaux] mais ça ne change pas grand chose.*

Finally, when it comes to motivations for use of social media, some journalists propose that they are essential tools in their daily work.

- **La Presse:** *C'est indéniable que les médias sociaux ont eu un impact sur la façon que les journalistes font leur travail. On recueille l'information via Twitter, surtout Twitter.*

In contrast, the Government of Canada executives are struggling with the nature of Twitter, as it conflicts with the bureaucratic processes that enable them to communicate with the

public. While Twitter should be nimble, there are some significant roadblocks that impede the government to use it in that fashion.

- **Health Canada:** *Je vois vraiment la bureaucratie comme un gros morceau et les médias sociaux, ça « fit » mal les deux. Pour avoir un plein usage hyper efficace pour joindre tous nos publics cibles, pour être rapide, ce n'est pas en ligne malheureusement avec la nature de la bureaucratie.*

In brief, this chapter illustrates that the press uses Twitter with great creativity and flexibility whereas government employees are still discovering its potential and the related impediments that inhibit the use of tool to its fullest. This next section will provide more details on the structures that are currently in place when using Twitter, while outlining the benefits and challenges when using it for both of our study groups.

4.2.2. Structures, benefits and challenges

While reporters and government executives alike are using Twitter in their work environment, there are some processes that are currently in place for those groups to help administer the tool in an appropriate fashion. Structures, for both media who engage with communicators and for government itself, can be beneficial or limiting. This section will outline those structures and how they impact the practice of tweeting, positively or negatively.

Government communicators and media see Twitter as part of the plethora of communications tools available to either obtain information or broadcast information to Canadians. Both groups agree that Twitter, although important, cannot replace existing tools currently used such as interviews, news releases or websites, as these remain the tools of choice.

- **Globe and Mail:** *Les outils traditionnels doivent rester, je ne pense pas que tu puisses remplacer, à moins que c'est pour les alertes mais l'élément humain est nécessaire.*
- **Freelancer:** *When an announcement is put out and I want to find out more, unless that person is doing 50 tweets of 140 characters each, it would not work. If it is a quick little thing like the time of a press conference, or what year was that program first announced some small little thing might work.*

In fact, some media perceive Twitter as a tool that could limit information provided to them from public servants. They even fear that Twitter could exacerbate the current communications climate, which as outlined in our literature review, is tense at times, as the information is perceived as being controlled by the current government.

- **Le Devoir:** *Ce serait dommage que Twitter remplace les communiqués de presse, des explications, des « backgrounders » sur le site web, des conférences de presse du ministre, qui sait peut-être même les « briefings » des fonctionnaires.*

A communications executive raised this exact concern, acknowledging the risk of solely using tweets instead of doing so in tandem with other products. Using Twitter instead of more traditional communications products or methods (such as interviews or web content) is perceived as being insufficient and could contribute to the added frustration felt by the journalists. This could potentially influence their neutrality when assessing the facts.

- **Veterans Affairs:** *Some reporters are afraid that the government is moving towards that platform more than any other and will be communicating less.*

Other communications executives bring up the approvals process and how the procedures that are in place affect social media messaging. The results of the study show that procedures for the approvals processes are diverse amongst the various departments' interviewed. The freedom to tweet is not common within departments. It is treated as just another tool and must follow the same processes similar to ministerial announcements related products, which consist of approximately seven (7) levels of approval. This does, ostensibly, significantly impact the use of Twitter in relation to the speed at which tweets can be released.

- **Fisheries and Oceans:** *If we have approved media lines, then we would respond, if we don't have anything pre-approved, we choose to ignore...We are not going to come out with brand new messages just for Twitter.*
- **Environment Canada:** *On suit la politique du Gouvernement du Canada qui mentionne les médias sociaux. Les mêmes règles s'appliquent au niveau éthique. C'est utilisé avec le même sérieux que n'importe quel autre outil de communication.*

Also, when it comes to measuring the level of interest in the federal tweets, it remains an afterthought when strategically planning events or announcements. Metrics are not an area that government communicators spend significant resources on but they do accept that they hold a benefit for evaluating the reach of communications activities.

- **Health Canada:** *On sait combien de tweet on a émis mais on ne compte pas l’impact que ça a eu sur la population. Autant les médias sociaux nous offrent une belle occasion de le faire.*

Overall, the benefits for both groups of interviewees are related to the speed at which information can be distributed and the opportunity to connect directly with Canadians. The Government of Canada characterizes the benefits of using Twitter as being able to communicate with citizens without the filter of the media. Many government executives raised the advantages of Twitter as being related to its form and engagement aspects, which can act as a consultation method.

- **Statistics Canada:** *C’est l’instantanéité, le plus grand bénéfice...on n’a pas besoin d’attendre qu’on diffuse des bulletins d’information mensuels, c’est tout de suite.*
- **Fisheries and Oceans:** *It is another way to engage with public and get their feedback and we are able to respond to some of their questions and we are able to rectify information that is sent.*

More than half the reporters talked about how Twitter benefits them in their work as both a continual source of information and as a channel for both receiving and transmitting. Some reporters use the term “essential” to qualify the impact when preparing their articles because the information may not be available through another means or it may be faster to access through Twitter.

- **La Presse:** *Je te dirais que c’est un outil devenu essentiel, incontournable pour faire son travail adéquatement.*
- **Canadian Press:** *I am not sure whether you can still get the same info you need without being on Twitter. I know that for example the Prime Minister’s office has made some announcements only through Twitter. From that respect I guess you could say it is essential.*

Interestingly, while the speed of Twitter is a benefit for both groups, it is also considered a challenge as the gaff potential is at everyone’s fingertips. This is another example that is a consideration when choosing to use Twitter and the impact it can have on the speed at which messages are sent out.

- **Postmedia:** *I suppose a drawback of Twitter for journalists is the concern that you will do something stupid. It is so fast and so instant, the drawback and risk to everyone, including politicians, is that you can Tweet yourself in your underwear.*

When it comes to challenges, government employees and reporters agree on only a few elements. One of those elements is the limited audience reach as subscribers on Twitter are still only a small percentage of the population, with less than one in five Canadian Internet users tweeting (Media Technology Monitor, 2013).

Another similarity raised by the two groups is the quantity of information and the effort needed to keep it sustainable, as it is not a static medium. Reporters struggle to find time to filter the “content to noise ratio” (Freelancer) while government executives speak of the value of it being adequately resourced to be able to commit to the “constant care and feeding” (Industry Canada) that Twitter requires to be successful.

An important point, although raised by a minority of participants, is the culture conflict. The conflict stems from the dichotomy between Twitter as a commentary product versus an information-based product and how it is currently used in the workplace.

- **Freelancer:** *Twitter blurs the line between the traditional objective rule as a journalist. You are not supposed to have an opinion on anything.*
- **Industry Canada:** *But that’s where it runs in conflict with the culture of any large organization, including government, which is, we don’t speak from the hip. You are not supposed to. The government can’t just do things on the fly. It has to consider things.*

Of note, journalists raise key challenging points such as anonymity of the public service corporate accounts and the perceived impact on their credibility. Although not all the reporters agree, anonymity behind corporate accounts seems to be an irritant. It could influence how reporters use the tweeted content and their trust in the validity of the

information. The fact that only a third of the Government of Canada accounts are verified by Twitter (Figure 7) could also contribute to this challenge.

- **Le Devoir:** *Tu as un anonymat derrière ton Blackberry que tu n'as pas devant une caméra...Tu sais pas à qui tu parles, si c'est un porte-parole, un stagiaire.*
- **Canadian Press:** *There has to be a person...just communicating with a body, there doesn't seem to be much accountability there.*
- **Freelancer:** *It helps if you know who you are following. Somebody can just make up things on Twitter, how do you know that it is actually accurate?*

Also, the media want to have exclusivity when writing articles. They do not wish the Twitter audience to be aware of the questions they are asking when researching a topic or following up on a lead. This could have an impact on their competitiveness. The Parliamentary Press Gallery is a small community of reporters and news travels fast in that line of work. It is not in the journalists' interest to share details of their story before it is posted online or printed. This aspect is a strong consideration as it can influence their use of Twitter.

- **Postmedia:** *...typically if I am working on an actual story, I am not sure I would want to share that with the world.*
- **La Presse:** *Faut que ça soit un à un pour préserver la confidentialité. C'est pour ça que je ne pose pas de questions sur Twitter.*
- **Health Canada:** *En plus un journaliste, à mon sens, ne veut pas que la réponse à sa question soit diffusée à tout le monde, ils veulent l'exclusivité, un topo qui va vendre des journaux, faire la première page parce que c'est exclusif.*

In order for journalists to prepare well-balanced, fact-based articles, they need to establish trust in their sources and have access to well-informed spokespersons. This next section will establish the value of using Twitter for both groups and whether the information tweeted by the Government of Canada is trustworthy.

4.2.3. Value and trust

When writing news stories, journalists act as gatekeepers of information for the general public. Trust is thus key when establishing a committed readership with clients. The present digital environment forces reporters to constantly create and update information as the thirst for recent news stories is deeply entrenched in online users. Twitter is the primary tool for these press participants to gather facts and “listen” to what the population seems interested in or not.

Reporters follow people on Twitter that they trust will flag important articles (Globe and Mail) or whose editorial judgement is perceived as relevant (Postmedia). This trust allows journalists, in the interest of quickly making news available, to use certain tweets for direct quotes.

