Newsgathering In the Harper Era:
Adaptation and the perpetuation of sameness

by

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Abstract

At the heart of political journalism is the gathering of information about the affairs of government, necessary for developing public opinion and keeping the government accountable. Under the current Conservative government mandate, political journalists have experienced heightened controls over information, rendering access to primary sources very limited. In turn these journalists have developed a reliance on secondary sources and methods to collect information for their stories. The barriers set in place by the government and its use of PR in the management of news have created a distance between journalists and their sources of vital information, as well as furthered the perpetuation of sameness within the news industry. Political journalists operate under the expectation that they will practice newsgathering and engage in the tug-of-war over information with their sources while upholding the values of transparency and journalistic truth. Currently, however, their primary source is increasingly dominating this dynamic, impeding journalists' ability to fulfill such expectations and continue to keep government accountable.

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Introduction

This thesis examines how journalists function in the Canadian political sphere, how journalists practice their craft and how they arrive at the information they use within their stories. This thesis surveys the practices they employ to gather information: their researching, their interviews and their verification methods. Most importantly, it examines the relationships journalists have with their sources, in particular government or political sources. This thesis examines how journalists operate in an age of managed political communications.

Since the 1990s, the Canadian political sphere has seen a rise of ‘court government’ (Savoie, 1999). Power within government, rather than being spread out through elected members, has slowly become concentrated within a select group of people: the Prime Minister and select Cabinet Ministers (for example the Minister of Finance). Also included in this group are key people in advisory roles; lobbyists, pollsters and select senior public servants. With this, the management of government affairs has in turn been controlled by a small group of officials, at the center of which is the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO). A large part of this control is exercised over the communication of government’s policies, decisions and programs to the public. Since the 1990s, professional public relations (PR) practitioners have come to be included within that circle, emulating the corporate world’s adoption of PR and persuasive communications in the management of public image (Kozolanka, 2006).

This rise of court government coincides with developments in new technology and the media industry. Canada's industry has grown both in the number and size of media outlets, and in its move towards the 24-hr news cycle. The Internet and new media have allowed for the proliferation of news platforms, more vehicles through which to communicate with the public, and a need for more content. For the government, over time this has signaled a need for more messages and a requirement to better manage those messages. While communication with the public is not a new feature of government, the use of professional PR and strategic communications has become more widespread and overt within the general activities of government.

The Harper Conservative government, which came to power in 2006, has shown a deep adherence to this style of court government. Increasingly over its mandate, it has made clear how the overall management of government affairs is controlled by the central office of the PMO. It has been highly criticized for this control, particularly in relation to its focus on information and news management. The Prime Minister has been accused of avoiding the media in traditional areas such as the Ins and Out of Question Period, opting to use the back door of the House of Commons. This government has been accused of muzzling civil servants like scientists, doctors and auditors, muzzling its own Ministers and requiring an absolute toeing of the party line (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2010). Journalists and the industry claim that information control has reached new heights with the hyper management of all aspects of communications, including pre-selecting journalist for questions at press conferences and disallowing outside photographers and

videographers within press conferences as well (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2010).

While the federal bureaucracy is meant to remain non-partisan, the Canadian government has increased pressures on it to provide pro-government messaging in its communication with the public (Aucoin, 2008). This current government has increased controls over information and communications government-wide. It has developed an impressive communications apparatus, with well-funded and active professional communications departments throughout the federal government. Strategic, streamlined communications and messaging has been a defining feature of the Harper Conservative Government. It has made communications a key part of its political activity through the centralization of messages and information by the PMO.

This focus on political strategic communications corresponds to changes in the media industry, where media platforms and content are converging, while outlets conglomerate. With news being a profit-driven business, these changes have meant cuts in the newsroom as well as a dependence on new technology. The 24-hr news cycle has increased demand for content across platforms in shorter periods of time. Journalists are pressured to produce more work and faster, but are still expected to adhere to the standards of their profession.

There are claims that journalism is undergoing fundamental changes, that the changes in the nature of technology today have a direct impact on the practices of the profession (Fenton, 2010; Hargreaves, 2003). The Internet provides new ways of collecting and reporting information, but also new ways of writing and producing news by new actors, as well as giving access to more varied voices. There are hopes

that new technology has reinvigorated democracy by way of these changes within journalism (Fenton, 2010; Machin & Niblock, 2006). This view however is countered by a longer standing notion that new technology and the increasing speed at which news must operate have resulted in a slackening of verification and research methods by journalists. Rather than going out to work their beat, they remain inside the newsroom where information comes to them (Fenton, 2010). In turn, the requirement to produce more content, faster, with fewer resources has negatively affected their professional standards.

These pressures are accompanied by an increased presence of PR, particularly in the political sphere. Employed by resource rich sources like governments, PR professionals—often former journalists themselves, are well aware of the industry's shortcomings and see in them opportunity to further their interests. They play to the needs of time and resource-strapped journalists, feeding them managed content or information subsidies. They are well organized and know the routines of the industry to which they tailor their efforts (Machin & Niblock, 2006). They provide continual free access to timely, organized information (Davis, 2003). In turn, critics argue, journalists have developed a dependence on these highly managed and strategic forms of information (Philips, 2010). It is governments and other powerful agents in society who have the means to employ these professional PR tactics, a situation that reinforces the critique that the media serve to reproduce solely those voices (Ericson et al., 1989).

New technology is not the only force changing the practices of journalists. These and the ever-present and powerful strategies used by the current Canadian

government are causing political journalism to be deemed uninformative, unoriginal and serving the interests of the elite establishments, rather than working to keep them accountable and in check (Fenton, 2010; Philips, 2010).

Journalism has long been considered as essential to the democratic process, “contributing vital resources for processes of information gathering, deliberation and action” (Fenton, 2010, p.1). Journalism has an intrinsic relationship to democracy, one that seminal works in Communication Studies, by authors such as Lippmann, Bernays, Dewey, Lazarsfeld and Habermas for example, have entrenched in the field of study. They among others have established the deep-rooted need to examine questions of information. Journalist are known as the primary gatherers of information, and “how journalists make news depends on their working environment” (Fenton, 2010, p.3). An examination of the current nature of news requires an examination of the current working environment and how journalists operate within that environment (Fenton, 2010). Currently the environment for political journalists in Canada is greatly affected by strategic government communications and changes in their industry. Whereas the nature of news is primarily the gathering of information, this Master’s thesis examines which factors affect information collection by political news journalists.

Newsgathering practices are known to be based on experience, trial and error and gut feelings rather than purely intellectual tools; they are truly a human experience (Machin & Niblock, 2006). As Machin & Niblock state, “for too long, researchers have relied on the products of news to assert far-reaching conclusions about the state of modern journalism and the integrity of its practitioners” (2006, p.3).

In addition, as this research is rarely produced by working journalists it is not reflective of their experiences in the newsroom, which underscores the need for research to balance theoretical approaches to these questions of practice (Machin & Niblock, 2006). In line with this need, this Master's thesis takes a journalist-centric qualitative approach and is informed by existing literature and research also based on qualitative or journalist-first perspectives. While many studies examine the American and British mediascape, there seems to be a lack in Canadian focused work of this nature. Non-Canadian works are, however, highly relevant and inform this thesis of developments in western societies with media structures similar to Canada. This thesis looks to add to the existing literature a discussion and understanding with a Canadian focus.

This Master's thesis is intended to answer the following questions: How do Canadian political news journalists collect information for their stories? What practices do they use in this endeavour? How have these practices changed alongside the changes in the media industry? Have journalists developed new practices with the proliferation of social media and online journalism? How have changes in government communications affected their practices of information collection? In what way do they encounter or make use of public relations material in the sourcing of their work?

In an attempt to answer these practical questions, a qualitative, semi-structured interview design was developed to directly pose these questions to working journalists. In the spring of 2013, interviews were conducted with active political journalists, members of the national Press Gallery working for print outlets with

national reach. The aim was to get a journalistic perspective and a practical understanding of the newsroom experience, one facet of political journalism. Based on this research, this thesis argues that under the current Conservative government, political journalists experience limited access to direct government sources of information. The use of professional PR and general informational controls by this government has restricted journalists' access to those closest to the information and issues at hand. Practices themselves do not seem to have been changed by this environment, but it has pushed journalists to develop a reliance on secondary sources and methods to fulfill their informational needs. In turn this has increased the distance between journalists and those responsible for the information they need. This reliance on secondary sources skews news values such as balance and leads to sameness in political journalism, putting into question the ability of journalists to fulfill professional expectations.

The following chapters will outline and discuss relevant literature on the topic and provide the examination of the interview research and its findings. These chapters will discuss the interplay between the professional and societal expectations of journalism and the various challenges facing today's newsrooms. Central to newsgathering is the journalist-source relationship, which in political journalism is a complex dynamic between journalists and the government, which has come to harness PR in an attempt to manage communications and thus the news. The discussion outlines how technology and the pressures of time and resources are coupled to increasingly aggressive communications tactics by the government, handcuffing journalists in their daily attempts at newsgathering. A methodological

discussion is included to provide insight into the steps taken to arrive at the interview research and its findings. This thesis concludes with larger questions in need of pursuit relating to the topic of strategic communications management and newsgathering, as well as possible solutions for journalists in Canada.

Chapter one

Journalism, Sources and Changing Media Dynamics: A Literature review

This thesis relies on a number of books, articles and research to support its position. As this Master's thesis examines how journalists operate in the face of increasingly managed political communications, the following discussion of these works outlines an understanding of the professional expectations of journalism as well as the forces that challenge these expectations. It lays out the complex interactions at the core of newsgathering and the journalist-source relationship, establishing who the sources are, and why certain sources are so prominent. The discussion generally assesses the central role the government plays as the dominant source of political information but also as a main impediment to newsgathering. Much of the discussion examines the changes and pressures within the newsroom, the key operations of political journalism, and chiefly how technology and the proliferation of PR affect journalist-source relations. As this thesis argues that government communications is highly managed and strategic, this discussion outlines how governments have approached their need to communicate, have outlined their position through policy and implemented PR as a management tool. This gives an understanding of how this powerful institution interacts in the dynamic of journalists, their sources and newsgathering. Overall, the following illustrates the multilayered dynamics involved in newsgathering and the barriers, pressures and continued expectations journalists face in daily operations in an era of strategic government communications.

The Role and Expectations of Journalism

The themes of democracy, of the importance and role of information, of public opinion and the mass media are seminal to the fields of Communication Studies and Journalism. Seminal works by Schudson, Lippmann, Dewey, Lazarsfeld, Bernays, Boorstin and Habermas emphasize the need to continuously examine these themes and questions in a contemporary context. This literature ties journalism to the basic tenets of western democracy and its processes: freedom of expression, freedom of the press and most importantly, an informed voting public. As this thesis examines questions of practice within the profession of journalism, it is vital to this discussion to include a common understanding of the social and professional expectations of this institution. These expectations underlie the subsequent discussion of practices in the changing media environment. These expectations, or ethics and duties of journalism, are inextricable from western democracy and peoples' need for, and right information. The institution of journalism is one of the checks and balances needed to make democracy work, it has long been known as a government watchdog, but also as intermediary between government and the people.

To understand this intrinsic relationship, we look to the emergence of democracy in the 19th century, which corresponded with the emergence of the bourgeois social class in European society. The rise of this educated group led to a separation of state and nobility as well as individual rights and freedoms. There was now a need for the consent of the governed in matters of the state, giving way to the ability and right to the discussion of and dissent from these matters without fear of

repression from the state (McNair, 1998, p. 16). The expression of these views and opinions regarding society and its government, later to be known as public opinion, were to be expressed by way of the vote in a representative democracy. Here citizens must make informed choices, and collectively that body of informed citizen expression becomes the public opinion, expressed by the vote, which is meant to be taken as a guide by the elected leaders (McNair, 1998, p.17). It is this emergence of public opinion, which becomes essential to our current understanding of western liberal democracy, and makes the communication of our society of central concern.

The seminal work of Jürgen Habermas outlines the emergence, development and formation of public opinion within an idealized *public sphere* (1974). For Habermas this functioning public sphere, is an inclusive space, exempt from state coercion and private interests, where rational informed debate is fostered, and a space meant to be a public monitor of authority by the critical discourse of the people (Habermas, 1974; McNair, 1998). Whereas the government and its influence are meant to be excluded from the public sphere, one main function of this sphere is to facilitate discussion on the topics of politics and governance, the political sphere, without fear of reprisal. As this physical arena by no means truly existed in society, rational debate on issues of politics took place through various channels, face-to-face, by letters and through newspapers. Journalism over time became a vehicle, through which relevant information and topics, particularly in matters of politics, were presented to the public, helping to foster informed discussion. The press became an institution meant to “function as an instrument or forum for the enlightened, rational, critical and unbiased public discussion of [...] common interests in matters of culture

and politics” (McNair, 1998, p. 18). Journalism became the way through which the modern public gained access to information and the issues facing society, notably about government and politics. This establishment of journalism as an institution, the Fourth Estate, also led to professional and societal expectations, the ethics and duties of journalism.

Journalism over time has undergone a continuous re-examination of these principles and new questions have consistently surfaced about this institution. This is exactly why it is important to this thesis to lay out what we understand about and expect from journalism, and attempt to define terms such as objectivity, truth and transparency. This thesis seeks to establish in the literature review, how academia defines the roles and duties of journalism, and in turn its practices. We accept journalism as a profession and society holds journalists up to broad professional standards. Yet unlike professions such as medicine or law, there are no set-in-stone methods. This paradox has long been established within the field and many works have tried to define and guide the profession as it moves forward. This thesis relies on some of these works to establish the principles that guide the practice of journalism.

In his 2009 work *Reporting and Producing for Digital Media*, Vivek Sehgal puts forth a guide to journalism within western democracies. Sehgal’s ‘theory of journalism’ informs this thesis by formally outlining the duties and ethics of journalism within a functioning western democratic state. His guide is based on research and forums undertaken in the late 1990s by the Project for Excellence in Journalism’s¹ Committee of Concerned Journalists, in order to “identify and clarify

¹ Project for Excellence in Journalism was renamed Pew Research Center’s Journalism Project in October 2013

the principles that underlie journalism” (Sehgal 2009, p.45). Similarly, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel’s 2007 book, *The Elements of Journalism*, sets out the same goal, examining the American media. Their work is a result of the same qualitative research with working journalists and the Committee of Concerned Journalists, offering a perspective from practicing journalists.

Both works establish that the purpose of journalism is to provide information to citizens. Journalists have a duty to remain loyal to the public, and in order to do this, their first obligation is to ‘journalistic truth’. Journalistic truth is not an absolute truth. Rather it is practical or functional, and is tied to notions of objectivity, verification and transparency. Both works describe that these are not to be thought of as attainable goals, but rather as guiding principles. It is not about absolutes, but about adhering to and applying these ideals within a method of information collection. Journalistic truth is an account of information arrived at via a method of verification. It is a “reliable account of [...] meaning, valid for now, subject to further investigation” (Sehgal, 2009, p. 46). Journalists have a duty to explain or try to convey the meaning and significance of the information they have collected and put it into context for the audience (McNair, 2009; Sehgal, 2009; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). Part of this is “being as transparent as possible about sources and methods” used, so that the audience is able to apply its own judgment based on the information and context presented (Sehgal 2009, p.26). This is what guides the daily operation of journalists, their newsgathering. Truth comes from clarity and giving context to the information, demonstrating the steps of how the information and findings were

arrived at. Transparency in that method is key. Where does the information come from? How was it arrived at? Who are the sources and why are they sources? What does the journalist know? How and why does he have this knowledge? Transparency allows journalists to adhere to their responsibility to the audience. Transparency allows them to demonstrate how they remain free from the state, from coercion and “provide news without fear or favour” (Sehgal 2009, p.46). This is how they can fulfill their watchdog status of monitoring those in powerful positions (Sehgal, 2009).