- **Canadian Press:** *We now quote people from Twitter on major stories that are breaking.*
- **La Presse:** *Le directeur des communications [du bureau du Premier ministre] est très occupé et il donne une réaction sur Twitter donc on peut se servir de ça pour avoir leur réaction.*

News consumers develop a preferential attachment to a media outlet based on many factors including the accelerated rates of information availability and accuracy of the content reputation, credibility and notoriety of reporters. Twitter is changing the press reporting landscape as practices are being modified to adapt to social media realities. Some reporters see how the Government of Canada could find itself in uncertain territory when it comes to employees using Twitter and trusting them to do so. This highlights a tension between the journalists’ desire for less anonymity on Government of Canada accounts and the issue of trusting employees with Government of Canada Twitter accounts. On one hand, the information stemming from the government is perceived as trustworthy.

- **Freelancer:** *If it is coming out of the Government of Canada, it is a trusted source. It is the essence of the Internet.*
- **La Presse:** *Normalement, je vais faire confiance [aux comptes Twitter du gouvernement].*

On the other hand, the users themselves do not seem to be perceived as entirely trusted:

- **Postmedia:** *I think that the hard thing for the Government of Canada – a challenge – is the speed of Twitter. People are using Twitter; you have to trust them to use it. I think that that is a challenge for the Government of Canada to put enough trust in people's hands.*

The Government of Canada is an active player in news generation. Concepts of accountability and transparency are singularly newsworthy these days, as governments are held to a high standard when it comes to properly administering public funds and decision-making for the people. When assessing the effectiveness of public sector Twitter accounts, Via Rail was cited by two (2) reporters (Freelancer and Postmedia) as an organization that was effective in using Twitter as the employees are empowered to respond to queries from citizens. As Via Rail is a Crown Corporation and not a government organization or agency, this example was not retained for the purposes of this study.

One variable that was omitted by almost all the participants were the opportunities provided when re-tweeting information. Re-tweeting news requires trust to be instilled by both groups. For Government of Canada employees to trust the information provided by the tweeter and to be able to re-tweet it; and from reporters to be able to share the opinions of other users without seeming to endorse them.

Trust can be instilled more easily once a professional relationship has been established. This next section will summarize the results obtained relating to the credibility of the Government of Canada on Twitter and its relationship with the press community.

4.2.3. Credibility and relationships

In order to determine if a relationship is healthy, information coming from those parties must be trusted. This is especially true of public sector organizations. When asked if Government of Canada twitter feeds were credible, all the reporters agreed that they are. Some indicated that they might validate the information through the departmental

website. Others offered that links in Twitter messages are important to be able to validate the information when verifying sources and access additional details.

According to the information collected in the study, some participants from the Government of Canada consider themselves credible when propagating messages on Twitter. The Government of Canada has established a credible brand and it transpires into social media tools. Employees perceive their work as being credible in the eyes of Canadians.

- **Health Canada:** *Peu importe l’outil, s’il a la marque de Santé Canada dessus, généralement c’est très crédible.*

When it comes to the perception of the relationship between Ottawa-based reporters and government communicators, they are at polar opposites. Media agree the *rapport* is at its lowest point in years and they now question the credibility of the relationship established with government communicators. Reporters indicate that there has been a change in the past years, which has an effect on how they go about confirming information from the government body. Below are some examples of how reporters qualify the deterioration of the relationship:

- **Globe and Mail:** *Moi je trouve que la relation, indépendamment des médias sociaux, est à la baisse, à cause des contraintes imposées par le gouvernement, le monde communique par « email »...Tout l’appareil de communications communique de moins en moins.*
- **Postmedia:** *I am very frustrated with recent changes in Government of Canada communications.... It is ventriloquism – political spinners pretending – they are using government communicators as sock puppets.*
- **Freelancer:** *I remember an era where government communicators, as long as something was not political and both sides were pretty much understood those rules of engagement, were fast, efficient, they knew their subjects, they would help reporters, and that benefited both sides...I do not think I am the only journalist whose reflex is to call a government communicator first. It is not so much a reflex now. Reporters are trying to find any other way to get information without dealing with a government communicator because there is so much frustration.*

- **Canadian Press:** *The relationship generally has reached a critical low point right now. I feel that I am constantly being sold something, sold a policy, rather than being given actual information. I feel like when the question is inputted into a department, I feel like there is a computer that has an algorithm that searches the words in your question and spits out by email to you, cause no one ever calls you anymore...*

This is a sharp contrast to how Government of Canada communications executives define their relationship with the press. The Communications Policy of the Government of Canada (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2006) outlines that “institutions must cultivate proactive relations with the media” and “operate effectively in a 24-hour environment”. Half of the government departments state that they have a positive relationship with the press.

- **Fisheries and Oceans:** *We work extremely hard to answer every media in a timely way. We throw ourselves at every media call...I think we have some very good relationships with the press and they understand we are doing our best to answer in a timely way.*
- **Industry Canada:** *A lot of time and effort is spent trying to respond to media...I do know for a fact that the department does place a lot of importance on maintaining good relations with the media.*

The other half of the government executives either did not respond to the question or were more in line with the press’ point of view of the status of their relationship. This could contribute to the lack of trust towards information being posted on social media by the Government of Canada.

- **Veterans Affairs:** *Right now, they [reporters] are not happy with government comms (sic). They think that we are shouting, flooding the airwaves, we are messaging as opposed to... They have become very cynical and critical of our stuff...Most government communications people right now do not have a relationship with journalists.*

Some communicators are aware that media do not use Twitter to ask the government questions. As stated in section 4.2.2, social media is not the place for the press to ask questions to departments. This could stem from the press’ desire for exclusivity and the lack of interest in receiving a superficial 140-character response could explain why they do not engage with the tool.

- **Health Canada:** *Je pense que là où on est fort dans nos relations avec les journalistes c'est quand on a des relations interpersonnelles... C'est pas l'outil Twitter qui vient, à mon avis, améliorer notre capacité.*
- **Statistics Canada:** *Non les journalistes à ma connaissance n'utilisent pas du tout Twitter mais on l'a dit même dans nos conditions d'utilisation. Si vous êtes journaliste et vous avez des questions, passez par la ligne « info média ».*

Reporters also have been known to shame the government using Twitter, which they perceive as sometimes serving to agitate the public service to respond faster to media queries. The press does this out of exasperation when not obtaining answers to their queries from government executives.

- **Le Devoir:** *Je vais dire « eille », tel ministère, ça serait super le fun que quelqu'un me rappelle avant demain.*

We have established that the credibility of the Government of Canada on Twitter is meaningful. Conversely, the relationship between the two parties in this study is polarized: some journalists feel their access to information is obstructed while government executives work hard to obtain information for the reporters. This can thus possibly make conversation difficult, not only on a one-on-one basis but also when using social media. This last section will define the nature of the existing online conversation and the impact it seemingly has on news making.

4.2.4. Presence of conversation

Generally, reporters are not interested in dialoging with the Government of Canada on social media. Nor do they expect answers to be provided to them using this forum. On the occasions when members of the press call on the government directly through Twitter, it is for a variety of reasons including a quest to obtain facts or for public shaming when responses are not forthcoming.

- **Canadian Press:** *A few times I have even sent a tweet to the Clerk of the Privy Council on a more or less controversial issue. He would never talk to you.*

- **Globe and Mail:** *C'est pas quelque choses que le gouvernement ferait super bien non plus, j'ai l'impression.*

Journalists do not perceive that conversations on Twitter are taking place. Although there is a mushrooming of Government of Canada twitter accounts, there are hardly any employees able to engage freely online, the operative word being freely.

- **Canadian Press:** *Twitter brings very senior people closer to you that you would not usually have access to but it is not a two-way communication that I can see.*

Media also indicate that it is a worthwhile exercise for them to obtain feedback from members of the public as it can serve to improve their work. Overall, results of the study indicate that reporters recognize that engagement and soliciting input can positively influence press reporting. Interestingly however, the media do not always answer questions from citizens. Reasons cited namely are not having the desire to engage:

- **Le Devoir:** *Je répons rarement à des citoyens parce que ça ne me tente pas.*
- **Freelancer:** *I don't want to get into a debate with a troll. It is frustrating and it takes too much time.*

In the case of the Government of Canada, responding to questions from the public is perceived unevenly across the participants. Some are answering questions from citizens on Twitter, but mainly with pre-approved material. Some do not receive questions at all. In brief, the government's engagement is limited to having on social media presence and occasionally responding to questions on Twitter, as long as they have existing material to use and it is not on a contentious issue.

- **Veterans Affairs:** *I do not think we have ever received questions on Twitter...If we do, it is very rare and is the exception.*
- **Health Canada:** *On émet quelque chose de neutre en pointant vers l'information qui est sur le web. J'appellerais pas ça un dialogue.*

Responding to questions is not actively pursuing a conversation. It does not fulfill two-way communication requirements. In social science, a conversation can lead to the construction of knowledge. Through an exchange of ideas, learning can be enhanced and a

valid contribution can be made to our democratic society. As per the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2006), “in a democracy, listening to the public, researching, evaluating and addressing the needs of citizens are critical to the work of government”.

- **Canadian Press:** *If you consider that consultation and public input is a valuable part of a democratic state, then using social media to invite input is probably a really positive thing.*

It appears that communications executives are struggling with the freedom that social media needs in order to be effective and the rigid rules that govern their communications. Even though there is an acute awareness of this fact, participants did not offer a solution to this conundrum.

- **Health Canada:** *Je pense qu’on est pris dans un paradoxe au gouvernement, parce qu’on est gros, on est pesant, on est lourd, les approbations sont lourdes, les médias sociaux de nature sont le contraire de tout ça, je ne suis pas sûre qu’il y a une issue évidente.*
- **Freelancer:** *They [the Government of Canada] will not be able to go fast enough. [Twitter] is like a brush fire when it starts.*

In sum, this chapter provided a deeper understanding of the Government of Canada’s use of Twitter through the eyes of Ottawa-based reporters. We explored principal themes around the current uses of the tool, its structures, how trust, credibility and relationships impact its usage and finally, took stock on the nature of the conversations taking place on Twitter. These findings illustrate that the press and Government of Canada communications executives use Twitter differently and have set up their accounts with different purposes and objectives in mind. Both groups see improvement opportunities with its use: civil servants generally agree that the rules are too rigid while reporters feel that Government of Canada accounts are anonymous, slow to post content and do very little to promote engagement.

The next chapter focuses on answering our main research question: *How do print reporters use Government of Canada tweets*. The answer to this question will be analyzed through the lens of our theoretical framework (Chapter 5.1) and literature review (Chapter 5.2), explaining our findings and presenting lessons learned for future recommendations (Chapter 5.5).

Chapter Five – Discussion

This chapter endeavors to assess the pertinence of the chosen theoretical framework and the literature review. We will appraise the extent to which the key findings obtained in this study allow us to answer our research question. Furthermore, a short list of recommendations is proposed to foster further sharing and exchanging of information with citizens by the Government of Canada.

5.1. Validity of theoretical framework

Our established theoretical framework, both in Rogers' perceived attributes of innovation (2003) and Qualman's edict of distributing information through word of mouth by conversation (2013), have served us to validate our findings. This section will clarify how these theories contribute to advancing our knowledge in the field of social media and public sector communications.

The majority of Rogers' attributes relating to innovation were corroborated in our results. Twitter is being used widely by both reporters and employees of the Government of Canada but with different goals in mind. Reporters depend on Twitter to feed their daily work and agree that it makes a positive contribution to the speed of information distribution, including engaging with citizens online and creating relationships with readers. Government of Canada institutions are generally slower to adopt the tool. The departments that are using Twitter are, for most part, using it to broadcast pre-approved messaging, instead of conversing. When qualifying how they use Twitter, they employ words such as listening, looking, watching, monitoring or even shouting. The notion of “relative advantage” put forth by Rogers indicates that in order to achieve success, an innovation must be better than the idea that it proceeds. For an innovation to mature, it must have room to expand, develop iterations and possibly even propose new ways of using the tool. For our Government of Canada participants, the innovation is being used similar to a traditional communications tool. They see benefits of using Twitter to communicate but

struggle with how to move beyond sheer information circulation to engage more deeply and use social media to converse with citizens. For the Government of Canada, Twitter is the epitome of a double-binder as it is clearly perceived as a new technology but is used within the traditional boundaries of legacy media protocols and framed within a stringent, even inhibiting code of procedures. The following quote eloquently captures the dilemma.

- **Veterans Affairs:** *We just take the hits. We do not engage in social media, we do not dialogue in broadcast mode. We are not playing the game.*

When it comes to the value of using Twitter, both groups – government executives and members of the press – see positive outcomes in the tool but not as a replacement for the more traditional communications products such as news releases and web content. While important in their work, participants generally agree that it should not replace the existing vehicles currently used in the networked community to distribute information such as news releases or web content. To do so would be detrimental to a relationship that is already fragile.

- **Canadian Press:** *We are already trying to get away from short responses so 140 characters would just be [...] the death of government communications.*

Journalists choose the people they follow as they value their opinions and judgment. They want to build a wide spectrum of followers in order to benefit from the exchanges that ensue. Rogers’ “triability” attribute suggests that experimentation should be admissible in order for users to build trust by using the communications channel. This can be challenging for the Government of Canada as trial and error in the public arena is a risk that cannot be afforded. Also, trust in government employees using the tool appropriately is not entrenched in the corporate culture as there are just too many factors that need to be controlled in order to guarantee the reliability of the information provided. Social media is still a work in progress for the public service and Twitter’s governance mechanisms are still being established. Both groups agree that there is value in using social media tools for communicating with the public but the press fails to recognize the value in Government of Canada tweets as they are considered nothing but political marketing. One government

communicator also agrees:

- **Fisheries and Oceans:** *The direction the government is going with social media is part of overall tendency for political marketing. Rather than engaging the public and pursuing open government and so on, I think it is more about persuading and selling the public on a product which is either the party in power or the main policy, which right now is the Economic Action Plan.*

As stated above, policies and procedures exist for using Twitter: the press is free to use as it sees fit as long as they follow the dogma of neutrality that is so strongly instilled in their profession; government employees is bound by stringent rules that dissuade the public sector to use social media tools to their full potential. Although almost all the participants agree that the benefits mostly outweigh the challenges, some of those challenges are showstoppers for both groups. For public servants, the arduous approvals process and the need for appropriate human and financial resources to be responsive on Twitter were some of the main reasons brought up by two thirds of the government participants.

For reporters, their desire to protect their exclusivity when writing stories has a significant impact on how they use Twitter. It is not always to their advantage to ask questions or risk giving the other media outlets hints on their upcoming breaking story. After all, the news market is a very competitive business where success is highly correlated to the speediness at which news stories are broken. Half of the press members also struggle with the anonymity behind the federal corporate accounts. This can in fact impact the credibility and reliability of the information from federal departments on Twitter in certain circumstances and therefore has an influence on how the tool is perceived. Rogers' (2003) attribute of "complexity" exemplifies how an innovation can be an intricate proposition to implement, which proved to be the case for the Government of Canada, especially when it comes to pursuing the public exchange of comments and discussion on Twitter.

One of the fundamental characteristics of digital media is the opportunity to exchange on a “many to many” paradigm, contributing and receiving information freely. This is in line with Qualman’s theory of socialnomics (2013). In wanting to control social media like a traditional communications tool and tweeting pre-approved messages, the Government of Canada is confining itself to use Twitter on a “one-to-many” model, ostensibly missing out on the entire feedback mechanism, which is at the heart of social media.

“The Internet is the first medium in history that has native support for groups and conversation at the same time. Whereas the phone gave us the one-to-one pattern, and television, radio, magazines, books, gave us the one-to-many pattern, the Internet gives us the many-to-many pattern. For the first time, media is natively good at supporting these kinds of conversations” (Shirky, 2009).

Some members of the government suggested that one of the reasons they want to use Twitter is to be able to communicate with Canadians directly without the filter of the media. However, that goal can only be achieved if the civil service considers embracing the tool to its maximum capacity, over and above mass broadcasting, in order to take advantage of the opportunities offered by Qualman’s world of mouth, or many-to-many model. When a message is communicated digitally to a mass audience, there is less room for interpretation as it gets distributed directly from the source, without being filtered by journalists. Although the technological potential of Twitter is extraordinary, the Government of Canada faces a paradox that is locking it in the past.

Results indicate that engagement or dialogue on Twitter does not take place with Government of Canada officials. Some departments such as Health Canada and Statistics Canada have the processes in place to be able to answer questions from members of the public. This is dependent however on the nature of the questions asked. Anything that is contentious or could have an impact on the government’s policy agenda is basically off limits. Furthermore, there does not seem to be a desire to converse on Twitter. Either the current internal regulations do not allow for the flexibility to do so in a timely fashion or,

more simply, government executives themselves remain skeptical of the potential of the tool itself.

- **Health Canada:** *Twitter « is a fad ». Je pense que ça va faire son temps et que par le temps que le gouvernement s'adapte pleinement, on va avoir passer à autre chose.*

When it comes to members of the press, they are keen to interact with the Government of Canada, but not on Twitter. The interaction happening on the microblogging service can translate into valuable input from readers. But when it comes to communicating with public servants, reporters generally resist engaging with them, as responses are sparse and most times, they want to protect the nature of their work. Reporters prefer to interact by using traditional means of communication, such as one-on-one interviews.

- **Canadian Press:** *Although journalists are in the public, the work that we do is often in private.*

For the federal government, social media conversations are a necessary evil, similar to public consultations. The Government of Canada currently conducts public consultations (www.consultingcanadians.gc.ca) on a wide array of subjects ranging from what Canadians think about Veterans' week learning materials to the human pathogens and toxins act regulations. Again, the means they use to do so are more in line with traditional communications methods. Opening up to the potential of social media would allow the federal government to stimulate peer discussion, and therefore, create richness in policy development. Rogers' attribute of "observability" seems difficult to achieve in these circumstances, as the political arena does not promote public trial and error.

- **Industry Canada:** *If you don't take it [Twitter] seriously, it's going to be worse perhaps than a phone number because your failure will be public.*

The lack of engagement on social media could have an impact of the public service's ability to deliver advice to elected officials on how to implement desired policy direction. "It is users or customers who encounter meaningful interaction via social media who are more likely to become advocates that recommend the service or brand with which they engage" (Anderson, 2013). The desire to control the messaging is present to the point that it has

amputated the civil service’s ability to communicate and therefore curtailed the opportunity to entertain discussions with citizens on key topics. The nature of the relationship between government communicators and members of the press constitutes an impediment to the Government of Canada’s credibility when communicating. While engaging on social media may not improve the relationship, only a change in the current situation could attempt to re-establish what is seen as damaged trust between the parties.

Lastly, since Twitter is still a relatively new tool for the Government of Canada, there was little evidence to support Rogers’ “compatibility” value of an innovation. Rogers proposes that adapting the innovation requires a new system, which can take some time. Granted that the Government of Canada is still establishing its Twitter presence and how it meets its needs while staying within the boundaries of the existing communications protocols. However, there was not enough evidence to confirm that this attribute is present at this time. These results contribute to gaining a better understanding of Rogers’ theory despite the fact that, as expected, it does not relate perfectly to our area of study. It nevertheless allowed us to apply his model to a relatively novel area of research as outlined in our literature review. Despite its limits, the model’s application resonates strongly in a research field that continues to morph and shed light on the way innovation takes a life of its own within government organizations as its use solidifies and develops further.