These works underscore the importance of objective journalism which Kovach & Rosenstiel describe as “one of the great confusions of journalism” (2007, p.81). Like many, Sehgal and Kovach & Rosenstiel reject objectivity as neutrality or as freedom from bias—no person can achieve these. Kovach & Rosenstiel suggest a replacement of the term with thoroughness, accuracy or transparency. The authors reiterate that objectivity in journalism is about using a “consistent method of testing information—a transparent approach to evidence. [...] Seeking out multiple witnesses, disclosing as much as possible about sources, or asking various sides for comment, [these] all signal such standards” (2009, p. 47).

Offering a Canadian perspective, Everett & Fletcher (2001) outline the important roles, functions and expectations of the mass media within Canadian democratic society. Journalism is the principle connection between citizens, leaders and Canadian institutions. Journalists are meant to convey knowledge and information about how the political system works and orient citizens to both institutions and issues (Everett & Fletcher, 2001, p. 167). Like Sehgal and Kovach & Rosenstiel, Everett & Fletcher establish that the media are expected to impart both

values and quality information to foster an interested and active citizenry, as well as monitor the activities of government in its watchdog role (2001, p. 167). “Media content ought to help clarify political priorities, assist in the creation of public opinion and maintain a link between government and the governed” (Everett & Fletcher, 2001, p. 167).

This discussion highlights the expectations of journalism in society, how journalists should gather information, and the ethical codes under which they are expected to operate. These authors underscore the difficulty there is in defining the principles of journalism and the terms, ‘truth’, ‘transparency’ and ‘objectivity’. These terms are interconnected, being used to define each other, and they are generally ambiguous, not meant to be absolute terms. At their core they relate to the methods and practices of journalistic work and newsgathering. But these in fact are indefinable as they are subjective and changing from journalist to journalist and story to story. Practices are rooted in the individual context of journalistic work. By trying to establish a common understanding of these terms, this discussion points to the societal and professional expectations under which journalists operate.

The Journalist-Source Relationship

What has been made very apparent in this discussion is that, at the core of journalistic work, the collection of important relevant information is essential. While there is no one guide to these methods and practices, much literature does examine how journalists go about getting information. Journalists do not create the information, they must seek it out, collect it, analyze it and impart that information

and the methods of collection to the public, so it may in turn develop its own understanding of the issues at hand. In journalists' role as mediums of information, the idea of balance, objectivity and journalistic truth, are tied to this essential information. Collecting well-rounded information, from many sides and viewpoints is ingrained in the day-to-day practices of newsgathering. In general, this process is also known as sourcing, and it points to the significance of sources in journalistic work.

"The relationship between journalists and their sources is central to any claim that the news media may make to a role within a Habermasian 'public sphere'" — sources are the various voices within this sphere (Philips, 2010, p. 87). Gaining access to accurate, regular, timely, trusted and quality information from many relevant viewpoints is the goal of relationship building between journalists and their sources.

"Sources are central to the practice of journalism. [They] are the people, places or organizations from whom potential news stories originate and [those] to whom journalists turn when" verifying information (Harcup, 2004, p. 44).

It is deeply important to this thesis to understand how journalists operate, how they choose sources and the daily interactions that make up newsgathering. Early studies of journalist-source interactions, like Sigal (1973) and Gans (1979), describe a symbiotic relationship. Gans establishes that:

The relationship between sources and journalists resembles a dance, for sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources. Although it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading (1979, p.116).

While the tango metaphor seems graceful, Gans argues that this dance is in fact more of a tug-of-war over access. On one hand sources seek to manage the news, looking to be presented positively, and on the other hand, journalists manage their sources,

trying to get at vital information (Gans, 1979). It is very apparent in the Canadian context that journalists are engaged in this tug-of-war relationship with their sources, especially the government. Both parties have a vested interest in the relationship. It is in the interest of most sources, particularly public and political institutions, to manage their communications, to provide information and be present in the public discourse. But it is also in their best interest to try to maintain a positive image in the news, in order to stay in power and continue their mandate. Here journalists have the final say in their output, so a relationship of give and take seems most ideal for both parties. However, many studies agree that this relationship has never been equal, as power resides in the hands of the source, deciding what they choose to divulge, and how (Sigal, 1973; Gans, 1979; Ericson et al., 1989; Carlson & Franklin, 2011).

This unequal relationship is most importantly affected by *who* journalists seek out as their sources. Although many types of sources exist, they “seek out sources that are both available and suitable” for their stories (Carlson & Franklin, 2011, p.3). They rely on select people as knowledge sources, and routinely seek out those ‘in the know’ who can provide them with a predictable supply from established organizations (Ericson et al., 1989, p.1).

One seminal study on the journalist-source relationship is Ericson, Baranek and Chan’s 1989 study of the Canadian news media, which is divided into three volumes. The volume, *Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources* takes a source perspective to examine the essentiality of sources in news production, focusing on the tactics and strategies used by sources to control their own image in the news. This thesis looks to Ericson et al. for an understanding of the complex interdependence of

the journalist-source relationship. The authors emphasize the control of knowledge in society—over good and bad news, and the negotiation of power in the journalist-source interaction. Their work focuses on sources of an authoritative nature, such as courts, the private sector and lawmakers. For Ericson et al., “news is a representation of authority. In the contemporary knowledge society news represents *who* are the authorized knowers and *what* are their authoritative versions of reality” (1989, p. 3). A newspaper only citing a man on the street, a traffic cop, a backbencher or a university student is self explanatorily not appropriate (Ericson et al., 1989). Journalists must source “the people who are recognized socially to be in a position to know. They have been authorized to give an account that serves the public expectation” of accountability (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989, p. 4). Particularly in relation to political news reporting, the authors propose that any other way of sourcing would remove legitimacy from the outlet and the information, relegating it to ‘fringe’ media.

The hierarchy or preference of sources, in Ericson et al.’s opinion is obvious, but credibility, Zvi Reich argues is the “most influential factor in source selection” (2011, p.19). In his study of credibility, Reich outlines a critique that authoritative or powerful ‘knowers’ in society actually gain such status from repeatedly being featured as news sources. This results in a perpetuation of the status quo in the news media. Reich states a lack of study from a journalist perspective on credibility and questions the paradox of credibility: is credibility gained from repeated coverage or do credible sources simply get more coverage? His findings support Ericson et al.’s view, stating that ‘traits’— such as status (public or private sector) and proximity to

information—affect journalists’ visceral assessment of source credibility (2011). This seems very logical when considering political news journalism. Reich’s findings also establish that journalists employ credibility as a tool or practice to help in the efficacy of their work. They do this by routinizing their interactions, relying on credible sources to which they can attribute information and minimize their workloads.

Credibility is secondary however to the need for efficiency. In a 24-hr news cycle speed is key. But journalism has always used organization and structure to gain efficiency. News is separated into beats for that reason. The beat was once a routine path physically visited daily to establish a network of sources on a topic (Machin & Niblock, 2006). Journalists tend to surround themselves, and develop relationships with those who can consistently provide them with attributable information. Subsequent to this, Machin & Niblock (2006) argue that news requires official sources and that society is bureaucratically structured, which gives journalists a ready list of relevant sources for any topic.

Conversely, Everett & Fletcher (2001) criticize the Canadian political news media as having a tendency to focus on “elites occupying positions of authority within the government and elsewhere” and that “this attention confers legitimacy on conventional political institutions” (p. 168). In turn, this has the effect of only providing reflections of the priorities of officials and sidelining coverage of those outside the political mainstream. They argue that “political discourse is narrowed and conditioned by elites” which is distorting the nature of the political process (Everett & Fletcher, 2001, p. 169). Everett & Fletcher argue that this repeated attention to official sources and specific offices and/or departments restrains political discourse

by presenting a picture of consistent reiteration masked as political consensus. This argument speaks directly to the current consideration of strategic communications and limited information coming from the Canadian government.

Carlson and Franklin's (2011) recent collection of work on news sourcing also examines why the choice of sources matters. They explain that this focus on sources with social power came about with the professionalization of journalism in the late 19th to early 20th century. "Journalists sought to promote a cultural view of news as accurate, verifiable, independent and systematic" (Carlson & Franklin, 2011, p. 5). With this, the use of attributable sources took hold by the second half of the 20th century and became rooted in the notion of the objective journalist-observer. There is a professional and societal expectation then of how journalists choose and use their sources. Carlson & Franklin explain that by directly interviewing, quoting and attributing content to sources, journalists demonstrate their proximity to these sources and the information—transparency— as well as establish their own authority and legitimacy for the audience. In our society, information without attribution, and that to credible sources, now renders both journalist and audience uneasy (Carlson and Franklin, 2011, p.1).

Ericson et al.'s source-centrist research explores the power sources hold over the flow of information. As much as news agencies are known as gatekeepers, selecting the information present in news content, "sources are continually deciding whether certain information should be revealed, which details should be highlighted or discarded [or] when the story should be offered to the press"— various acts of news management (1989, p. 6). The authors do not however remove all agency and

capability from journalists. The information required by journalists could eventually be discovered via other methods of more investigative journalism. But they note the pressures of news work—time, budget etc., limiting journalists’ day-to-day ability to access what they need (Ericson et al., 1989). Journalists can only use what they can access. The constraints of the job make the journalist a ‘conduit pipe’ of the information crafted by the source (Ericson et al., 1989). The authors tie the journalist-source relationship and the choice of source to access, both to these sources and the information they hold. As much as sources strive for coverage for their organization (positive of course), there is much that they wish to keep in the confidence or what Ericson et al. (1989) call, the ‘back regions’— negotiating protection and favourable publicity is key to maintaining control over knowledge.

The authors discuss how different authoritative organizations—prisons, courts, the police—have different levels of closed-ness and openness to these regions, but that the political sphere must be relatively open as accountability is key, and the news media are the vehicles for that accountability (Ericson et al., 1989, p. 8).

“Politicians [...] recognize the importance of news media not only to the authority of their office but also to their ability to stay in office” (Ericson et al., 1989, p. 12).

Therefore, many resources are allotted to communications and media relations as they realize the need to manage the access to coveted information and balance this with a need to be open and operate with transparency. Thus the era of managed communications by government has long been in the making.

Again considering the question of access, Ericson et al. (1989) argue that journalists do not only report on the limited settings to which they expose themselves.

They posit that it is more about what sources allow them to be exposed to. “Even ‘back region’ access, may not yield reportable material because relevant information is still enclosed (secrecy), or disclosed” but off the record or on embargo (Ericson et al., 1989, p. 12). Even when journalists break the barriers of access into the more secretive and coveted affairs of official organizations, attained by secret informants or leaked documents, it may not be of use. Journalists are limited by the usability of the information they have access to, their ability to verify it, as well as their need to be transparent about their work and to put it into context for the audience. They cannot fulfill these expectations with secret nor un-attributable sources, or information on embargo. However they are also bound by their need to foster and develop source relationships in order to continue access to information in the future. In this line of thought, Carlson & Franklin describe the journalist as ‘handcuffed’ by their professional need for impartiality and dependence on sources for direct quotation, as well as their “need to work efficiently and swiftly” (2011, p.5). It is not about trying to remove agency from journalists, rather these works are about drawing attention to the interdependency between journalists and their sources, what journalists have access to and thus how the strategic management of communications by sources has significantly affected their ability to do their work (Ericson et al., 1989; Everett & Fletcher, 2001; Carlson & Franklin, 2011).

Even when journalists cover politics they encounter many potential sources daily, who also only have access to limited information. Ericson et al. (1989) state that journalists aren’t simple observers of what goes on in a source organization, but instead that many sources within are simple observers themselves—rarely being eye-

witnesses to the issues or information at hand, rather only to the constructed view provided by their own seniors within the organization. This is the reality for most communications staff and even backbenchers on Parliament Hill. Under the court style government in Canada, true knowledge of governmental affairs is relegated to a powerful few led by the PMO.

Journalists themselves have agency. They have control over what they expose themselves to, what they attend, how much attention it deserves, what other texts/sources will be used to contextualize it, and how it should be reconstructed and so on. “He is a participant in the process of giving meaning to the texts of the source organization, and of having [those texts] enter back into the source organization to affect social relations and practices there” (Ericson et al., 1989, p. 14). News products are rarely framed solely within the context of the source, or in the way it wants to be presented. In the end sources lose control over the information provided, despite the fact that organizations spend huge amounts on advertising and PR to present or correct the account they would prefer (Ericson et al., 1989). Sources really have no other way to control the end product of news, and the way they are portrayed, than by strictly managing the information to which journalists have access.

Ericson et al.’s work echoes the notions of ethical duty and the watchdog role of journalism, noting that journalists cannot simply accept the “bureaucratically constructed barriers erected by [their] source” (1989, p. 21). The authors describe how certain tactics are needed to verify information and detour stonewalled organizations. They can go to political opponents for their perspectives, pursue multiple organizations and sources, find whistler blowers and confront unforthcoming

sources with discovered information—what we know as investigative journalism.

This is the pursuit for journalistic truth, as per Sehgal (2009) and Kovach & Rosenstiel (2007). Ericson et al. note how journalists must decide how to articulate the context of their information, to attribute or not, keep a source safe and disclose the practices and tactics used to acquire information.

It is apparent that there is a complicated interdependency between journalists and the sources they seek to inform their work. This gives insight into the negotiation process and the practices journalists must use on a day-to-day and case-by-case basis. Ericson et al., Carlson & Franklin, Reich and Gans, offer insight into the use of and dependence on authoritative sources within journalism, by giving reason for these as the primary sources, particularly in political reporting. They present the source as having the upper hand in the tug-of-war over access and direct understanding about the complex layers of constraints involved in information collection, but also efforts in information management. This discussion informs this thesis by establishing who journalists seek out for information, how they operate to do so, as well as what is expected of them by society and their industry. There is good reasoning for political journalists to consistently seek out the upper most bureaucrats and elected politicians for information. Politicians are the people elected to follow a mandate, those who need to be kept accountable and kept in check. But this group also has the tendency to highly manage its relationships with journalists, manage access to information and look to promote itself and its work in a positive way. This works to deepen the complexity of the relationship and newsgathering.

New Technology and PR: Influential Factors in Information Collection

As has so far been established, many factors play a role in the journalist-source relationship, in the choice of source, in the ability to collect information and ultimately on the information gathered. This discussion has shown that in their relationships with their sources, journalists have a need to routinize their practices and their work. In the most recent decades, technological advances, the Internet and the convergence of media platforms have presented new tools and ways for journalists to routinize their work. However, these have also increased pressures on them by their industry to work more and work faster. Sources also have access to these tools and mediums, which, coupled with an increased use of PR, has allowed for new avenues to increase the strategic management of communications and news by sources such as governments.