5.2. Pertinence of literature review

The literature review focused on concepts that are echoed in our interviews. When it comes to members of the press using Twitter, the results of our study confirm that Twitter assists them in 1) gathering information 2) curating the important details and 3) dialoging online with news consumers.

Twitter allows reporters to source content directly as they have established trust with some of the digital contributors that they follow such as other reporters or opinion leaders. As social media is said to allow instant gratification, reporters use it as a live feed to gather bits of news at an unmatched speed (Bruns & Burgess, 2012). They also depend on their network of followers to flag the news that is important to the community. It acts as a curator to sort through the noise of the millions of Tweets posted daily, the average today estimated at being at some 400 million (Smith, 2013). As the tool is in constant evolution, trial and error is a method that is used to profit from the information being posted on Twitter instead of being buried by it. The establishment of an appropriate “following” base comes with time. Individuals that reporters follow can have an immense value added to their work, especially other members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery as it allows them to keep up with the competition and follow established leads for key stories. Journalists can therefore act as smart aggregators, witness bearers and empowerers (Artwick, 2013). Social media users can present parallel or opposite ideas, which can both allow journalists to pursue their critical thinking and even spark ideas for future articles, therefore allowing a greater contribution to knowledge and democracy.

The reporters’ credibility and influence is linked to their ability to actively participate on social media through either engagement with news consumers or when self-promoting their articles to increase readership.

- **Canadian Press:** *I generally tweet every single story I write. I tweet it immediately, as soon as I can get a link online. I don’t just use it for news because I view social as building a relationship with the public, I also use it for re-tweeting interesting things...does it make sense to use the word curatorial?*

Interestingly, members of the press also use Twitter to broadcast their work and solicit interaction from the public. All reporters that were interviewed do use the global short messaging service to either post a 140-character breaking news tidbit or advise readers that an article has been posted on their corporate website, which act as a strong enabler to share comments and stir discussion.

The literature review also lays out the way that governments use social media and how it can benefit from doing so (Lee & Kwak, 2012; Coleman & Shane, 2012). Our participants' responses confirm what we proposed in the literature review. As defined by Rogers (2003), the government has to be considered a laggard as it is still in the early stages of developing its policies, more than seven (7) years after the tool has been launched. While citizens and members of the press are using Twitter not only to obtain information but to contribute to it and maintain relationships, the government is mostly stagnant, remaining in the listening or watching phase, instead of acting, conversing or engaging.

- **Environment Canada:** *La façon qu'on utilise Twitter, on affiche de l'information...On re-tweet parfois mais on ne participe pas au dialogue sur Twitter. On le suit.*

As it is still at the initial stages of learning how to use Twitter to benefit the organization, the government falls at the tail end of the adoption model with regards to the conversation potential of this new technology. Our government participants did not raise specific reasons why conversations were not happening on Twitter and media were somewhat unaware of the extent at which this was occurring.

When it comes to the Government of Canada responding to queries, the literature review indicated that the *Guideline for External Use of Web 2.0* (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2011) recommends responses to queries within 24 or 48 hours. While some departments are answering questions on Twitter, the results of the interviews confirm that for others, it depends on the nature of the question and if material already exists to be able to answer. Also, some departments, such as Industry Canada and Environment Canada, are not answering questions at all. For Veterans Affairs, it is because they are not being asked questions directly on Twitter. What is clear however is that there are no unhindered conversations currently taking place with government officials on Twitter. The reasons outlined in the interviews ranged from the departments not being able to freely interact with online citizens as they are not equipped to do so, to central agencies wanting departments to engage but the risks and opportunities of doing so are not clearly defined at this stage.

- **Health Canada:** *S'il y avait une conversation qui s'engageait sur un dossier très chaud, on s'engagerait pas sur un dossier très chaud, on enverrait des messages neutre parce qu'un ministère par principe ne se pogne pas sur la place publique avec un journaliste ou avec un membre du public. Ce n'est pas notre rôle, ce n'est pas approprié, une bonne pratique de relations publiques, ce n'est pas respectueux.*

There is also the chicken and the egg scenario where departments are not engaging with online users as they are not getting any questions from them or assume that they will not be getting a response. Our results demonstrate that Estes (as cited by Sniderman, 2011) was right when he says that government wants to give the illusion of engaging on social media. Government departments are present but do not have the tools, abilities or trust from the political arm to be able to freely converse with Canadians.

On the benefits of e-citizenship and democracy, results are mitigated. The Government of Canada has made available Twitter accounts to citizens. They have the opportunity to view or comment on information that is being posted but have no sense if the people's content is being considered or even read by officials (Novak, 2012; Barney, 2005). Many journalists revealed the perception of the existence of a black hole when it comes to government interaction. The government wants to move towards a modern way to engage citizens to participate in policy debate whereas they are still at embryonic stages of using the tool making it open for posting but no great investment to assure responses is provided.

Furthermore, the literature review suggests that opening up discussion and encouraging citizen engagement can improve policy-making (Coleman & Shane, 2012). Remarkably, there was no evidence of that in the results of our study. Tweeting once a day or reporting an increased number of followers on governmental accounts does not translate into active participation. As discussed earlier, since the Government of Canada is currently in the early stages of using social media, the governance models are still being developed which understandably make Twitter interactions difficult and somewhat limited (Kundra as cited in Novak, 2012). Future policies will need to be more prescriptive around

the engagement aspect of social media to allow a through and desired contribution via e-citizenship to governmental plans and priorities.

5.3. Key findings

As this study was designed to be an investigative analysis, the following section reviews the data collected in the previous chapter by contextualizing the significance of the results. As a whole, journalists are proved to be great users of Twitter. They use it as a news ticker of information and to obtain feedback from their readers on their articles. They value the input that they receive in the digital agora, as news is now an iterative business. “The publication of a story today is the beginning of a process, not the end. It’s more of a conversation starter” (Kramer, 2013).

Reporters on Parliament Hill are not following the Government of Canada Twitter accounts with great interest. The information that is being shared is seen as pre-approved media lines part of a ministerial announcement or relating to an event. Media perceive the tweets are being a form a political marketing, conveying the current government’s platform for messaging.

- **Le Devoir:** *Les ministères c’est de la communication organisée. Ils diffusent leurs communiqués de presse, quelques annonces mais c’est sûr que c’est teinté forcément.*

Below is an example of a recent Industry Canada tweet demonstrating political marketing of the Economic Action Plan.

Industry Canada @industrycanada, 27 Sep
#didyouknow Canada’s #EAP13 is supporting manufacturers through lowest corporate taxes in G7 with \$1.4B in incentives for new equipment

The press also does not see members of the Government of Canada as adding anything pertinent to the information landscape. This could be a result of the Parliamentary Press Gallery reporters having direct access to federal political players as they are based in Ottawa. As they easily have access to a minister’s political staff, the ministers themselves

and staff in the Prime Minister’s office, some political reporters may not have the desire to report on Government of Canada initiatives per se but prefer to concentrate on strictly writing about the happenings in the political arena. This could explain that there is not an overwhelming interest in government messaging on social media from our media participants.

- **Postmedia:** *I don’t really pay attention to Government of Canada Twitter feeds. I am not consuming that information.*

Exclusivity and anonymity were two (2) findings that are important from members of the media. They do not necessarily want to engage the Government of Canada on Twitter – or any other player for that matter – as they aim to protect the uniqueness of their news stories until they are published. As the success of their work depends on the validity of their sources and the distinctiveness of their topics, this sets them apart from their fierce competition. Besides from the odd occasion to use Twitter to shame the federal government when information is not forthcoming, there is no advantage for them to engage the Government of Canada in a public forum.

- **La Presse:** *Je veux garder une certaine confidentialité des discussions avec les gens. Je ne veux pas que toute la planète soit au courant de ce que je raconte.*

Also, the anonymity of the corporate Twitter accounts can be a deterrent for media when using the information as a source. Although they agree that the tweets from the Government of Canada are credible, it is suggested that it would be valuable for the accounts to be associated to people within the organization, instead of dealing with unknown social media ghosts.

A dialogue on Twitter may not be occurring for a few reasons. Government communicators are struggling to entertain personal relationships with members of the press. Through some department’s terms of use and rules of engagement, it states that media should refrain from asking questions on Twitter and refers them to the media line. Some Government of Canada executives are also skeptical when it comes to being able to

converse on social media. A reporter even goes as far as qualifying that as being threatening for public servants:

- **Postmedia:** *I think it would be dangerous for them [government communicators] because the political masters are watching.*

This lack of trust has a direct impact on how the relationship between members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery and the Government of Canada is perceived as fundamentally different by the two groups. On the one hand, media define the relationship as quasi non-existent, filled with frustration by the length of time it takes to answer. On the other hand, Government of Canada communications executives invest significant effort and dedication into providing fact-based and timely responses to all incoming media queries.

While an utopic professional relationship between these two groups is impossible to achieve, there is a mutual respect that seems to have eroded away – to the point of media choosing to avoid interaction with the public service all together.

- **Postmedia:** *I often try to find ways to avoid having to deal with Government of Canada communicators to get the information some other way.*

This could explain the exponential growth in Access to Information and Privacy requests that have been submitted over the past years. As stated on the Information Commissioner of Canada’s website (www.oic-ci.gc.ca), “every person in Canada has the right to request access to government records – a right that is preserved through various federal, provincial and territorial laws across Canada. This right is essential to foster greater government accountability and transparency”. Estimated at over 30,000 requests a year, the number of complaints since April 1, 2013 to date has exploded by 50 per cent (Minsky, 2013). In the information age, access to data is expected to be easy, instant and where possible, free. We are witnessing the opposite of the desired effect where the system, which was designed to elicit transparency and openness, is suffocating, as it can hardly meet the increasing demand.

Government departments look at other departments or central agencies such as the Privy Council Office, the Deputy Minister Committee on Social Media and Policy Development or the Communications Community Office for best practices and advice when developing their social media policies. There is a national corporate strategy (*Guideline for External Use of Web 2.0*, Treasury Board Secretariat, 2011) that gives overarching principles of the guidelines to follow but no brain trust in government that gives advice, no overall strategic plan for Government of Canada, although that is currently being considered. Only half of the Government of Canada departments interviewed have an active social media policy specifically for their department (Environment Canada, Statistics Canada and Fisheries and Oceans). The strategies that do exist and are in place vary from putting out one tweet a day to actively responding to questions that are asked by a citizen on Twitter.

Media want to protect the exclusivity of their stories and therefore do not necessarily want to ask questions in a public forum. There is an appetite on behalf of reporters to conjure comments from news consumers online but most reporters agree that it would be problematic for the government to use Twitter effectively as the processes currently in place do not allow them to do so.

- **Freelancer:** *It is going to be very hard for government accounts to engage with people on Twitter if every tweet has to be approved. From what I have seen of the time frame of how long it takes to get approval, versus how fast Twitter goes, the debate will be gone by the time you have approval.*

In short, the findings in this study illustrate that there is a significant difference of perception of the Government of Canada's use of Twitter by both groups. The way in which the micro blog is used is also polarized which could contribute to the two parties' challenging relationship.

5.4. Strengths and weaknesses of the study

The strengths of this study revolved around tapping into a particular segment, which is still lagging in academic study to date, the media's perception of how government uses Twitter. More specifically, studies on the Canadian media and the Government of Canada's use of social media are negligible. Although there are studies that have been conducted in the United States (Artwick, 2013; Cozma & Chen, 2013) and in the United Kingdom (Vis, 2013) on this subject, this new data adds knowledge to Canadiana works.

The credibility of the participants that agreed to be interviewed was also a significant strength of this study. Qualified journalism is very time consuming, as hard deadlines no longer exist in the digital world. The Internet offers a constant flux of news stories from around the world, making it challenging to add value to the barrage of information that is so easily accessible. Stories need to get out as soon as possible therefore increasing the pressure on the professionals that produce the articles. The fact that they made themselves available to be interviewed despite their busy schedules is telling as they indicated being very interested in the results of the study as Twitter is profoundly impacting their business. The government executives that were interviewed also have tremendous credibility in their field that is ever changing and more demanding than ever before contributing to the 24/7 news cycle. Instead of anonymous responses, being able to identify the media outlets and the government departments that contributed to the research added strong meaningfulness to the results.

Resources permitting, a qualitative study of the Government of Canada's tweets could contribute to shed light on the content that is currently being shared and the type of messaging that is employed. Another perspective that could have complemented the study would have been interviews with citizens that are subscribers to Government of Canada twitter accounts. This would have allowed us to evaluate the perspective of the citizen when it comes to how they want to receive information from the government and their

thoughts around how public servants are currently using social media. Future research in these areas could contribute to achieving a better understanding of how to improve the Government of Canada’s reach on Twitter.

Also, this study sought to communicate results on a specific type of journalist – press reporters – to be able to make the results more significant. Further study on a wider sample of journalist types, including broadcast television or radio, and web-specific, could add to the understanding of the overall perception of the press towards Government of Canada communications on social media. Furthermore, this study is Ottawa-focused as most political news is centered where Parliament sits, in the nation’s capital. If the interview sample included more regional based participants (for both the reporters and the government executives), the results could have varied. Political sources may be more difficult to engage with when you are not based in Ottawa. Therefore, social media tools could be conduits for more direct access resulting in a different experience. Regional-based government employees may have an altered experience using Twitter as, based on the results of our research, social media is currently managed by headquarters staff.

Our research question asked *how do print reporters use Government of Canada tweets?* In short, the key findings listed above reveal that based on the current relationship with government communicators, the nature of the material and the lack on engagement on social media, members of the press attach minimal importance and attention to Government of Canada tweets. Although it sees value in conversing on Twitter, the policies and procedures currently in place at the government level make it difficult for departments to achieve success and fully deploy the potential of social media tools.

5.5. Lessons learned

This section will operationalize the lessons learned from the results of our interviews. As presented earlier in this chapter, the government's engagement on social media can be said to be:

- Limited, as most reporters agree that their relationship with government communicators has little value added; and
- Biased, as the information that is provided by government communicators is perceived by some members of the press is as a marketing ploy.

Below are some modest contributions to the most pressing needs that could be addressed should the Government of Canada wish to optimize the use of its Twitter accounts and increase the functionality and usefulness of its presence on social media. The recommendations outlined below relate specifically to government organizations as the overt emphasis of this study is on the Government of Canada's use of Twitter. Although recommendations destined to reporters might have brought some value-added to this research, the researcher felt that her lack of knowledge with journalistic practices has impeded her from providing any valid advice to members of that profession.

As the volume of information available to reporters on social media is exponential, it can be a daunting task to curate. We have heard from our reporter group that they follow many people on Twitter but are not necessarily aware of which government departments have Twitter accounts, per se. Since the results of the interviews have conveyed that they use the online community as a source to produce newsworthy material, it seems appropriate to make it easy for them to access available Twitter accounts. This is also in line with one of the proposals in the *Draft Guideline on Official Use of Social Media* (Treasury Board of Canada, 2013).

Recommendation 1. Create an index of official Government of Canada social media accounts and promote the use of Twitter on the www.gc.ca site and consistently on the homepages of all federal government departments. Furthermore, create a top ten list of most used hashtags and make them available to build following and maintain a daily presence.

Members of the media agree that the Government of Canada accounts are a trustworthy source of information. News consumers also believe that journalists are credible and treat them as opinion leaders when it comes to reporting the news. When links are included in the tweets, this can help journalists and citizens alike validate the information sources, as they often contain links that refer to another communication products hosted on a website. In order to establish credibility in the eyes of citizens, a vehicle already exists on Twitter to establish the credibility of the accounts, called verified accounts (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Environment Canada’s Twitter account, which hosts a verified account certification <https://twitter.com/environmentca>



In keeping with the credibility theme, most journalists who were interviewed have indicated their frustration of not knowing the Government of Canada Twitter author who is posting information. Associating accounts with specific people within the department could serve as one way to build the relationship with members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery. This is a way for departments to increase their visibility, get facts out to the public and

generate discussion by trusting some highly skilled public servants to communicate using social media. This may assist the members of the press when writing articles by certifying the Government of Canada tweets as a trusted source.

Recommendation 2. In order to increase the trustworthiness of the Government of Canada activities on Twitter, departments should apply to obtain the verified accounts validation by Twitter to establish optimal credibility in their respective fields. Also, key people within Government of Canada organizations, such as the Director General of Communications or senior spokespersons should author Twitter accounts to increase the credibility and reliability of their posts.

The interviews have allowed us to obtain a better understanding of the processes in place when the Government of Canada posts a message on Twitter. We have observed that while there is an overall social media policy, many departments have their own policies that are at different stages of development or implementation. Federal government employees qualify the processes as heavy and cumbersome, hindering them from being able to answer questions swiftly or enter into dialogue with citizens. Some departments are more advanced and are better at using the tool than others. While pockets of expertise exist across departments, they are mostly working in silos and could benefit from working with experts in social media to share best practices and increase the harmonization of effective processes.

Recommendation 3. Create a central social media brain trust who could act as consultants for other government departments to build their Twitter expertise. Providing streamlined advice, lessons learned and a strong coordination role could benefit communicators across the Government of Canada.

In order for the Government of Canada to be immersed in social media, it must let go of some of the exercised control as its full potential can only be achieved once it is open to all possibilities. Of course, members of the public may disapprove or criticize the government and will have the opportunity to express those views in a globally accessible space. While we must consider that the public sector does operate a complex business and

hosts over 262,000 employees⁴, the modalities behind operationalizing how they should engage in conversations with members of the public is not a small task. The result of a transparent and democratic social system cannot remain a deterrent from engaging on Twitter as it is the very essence of the Internet.

“If social media is used correctly, it will supply the ideas, insight, support, concerns, and satisfaction of the public. It allows for a government to be more in tune with the citizens and to truly run the country as a democracy by stripping away the politics and getting to the core of what matters” (Qualman, 2013, p.61).

In order to exploit social media to its fullest, government executives must consider moving beyond one-way communication by responding quickly to citizens' queries and provide immediate feedback to avoid what is considered the black hole of their government social media experience. These practices have been used by businesses for years and have demonstrated positive results, such as Qualman (2013) suggests with his world of mouth strategy. Despite the results of this study indicating that there is no substantial appetite from members of the print media to follow Government of Canada departments on Twitter, it is beneficial to continue to actively engage with citizens online. As stated earlier, the lack of dialogue between government officials and reporters could be a result of several factors including not receiving timely or personalized responses to questions or the relationship hindrances such as public shaming which were strongly characterized in Chapter 4. While government departments are still in the early stages of Twitter development, there is value added in continuing its use in order to evaluate its effectiveness through time.

Reporters are not engaging Government of Canada employees on Twitter as they anticipate not receiving adequate answers due to the limits of the tool such as the succinctness of content. They do sometimes engage in the occasional shaming tweet out of frustration of not receiving answers to their questions. Concurrently, some government

⁴ The population size of the Federal Public Service in 2013 is 262,817 employees (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2013).

departments have posted terms and conditions on their Twitter accounts that stipulate that media should not post questions on the tool but instead use the traditional means of communication to acquire answers. Indeed, these parties are not dialoguing with each other, as the current *modus operandi* of message control hinders them from doing so. This impacts the opportunity to further grow new avenues of policy making and prospects of e-democracy.