The last 20 years have brought about important changes in the news business. Convergence and conglomeration have resulted in fewer resources available to journalists who are also expected to produce more work. The current 24-hr news cycle has shortened time lines for journalists, yet online news platforms have also required them to produce more content. Journalism has always been an institution substantially affected by time, but more so in the age of information technology (Patterson, 1998). Journalists are now expected to write their stories while constantly updating these to their outlets' websites, as well as push their work through time sensitive platforms like Twitter. They are expected to have a presence on their news beat by serving as commentators in other media, maintaining a blog of their activities and participating in social media where journalists have been found to be the most

active users of Twitter, with the highest number of followers (Lasorsa et al., 2012). Here they are expected to interact with their audience, keep up to date on news and their competition, as well as share their own and their colleagues' content. Working their beat, developing networks and being seen or heard is part of their job. Since journalists are so active, and are expected to be active, this reinforces the essential need for efficiency in their information gathering practices, in the research, phone calls, interviews and verification required for each story. As they have come to further routinize their practices, savvy resource-rich sources looking to have the upper hand have come to learn their routines and needs for information. Davis (2002; 2003; 2009), who examines PR's increasing role in the reporting process, argues that PR has come to fill this gap by providing 'information subsidies'. This dissemination of strategically packaged information has, according to Davis, changed the traditional media-source hierarchy (2003, p. 27). The heightened use of PR in the last few decades has helped resource-rich sources like governments and corporations extend their control and influence over the news.

The discussion of the journalist-source relationship has shown how organizations like governments need to organize themselves and manage how they interact with journalists, as well as manage the information they make available to the public. The term public relations (PR) is widely used and made ambiguous by its various and competing definitions and applications (Ihlen et al., 2009, p. 5). What is generally accepted is that it constitutes strategic communications between an organization and its publics (Ihlen et al., 2009, p. 5) For the purpose of this thesis; PR is defined as the strategic communications efforts by an organization, with the

inherent goal of yielding positive results for that organization. These positive results generally are news coverage or media representations of images, messages, information and topics the organization wants covered and covered in the way they have intended. Here PR moves away from general communications management by using decisively promotional strategies that go beyond building relationships with journalists and go beyond providing organized and relevant information for the public (via the media). PR is used organization-wide to streamline messaging and representation, providing access to selected topics, information and people under the guise of open access to ‘front regions’ of the organization, while diverting attention from the coveted ‘back regions’ (as per Ericsson et al. 1989). PR moves beyond communications management and into news management, where the concern is representation in the news media, and a strategic effort to impact, limit or control this representation.

Although Davis’ (2003) work focuses solely on the British PR and media industries, it is highly applicable to a similar democratic society like Canada and gives insight into the influence PR has had on journalistic practices. The changes in media structure have increased journalistic workloads, consequentially, this drive for productivity has created a decline in “costly investigative journalism” (Davis, 2003, p. 32). Davis argues that standards have dropped and corners are being cut, which in turn has caused journalists to become dependent on a steady supply of “conveniently packaged (and free) PR ‘information subsidies’” (2003, p. 32). He explains that those using PR are governments and institutional sources. Journalists are drawn to these because; “such sources are in positions of power, draw legitimate support from the

public and are expected to provide expert knowledge” (2003, p. 34). Furthermore, Davis outlines that the effective use of PR is directly related to resources—more money, thus more people, more output, more outlets, more coverage etc. The effective use of PR ensures that these sources are “accessible, well resourced and provide a regular supply of ‘information subsidies’” (Davis, 2003, p. 35). This creates a journalistic dependence upon routinized access to sources seeking to ‘help’ journalists be efficient in a time pressured, resource poor newsroom. Davis goes so far as to say that in the areas of Parliamentary coverage, academics have deemed journalists “‘captured by their sources’” (2003, p. 35). The use of PR by resource rich, credible, authoritative sources like governments gives insight to this discussion about the current era of strategic government communications.

It is very difficult to separate this important influence of PR on sourcing from the digitization of the media industry. While PR practitioners have been active in trying to manage news and relationships with journalists for the better part of the 20th century, their current influence on practices is interrelated to the present state of the news industry. Philips’ (2010) research on the British newspaper industry discusses the changes brought on by new technology. Her first hand qualitative research with working journalists in a similar media scape to Canada, is directly applicable to this thesis, providing a view of existing research focused on the practices of information collection in newspaper production.

While the Internet and new media platforms now exist, these have not exactly provided new sources or new practices in newsgathering (Philips, 2010). Rather they are new media through which traditional practices are used. Philips describes how the

nature of practices has been positively changed by speed, accessibility and connectivity but that this works as a double-edged sword. Fast access to vast amounts of information and people have increased journalists' productivity, but also heightened expectations of their productivity and consequent workloads. Internal documents, meeting agendas, freedom of information responses etc., are all fully available to journalists on official websites, which is of course extremely convenient. However even less official, or alternative and 'off the beaten path' sites and sources, like blogs and forums, are fully available to all with access to the web, rendering these no longer sites of original content or scoops (Philips, 2010). Philips notes that blogs and user-generated content (UGC)—reply/comment mini-blogs for example, now offered on most sites and news forums to enhance the democratic feel and function of these by allowing public participation in production—are felt to be generally informative in seeing “where the wind is blowing” on issues but require hours of trawling the web for subsequent verification. This is not efficient newsgathering (2010, p. 93).

Due to the demands of the newsroom, journalists must seek out the “most easily available sources” or already “known sources, because they are trusted and more easily verified” (Philips, 2010, p. 92). Her work revealed that due to the extensive follow-up research and verification required to use tips from unknown sources, stories based on them are extremely rare (Philips, 2010, p. 92). Although exciting and beneficial to the public, themselves and their outlets, rather than focusing on original off-beat stories and information, “the bulk of reporting [in] newspapers involves routine sourcing, analyzing and structuring of information

which is anticipated rather than random, and offered freely by sources rather than being unearthed” (2010, p. 93). Instead of using investigative tactics and forcing out information from those trying to hide it, journalists are relegated to the news room, sifting through and assessing the typhoon of competing voices with which they are inundated daily (Philips, 2010). Neveu (2002) argues that to inundate journalists with material, is in fact a strategy used by political sources to waste time and block opportunity for investigative reporting.

This typhoon is a consequence of the use of the Internet and email, but it is made even worse by the professionalization of PR. Firstly she notes PR’s influence is seen in the sheer quantity of information journalists are sent. As email has become the number one mode of communication, organizations now send out hundreds of emails to mass press lists. These organizations are able to act quickly in breaking news situations proactively or reactively, via email, their websites and social media platforms. They are also able to bypass traditional newsroom gatekeepers having direct access to journalists’ inboxes, sending complete statements and releases. These can often include direct quotes by spokespersons or officials, images, headline suggestions, official websites, attached document briefs and media person contact information (Forde & Johnston, 2013). Journalists can now find highly developed and complete materials going beyond the traditional media release, right in their inboxes.

On a day-to-day basis “every single major public announcement can be classified as PR, and every organization wishing to address journalists will use PR techniques” (Philips, 2010, p. 95). This omnipresence of PR is not, for Philips, automatically “evidence of a democratic deficit in the news media”, pointing to the

notion of media as simply reproducing the discourse of elites (2010, p. 95). Philips as well as Davis (2003) argue that, as PR has grown, alternate and traditionally non-powerful groups without automatic access to the media have learned to harness PR to draw attention to their various events and ideas outside the status quo, democratizing the news. However their own typhoon of information subsidies is simply added to that of authoritative voices, doubling the impact of PR content on journalists' workload. Despite their harnessing of PR, with the aforementioned industry constraints, journalists will still prioritize known organizations. Unknown emails will not be opened for the fear of using false information under time constraints; ensuring 'safe organizations' receive priority (Philips, 2010). Not only are authoritative sources contributing to general management of news, PR's impacts are coupled with speed demands deeply felt in daily newsgathering by journalists.

Philips' interviewees stated they rarely scoop stories from news wires as they generally have access to the same information, quotes and statements in their inboxes. Forde & Johnston's (2013) content analysis study of the use of Australian Associated Press (AAP) copy by Australian news outlets provides a recent account of news wires' role in a media environment comparable to that of Canada. The online environment's consistent need for copy has increased the use of wire copy by news outlets (Forde & Johnston, 2013). Although these are purchased, they cost less than having more staff on hand in the newsroom. Forde & Johnston's study found that news wires play an important role in transmitting PR materials directly to journalists, under the guise of a trusted news source. They explain that PR materials are incredibly sophisticated, particularly those from government or political sources,

which reinforces the effect of government information management through PR. These resource rich sources make a broader range of communication materials available to journalists, creating more primary or seemingly raw information. Content from governments is often “substantial transcripts of press conferences, interviews and speeches” presented as less managed and almost journalistic (Forde & Johnston, 2013, p. 124). These go far beyond the traditional press release, and allow for more a varied use of the products by journalists, giving the illusion they are constructing new stories rather than using PR content (Forde & Johnston, 2013). The intent of these PR products is to allow journalists to stay in the newsroom, fitting with current industry time pressures, rather than having them digging about investigating the beat. While both journalists and news wires receive the same PR products, Forde & Johnston found that two thirds of distributed content was picked up by the AAP (Forde & Johnston, 2013, p. 124). “Of that media relations content, AAP used copy wholly or predominantly in nearly 40 per cent of stories, without any apparent additional newsgathering. A further 55.5 per cent of AAP stories were “partially” untouched [PR] copy” (Forde & Johnston, 2013, p. 124). Once in the hands of the news outlets, they found that 53 per cent were “wholly or predominantly” taken from AAP content, with 20 per cent containing verbatim copy from the news wire content (Forde & Johnston, 2013, p. 124). This study show how news room pressures and the use of news wires to alleviate them is allowing government PR to enter the newsroom and affect newsgathering in an alarming way.

This study reinforces the trends offered by Philips of ‘cannibalization of copy’ and ‘pack journalism’ (2010). With automated press lists, widely available Internet

data, PR-orchestrated events and wire services, journalists essentially all have access to more or less the same information. Convergence and the digitization of news content have changed production practices. Stories go online within minutes, putting journalists “under intense pressure not to miss anything that has appeared on a rival website” (Philips, 2010, p. 96). In turn this pressure and competition have resulted in reporters being assigned the rewriting of content from other outlets and news wires, without additional verification and the use of exact sources and quotes. Rather than seeking out alternate viewpoints and new content to top their competition, journalists are just churning out the same content. Philips notes that North-American outlets standardly credit the original sources when this rewriting occurs in their newsrooms. While they are not partaking in pure plagiarism, journalists are still actively engaging in the ‘cannibalization of copy’, which proliferates sameness, minimizing voices and blurring the transparency of newsgathering and the use of sources (Philips, 2010). This reuse and recycling of copy and information is reinforced by American research on journalists using blogs without crediting or sourcing the information.

This sameness and eroding of transparency in method is also examined by DiStaso and Messner (2008), who studied the use of blogs as sources by journalists. They concluded blogs are as powerful agenda-setters for the news media. They explore what they call ‘intermediate agenda setting’ between traditional media and newer outlets like blogs, looking at the way they use each other as sources. The authors found a ‘source cycle’ where the bloggers used traditional media to source their content based on well-established legitimacy. With blogs gaining legitimacy themselves, it was found that traditional media has begun seeking out blogs and using

them as sources for their work. While they do not name any of the thousands of blogs analyzed by the search engine *Technorati*, they did find that 73 per cent of blogs used by examined outlets were of a political nature, for political beats (DiStaso & Messner, 2008, p. 458). Blogs are not the central focus in articles, but as blogs do not generally cite sources, the source trail and thus the apparent verification of information are lost. Consequently, with journalists using blogs for sourcing and blogs using traditional media, no new information, viewpoints or voices are included in the cycle. For DiStaso & Messner, this is an effective reaffirmation of the status quo and an important signal to a “change in reporting norms which usually prefer original reporting rather than reliance on other media” (2008, p. 451). The authors do not point to why there is such a use of political blogs. This could be due to a lack of access to, or dissatisfaction with, information coming from government sources.

Similar research by Lasorsa et al. (2012), used content analysis to examine the use of Twitter by journalists. They found that journalists were the most avid users of this micro-blogging platform with the most followers. They also found that nearly half of their tweets contained links to content from their own media outlets and one quarter containing links to other mainstream outlets (Lasorsa et al., 2012, p. 28). While the sources themselves are not lost as in DiStaso & Messner’s study, this does point to re-cycling of sources and cannibalization of content, where journalists are reinforcing each other’s work in the cycle. Consequently Lasorsa et al. mention that 18 per cent of tweets contained links to outside sites and content which the authors attribute to an attempt at more transparency and accountability within journalists’ use of micro blogging (2012, p. 28).

Philips (2010) states that along with this cannibalization of content there is now a hyper-vigilance over other news outlets and rivals, but also evidence of ‘pack journalism’. Across outlets, with access to all the same sources and information, with journalists reusing each other’s work, and most content being slanted only slightly differently to fit the needs of their paper, journalists aren’t breaking free from ‘the pack’ and producing original content. Philips argues that, with a higher demand for quantity in less time from journalists, this cannibalization and pack mentality is to be expected unless journalists manage to gain more control over their own time, and thus, the quality of their work. Otherwise these industry constraints—the dependence on news coming at them—leaves them vulnerable to resource rich sources like governments using PR to manage their communications and subsequently the news.

Even with its ubiquitous access, the Internet, Philips believes, is a means for journalists to improve the collection of quality information. While email has increased the speed and ability to communicate and exchange information with sources, finding those sources has also improved tenfold. Abundant online tools facilitate finding sources and verifiable information about or related to them, with “official sites [having] massively increased the efficiency of fact finding” (Philips, 2010, p. 97). Reports, press releases, statements, background information etc. once found in libraries and archives, are now concentrated in well-developed official sites. Reporters who harness the intelligent use of web tools can make connections, crosscheck masses of data and find original sources with easily available tools. It is commonplace now for reporters to regularly and easily keep up to speed with the key issues and players on their beat via the web and now, predominantly, Twitter. Many

tools and sites, like Factiva and LexisNexis offer aggregation services on a vast number of topics, key words, sites etc. (Philips, 2010). These are often customizable to trawl the web for you, accumulating data but also analyzing it, allowing journalists to monitor news and information worldwide.

This discussion has outlined how journalists are confined to the newsroom, dependent on PR products sent via email, and researching online for supporting information. These changes in the media industry have caused face-to-face interactions to decline in favour of faster connectivity with sources via email. This has an unfavorable effect on the ability of journalists to uncover original information. Formerly the real-time aspects of face-to-face interaction allowed for open avenues of questioning and uncovering of details or leads not anticipated, and thus more relevant and useful information. Overall, Philips' research finds that:

The availability of information is creating better opportunities for checking materials, finding alternative sources and improving the reliability, independence and therefore democratic and cultural relevance of newspapers. At the same time the speeding up of news reporting and the need to be visible on the net is impacting directly on the quality of follow-up, routine news (2010, p. 99).

This is the environment in which journalists must operate. However, this narrowing of source relationships is not an inevitable outcome of technological advancements and demanding changes in the mediascape, but rather, Philips (2010) explains, a response to pressures from inside journalists' immediate industry environment, and outside by sources like governments. While technological advances have been shown to be positive, the ability to harness these truly depends on the willingness, access and ability of individual journalists through self-skill development. In addition, Philips argues general training in research techniques is lacking in formative programs

offered by news outlets and educational institutions (2010). Overall, responsibility is then relegated to journalists expected to implement these and pursue investigative journalism despite the pressures in their newsroom and lack of resources.

According to Philips (2010), in their eagerness to compete and be visible, newspapers are contributing to a slackening of investigation and verification of new information and homogenization of news content, which is not working in their favour. “Unusually perhaps, the requirements of democracy and commercial survival seem to be pointing in the same direction,” i.e. to the need for more autonomous journalists with access to a wider range of quality and varied information and sources (Philips, 2010, p. 101). Otherwise, in her view, PR practices, the Internet and technological advancements have only served journalism and democracy negatively (Philips, 2010). Fewer resources, diminishing verification methods and increased industry pressures inhibit journalists from fulfilling their societal and professional expectations as watchdogs. This is especially true when that which they are meant to keep accountable, the government, is increasing its use of PR. The government is seen to be gaining the upper hand in the tug-of-war with its sophisticated news management efforts.

Government Communications Management

To better understand the current era of strategic communications management in which journalists must operate, there is a need to examine how the Canadian government has approached communications in recent history. The body of literature examined for this thesis has established that essential to the operation of journalism is

the collection of information from sources, and that while these sources can take many forms (data, documents etc.), interacting with people ‘in the know’ on a given issue remains the bulk of newsgathering. Within political journalism, those ‘in the know’ are the elected officials and important figureheads or spokespersons of society’s institutions. The previous literature has presented good reasoning for why these authoritative sources figure prominently in the news. In addition, it has been established that it is in fact journalism’s duty in a western state such as Canada to communicate the important information from these sources to the citizenry. The following discussion informs this thesis by outlining the government of Canada’s approach to its relationship with journalists, to journalists’ role to gather information from the government and about its operations, and its own duty to communicate with the public.

In her 2009 Master’s thesis, Denise Rudnicki offers a comprehensive outline of the history and development of Canadian government communications policy. She describes how in 1969 a government taskforce was formed to examine the federal departmental (or bureaucratic) information services, a previously unexamined area. The report called *To Know and Be Known*,

Covers a wide range of topics: the definition of information, the proper role of the government with regards to information, the public’s right of access to official information, the role of the “newsmen” in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, and the theories prevalent in 1969 about the connection between information and participatory democracy—all issues that concern us today. (Rudnicki, 2009, p. 25)

Considering the grim global democratic context of the time—the Vietnam War and threats of nuclear war for example— the authors looked at how to create better ties between the government and the public in Canada. They concluded that a “two-way

flow of information between state and citizens” was essential to a healthier democracy, based on the notion that citizens required relevant information in order to better participate (2009, p. 26). The taskforce found that there was essentially no communications or information policy in place, that these functions were undertaken by each individual office and department. Federal communication was “fragmented, uncoordinated, without clarity of purpose and even contradictory” (Rudnicki, 2009, p. 26). It found a reluctance to share information by top bureaucrats, internally with information officers and departmental staff, as well as externally with the media and the public. Information sent to journalists was poorly written, useless and done with poor timing, while direct public communication was almost non-existent (Rudnicki, 2009, p. 27). Information officers were of the lowest echelon within the bureaucracy, denied access to officials, meetings and documents, which in turn “hampered their ability to provide timely, accurate and useful information to the media” (Rudnicki, 2009, p. 27).

Based on the “principle that the government has a right and duty to inform the public of its activities”, the taskforce recommended the implementation of a government-wide information policy, which would better serve the public by providing “accurate, timely and relevant information”, would seek out public opinion in policy formation and strengthen media ties (Rudnicki, 2009, p. 29). The report identified the overall need for government to manage communications, better organize and develop the apparatus and synchronize efforts government-wide. While including the need for advertising and non-partisan promotional activities, the authors recognized the dangerous possibility of abuse within this new strengthened apparatus.

The risk of public opinion manipulation by government was important, and the authors stressed the need for an ethical code for those involved to assure the apparatus be non-partisan and be in the best interest of the citizen; that “openness and transparency were critical to a functioning democracy” (Rudnicki, 2009, p. 30).

In 1988, the first comprehensive government communications policy was implemented. Rudnicki notes the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1985 as an influence on the policy, as much of the policy outlined guidance in communication related to gender, race and citizens with disabilities. In addition, the Access to Information Act, also erected in 1985, enshrined that “the public was entitled to government information [...] and was supposed to get the information without needing to resort to the Act” (Rudnicki, 2009, p. 31). Simply put, the policy’s 3 main principles, as cited by Rudnicki, were that:

1. The responsibility to provide information is inseparable from the nature of representative government;
2. Good communications are fundamental to achievement of government objectives; and
3. Adequate information is essential in order that the public may understand, respond to and influence the development and implementation of government policies and programs (2009, p. 31).

The policy required that, in order to serve the public, “information must be readily available in complete, clear and useful forms” (Rudnicki, 2009, p. 31). The Privy Council Office had the responsibility to ensure that communication was planned strategically and institution wide. In following with the with 1969 taskforce recommendations, the policy required a two-way flow of information, thus individual departments had the responsibility to monitor public opinion in regard to government policy and programs, to involve citizens in the policy process and evaluate their own

work (Rudnicki, 2009, p. 32). In order to ensure the availability and dissemination of information, information officers' and media relations officers' roles were rearticulated, establishing their need to access high level officials, discussions and documents, although, Rudnicki notes, much inquiry regarding policy was left to be the responsibility of directly related Ministers (2009, p.32).

The 1990s are described by Rudnicki as a 'roller coaster ride', with first the expansion of the communications infrastructure and culture, followed by a downsizing and reorganization (Rudnicki, 2009). In addition, all along the way, a changing mediascape brought on the prominence of the 24-hr news cycle, while the government of the day brought about the implementation of a corporate culture within the apparatus. The economic recession of the time and downsizing of the public service, created a "contract state", allowing more opportunity for the private sector to enter the public service (Kozolanka, 2006, p. 345). Through these contracts, more communications programs were implemented by the government in an effort to better connect with Canadians, particularly to counter the looming issues surrounding the Quebec sovereignty movement (Kozolanka, 2006). Rudnicki explains that, "the Mulroney years radically altered the policy-making environment, bringing in 'outsiders' such as political aides, CEOs, lobbyists, think tanks and others who entrenched PR and promotional techniques into government communications" (Rudnicki, 2009, p. 35). 2001 saw the first benchmark review of the 1988 policy, resulting in a new communications policy in 2002. A corporate mentality and language dominated this policy, with the idea of a two-way-flow of information being sidelined by the ever-important corporate management ideology and the need to

satisfy the strategic goals of the organization—the government (Rudnicki, 2009). This change in policy-making and use of ‘outsiders’ developed, according to Kozolanka (2006), a “hyperapplication of strategic communications [in government, shifting] the focus from substance to image, from information to promotion and from policy to communications” (p. 344). This signals a shift from communications management to strategy and news management. While “strategic planning” was the buzzword and mindset directly borrowed from the corporate/business/PR world of the ‘90s according to Kozolanka, today the notion of the government having a “corporate identity” with “business operations” and “business planning” can be seen in the current government’s communications policy, pointing to a continued adherence to this business mentality (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2012, sections 5 & 13).

Kozolanka’s (2006) case study on the sponsorship scandal provides a current Canadian contextual understanding of how today’s government communicates. While not long ago “communications was an afterthought” for government, changes in the Canadian mediascape, such as the 24-hr news cycle, conglomeration and convergence, brought an endless need for content (Kozolanka, 2006, p. 350). For the government this meant a need to better manage information as well as image, and more effective communications strategy through the use of PR. While these tactics are based on known journalistic routines and practices, conversely journalists became accustomed to these tactics, resulting in an increased reliance on information subsidies from this valued authoritative source. Despite this, Kozolanka explains that journalists’ need for saleable content and their continued adherence to the watchdog

role actually “intensified the struggle and negotiation in the media-politics relationship”, pressuring the government to be more effective and striving to “win the contest over meaning”, and the representation of their priorities, again pointing to a shift into news management (2006, p. 348).

The early 90’s saw the rise of ‘court government’ (Savoie, 1999) and the subsequent ‘New Public Governance’ (Aucoin, 2008), where power is concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister and his office, bringing more attention to the leader and a need for better management of image and communications. This style of governance, Aucoin (2008) explains, is driven by political governance, blurring the distinction between the government and the party in power. It is a style that asserts itself by taking control of the whole apparatus, namely thought tight controls over government wide communications (Aucoin, 2008). This governance increased pressures put upon the public service to support and provide pro-government messages in their communication with citizens, which has continued through subsequent government mandates. “The traditional role of government communications as providing information to citizens, [...] shifted to managing information and then to PR” (Kozolanka, 2006, p. 348). The corporate strategy mindset aimed at a ‘bottom line’ of favourable outcomes (publicity and public opinion), for Kozolanka, clashes with the notion of “an ideal ethical public service providing neutral information to citizens”, putting into question the government’s role within and impact on democratic political communications in Canada (2006, p. 349).

Davis (2002; 2003) reinforces these developments in government communications management, with the argument that the evolution of PR in North

America is tied to the need for elites to manage public opinion within capitalist democracies. He links the many social/cultural changes of the 20th century, such as the rise of mass communication, to the increased needs for corporations and governments to manage the flow of information into the public sphere. While journalism still bears the responsibility of aiding the public in accessing relevant information and contributing to the public sphere, for Habermas, PR and special interests have jeopardized this space for public opinion formation. For Habermas, the act of making things public entails the intent to subject such things to public reasoning and to make political decisions subject to appeal before the court of public opinion (Habermas, 1974, p. 55). Today with governments and organizations using PR, making things public simply equates to publicity. According to Habermas, the strategic dissemination and delimitation of topics and information by PR efforts betrays this court. The use of PR undermines “the critical public sphere by cultivating consensus that is not based on rationality and good arguments but on the ability to portray oneself as having the public interest in mind while hiding one’s real business intentions” (Ihlen et al., 2009, p. 7). The implementation of PR practitioners and corporate strategy within government has shifted efforts from communications management to news management, where the main goal is to directly impact public opinion.

Although long established in the United States, according to Davis (2002), the 1970s saw a significant rise and professionalization of corporate PR as a response to a need to change public opinion about big business and industry during recessionary times. With advertising, pro-business think-tanks and heavy attempts to influence

media, Davis (2002) recounts details of the many studies of corporate PR managing news and public opinion to achieve its business objectives. With this, while looking at the UK, a political media environment similar to Canada, Davis notes a correlation between this rise in corporate PR, its professionalization and the trend of Conservative governments in the 1980s developing free-market-policy-making (2002, p. 48). The rise of corporate PR “appeared directly linked to the Thatcher policy agenda, as a 3-way alliance seemed to develop between the Conservative government”, the corporate sector and the PR industry. Davis details the growing ties between these three, as former PR professionals and heads of industry came to work for, aid and advise the Conservative government in the UK.

Although Davis’ body of work focuses on the relationship between business, corporate PR and the news media, his work echoes the changes within Canada at the end of the 20th century from government communications management to strategy and PR. The aforementioned trifecta mirrors Rudnicki’s (2009) and Kozolanka’s (2006) description of the Mulroney era in Canada, followed by the Liberal governments and their concerted pro-business communications programs, like the Team Canada trade missions aimed at developing business investments in Canada, as well as the signing the North American Free Trade Agreement. These mandates pushed implementation of professional PR practices and a corporate mentality within government. Davis (2002) describes the infiltration of corporate PR and professional communications strategies within liberal democracies tying this to the conservative, industry oriented politics of the time.

While the adoption of PR techniques are thought to enhance efficacy and the organization of government communications, Davis argues that the government's harnessing of PR has rather given "them the power to restrict/enable media access to information, censor news reporting, and threaten journalists with legal redress and/or less access to important sources" (2003, p. 34). This implementation of PR within the government apparatus moves efforts from communications management to news management, which is currently being observed in the Canadian political sphere, directly supporting this thesis. This can be explained by the fact that, as described in the evolution of the Canadian government communications policy, the government has developed a large and powerful communications apparatus, with greater allotted resources, meaning "more media contacts, greater output of information subsidies, multiple modes of communication and continuous media operations" (Davis, 2003, p. 34). All of these capacities and practices are of course informed and shaped by a business mindset and an ever-increasing use of professional PR. But an important factor in this, explains Davis (2003), is that, for the government, thus for high profile public figures and institutions, coverage does not need to be acquired. In political news journalism, as Ericson et al. (1989) highlighted, these figures *are* the news. For Davis (2003) then, government use of PR thus becomes about restricting media access to the political sphere. Management of news coverage and information become priority over ensuring information about government and policy is available and organized, participating in a two-way relationship with the public and allowing journalists to be vehicles for that information to enter into the public sphere. Focusing on Canada, Everett and Fletcher (2001) reiterate this thinking, maintaining that while

the current establishment of a massive, well developed, well-funded information service is justified by government obligations regarding information and the processes of liberal democracy, the apparatus is not immune to politicizing government information and attempting to manage the news media. Everett & Fletcher note that even while the political elite dominate as sources for news, outlets and journalists do not necessarily replicate their official messages and priorities “without some interpretation or balance” (Everett & Fletcher, 2001, p. 175). As much as government communications is meant to be non-partisan, as per its own current policy, paralleling Rudnicki’s (2009) and Kozolanka’s (2006) mention about abuse, Everett & Fletcher state that “neither the philosophy behind government information services, nor the practices that have developed, contain sufficient safeguards against abuse” (2001, p. 175). With the infiltration of professional PR practices and a corporate organization of government, much research, according to these authors, is pointing to an ever-increasing partisanship within recent Canadian government communications and to efforts going beyond the effective management of communications by government.²

This review of literature outlined the many factors important in examining how journalists operate in an era of communications management. Briefly, an understanding of the ties between journalism and democracy, and the subsequent

² Other academic literature does address the issues of the changing Canadian mediascape from a government-practice perspective. Examining similar questions under the Conservative Harper mandate, *How Canadians Communicate IV: Media and Politics* by Taras & Waddell (2012), is an edited volume with chapters ranging in topics from election campaigns, leader tour buses, political blogs, polling and Blackberries. The authors examine the various practices in which the government engages to gain office, pass legislation, maintain its mandate and communicate with Canadians and the Canadian media. Such works should be considered to gain a government-perspective on issues of information access, journalist/media relations and changing government communications practices.

expectations of journalism's role as a watchdog, were established. By seeking to keep the government accountable and adhering to the values of transparency and journalistic truth in their daily newsgathering, journalists have an expressed goal and duty to transmit relevant information to the public. This discussion underscored the vital, yet highly complex tug-of-war that is the journalist-source relationship. In this dance, the source most often leads. But in the dynamic between journalists and the Canadian government, this discussion has established that the source dominates. Here journalists face many pressures from their sources who seek to manage news and access to information by the use of strategic PR tactics. The discussion covered the various changes and pressures within the news industry. The Internet and the convergence of media platforms require journalists to do more work, faster and under the constraints of fewer resources and overwhelming information flows, driving their dependence on information subsidies. All these factors are seriously challenging journalists' ability to fulfill societal and professional expectations. They face limited access to relevant information and are deepening their dependence on content provided industry wide, pushing journalists to cannibalize content and operate as a pack, rarely breaking free with investigative journalism. The examination of the history and policy of government communications has shown that the apparatus as a whole has become more partisan and strategic. An adherence to a business mentality and PR have moved the priorities of government from communications management and providing information to the public, to managing image, access and ultimately the news.

With an understanding of the supporting literature, the following chapter is a detailed outline of the methodological approach to qualitative, semi-structure interviews undertaken to give a current relevant ‘snapshot’ of how journalists operate under this strategically managed political sphere.