Recommendation 4. Engage with citizens to build credibility and a strong following: acknowledge receipt of questions, thank Twitter users for their comments, answer queries within the limits of the tool. Be present, let loose, use it, learn from it, embrace it. Since the current situation allows only minimal involvement with reporters, the Government of Canada has an opportunity to get involved in discussions directly with citizens. Build a following which will serve well in times of crisis, actively participate in online community exchanges to be able to benefit from the available social production.

Some federal departments have been quick to dive into social media and use it as they “don’t want to be the last department to leverage new technologies and new tools” (Fisheries and Oceans). As most have indicated that they see a constant increase in followers and qualify that there is a benefit to using Twitter, the results of using social media are vastly unknown. Social media offers an opportunity to measure the reach and impact of the message in real time and at low cost. Building a strong following can be advantageous, especially in times of public health crisis or safety situations.

- **Freelancer:** *Those are powerful tools in times of crisis where you really want to get the message out to as many people as possible...You probably want to build us a Twitter following over the years with health tips where you become the trusted source for health information.*

This recommendation is in line with the *Draft Guideline on Official Use of Social Media* (Treasury Board of Canada, 2013), which proposes to create performance measures such as metrics and qualitative data to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of Twitter platforms when communicating with Canadians.

Recommendation 5. Find out how the Government of Canada is doing using social media by conducting public opinion analysis on social media use when it comes to the Government of Canada.

These recommendations aim to contribute to the optimization of social media use for the Government of Canada. Their goal is to improve the use of Twitter and attempt to positively influence the relationship between the public organizations and digital users, even if the gain is only in a virtual manner.

6. Chapter Six – Conclusion

Over the years, social media have helped us come together and facilitate change, through events such as the Occupy Wall Street movement or the Quebec student protest in 2012 against raising post-secondary tuition costs. We have ostensibly become a technological society that relies on the web and its mobile reincarnations for information, entertainment, business and relationships. The incessant stream of digital technologies and platforms even encourages us to be more engaged politically, use our brain differently (Sparrow, 2011) and binds us together, morphing us at times towards a more connected worldwide humanity. This thesis has demonstrated some of the benefits of using social media, such as the increased speed at which information can be distributed and the opportunity to connect directly with Canadians. This is especially relevant when it comes to collaboration and the impacts that e-democracy can have on society.

While some countries are jumping on the social media bandwagon – diving into all the facets and possibilities offered by social media – the connection between the Government of Canada and social media is, at best, at its infancy stage. The Government of Canada participants currently use social media mainly as a one-way communication tool to disseminate messages to citizens and share information about its programs and policies. The government is participating using digital content and capitalizing on the amplifier function of the medium to echo positive ideas and share facts. Most government officials interviewed for this project do so relatively well. They use Twitter as a broadcast mechanism to deliver pre-approved messages. This is in line with Rogers' (2003) adoption of innovation theory, as government departments are keen to using social media tools as they perceive it as being advantageous to communicate their messages. Statistics Canada's does a stellar job at responding to questions from citizens. Its mandate of releasing facts allows it to engage in those positive exchanges more easily than others.

While some government departments do answer questions they receive on social media, they typically do not engage in debate or conversations online. Our research revealed that Government of Canada officials do not engage in conversation on Twitter with members of the public or the press. Departments are expected to mitigate any negative aspects that social media tools propose such as the nature of the comments and the anonymity of some of the online proponents by either responding with pre-existing messages or ignoring the queries completely if they are seen to be contentious.

Governments cannot act as social entities and government policy is not easily explained in 140 characters. Their resistance to opening the online door to comments from the general public is not atypical. It is not the role of public servants to share their opinion on matters that involve public policies and programs. For government, as with businesses, monitoring feedback and responding to queries is extremely labour-intensive, not to mention that it can become exponential as tweets can quickly be shared to a massive audience. Return on investment is difficult to isolate due to cross over with other communications tools where comparable information is available such as the web, press releases or public enquiry telephone lines like 1-800-O-Canada. Never mind the immense investment in human resources and capital needed to maintain the response momentum, especially in a deficit reduction environment where budgets are tight and all expenses are reviewed with increased scrutiny.

The Government of Canada provides services to over 35 million people. How can it start to consider engaging in meaningful conversation with even a small segment of its citizens? Using Twitter as a platform to distribute information, as a sort of electronic flyer, building a following with an audience that is interested in its information, products and services can be valuable, especially in times of crisis. As Robert Rabinovitch, former CBC/Radio-Canada and CEO once said, “we can't be all things to all people, but we have to be something to everybody” (“View from the Top: Value Equation,” 2002). The Government of Canada operates in a rigid process environment where many levels of approval hinder

the high velocity opportunities of social media. For the benefit of a well-functioning society, it must weigh a wealth of considerations in the moral, legal, ethical or privacy arenas. The complexity of protecting those values – while entertaining an online dialogue without expressing an opinion on any political or sensitive issues – is a difficult balance to maintain. This, combined with the fact that the Government of Canada houses over 90 federal departments, agencies and crown corporations, makes it quasi unreasonable to consider entertaining an active dialogue on Twitter. Although Qualman (2013) suggests through his theory of socialnomics that companies can benefit from participating in the discussion that their consumers are having online, when it comes to the public sector, the powerful tool can be extremely challenging to manage. Responding to citizens online can quickly become a gargantuan task. Nevertheless, it remains possible...to a certain extent.

Judith Martin, commonly named Ms. Manners, once said “let us make a special effort to stop communicating with each other, so we can have some conversation” (1982, p.165). There are some queries that the Government of Canada can unquestionably excel at responding to, for example, how much rain did the Outaouais region receive last September or how to apply for a patent. In fact, it is the government's role to inform the population of new policies or changes to existing ones. Public servants must feel empowered to be able to respond to citizens, regardless of the platform chosen by the members of the public. In this case, Twitter can be used to generate some responses to enquiries and federal departments should be encouraged do so in a timely manner. In that sense, policies should include responsabilization and empowerment to trust government employees to be able to dialogue with Canadians on any factual issues that emerge in order to serve the Canadian public.

Our study reveals that members of the press do not engage federal departments on Twitter either, except for the occasional shaming tweet when they are frustrated by the responses or lack thereof. The desire for journalists to protect their exclusivity when it comes to writing a story was a revealing finding as it is strategically ill-advised nor desirable

to inform readers or competitors about an upcoming story when it is at the researching stage. Although the press interviewees profess to use Twitter regularly and with great appetite when it comes to consuming and distributing information, they are guarded when considering the information from the Government of Canada. Contrary to our initial thinking, the reasons for this reserve are not related to the credibility of the information posted by federal departments as the participants reveal that they find federal Twitter accounts trustworthy. The lack of interest towards the federal Twitter accounts comes from the nature and extent of information shared via the tool and the non-engagement from the Government of Canada that ensues following an online prompt. Results also demonstrated that the press’ lack of interest stems from the anonymity of the corporate government accounts and the damaged relationship between members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery and Government of Canada officials due an unparalleled level of control of information by the current government.

Almost all the reporters interviewed feel strongly that government communicators have little value added in the public relations landscape and are increasingly frustrated with the responses that they receive, when they do in fact receive one. This is at odds with the perception of the relationship by the public servants, who continue to deliver what they consider to be appropriate media responses, to the best of their ability and within the confines of a bureaucratic and highly politicized environment. In addition, just as journalists have to remain neutral when writing a news article or tweeting, civil servants also need to use Twitter strategically and refrain from expressing their personal opinion. This can prove to be challenging for both groups as Twitter is largely used as a commentary tool for members of the general public and opinion leaders alike.

The concept of e-democracy, for the most part, seems out of reach for government institutions, which are inching towards openness at a snail pace. A democratic society can only truly progress when it empowers its citizens to speak out and be heard by their government, and not only on election day. As McLuhan states, “we look at the present

through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967)". Social media is not a revolution. It is the current evolution of communications technology, which can only innovate and evolve when learning from the past and applying open models to the future, relative to Rogers' perceived relative advantage attribute.

Recommendations included in this thesis, although they do not profess to eradicate the obstacles that surround social media use for public organizations, can serve to mitigate some of the worries from members of the press when it comes to using microblog tools. Focussing primarily on the dynamics behind the public sector's use of Twitter was a determinant editorial choice made at the outset of this research project. While it is perfectly legitimate to desire more details about the reporters' use of the microblog, our primary focus remained centered on the Government of Canada's results using this relatively new technological platform.

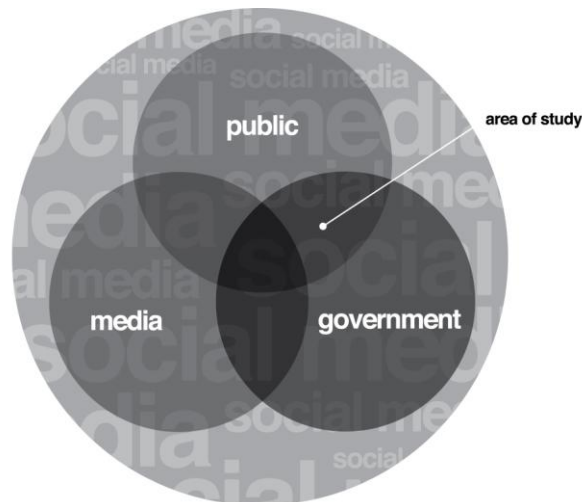
Recommendations include creating a center of expertise to provide a strong advisory function within government, a database of available Twitter accounts and most used hashtags, and start on initial stages of engagement to build a following that can allow instant distribution of important facts in times of crisis. These improvements could contribute to the optimization of social media use for the Government of Canada, working to clarify the blurred lines that currently surround the government's position when using Twitter. The results of the research allowed for a modest contribution in applying Rogers' theory to a new field of investigation, providing tangible insights into the consequences of the adoption of a technological innovation in the public sector as well as in congruent social science fields. Despite the Government of Canada's policy (Treasury Board Secretariat, 2011) instructing all departments to tweet, the findings of this thesis challenged the validity of a one-model fits all framework in that government departments are far from marching to the same beat when it comes to appraising the level and intensity of their Twitter performance. In that sense, our results demonstrated that there are a plethora of factors that come into play in understanding the extent to which

different agents adopt Twitter. Future research might want to examine more closely the individual contribution of some of those factors in determining how social media get deployed in a public service context.