Chapter two

The Newsgathering experience: Qualitative, semi-structured interviews

Design Strategy

This Master's thesis is intended to inquire into the practices of Canadian political news journalists. In order to examine questions of their practice, behaviour and experience, qualitative, semi-structure interviews were chosen as the research strategy. This qualitative strategy is interpretivist, which means it stresses an understanding of the social world by examining the participants' interpretations of their world, and constructionist, implying that social life is an outcome of interactions between individuals rather than a phenomenon separate from the actors involved (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, p. 144). Many academic works discussed in the literature review also take on similar questions of changes in the mediascape and journalistic practice using similar qualitative strategies. Machin & Niblock (2006), Fenton (2010), Philips (2010), Carlson & Franklin (2011) and Ericson et al. (1989) all take various qualitative approaches, namely content analysis and interviews to examine their questions (the larger, more extensive studies use paired strategies including qualitative and quantitative). These authors also stress the need and importance of examining similar questions using qualitative designs in order to address issues from a participant perspective.

With the main concern of examining questions from the point of view of those being studied, the process of qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews allows for a rich description and context to be collected in the results and findings. (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). This, in turn, allows for a better understanding

of social behaviour, values, beliefs and choices anchored in the context of the participant experience. The studies of DiStaso & Messner (2008), Forde & Johnston (2013) and Lasorsa et al. (2012), used content analysis and more quantitative approaches to examine their questions. These studies lack exactly this context and description of experience in their findings. Questions of how and why certain choices were made by the observed population, and what outside factors might influence their behaviour and in turn the research findings are poorly addressed as the structure and style create limitations on the research and its findings.

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews approach the research process in an open and flexible way, allowing for changes in the direction of the research and adaptation in response to the data already collected (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). The use of a research guide allows semi-structured interviews to have a general focus, while following main themes and questions outlined by the guide. This provides flexibility in the type of question posed—probing questions, follow up questions, open- and closed-ended questions for example—and the sequence of each interview. This style of interview is adaptive to the participant, his answers and his experience of the subject at hand. These interviews allow for a gradual narrowing of focus into questions and problems as they emerge from the findings over time (Bryman & Teevan, 2005).

However, this also leads to a critique of this method as too subjective, leaving interpretations of what is important and/or not to the researcher (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). The lack of limitations and structure to the process, which allows for rich descriptive findings, require a larger involvement by the researcher, and makes

central to the findings what he saw, heard and understood. The researcher is the main tool in data collection, which makes replication of the research very difficult as choices of focus on problems and questions are again tied to the researcher (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, p. 157). As much is based in researcher choice and experience of the interview process, qualitative interviews can lack in transparency of methods and population sample.

When semi-structured interviews are “conducted with a small number of individuals in one organization or locally, many agree that it is impossible to know if findings can be generalized to other settings” (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, p. 158). This is not necessarily the goal of such research designs, rather, the findings of qualitative research are meant to help develop theory (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). Generalizations from interviews in small contextual settings are however made to larger populations, but these are much more limited and tentative than some based in quantitative strategies.

Qualitative Semi-Structured interview method

The research was conducted in Ottawa, the nation’s capital, and hub of Canadian federal and parliamentary affairs, therefore the hub of Canadian political journalism. To provide a first hand, practical examination of actual journalistic methods, qualitative semi-structured interviews were undertaken. All candidates were offered full confidentiality, wherein no information that would personally identify them, their work or employer would be used in the research and analysis. This was done following the recommendation from the Carleton University Research Ethics Board to minimize the possible associated social, professional and economic risks for

participants. This was an attempt to increase the odds of participation by minimizing such risks for participants as well as an attempt to minimize the limitations of qualitative research.

An interview guide with a general list of open topics and questions was prepared based on the proposed problems and hypotheses of the research (see Appendix 1). This guide was at hand for the researcher throughout the interviews and ensured particular topics and issues were covered in each interview but flexible in sequence and denouement. The style of questioning was informal and semi-structured. The phrasing and sequencing of questions and topics varied from interview to interview, to allow for a more informal and comfortable atmosphere. These one-on-one, in-person interviews varied in location, but all were conducted in small, public places, mainly coffee shops, in the downtown core of Ottawa. The aim was to encourage interviewees to feel at ease and comfortable enough to have a candid conversation with the interviewer.

For analysis purposes, the interviews were digitally recorded, with the knowledge and consent of the interviewees, this allows the interviewer to be less distracted from the subjects and focus on listening. It allows for a minimal need to take notes, again reinforcing the casual conversation atmosphere. The aim was to minimize the limitations of the interviews, where the information collected is dependent upon the willingness of the participants to participate, answer questions openly, truthfully and provide knowledgeable insight without self-censorship or deceit. Acknowledging and minimizing the possible economic and social harms and risks taken by the participants (job, status etc.) by offering confidentiality also helps

minimize the limitations of this research strategy.

Once an interview was completed, the digital recording was transcribed by the researcher into a document format. These interviews were analyzed qualitatively by the researcher. Summaries, answers, generally discussed topics, respondent anecdotes and direct quotes were then used within this thesis to inform and support arguments and statements of findings.

Research sample

The focus of this research was on the information collection practices of Canadian political news journalists who cover federal or parliamentary affairs. Although a variety of news outlets feature federal/parliamentary issues and reports, these mainly stem from reporting done within Ottawa, within the walls of Parliament, and from journalists who work federal/parliamentary beats. In order for a journalist to have access to the Parliament, to Question Period, committees and to parliamentary press conferences, they must be a member of the National Press Gallery. Members of the Gallery, a list of whom is publicly available on the Gallery's website, were the prime candidates for this research. This ensured that the possible participants were official reporters of this news beat, having access to Members of Parliament (MPs), parliamentary news releases, Question Period, and that their methods of information collection were based on and influenced by the current context of the Parliament and federal affairs.

In addition, for the sake of the scope of this Master's thesis, the focus was on members of the Gallery who write for, or submit to, nationally circulated political

news outlets, such as *The National Post*, *The Globe and Mail*, *CBC*, *The Toronto Star*, and news agencies such as the Canadian Press that supply a variety of outlets with stories and content. These are the most prominent, best-known and most sought-out national news outlets. For the sake of the scope of this research, the focus on these outlets and their reporters ensured that the focus of these interviews represented the reporting within Ottawa of parliamentary/federal affairs.

Based on the National Press Gallery member list, individual reporters from each outlet were identified as possible candidates. However, for the purpose of this research, and the scope of these interviews, candidates were chosen based on their most recent activity. Only journalists having published at least one federal/parliamentary affairs piece/story per month for the six months previous to the research were sought out. The reason for this was to ensure that participants could share their most recent methods of information collection and the most recent collection and publishing requirements from their respective news outlet.

Once identified, potential candidates were first contacted via email with a letter of intent, approved by the Carleton Research Ethics Board, outlining the purpose and process of the project, an invitation to participate and a consent form outlining the use of the data and Carleton's ethics approval. The emails were followed up with a phone call to establish contact, bring attention to the email and project, as well as attempt a confirmation of participation. Further contact with participants was generally done via email as per participants' request.

The proposed number of participants was 10-15. This size of a pool of interviews was felt to be representative of the actual number of journalists who

actively report federal/parliamentary affairs for national news outlets. Based on preliminary examinations of the Canadian news media, it was estimated that approximately 2-3 journalists, who are members of the National Press Gallery, actively work the federal/parliamentary beat, per national news outlet identified (approx. 5). Thus this sample was felt to be an appropriate and valid measure to examine the most current practices of journalists currently working this particular beat in Ottawa, and appropriate for the scope of this Master's thesis. In addition, seeking out a larger sample would have been difficult within the timeframe and scope of this project, as journalists are known to be highly busy individuals, constantly working on deadlines, sometimes working multiple beats, from various physical locations, for various outlets, and themselves seeking out interviewees and researching for their own work.

Shifting of research sample size

The initial sample size and scope of news outlets were refined over the course of the collection process for various reasons.

At the outset, all national media outlets covering Canadian parliamentary/federal affairs were considered, broadcast (radio and television), print and online. However after undertaking the first two interviews, both with print journalists, the researcher noted the possible important differences in information collection practices between each outlet, namely television and print. Thus, in order to stay within the realistic scope of a Master's project, as well as to more precisely examine the effects of changes in the industry on one particular set of collection

practices, thought to be most traditionalist in a theoretical sense, solely print outlets were sought from then on.

Thus the scope and sample size of the project were affected, refined to a goal of 6-10 interviews, thought to be representative and a valid measure of print journalists, members of the National Press Gallery, covering parliamentary/federal affairs for Canadian print outlets with a national reach. As it happens, most print outlets are conversely online outlets and thus were considered one and the same for the purpose of this project.

Hurdles in collection

As mentioned earlier, the difficulty of engaging with this particular population was considered in the proposal of this project, and proved to be the main hurdle to collecting primary information. Several waves of email invitations were sent to many potential candidates selected as per the aforementioned criteria. The majority did not elicit a response while a few emails were replied to with an acknowledgement of interest, but an inability to participate due to time and work constraints. A total of eight interviews with print journalists were undertaken and analyzed for this project during the collection time frame of late February to mid-June 2013.

As was predicted, one main factor affected the prompt and successful collection and analysis of interviews, the news. The spring of 2013 proved to be highly newsworthy—with one federal party leadership race, the annual budget announcement and sequential and ongoing senate scandal outbreak—all of which was covered by the precise population targeted for the research. All respondents cited

difficulties in participating due to work (thus news) related issues, time frames, deadlines, their own research, press conferences, etc. Two planned interviews were canceled last minute due to news breaks and work commitments, and two other interviews were only possible once the House of Commons had risen for the summer in June.

Interview participants

In total eight interviews were conducted and analyzed, three female participants and five male participants. Two participants were freelance journalists who had once worked as staff for national news outlets and continued to submit to these or similar outlets. One participant worked for the Ottawa bureau of a national newswire service, which for the purpose of this research is being considered as print, since these stories are used in print publications as well as online, even though the participant does not directly write for an expressly print publication.

Two participants were francophone, working for francophone news outlets with national reach. These interviews were done in both French and English. One interview switched back and forth, depending on the comfort of the participant with each question or topic. French was used at times when feeling a lack of ability to best explain in English. The second interview was mainly conducted in French, with use of English for terms commonly used in the industry. It was initially indicated that the interviews were to be preferably conducted in English for reasons of analysis. However, as the researcher is a fluently bilingual francophone, this option was allowed to maximize the representative sample of the research.

The range of experience spanned from five to forty years as a reporter with all participants reporting having worked for at least two or more outlets in their careers to date, as well as all having worked multiple beats over time. All reported currently working multiple beats or topics, including parliamentary affairs and a second or third more precise federal file such as agriculture or finance/economics, for example.

All participants confirmed having had formal training in journalism, with either a university degree, Bachelor's or Master's, or collegial diploma. Many of these were paired with various other training backgrounds or degrees, such as Communication Studies or International Affairs, for example.

Limitations

The qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews has limitations over the information it can render. The research for these interviews was fully dependent on the participants' willingness to firstly participate, and be forthcoming in their participation, about themselves, their experiences and their work. These are human subjects prone to bias. They can succumb to, or feel the need to exaggerate, censor, or present themselves, their work or experiences in a positive light, for various reasons. All participants were currently working on stories with details they did not wish to share. Subsequently this study does lack in precise examples, like actual percentages of use or interaction, and examples of key informants or actually used information/materials. This could be better achieved by a content analysis of news products or first hand newsroom observation. However these limitations need to be considered within the scope of a Master's level thesis.

The Newsgathering Experience: Interview analysis

The following chapter provides a detailed summary of qualitative, semi-structures interviews undertaken with Canadian political print journalists. The findings are organized by the general themes found within participants' own descriptions of their experiences in the newsroom and out in the field, over the course of their careers, and particularly under the current Canadian government. These interviews provide a current 'snap-shot' and understanding of how political journalists function in an age of strategic government communications. It illustrates their relationships with their sources and the newsgathering practices they undertake daily. What is most apparent from these accounts is the almost homogeneous experience they have had working during this current government's mandate. Despite writing for different outlets over different spans of time, repeatedly participants recounted a very similar day-to-day experience. This reinforces this thesis' stance that the limited access under tightened control of government communications proliferates sameness due to a reliance on mass-disseminated secondary sources.

Subjects were asked to describe their main goals and objectives when setting out to collect information, or sources, for their prospective stories. For these journalists, this is the basis of their profession; and these practices are ubiquitous to their jobs, having become second nature within their average day. Each expressed their goals and objectives of sourcing in reference to common notions of journalistic duty. While all participants have undergone formal training in journalism at the university or college level, it is understandable that their view of their profession is guided by the expectations of transparency, objectivity and journalistic truth. To

provide a balanced story was the overall common goal mentioned by participants. For them balance means the seeking out of the various voices of all those concerned in the matter; who would provide the widest range of context, perspective, and information to the reader, with a goal of presenting the widest picture of the issue at hand.

Although generally they felt they performed their jobs properly and fulfilled their journalistic duties as best they could day-to-day, participants certainly did not feel they were able to always fully provide the balance they sought. The most seasoned journalists and the most junior alike described the many issues and roadblocks they encounter daily, as well as the various tactics they attempt to employ while seeking access to the information most often kept out of their reach.

Traditional practices

Analysis of the interviews showed that generally, political news journalists partake in what we can consider to be traditional practices to source their stories, traditional in the sense that these practices are widely used and well established within the general understanding of journalism work. Each participant described ‘working their beat,’ making phone calls, sending emails, setting up interviews, researching documents, policy, statistics, seeking out important voices, flipping through news releases and attending press conferences and events alike.

While these steps are routine and second nature to most journalists today, participants expressed how sourcing, and its practices is largely a self-taught art. Each participant stressed how there is no one way to get at the information needed to write

their stories and that many contextual elements play in their daily choices. While all attended formal journalism programs, each stressed that this essential part of their day was not explicitly taught in their journalism programs. While general research skills, data analysis and general practice is studied and laid out in textbooks, most of their practices were learned on the job, from colleagues and mentors over the years and shaped around their own skills and interests. One would think that a lack of formal instruction in the ‘how to’ of information collection would lead to vast disparities within the practices of Canadian journalists. Yet despite this expression of difference and lack of instruction within this area of journalism, when asked to think of a current piece being worked on or a past submission, and to describe the various steps taken to inform this work, across the board each participant described a very similar process.

Firstly, the phone is the most preferred method to begin the sourcing process, whether it be to set up an interview or to undertake one over the phone. All participants indicated that although they would ideally like to sit with each of their human sources individually for interviews, this was highly unrealistic, mainly due to time and displacement constraints.

My preference is the phone. I try as much as possible. I want to be as specific as possible as to what I want to say; I always prefer to speak to people over the phone. You have a live interaction; can ask follow up questions right away. [...] In terms of meeting in person, if I'm up on The Hill for something else its always the best way, but there's just so many phone calls to be made in a day, so many people to be interviewed that going up to each one would be difficult. (Participant 4)

Real-time information collection is prized for participants, not only for the sake of getting direct quotes from key people, but mainly for the richness a face-to-face encounter can provide. Being able to tailor follow up questions, lead into subjects

more naturally, and of course interpret the communication physically conveyed by subjects later to be described to readers, adds a detail and opportunity only found in real-time interaction. So the phone call, leading to a phone interview, is the most appealing alternative.

It was made apparent that modes of communication are never really used in isolation, and individual practices are difficult to examine. Although the interview was the ideal, and the phone interview the more realistic ideal, most participants described how email was constantly used in tandem with the traditional phone call, either phone then email, email then phone, depending on the targeted source. Some expressed that the phone, however, is generally reserved for closer or better-acquainted sources, or for less high profile potential sources, as a starting point. They would lead with an email then a phone call if they were not acquainted with their source, or if the source fell lower within hierarchy of sources. For the purpose of this project, email is considered a traditional method, as it has widely been used within this profession for at least a decade if not more, and its ubiquitous and essential use was made easily apparent within the research data. No participant mentioned a time when email was not part of his or her day-to-day practices.