6.1. Further research opportunities

As detailed in the discussion chapter, there are future research undertakings that could allow a more in-depth study of how social media are used in the public sector. As the Government of Canada continues to advance in its use of social media, it would be worthwhile to enquire into if, and how, citizens want to engage with government using social media. Interviewing members of the public on how they perceive the Government of Canada’s use of Twitter could produce a higher level of knowledge about the online relationship between the groups (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Future area of study



Furthermore, in order to understand the current alignment gap between existing social media policy and current practices, a content analysis of the information and frequency at which content is being tweeted could prove to be fruitful exercise. Using this

methodology could allow the evaluation of a broader number of federal departments, including agencies that currently tweet the most compared to other government departments. It could serve to obtain a better understanding of the existing online federal landscape and get a more in depth understanding of the established best practices in the *milieu*.

Finally, further research is required to establish the emerging opportunities and challenges of deeper government engagement in the electronic agora and the extent to which this is desirable. Public service organizations have to ensure return on investment, since not pursuing social media opportunities could negatively impact their reputation and their branding. Of course, engaging on social media has a price. But there may be a larger price for not being present. Studying the impact of social media on the Government of Canada's reach through its messaging would be a valuable exercise. This could help establish how valid it is to consider engaging in conversation online and the ramifications of an increased investment or re-alignment of resources needed to consider pushing the government towards a more modern communication agenda.

6.2. Epilogue

Although there is a deep desire to promote e-democracy and promoting the benefits of global online communities, the complexity of the government operationalizing a sophisticated, conversation-based interaction using Twitter is staggering. The mere intricacy of the implementation of this mechanism is imposing. The public servants – specialists in their field – must be continually available and extremely knowledgeable to appropriately host the conversation at hand. They must master the parameters or rules when engaging citizens online while minding the commentary tweets. Not to mention the implications of the resources involved in executing this daunting task. Add the responsibility of tweeting in both official languages and the multitude of complex projects that are worked on by over 275,000 public servants Canada-wide is no doubt an overwhelming feat.

The results of this study have demonstrated that there are some advantages for the Government of Canada to communicate with citizens using social media. To inspire community engagement can be beneficial for societies. Be it municipal, provincial or federal, governing in the digital age makes the usage of social media for policy-making an extremely intricate exercise. So many features are contemplated when actively conversing on Twitter including resources, training, policies and procedures, ethical issues, linguistic challenges, and many more. The use of the microblog is influenced by a myriad of multi-factorial aspects, which influence the ever-morphing communications tool and is considered virtually organic. One must consider what a government can gain by fully opening a true online dialogue? Is the government elected to govern or to chat? And above all, what are the most concrete benefits to be derived for a governmental body to adopt these modern communication tools?

The Government of Canada is right in the middle of this dilemma. In order to shed light on these questions and in the spirit of moving forward, it could be valuable for the government to be perceived as innovating when using social media. The attempt to engage a dialogue using Twitter can demonstrate the aspiration to evolve and therefore, could positively contribute to the e-democracy effort. The Government of Canada could consider hosting periodical online discussions. A pilot project involving cross-department engagement, where a "Twitter talk" is opened to members of the public in order to gather citizen intelligence on a particular subject is not only desirable but also quite feasible. Framed in a controlled setting where the government hosts the chat, subjects could propose ideas for the Speech from the Throne, the annual budget or policy changes to the employment insurance program. A short 30-minute window where exchanges are encouraged on an important upcoming government activity can result in some amazing discoveries. A society that creates collective intelligence is at "an age of sharing and understanding the new power of the commons, and it's an age of empowerment and of freedom" (Tapscott, 2012).

Of course, there is always room for improvement when it comes to citizen engagement. It is not realistic to consider that the Government of Canada cannot afford to be present on social media as two in three Canadians are using Facebook and Twitter on a daily basis. It is legitimate to acknowledge the factual information requests public officials receive. But it remains a very difficult task for the government to become a proponent for social media as a conversation tool. Regardless of how deep the engagement or the level of dialogue instigated, by definition and design it will never be enough. Our respondents are aware of the potential of Twitter and are cognisant of the limits of the digital conversation model. Nevertheless, the relative importance of new media adoption in any government agenda remains fundamentally organic and certainly a work in progress.

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Appendix A – Consent Form

Title of the Study: **To Tweet or not to Tweet? An investigative analysis of the Government of Canada’s social media practices**

Researcher: Renée S. David, M.A. Candidate
Department of Communication,
Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa

Supervisor: Prof. Pierre C. Bélanger
Department of Communications,
Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Renée S. David, supervised by Professor Pierre C. Bélanger.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to better understand how the Government of Canada uses social media to communicate with members of the Canadian media. This study aims to outline the government’s current use of Twitter and how members of the media interact with the government using social media.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of voluntarily answering questions during an informal interview with Renée S. David. The interview will take place [insert location] at a time convenient for me. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail no risks to me whatsoever.

Benefits of Participation: I will not experience any personal benefit from my participation in this study. My participation will contribute however to the advancement of understanding the Government of Canada’s use of social media, and specifically the use of Twitter. This will allow the establishment of a strengths-and-weaknesses, opportunities-and-threats (SWOT) analysis as well as recommendations for the government to consider for future policy frameworks.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for supplementing publicly available information about the Government of Canada’s social media practices, and that my confidentiality will be protected by maintaining my anonymity and by using any information that I provide during the interview for no other purpose than for Renée David’s thesis study. **Anonymity** will be protected in the following manner: my name will not be used but my organization will be identified; my gender will not be identified, my job title will be paraphrased, no other information will be used in the study that might identify me.

Permission for the recruiting of senior government officials and media has been obtained by the individuals being interviewed, if needed.

Conservation of Data: The data collected consists of all paper copies (i.e. consent forms, research notes, drafts of research paper) and electronic recordings of the interviews saved on Renée S. David’s digital voice recorder. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data. The data will be stored and locked in the supervisor’s computer on campus for five (5) years after which it will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered in the form of interview recordings and/or any notes until the time of the withdrawal will be erased and will not be used in the thesis.

Audio Recording: The researcher has requested permission to record the interview, in order to help ensure that the information that I provide is accurately documented. I understand that I am under no obligation to agree to this request.

I have indicated my decision, by marking the appropriate box.

- I consent to the audio recording of the interview.
- I do not consent to the audio recording of the interview.

I understand that direct quotes from my interview may be used in the researcher’s thesis. As a result, I agree to be contacted if necessary to verify the accuracy of transcripts.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Renée S. David of the Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa. The research is under the supervision of Pierre C. Bélanger.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the:

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity
University of Ottawa
Tabaret Hall
550 Cumberland Street
Room 154
Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5
Tel: 613-562-5387
Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant’s name: _____

Participant’s signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher’s signature: _____

Annexe A – Formulaire de consentement

Titre du projet : **To Tweet or not to Tweet? An investigative analysis of the Government of Canada's social media practices**

Chercheur: Renée S. David, candidate à la maîtrise
Département de communication,
Faculté des arts, Université d'Ottawa

Superviseur: Prof. Pierre C. Bélanger
Département de communication,
Faculté des arts, Université d'Ottawa

Invitation à participer: Je suis invité(e) à participer à la recherche nommée ci-haut menée par Renée S. David, supervisée par professeur Pierre C. Bélanger.

But de l'étude: Le but de l'étude est mieux saisir comment le gouvernement du Canada utilise les médias sociaux pour communiquer avec la presse canadienne. Cette étude veut dresser le portrait de l'usage actuel de Twitter, par le gouvernement du Canada, et comment les membres de la presse interagissent avec le gouvernement en utilisant les médias sociaux.

Participation: Ma participation consistera essentiellement à répondre à des questions verbales lors d'un entretien informel avec Renée S. David. Les séances sont prévues avoir lieu [inclure le lieu] à une heure qui me convient. L'entrevue aura une durée d'environ 45 minutes à une heure.

Risques: Ma participation à cette recherche n'entraîne aucun risque personnel.

Bienfaits: Ma participation à cette recherche n'aura pas de bénéfice personnel. Par contre, ma participation contribuera à l'avancement du savoir de l'utilisation des médias sociaux par le gouvernement du Canada, plus spécifiquement l'utilisation de Twitter. Cet exercice permettra l'analyse de forces et faiblesse, occasions et angle-morts. De plus, elle permettra de mettre de l'avant des recommandations pour le gouvernement lors de futurs cadres politiques.

Confidentialité et anonymat: J'ai reçu l'assurance du chercheur que l'information que je partagerai restera strictement confidentielle. Je comprends que le contenu ne soit utilisé que pour appuyer l'information déjà disponible dans le domaine public au sujet des pratiques des médias sociaux par le gouvernement du Canada et selon le respect de la

confidentialité de mon nom et que l'information partagée sera seulement utilisée que pour la thèse de Renée S. David. **L'anonymat** est garanti de la façon suivante : mon nom ne sera pas utilisé mais mon organisation sera identifiée, mon sexe ne sera pas dévoilé, mon titre sera paraphrasé et aucune autre information qui pourrait m'identifier sera dévoilée.

La **permission** pour le recrutement des cadres supérieurs du gouvernement et pour la presse a été obtenue pour les individus interviewés, si nécessaire.