In tandem with these two most widely used practices, the daily activities of journalists also provide opportunities to actively collect information and inspire new stories. As previously mentioned, the face-to-face sit down interview is a rarity, nonetheless participants described the various opportunities they have over the course of their day to interact with the sources they need, allowing for impromptu conversations, camaraderie and more intimate or appropriate arenas to ask questions.

Participants each described actively participating and going through the motions of journalism on Parliament Hill, working their beat. As Press Gallery members, all are granted access to The Hill, its halls and walls, where the bulk of their targeted sources can be found for meetings, work and sometimes lunch.

All but three participants interviewed work out of what is known as the Hot Room, the large room in Centre Block, filled with individual desks, which has long housed the nation's political news hub, essentially making Parliament their office. Participants described the value of working side by side with their colleagues and fellow competitors, on site in the core of the Parliament where they regularly cross paths with MPs in the halls, meeting rooms and the cafeteria. There are, however, strict rules about where within Parliament journalists are allowed to officially practice. "There are rules, you can chat and mingle but you can't just take out your recorder in any given hallway, there are some [hallways] where you can and some where you really are not allowed at all, but being on site is very useful" (Participant 8). It is well established that much of what is overheard or discussed is off the record, but the physical proximity and ongoing possibility of coming across bits and pieces of prized information is central to the day-to-day work of these political journalists

We're physically just down the hall from the House of Commons. I'm physically in the Center Block right next to the Library of Parliament, which is a great resource, one thing I use all the time because whenever a document gets tabled in The House, they get a copy, so I can just go down and look at the document. That becomes a great source of information. My Press Gallery privileges also allow me to come and go from committee meetings all the time. Go sit in the back and get coffee. (Participant 6)

The ability to walk out of one's office and head to a parliamentary press conference down the hall, or to committee meetings, Ins and Outs or scrums, is vital,

saving time and increasing first-hand information collection through observation and the possibility of ask questions to key people. Being in place at these events, meetings and locations is the perfect example of journalists physically working their beats. Again stressing how information collection is highly contextual and sometimes ad-hoc, participants explained that it can happen at any time in any place. For them, being in place and working the beat is almost constant. Networking and meeting people might be of use to them in the future, but it could also spark a lead or an idea or an interest at any point in time, so vigilance and a constant working of the beat is essential. This speaks to the minutiae of journalism and information collection. While each journalist can have such a vastly different day, leads, stories and preferences, they showed a common understanding and expression of duty, and use of day-to-day practices.

Participants also have access to the galleries to watch Question Period (QP), but across the board QP is watched on television as background noise while doing other work. Participants described, however, actively going to what is known as Ins and Outs, before and after QP where MPs enter and leave the House of Commons. This is a traditional opportunity for each party, its leader and members, to answer questions from journalists assembled outside the door in what is known as a scrum, or to make comments headed into QP about the upcoming agenda, or, while leaving, about the session that has just ended.

While individual participant interviews showed a varied use of very similar and traditional collection practices, the total sample analysis found that the context in which collection practices were used had the greatest effect on their success in

collecting relevant and useful information. All participants noted that many factors influenced how they each proceeded in seeking out information. Much depended on the type of story and where the lead originated from, the amount of time until deadline or what else they had on the agenda. But mainly it was the context and the subject of the story, the *who* and the *what*, which affected the steps and strategies taken.

As political news journalists covering Canadian parliamentary/federal affairs, the main role or purpose of these participants is to report on the goings-on of Ottawa. What the government is doing and not doing, saying, proposing, reacting to etc., in its multiple facets is of primary concern. It is the people of government, who are of most interest. This includes not only the party in power, its cabinet ministers, their departments and their law making/governing decisions and plans, but also the opposition parties, the Senate and the various organized bodies who affect and are affected by the daily operations of Parliament Hill. These form a source hierarchy. Those most commonly sought out by participants in the sourcing of their stories in order of preference and importance are as follows:

- The Government; the Prime Minister, his various staff and generally the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Ministers, their respective offices, staff and departments/ministries.
- Members of Parliament; oppositional official critics, opposition leaders, their respective offices and staff. Senators, their offices and their respective staff.
- Industry groups, associations, lobbyists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), university professors/researchers, subject matter experts, and occasionally individual citizens.

Analysis showed that participants found a need to interact differently with each aforementioned group: government, oppositional and non-governmental. Participants

described having, over time, learned to use different collection tactics and modes of communication with sources within each targeted group. The modes, tactics and experiences of each reporter were very similar. Yet each target group responded to (or made use of) communication modes very differently, according to participants. When analyzed, the sample highlighted an ongoing account, where participants described the use of very similar practices when dealing with each individual source group. In essence, participants described how they learned whom to approach and how to approach them as sources related to the issues they were reporting on.

The Government

During interviews participants were asked questions with the intention of having them reflect on their current information collection practices and how these may or may not have changed or evolved over the course of their careers. As much as each journalist has had a different path into journalism, a different length of career and has worked for different news outlets, all participants mentioned one major factor having affected or changed their ability to collect useful information on a day-to-day basis. All participants described how the current Conservative government has had a very heavy impact on the way journalists collect information. Although five participants had careers spanning much longer than 15 years, the three other participants started their careers each just a few years before 2006, and had studied journalism and the Canadian political landscape prior, thus could speak to the changes they and their colleagues observed on the Hill since the current government came to power.

As political news journalists covering parliamentary/federal affairs, the central theme, focus, or issue in participant's stories is most often that of the government, the political party in power, its leader, Ministers and MPs. This group sits at the top of the source hierarchy; they are responsible for government portfolios, for policies and decisions made which effect Canadians directly every day. They are the primary source group participants seek out daily, that which sets the tone or the context participants must adapt to in order to attempt to find the key information, and answers to the questions they seek, in order to fulfill their duty. According to the interviews, there appears to be a very well understood precedent set by the current government. This has been described by each participant in terms of the difficulties of covering Canadian politics they have observed since 2006. The research has found a common account, negative in tone, related to the party in power and to the lack of access to information and general blockade felt by participants.

End of the phone: enter the email

I would say [what] has [changed] a lot since I started working as a reporter [is], now days there is much more [of] an established structure when it comes to actually getting information. Let's say I am covering the federal budget, basically I want to speak to the Minister of Finance, well that will be impossible, its that simple, it will be some communications person at his office [who] will basically ask me to send them the questions by email and then they will provide an answer, [...] if its for attribution it will always be to the communications guy not to the Minister. (Participant 3)

There is a well-established understanding that there is no use in attempting to contact Ministers directly to ask questions by phone or to set up an interview, especially not when their portfolios are a hot topic.

Oh no! It's almost impossible to get a Minister as a newspaper. Their staff is happy to put them on TV. [There] even if the interviewer is doing their job and coming and challenging them, they still get that full time to read and present their full statement. But if [I get] a Minister on the phone with me, they tell me absolutely nothing. And I'm not going to include their statement if they're all the same and I think they are aware of that. (Participant 4)

Although, in order to attempt to fulfill their duties, all participants still try for direct contact, they expressed how calling any government office is usually a futile attempt and that the usual response is a request by a staffer or communications officer to send questions or enquiries by email. The issue with this established structure or procedure is that the emails simply end there. Once questions have been sent, the email may or may not be replied to, answers may or may not be given, and the timeline is never clear. The understanding among participants is that they have that one email opportunity. Follow up emails with further questions, reiterations or probing are rarely ever acknowledged. Participants described having little choice but to accept the information they receive from these vital offices, even when it rarely gives them insight or speaks to the initial topics or questions. While they still scrutinize the information, the often single-line official reply, without ministerial attribution is all they have to source and include in their stories from that important voice.

The opposition/ non-government

Government interaction is painted in stark contrast to the interactions participants have as they move down the source hierarchy. Members of Parliament in oppositional parties are described as having very different interactions with journalists. Across the board participants described this group as highly approachable.

Participants have no qualms calling these MPs' offices for information or interviews, and emails can in most cases be sent directly to MPs accounts, where they have the opportunity for back and forth and answered questions. Certainly this ease of access varies depending on the size of the office and the responsibilities of each MP.

Certainly the leadership of each party has its own communications team, and staffers answering emails, but getting through to them in the end was not described as being much of a challenge.

Yeah they're definitely easier to talk to than the Cabinet Ministers. A lot of them, you go on their website and find a direct number to call. You don't have to go through all these people. They just want to make themselves available if someone has a question cause they know otherwise, they're not going to get heard. I think they realize that probably the priority is [for us] to get people in a position of power and as you go down the totem pole it becomes less of a priority. (Participant 1)

Opposition parties and non-government groups alike have an interest in having their voices heard, getting their messages out and developing favourable relationships with the media. Participants are highly aware of this and the information from these offices is always scrutinized within journalistic duty. But these relationships allow journalists to strive for more balanced work on their own part. Having access to these individuals with a relative lack of resistance allows them to feature multiple voices in their work, legitimate and relevant perspectives giving readers more context and, as much as possible, balanced information.

The opposition parties and NGO/industry groups were described as being highly organized, and most of the time being ahead of the news game. While participants felt very comfortable calling these offices directly, they also mentioned

that many times these offices would call them first with reaction to policy, scandal or anything on The Hill with a slight tie to them. While many of the industry groups practiced cold calling and pitching private sector interests or stories, on the whole, participants said that NGOs and industry contacts tend to have very good communications teams, quick, efficient, and strategic. These groups have made a clear impression on journalists that they want to be included, they want to be heard and will work with journalists to make that happen. Although the government of the day is high priority for journalists to get comments and information from, and these groups do not control or have responsibility over important ministries and portfolios, they are interrelated and have influence and importance in the grand scheme of The Hill. These groups may not be the utmost priority but journalists know they will come through with information in a timely manner, which will allow them to do their job and give the public information.

Alternative Traditional Practices

Participants all noted rarely having direct contact with high-ranking officials responsible for the issues or the portfolios they are covering. Rather they are in constant communication with communications officer or directors, who are the only ones available for attribution, yet not the officials journalists seek to hold to account. Participants all seemed to know very well what to expect from their interactions with any official ministry or office. Since first hand information is prized and directly speaking with a source in question in an attempt to write a balanced story is the first step, participants went on to explain the alternate routes they all take for information.

Although journalists are constantly seemingly starved for information, they are also inundated by a tsunami of information. When asked about their use of news releases as sources, one participant took out her Blackberry, made the inbox screen visible and profusely scrolled to display all the new unopened emails. “I received about 300 today, I’ve flagged maybe four and I’ve skimmed a few more” (Participant 5). Much like this display of the absurdity of her inbox, all participants described the absolutely overwhelming number of news releases they receive daily and the impossibility of reviewing them all. As Press Gallery members, they are all subscribed to a list-serve from the Press Gallery, which reviews news releases incoming from various organizations and sources, and sends them out daily to members. This service used to be done in paper format, where stacks could be found in their individual mailboxes. The sheer number they receive today makes that impossible and email is now the standard. Much of what comes into their inboxes they describe as highly promotional and niche, which they deem not interesting or important to the bulk of their audience or useful for their particular portfolio or beat. Many of these news releases come from private interest groups, industry groups, lobbyists, public relations firms and NGOs.

Generally participants ignore the bulk of new releases, skimming subject lines and senders. This is a simple practice done throughout the day. It is very important as participants explained the flow of news releases helps them see what is going on in the next coming days or weeks, and what is on various organizations’ agendas, almost like a news aggregator or bulletin board. The news releases they religiously open are those from the most official sources, particularly government offices and

ministries and the opposition parties. Without direct conversations, quotes or interactions with their targeted government sources, news releases from these offices are an alternative information source as they usually contain attributable quotes from Ministers and information about issues, policy and portfolios, with background information and briefings. When no other information from these sources is coming down the line, participants described often using, or recycling the news releases as ‘briefs’. Here the information in the release is added to, other voices are sought for comment to complete the picture, balance and supplement the information. No credit given to the journalist for the work, it is simply filed in the name of the paper.

Many news releases from these sources are announcements for upcoming press conferences involving those offices, which participants certainly do not want to miss. These press conferences are an opportunity for them to possibly ask a question directly to the officials they have been seeking out, to hear what others are asking, and to hear the answer. But it is also an opportunity for journalists to add more context to their stories for the audience. While it is not a private audience with a Minister, as opposed to the emailed answers from communications officers, journalists can describe the tone and mannerisms, and the context of the quote, giving a more well-rounded understanding of the information being relayed for the audience. Still, according to participants, these events are reiterations of the talking points sent to them via email should they have the rare opportunity to ask a direct question.

Similarly, scrums and Ins and Outs were described by participants as equally important arenas where journalists can come directly into contact with the sources they seek and ask the questions in need of answering. They catch the sources as they

walk the halls, enter or exit question period and committees. The discussion of these, however, was accompanied with much lament by participants. Senior journalists described the stark differences mainly in frequency between scrums, and Ins and Outs opportunities today compared to past governments and other parties as “the Opposition is always out there and the government rarely descends” (Participant 1).

While these opportunities in theory should occur daily, participants said the Prime Minister and Ministers rarely actually stop and mount the podium to address the media. Rather there has been an increase in the use of the back door on the way out of the House of Commons, particularly by the PM.

It used to be, for the longest time, there was Cabinet Ins and cabinet Outs, and it used to be that Cabinet would meet, they still meet, but one of the changes that the Harper Government made was that they don't tell anyone where or when they're meeting, he's changed that. Used to be under the Martin Government and Chretien before, reporters knew where and when and had mics set up outside the Cabinet room so when Ministers came out, Tuesday Cabinet outs, you would go there and Paul Martin would tell you about the state of the economy and Lloyd Axworthy would tell you about what's happening in foreign affairs, that the Tories ended. So they have dramatically restricted that, so you don't have cabinet Ins and Outs now. You have the third one the triumvirate, caucus Ins and Outs, so every Wednesday, the caucuses, each party has their MPs convening in private. (Participant 6)

They will only come out and make themselves visible usually if they have something to say and it is pretty easy for them to avoid a type of question if they don't really want to speak on a certain issue. (Participant 1)

Contrarily, participants described the opposition, particularly their leaders, as frequently mounting the podium to make statements and ask questions. Describing a research project undertaken with the Press Gallery, where data from audio recordings of all questions and comments in the Parliament foyer was analyzed, one participant tried to quantify his experience.

So I took all those and loaded them into a database to figure out that, opposition MPs were saying something like ten times the number of words that conservative MPs were saying in front of a microphone. Bob Rae was the biggest talker of them all. (Participant 6)

Nevertheless, the few opportunities journalists do have to ask questions and interact with the sought out sources, are not the open dialogue fostering a better understanding of issues and answers to pressing questions that journalists would like. When the government does participate in Ins and Outs, according to participants, they are simply a shorter version of a planned-out press conference.

Press conferences are held more frequently, but participants cast them as simple reiterations of the news releases, which precede them, and the briefings, which follow. Participants explained that Ministers stick very narrowly to talking points, the same ones found in their emailed replies and news releases. They repeat answers with very little change or elaboration. Although these journalists religiously attend carefully crafted press conferences, the rarely fruitful Ins and Outs, and reluctantly chase sources down halls in scrums, participants described needing to do so almost out of desperation. Since their favored methods of direct first hand contact or private audience rarely occur, these alternate practices are in most cases the only opportunity for journalists to get a comment or an answer that is not scripted. Continuously citing the need to fulfill their duty and give a balanced perspective, yelling out a question in the hectic scrum, a few participants described, is a pressure tactic, hoping the source under fire will answer outside the allotted talking points. While no participant took pride in the practice, the desperation to fulfill a certain journalistic ethic and duty is underlies the scrum chase. It is a way participants can ensure that all concerned

voices were given an opportunity to be heard, their questions were asked directly to the source, but that an answer or comment was declined. Citing this “declined to answer” at least demonstrates to their readers an attempted effort and methods for a balanced approach.

While Question Period was quickly brushed aside by participants, they all mentioned watching it or keeping up with it in some way, most often as background noise. “The government will sometimes use it to make a statement on something, the PM or Cabinet Ministers, but otherwise its just like covering a schoolyard” (Participant 2), “answers are not the highest quality” (Participant 4).

Question Period is known as the daily activity of government, where parties regroup and clash. It is fed live online and on television via the Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC) and often used as television sound bites. Partially, it is the accessibility that renders it less useful: everyone has access to it. But mainly, participants do not think of it as a source of information, since the key government players they have an interest in simply reiterate the same talking points. Likewise the opposition members are criticized for their part in question period, one participant noting that in QP “they are asking non questions and getting non answers” (Participant 2). For the most part participants felt QP was more useful for, or geared to television news for the sound bites and visuals it provides. Generally, participants do watch QP as it can give the daily tone of government issues and the daily agenda, but it is rarely where new information is discovered, and certainly not what they deem quality or useful information. QP can be a source for story ideas or leads according to participants. As a last resort, when unsatisfied with news release

information or emailed replies, QP can be used for direct quotes, from the PM mainly, and tone and manner can be described to give additional context to readers. Overall there is a reluctance to use QP as a true source, as it is not exclusive nor is it new or informative.

While only a few participants actively discussed parliamentary committees, they were described as an excellent opportunity to interact with key officials. As committees are less widely broadcast or public, in the way that QP is, participants described them as more interrogative, more intimate and more direct. Officials are in closer quarters, discussing more precise portfolios and issues, and in a more serious tone. While they are still open to the public, on the record and broadcast, they were described as much less hectic and more fruitful in terms of information. Generally committees make for excellent networking and interaction, the essence of working the beat. By regularly being present journalists can establish themselves on that beat, be seen and be known and develop authority as the reporter for that topic or issue. Despite this, it was not made out to be the place where one-on-one interviews are scored nor where Ministers stray from their talking points. But the intimacy and the lack of a back door do increase the opportunity for interaction and questioning.

Committees and other less public arenas within Parliament give opportunities for journalists to develop their ties with less prominent members of government as well. Backbenchers, non-ministerial MPs from the party in power, were described as highly useful connections by participants. While these MPs are not responsible for ministries, they are still privy to government information and agendas. Participants explained that these Members tend to be less under the controlling eye of the PMO,

and some can be very happy to be sought out and receive attention from journalists. Some, according to participants, can even be disgruntled at times, making for very good contacts at times of need. However, as backbenchers, one participant explained that they only have limited access to information; they are not in Cabinet, nor Ministers, and many times are only privy to the same highly strategic talking points and lower level information as journalists. Most of the time they must also be used as unnamed sources, which participants expressed reluctance in doing. There are a few reasons unnamed sources are not favourable. For participants it again comes down to balance, context and legitimacy. It is their duty to give readers the most complete context surrounding the information so they can make their own judgments. Knowing who said what helps assert the balance of the story and establishes the legitimacy of the information, the source and the journalist's work. In addition, depending on the type of information, other voices in a featured story deserve to know the source of information, particularly if it is accusation or scandalous. There is a balancing act for journalists, to work their sources but keep their confidence and secure access to information. It is necessary to use unnamed sources in their work, but it needs to be kept to a minimum and should be considered secondary according to participants.

General Sourcing Methods: New technology

There is no doubt that the Internet and new technology have greatly infiltrated sourcing practices for journalists. As *to Google* has become a common and essential verb in our society's lexicon, so to has it become ingrained in today's journalism practices. For participants, the Internet, email and tools like Google generally have

made their traditional day-to-day practices much faster and more efficient. New technology is mainly used, of course for production, but most importantly for research, finding documents, background information, and sources. Much of that information would have been available in various places and formats in the past, requiring a lot more digging, verification and time. The Internet and official websites now house those traditional documents and sources, verifiable information, easily accessible and generally well organized and searchable. There is no need for that old Rolodex or switchboard assistance, as one participant put it. Possible sources, like experts, university professors, researchers, NGOs, industry groups, associations etc. can be found online. Participants noted that many of these sources, particularly NGOs and industry groups, put immense effort into their online presence, with well-organized, thorough websites and social media accounts. Their contact information is centralized on their website, background research can be done beforehand, their legitimacy as sources can be assessed and their provided information verified. These proactive groups post media releases and statements as well as multiple contacts on their sites, making it easier for journalists to seek them out and include their voices and perspectives. For participants, the ease and ubiquitous use of email allows them to contact multiple possible sources and leads in a day, set up phone calls or interviews and have documents and information sent and delivered instantaneously. Googling and email have become industry standards.

There is no doubt that social networking sites have, in less than 10 years, become essential to the way our society consumes and disseminates information. While participants described using Facebook almost solely for personal use with

family and friends, Twitter on the other hand has become an essential tool for their journalistic work. One participant recounted a groundbreaking court decision to allow reporters to live tweet court proceedings only a few years ago. For him this solidified the essentiality of smartphones, technology and social media within the profession of journalism.

Overall, participants described their use of Twitter in very similar ways. They described the omnipresence of the medium in their lives, as always on, on their desktops and smartphones, at work and at home, from first thing in the morning to right before bed. All participants stressed how proficiency with the medium was absolutely mandatory and essential within their media organizations. While the most junior participants started their careers having great familiarity with the medium, more senior participants described their learning curves and the almost ad-hoc training sessions their outlets organized when realizing the emerging importance of social media in the industry. One participant described taking the helm and helping their outlet develop their social media strategy, simultaneously learning the Twitter-sphere as it emerged and learning how to harness it for journalistic work, a process still ongoing. This involved individually setting up an account for and crash coursing each journalist and editor in the outlet. In addition, the participant described how while learning the medium, he attempted to write the rules or ethical use of Twitter for his outlet's handbook, again an ongoing process.

For participants, generally Twitter is another platform for journalists to push out their stories by tweeting links to their published work connected to their outlet's website. It is a way of reaching out to a broad audience, who may not pick up the

paper, and create traffic on their outlet's website, the essence of the news business today. While participants in this study are all print journalists, for them and their outlets the website and the paper are really one in the same. Gone are the days of the web reporter—everyone now does both. Journalists also use Twitter to stay on top of the news game. They need and want to be the first to post their own angle or interpretation, be the first to write on a subject, develop the newest lead and scoop. Participants explained how Twitter use has helped develop their careers. For them it is highly useful for the building of credibility and notoriety on their beat, which is essential to securing access to information and the confidence of sources.

Not only are journalists posting links to their fully filed stories, but they are live tweeting events, QP or press conferences, and updating stories, angles and leads as they develop. To a certain degree Twitter, as described by participants, becomes a draft of an evolving story, which is then typed up, posted online and filed. One participant described how online web publishing generally, as well as paired with Twitter, allows for more well-rounded and balanced journalism. While articles are published in the paper, stories are described as living on the web. While a story can be a maximum of 500 words in print, a journalist can continue to elaborate and develop a story to 2000 words or more. In addition, online a journalist can include hyperlinks within a story, allowing readers to access the documents, releases and data used for a story, or links to past stories to get a much wider, more balanced understanding of the issue.

What we're able to do now with the web is, were able to put in hyperlinks, so if the reader is interested in more well we can point them to 'here is the Auditor General's full report, fill your boots', 'here is the PM statement on his website', 'here is what the opposition has to say about it.' So I think

that's good because it allows for the reader if they have questions about our story, well they can go and get the broader fuller context. (Participant 2)

With Twitter, while only 140 characters, journalists can also include links to websites and documents used to source and inform the story. The participant stressed that, while readers can now go on and read, judge and inform themselves about the issues at hand in a more in-depth way, good journalism still needs to be performed, these features are simply an option to enhance agency for readers. Another participant described how Twitter allows for the “inside baseball stuff” of politics in Canada (Participant 4). While much can be cut out of a published piece in the editorial process, the little snippets of information that do not make a story can be pushed out via Twitter, the little details maybe only fascinating to the biggest #canpoli followers.

While Twitter has become the place to publish and stay on top of the 24-hr news-cycle, tied to this need to push out content is a need to also monitor content from other outlets. Like the majority of citizen users, participants described using Twitter as a tool and place to monitor what is going on, as a news aggregator. Journalists follow hundreds of other journalists and outlets, their colleagues and competitors, local and from around the world, working their same beats or various others. All participants described the need to know and keep a very close watch on the news. As Twitter is the new platform to publish content, it must be monitored with hyper vigilance. To stay relevant and in the know is to not miss anything on Twitter. Journalism training programs have long stressed the importance of staying on top of the news, and knowing what is going on has always been part of the job. Observing and monitoring is second nature to these journalists and Twitter has

become the new tool and the easiest way to do so. Twitter is not a new practice, simply a new medium to enhance with speed and access an established professional need.

Participants stressed the importance of other news outlets and what they are doing, writing or saying. While it would be impossible to constantly be the first to break all stories or information, participants stressed a need for their outlet to feature all the breaks and leads coming down the line, whether they originated from their own journalists or not. The speed, short form (140 characters), and the linking of content is perfect for journalists to stay vigilant. While with online immediacy they do not need to wait until the next morning to find out their competition's scoops and stories, participants described the common practice of also sometimes reusing other outlets' content. Certainly outlets would like to be the first and only to break stories and information, but much like with news releases, when they aren't the first or do not have access to something, they recycle. A new angle, voice or information is meant to be added when this occurs and appropriate credit to the original source, such as "first reported in XX outlet..." is given. To a certain degree however, the reuse and re-tweeting or re-coverage of content is also a way for journalists to gauge the success of their work. One participant described the breaking of his biggest story in terms of the amount of reuse and re-coverage received from other outlets.

Journalists and their outlets do not solely follow their kin on Twitter, for the medium brings them very close to their active audience. No participant fully admitted to regularly using Twitter for expressed crowdsourcing, nor using the average citizen as a source. But all mentioned the interaction they have with their followers as

influential on their stories. Twitter allows for direct feedback on their news work, appreciation or criticism, but mainly being able to follow the associated comments and tweets linked by retweets or hash tags. It allows them to see how their stories are received and discussed, find out citizens' opinions on the issues and the information presented. One participant explained that Twitter, in a way, can help generate content, with an online tool called Storify. Similar to a news aggregator, Storify collects related tweets, retweets and hash tags to curate feeds from Twitter on particular subjects. These are more and more being included within the online version of articles, as pull quotes or in sidebars, as the 'what is being said', or feedback angle of stories. Participants mentioned the few (but growing) times where their audiences' tweets have helped them in writing, and developing an angle or lead. They mentioned how, more and more, Twitter is leading to helpful information for their work. One participant described a recent occurrence of how a story was broken when she tweeted a question out to her followers about the unknown identity or origin of protesters on Parliament Hill. At a standstill in her work, the journalist tweeted about her own lack of information on the matter, and her inability to have questions answered, so she turned the question to her mass of followers. Within an hour or so, the participant's followers had discussed the issues through tweets, tweeted thoughts and suggestions, leads and even possible contacts, which the participant then followed up and verified, allowing her to break the story, firstly on Twitter and then filing a story by end of day. On a whim, while simply expressing a journalistic roadblock, quick tweets incited interested, active citizens to aid in the development of political news coverage. While this is an isolated occurrence, it demonstrates how

some journalists are using new mediums and secondary sources to gain access to information where they find roadblocks on The Hill

When asked if Twitter was expressly a source for their journalistic work, most participants had a slight moment of hesitation before indicating that no, Twitter is not truly an important source for their work. While new media is generally being embraced by news media, as mediums emerge, their use and adoption is carefully considered in its effects on journalism, traditional roles, duties, responsibilities as well as ethical practice. Participants stressed that the ethical use of Twitter in journalism is still evolving, and while their individual news outlets outline the accepted practices in their own handbooks, each outlet has a different articulation of the acceptable uses of Twitter and social media. There seems to be a grey zone regarding exactly how, when and how much to use Twitter for direct quotes and information. In terms of outright sourcing, participants described using Twitter as a last resort. There are verification issues with Twitter. There are millions of voices, opinions and agendas, and generally speaking, their followers are not reliable or legitimate sources of information for the Canadian political news beat.

Each participant indicated that yes, at times they have used tweets as direct quotes in their work and each expressed a similar position on what is acceptable use. When used, just like email, phone or in person, the context of the information must be given to the audience, indicating it was pulled from Twitter, as well as from which account or handle. This is where the issue of verification comes into play. While politicians, industry groups, NGOs, journalists and just about every company now has a Twitter handle, these could be fake, hacked or ghost accounts run by various

staffers. The little blue check mark for official accounts does help establish legitimacy but there is always a chance of Twitter misuse. Since most targeted source groups have adopted Twitter it is worthwhile for journalists to monitor their activity. Generally speaking if they have not been able to get a quote or comment from a targeted source, journalists will turn to their online activity. Participants felt that about 90 per cent of Ministers active on Twitter, the PM included, stick to official talking points. Most of the time official government tweets are simple reiterations of press conferences, news releases and QP statements, not very useful. There are a few Government MPs known to be more active tweeters, like Tony Clement, with whom participants felt confident in knowing that the content is posted by the actual Minister. These few have yielded non-scripted and useful tweets over the years. “The rare quick reaction stuff [on Twitter] is good as gold” according to one participant, but the key word here is rare (Participant 2). Participants noted the increasing number of more scandalous government Twitter incidences, the late night meltdowns and the interparty low blows. As much as these are entertaining and create traffic, they do not help in sourcing actually informative political stories, and were discussed with slight lament by participants.

Data journalism and ATIPs

Other uses of technology and the Internet were described as essential to today’s journalists. Participants mentioned in passing the emerging practice of data mining journalism, with only one participant ascribed as an avid user of this tactic. Data mining journalism, or data journalism, is the use of computer coding and

programming to analyze masses of raw data or online content. Using code, programs are custom created to search for trends, keywords and general statistics.

I use a technique called web scraping, that's something that I do that very few reporters do. I write computer code programs to robotically download these webpages and load it into a database for me, so I can look at an excel worksheet. [...] That algorithm is basically just to collect that information, if you've heard of things called spiders. Web spiders it's basically that. It's a robot that pretends to be a web-browser and it just looks at every MPs [website or government website], downloads it, formats it for me, for that specific thing over and over and over again. Now I can get it to do other things, because the program is customizable, I can get it to download whatever I want with enough programming. That's the way I do it. (Participant 6)

While this practice has gained popularity in the United States for some time, it is still slowly entering Canadian newsrooms.

There are lots of guys in the US and some, an increasing number here in Canada, a bunch of people who do it. And for me it was born out of frustration of getting information out of the government. It's hard to get at them, especially this government. I really started to do this intensely with the Harper Government because they are notoriously secretive and they don't like to share information. (Participant 6)

Explaining he basically got into this practice out of desperation, the participant recounted how, over the years, the government bureaucracy started moving information online. Here masses of raw data, various databases and general information were available on multiple government websites. It was a move to make things more accessible to the public, however, this information was undecipherable, too general, sometimes too simplified, and at the time most journalists (and the public) lacked the ability to make anything of this information, according to the participant. Self-learning, researching and attending conferences on the matter, this participant learned how to code and program over the years to uncover leads and key

information. He described being guided by frustration from the lack of accessibility to sources and relevant useful information found via primary and traditional practices. For him this is a new way to access primary information, and while some criticize that leads should come first then data and research, he feels he has had much success in breaking stories from the data first method. Once an issue or story or lead is found in the data, it must be supplemented afterwards, given balance with voices and other research deemed more traditional.