Conservation des données: Les données recueillies consistent en toutes les copies papier (c.-à-d., les lettres de consentement, les notes de recherche et les ébauches du document de recherche). Les données sur bande électronique seront sauvegardées sur l'appareil digital de Renée S. David. Seulement le chercheur et le superviseur de thèse auront accès aux données. Elles seront conservées de façon sécuritaire sur l'ordinateur du superviseur sur le campus pour une durée de cinq (5) ans. Elles seront ensuite détruites.

Participation volontaire: Ma participation à la recherche est volontaire et je suis libre de me retirer en tout temps, et/ou refuser de répondre à certaines questions, sans subir de conséquences négatives. Si je choisis de me retirer de l'étude, les données recueillies jusqu'à ce moment seront détruites et ne seront pas utilisées pour cette étude.

Enregistrement audio: Le chercheur demande la permission d'enregistrer l'entrevue pour permettre que l'information qui sera présentée est documentée de façon appropriée. Je ne suis pas sous aucune obligation de consentir à cette demande.

J'indique ci-dessous le résultat de ma décision, en cochant la boîte appropriée.

- J'autorise l'enregistrement audio de cette entrevue.
- Je n'autorise pas l'enregistrement audio de cette entrevue.

Je constate comprendre que des citations directes résultant de mon entrevue pourraient être utilisées pour la thèse du chercheur. J'autorise alors d'être joint si nécessaire pour valider l'exactitude des transcriptions.

Acceptation: Je, _____, accepte de participer à cette recherche menée par Renée S. David du Département de communication, Faculté des arts, laquelle recherche est supervisée par Pierre C. Bélanger.

Pour tout renseignement additionnel concernant cette étude, je peux communiquer avec le chercheur ou son superviseur.

Pour tout renseignement sur les aspects éthiques de cette recherche, je peux joindre :

Responsable de l'éthique en recherche
Université d'Ottawa
Pavillon Tabaret
550, rue Cumberland
Pièce 154
613 562-5387
Courriel : ethics@uottawa.ca

Il y a deux copies du formulaire de consentement, dont une copie que je peux garder.

Nom du participant: _____

Signature du participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature du chercheur: _____

Appendix B – Letter to Prospective Participants

Renée S. David, M.A. Candidate

Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa

Dear Participant,

As an M.A. candidate from the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa, I am conducting a research project titled ***To Tweet or not to Tweet? An investigative analysis of the Government of Canada’s social media practices.***

Having received the approval of the University’s Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, I am presently seeking volunteers to participate in interviews on their experience using Twitter to communicate.

The participants in this study will be:

- Government communications senior officials chosen based on the number of followers on their departmental Twitter accounts.
- Canadian print/web reporters from the Parliamentary Press Gallery in Ottawa.

Your participation will be needed in the form of an informal interview that should not exceed sixty minutes. In this study, your confidentiality and anonymity will be assured and your name will not appear in any documentation that is produced however, your organization will be identified. You are also responsible for obtaining your employer’s permission, if needed, before taking part of the study.

Your identity and that of all participants will be kept private and confidential, so that the nature of the questions posed is such that there is no risk to you. The answers that you provide in the interview will be audiotaped and, later, transcribed, printed and kept strictly confidential at the University of Ottawa.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated. If you are interested in participating, please let me know your availability and we can meet after work hours in a place of your choosing.

Thank you for your support and contribution to this research. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Renée S. David

TRADUCTION

Annexe B – Lettre aux participants éventuels

Renée S. David, candidate à la maîtrise
Département de communication, Faculté des arts
Université d’Ottawa

Cher participant, chère participante,

Comme candidate à la maîtrise du département de communication de l’Université d’Ottawa, je travaille à un projet de recherche intitulé ***To Tweet or not to Tweet? An investigative analysis of the Government of Canada’s social media practices.***

Ayant reçu l’approbation du bureau de d’éthique en recherche de l’Université, je suis à la recherche de bénévoles pour participer à des entrevues au sujet de leur utilisation de Twitter pour communiquer.

Les participants de cette étude seront:

- Cadres supérieurs en communication au gouvernement qui ont été choisi sur la base du nombre d’abonnés sur les sites Twitter ministériels.
- Membres de la presse canadienne, spécifiquement de la presse écrite ou du web de la galerie de la presse parlementaire à Ottawa.

Votre participation consistera d’une entrevue informelle d’une durée d’environ une heure. Pour les fins de cette étude, votre confidentialité et anonymat seront assurés et votre nom n’apparaîtra pas dans la documentation qui sera produite. Par contre, votre organisation sera identifiée. Vous êtes aussi responsable d’obtenir la permission de votre employeur, si nécessaire, avant de participer à cette étude.

Votre identité et celle de tous les participants sera protégée et gardée confidentielle et la nature des questions posées ne présentera aucun risque pour vous. Les réponses que vous donnerez lors de l’entrevue seront enregistrées, et plus tard transcrites, imprimées et garder confidentielles à l’université d’Ottawa.

Votre participation sera grandement appréciée. Si vous désirez participer, veuillez me communiquer votre disponibilité. Nous pourrions fixer une rencontre après les heures de travail à un lieu de votre choix.

En vous remerciant de votre appui et de votre apport à cette recherche. N’hésitez pas à communiquer avec moi pour toutes questions.

Recevez mes salutations distinguées.

Renée S. David

Appendix C – Interview Guide

Renée S. David, M.A. Candidate

Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa

Title of the Study: **To Tweet or not to Tweet? An investigative analysis of the Government of Canada’s social media practices**

This research seeks to answer the following question: *How does the Government of Canada currently use social media?*

The results are expected to produce a strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis and recommendations for the government to consider for future policy frameworks on this issue.

Introduction (approx. 5 minutes)

Thank you very much for meeting with me today. This is an exploratory research on how the Government of Canada uses social media, specifically Twitter. Your participation will help to ensure an accurate understanding of the current government communication environment. The results of this research could have practical applications and facilitate further research interest in Government of Canada communication. I am investigating four areas of research:

- a) how print/web reporters and the Government of Canada use Twitter;
- b) if the Government of Canada’s use of Twitter is perceived by journalists as being credible;
- c) if print/web journalists and senior executives in the Government of Canada mutually use it to get information and to what end; and
- d) if a dialogue exists between the parties, what is its nature and frequency?

Consent form / Confidentiality

This is a standard process followed at all Canadian universities when primary research is being conducted that helps protect participants.

I’ll remind you that your confidentiality and anonymity is assured throughout this study.

- Your name will not appear in any documentation that is produced as a result of this research.

- If there is a question that you would prefer not to respond to, please inform me and we will go on to the next question.
- You also have the option of withdrawing from this study at any time.

The interview portion of our meeting is expected to take between 45 and 60 minutes.

Questions (between 45-55 minutes)

Government officials	Journalists
<p>RQ1. How does your department use Twitter? (10 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you use Twitter? • What prompts you to use it? • How functional do you think your department’s use of Twitter is? • What are the benefits of using Twitter? What are the drawbacks? • What issues can impact your use of Twitter? 	<p>RQ1. How do you use Twitter? (10 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is it important? • What prompts you to use it? • What are the benefits of using Twitter? What are the drawbacks? • What issues can impact your use of Twitter? • How does the Government of Canada use Twitter?
<p>RQ2. How credible is the Government of Canada when using social media? (15 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What value does your organization place on using social media for communicating with reporters? • Is this a value that is shared by your colleagues in other Communications Branches? • How would you describe your department's relationships with the press? • What role does multi-way communication play in your organization’s communications strategy/approach? • Is the Government of Canada credible when using Twitter to convey messages or make announcements? • To what extent does the press influence what type of tweets or how you respond to twitter traffic online? 	<p>RQ2. How credible is the Government of Canada when using social media? (15 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What value does your organization place on using social media for communicating? • Is this a value that is shared by your colleagues in your organization or in the reporter community? • How would you describe your relationships with government communicators? • What role does multi-way communication play in your organization’s communications strategy/plans? • Is the Government of Canada credible when using Twitter to convey messages or make announcements? • What role does responding to queries on Twitter have on your professional practice?

Government officials	Journalists
<p>RQ3. Do you rely on Twitter to get information from the press? (15 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What structures or practices within your department are the most helpful when using social media? • What structures are the most limiting? • What would need to change to make it easier to dialogue using social media? 	<p>RQ3. Do you rely on Twitter to get information from the Government of Canada? (15 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What structures or practices are the most helpful when using social media? • What structures are the most limiting? • What would need to change to make it easier to dialogue using social media?
<p>RQ4. Has your department responded to queries or engaged in dialogue on Twitter? (10 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you received any questions on Twitter from members of the media? • How are media queries or feedback received on Twitter responded to? • What was the result of the dialogue? • What do you consider to be the ideal frequency of sending tweets? 	<p>RQ4. Has the government responded to queries or engaged in dialogue on Twitter? (10 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was the query received on Twitter responded to? • What was the result of the dialogue? • What is your expectation when engaging with the Government of Canada on Twitter?

If required and time permitting: Is there anything that we’ve missed that would be important for me to know?

That concludes the questions I have for you today. Thank you again for sharing your expertise. I will be sending you a transcript of our discussion for your review. Would you like to receive a copy of the study once it has been defended and published?

Appendix D – Ethics Approval Notice

File Number: 03-13-02

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 05/03/2013



Université d'Ottawa **University of Ottawa**
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice

Social Science and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Pierre	Bélanger	Arts / Communication	Supervisor
Renée	David	Arts / Communication	Student Researcher

File Number: 03-13-02

Type of Project: Master's Thesis

Title: To Tweet or Not to Tweet: An Investigative Analysis of the Government of Canada's Social Media Practices

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
05/03/2013	05/02/2014	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:

N/A