For this participant, this practice is a way to dig out a niche for himself on the political beat, find unique leads and scoops while minimizing the continuous blocking of access at the government level. Other participants are aware of this practice but lack the skills to fully engage themselves in it. All certainly use data to supplement their stories and research their issues, but use data in a secondary way. While data analysis software is available it is costly and still requires learning, some participants mentioned having in house data or research experts to whom they can get help and request specific analyses.

Another secondary research practice is that of ATIPs. Access to Information and Privacy requests (ATIPs), are common supplementary sourcing practices all participants described using. The Access to Information Act was passed by Parliament in 1985. It is based on the premise that the public should have access to information held by the government. ATIPs are the formal requests made to the government for information under the Act. The Act stipulates that these requests must be somewhat specific, but that exceptions and limitations to access should be minimal. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that yes, ATIPs were useful to them to

find and source information, but that they are also excessively time consuming and take a very long time to materialize. The process of putting together a request is difficult and long. Applicants must carefully craft their requests, tailoring the research scope, keywords must be specific but also broad enough, including the right departments where information on that topic could be found etc.; a science in itself. In addition to the process of requesting, it can take many months to simply receive the information from the government. Participants described waiting up to six months, continuously having their requests delayed. When it does arrive, generally, journalists are inundated with thousands of printed pages. Including emails, internal memos, various documents and reports, the format of the information is very broad.

Depending on the requested information, large chunks of documents are often blacked out for censoring by the ATIP officers who review the requests. There is no guarantee that what one was looking for will actually be found. Participants explained that they often must make multiple requests, adjusting their wording and the included departments before they find anything useful. They develop a sort of ATIP expertise. One participant estimated that 1 in 10 requests were useful. But at times they can uncover completely unrelated leads and scoops. In a way it is an opportunity to move away from the mainstream or daily news of politics and provide very original work to readers. As much as these finds can be very important, ATIPs are mainly secondary for participants because of the sheer time and work involved with them. They are still deemed essential to the job because they are felt to be one of the only ways to get around government control over information. Much of the time the piles of random

emails and memos they receive, are the only true route they have into government beyond the coveted talking points.

Chapter three

Research findings: Limited access and more of the same

This Master's thesis sought to examine how political journalists in Canada collect information to source their stories and what factors might influence their practices. It questioned the way in which new technology and the implementation of PR techniques by the Canadian government played a role in changing actual practices. This thesis considered current literature on theories of journalism, on new technology and information subsidies in the newsroom and on government communications policy.

The research collected by way interviews with political journalists in Ottawa, shows that, under the current Conservative government, political journalists have experienced reduced access to direct, first hand governmental sources of information. A heightened use of professional public relations tactics within this government, as well as more ominous controls over information, have restricted journalists' access to information and high-profile primary sources. While this environment has not been shown to have an effect in changing information collection practices in themselves, it has forced journalists to develop a reliance on secondary sources and methods to fulfill their informational needs. This reliance in turn creates a distance between the accessible information and the individuals responsible or accountable for it. This reliance on secondary sources also skews the notion of balanced sources. But most importantly, it drives the development of pack style journalism and the cannibalization of information, putting into question the ability of journalists to fulfill their understood journalistic duties.

The literature and the interviews both point to underlying notions within newsgathering practices or methods of an order or hierarchy of sources, which became apparent over the course of the research. For the purpose of this discussion and thesis it is important to better outline how primary and secondary sources are understood. As understood from the literature and the interviews, there are generally two hierarchies of sources in political journalism. The first concerns the hierarchy of individuals as sources; the second is of mediums through which the information is communicated. The hierarchy of individuals is based on the proximity, authority and credibility each source has in relation to the issues and sought-out information. The hierarchy then also subsumes institutions and organizations. So here primary sources are those closest, with most authority over the information at hand. The second hierarchy values first hand, oral interactions (telephone or interview) as well as original documentation. Primary sources are mediums that allow for direct real time interaction and questioning, these are found at the top. Written accounts and managed textual communications are secondary and found lower within the hierarchy. The two types of hierarchies are highly intertwined as the different people and source groups, and the modes through which information is obtained from them, is inextricable. The hierarchy of sources remains however highly subjective and fluid depending on the journalist involved and the nature of each individual news story. But this outline allows for a better understanding of the effect of government management on newsgathering.

The analysis of these interviews shows that for Canadian political journalists, access to primary sources of information, both in terms of people and communication

mediums, is highly limited. Participants described the sheer rarity of having access to those directly responsible for the policies, portfolios and goings-on of Parliament. Although the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, MPs, deputies and directors remain at the top of these journalists' source hierarchies, and they continue to seek them out as sources, rarely are journalists afforded the opportunity to directly use them as sources of information. Rather journalists are given access to government institutions, by way of the communications departments and the officers who take in and manage their requests.

Why does it matter that primary sources are not accessible? Is it reasonable to expect these public officials, busy developing policy and running the country, to be continuously accessible to the hordes of journalists seeking their comment daily? Aeron Davis (2010) argues that the relationship between politician, journalist and the audience is in reality more distant and more symbolic in today's world. Pointing to the increasing pressures journalists face from their industry, with limited time and resources yet producing more work, Davis (2010) argues that politicians face many of the same challenges and pressures. Thus it would be unreasonable to assume their utmost availability to journalists, nor their ultimate knowledge on most issues and topics. This is precisely why they have communications departments, to field requests and disseminate information. However, current government communications policy states the importance of relationships with journalists and that "Ministers are the principle spokespeople of the Government of Canada" (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2012, section 20). But it is highly difficult to actually speak to Ministers.

The problem with this limited access to these high ranking officials and continued gatekeeping by their communications departments is that it distances the journalists from those they are meant to keep accountable. These are the individuals that are elected and given authority and legitimacy over the issues and questions directed at them by journalists. If the majority of the access, as well as attributable information, is to those with less authority over, and proximity to government portfolios, then how can journalists continue to keep politicians accountable over their own files? No longer do we have a journalist-source, journalist-government (politician) relationship; we now have a journalist-PR practitioner relationship. The increased use of communications officials and sources with less authority over and proximity to the issues creates a distance between journalists and politicians. It creates a distance between journalists and primary information, eroding their ability to keep politicians in check. In turn this creates a distance between the public and its elected officials, distancing it from vital information.

Participants in the study said that they continuously encounter communications agents when contacting Ministers' offices and government departments. These have limited access to individuals directly responsible for certain files and issues. They also described their ease of access to opposition party MPs and various other organizations and institutions as sources. One participant described his access to sources in the form of an approximate ratio. 10 'other' sources with concern on the issue (secondary), to 1 government source directly related to the issue (primary). When considering the need for journalists to attain transparency and objective truth in their work as well as present pieces with balanced information and

voices, it seems that the access to voices in itself is unbalanced. Reich's (2011) study on credibility as a journalistic practice found that when journalists did not have access to their most preferred and deemed credible sources, they ended up using a larger number of sources which were less credible. The result was that more copy was then devoted to less desired sources, even if they had less proximity to or authority on the issue at hand. Using more of them was a practical measure to corroborate their information, and achieve a perception of balance in the story. Similarly, with limited access to their primary targets, interview participants described seeking out multiple other secondary voices for their pieces also in an attempt to seek balance. But, they felt this balance was difficult to truly achieve when their access to usable, attributable primary government sources was lacking. There was a sense of unease with not having a more equal number of voices possibly featured. In their work, Kovach & Rosenstiel (2007) describes the idea of balance as a guide, a verification practice for journalists rather than a goal because at times it can lead to a distortion of issues, since there is never an even number of voices on each side. However, having many voices from the opposition parties, academia and the non-profit sector, with only one government voice, can also lead to a distortion. There is a lack of voices most directly related to the issues. This is a skewed version of balance and a concern expressed by the journalists themselves. The access itself now consistently begins with an imbalance. In an effort to counter and make apparent this imbalance, journalists do try to adhere to transparency values and outline their steps taken in collection, which leads then to using, 'such and such Minister declined to

answer', fulfilling transparency in a way. But by no means does it allow them to fulfill their informational role to get quality information to the public.

In addition to having limited access to primary sources in terms of people and organizations, participants also indicated that the information they have access to from the government, via communications officers (secondary source) is also secondary in nature. A phone call or an interview with a Minister, a high-ranking senior official or even the communications department, was reported as basically impossible. Not only is communication limited to individuals not directly tied to issues and portfolios, the mediums of communication are non-direct. The interviews showed the predominance of the email as the communicative tie with Ministerial offices and government departments. Any questions or requests must be sent via email, and responses are sent back again via email. What access journalists do have from these sources, comes from highly managed and strategic forms of information: press releases, briefs, official comments, press conference announcements etc.. These are information subsidies. They are crafted using PR techniques, by professionals, and are meant to communicate very specific, selected information, with a goal to portray the organization in a positive light. These subsidies, under the current government, are remarkably streamlined with the larger internal government communications strategies, displaying this government's controls over communications. Across the board, participants described the information they receive from various attempts at government contact as pure PR materials, consistent reiterations of the same talking points. Rarely, participants stressed, are these subsidies even useful to their work, or for answering the initial questions asked. Most

of what they receive they deemed as very general, ‘non-answer’ statements, attributable to no one who is relevant or truly accountable.

There is a reliance on textual communication. At least with this, as Reich’s (2010) research found, the information found in these are undeniable, the author can be held responsible for those statements. Oral accounts were found to be most credible as they are primary, while text sources were less favored and deemed less credible, particularly from PR practitioners working in political offices (both very low credibility as per (Reich, 2010)). Official information written down and disseminated is undeniable, which is useful for journalists. However what is the true value of that information if it is not attributable to a primary source, someone truly responsible for that information, who has legitimacy and authority in relation to the issue? The answer according to the interviews is, very little.

To add to this, the direction of these interactions is very one sided and not the two-way flow of information elaborated within the government’s own communications policy. On the one hand journalists receive precise material the government wants them to use, and journalists can send in questions and other requests of information, but with little confirmation they will get a reply, let alone a fruitful one, or one within the timelines of the news day and their deadlines. Government communications policy states that “Institutions must operate and respond effectively in a 24-hr media environment [and][...] must facilitate information or interview requests from the media” (2012, section 19). But interview participants noted the consistent last-minute timing of the replies they do get,

sometimes sending statements after deadline, or a second contradictory email after they have already published online. As explained by one participant:

The difficulty is you'll ask a question at 10 in the morning and you'll get a response at 5 at night, so, this again is kind of indicative, it has literally take them that long to get a paragraph through the approval process. You know they draft that paragraph, rework it, and get the paragraph approved by various people. By the time they get back to you at 5pm saying 'The tulips are purple', you can't send an email back saying 'You know I asked the color of the sky'. (Participant 2)

Considering many PR practitioners are former journalists, and that industry deadlines are well established, participants themselves hinted that these small but important actions were deliberate attempts by the government to control their ability to collect information about the government. Furthermore, the medium of email does not allow for follow up questions or reiterations. Participants explained getting little chance of a back and forth exchange of email if their first reply begged for more elaboration.

There is little opportunity for further probing, to develop questions, to examine body language and tone, which are basic journalistic questioning practices. With this, context of the information is also limited. The 'how' of the information, the collection method, which helps establish the credibility of the source and of the journalistic practices used to arrive at the information, becomes minimal. Stating 'in an email' or 'in a press release' has much less salience and seeming proximity to information than 'in an interview'. Here more of the interaction and contact can be relayed to the audience, allowing for a more transparent method of newsgathering.

What secondary information and sources journalists do have access to and must rely on, are at the same time highly available. Email and the online word have made the various information subsidies, official publications, reports and documents

used by political journalists bountiful and highly accessible. The information subsidies are sent out to hundreds of journalists via mailing lists daily. So many documents, reports, files and statistics are easily available online. Archives, books and studies are digitized into online databases. This is incredibly convenient and makes accessing vast amounts of information very easy. But the problem with the reliance on these secondary sources is exactly their availability. All journalists on the political beat have access to the same information, especially when considering the precise focus their work. Information regarding the daily goings-on of the House of Commons, committees, press conferences or policy, is available en masse, via CPAC, through the Press Gallery distribution, directly to journalists inboxes and phones. Journalists might have the rare opportunity to question a Minister in a scrum or at a press conference—which would be primary sourcing—but again rendering no true leads or scoops as all those present bear witness to the question as well as the answer. While individual questions may be different, the impression from the interviews is that even direct answers are highly managed, and often un-useful. Whether it be in a scrum, at a press conference, in the House, via email or within a policy report, communication from this government has been reported as streamlined, sticking very closely to the ascribed talking points, rarely diverging off the path of the official and broadly disseminated line.

One participant compared this limited direct access to a great wall, over which journalists throw questions and inquiries, never quite sure what is going on on the other side.

Ottawa is really dysfunctional in that way. It used to be you asked a question, you would get a subject matter expert on the phone, you would

have a conversation and that conversation would evolve and you talk out a topic. Often you think of some questions. Now, its sort of, you throw a question over the castle wall and you'll get an emailed response back from the spokesperson, usually professing to take whatever issue really seriously and it may or may not answer your question. But you don't get a supplementary; you don't get to press them. You know its just your normal duty to say 'You're horse shitting me here! You didn't answer the question I asked you blah blah.' So it can be frustrating. But it also it just speaks to the control that is now imposed and there is just not the freedom, many people don't have the freedom to speak, so that's one problem. (Participant 2)

What is apparent from the interviews however, is that political journalists in Ottawa, seem to be standing on the same side of that wall. Overall, participants described their limited access to prized information and their easy and equal access to secondary sources, mainly information subsidies. They all reiterated their experience with the same talking points, from the same communications agents, from the same departments. They receive the same news releases, attend the same press conferences, and have access to all the same websites, reports and documents. Each of their outlets uses news wires and agencies, who again have the same kind of informational access and are also used by various other outlets— all seemingly very equal access to very much the same information.

When considering news and journalism within the context of the public sphere, difference and variety are very important. In theory, we read from different journalists and outlets to get different viewpoints. Different articulations of information are vital to us as citizens. They are even more so important in the case of politics, where discussion and debate of issues, stances and viewpoints is key in audience understanding and development of public opinion. But what we can take away from these interviews is a proliferation of sameness by the government, forcing

journalists' reliance on this sameness. Phillips (2011) establishes that at the very core of the business of news is difference. Throughout her various works, Phillips (2010; 2011) hones in the reality that news is a business, one based on competition with other outlets. Within this business, difference drives the competition and is attained with scoops, different access to different people, sources and information, and most importantly exclusives. But the business of news paradoxically forces outlets to look to each other and copy from each other, or compete to have the sameness in content, in order to monopolize audiences, or at least equalize gained readership (Phillips 2011, p.51). Not only are outlets striving to be different, this competition for difference forces them to seek out and ensure no other outlet has the upper hand by being different. With this no one breaks from the pack

In a digital age, where so much content is easily available en masse, difference cannot be maintained for very long according to Phillips (2011). What develops is what she calls pack journalism, where journalists stick to the same sources, same information and same issues, rarely diverging from the pack by difference. While Phillips examines the industry forces, which have led to this pack mentality, these interviews show how sameness can also be source driven. Canadian political journalists not only have industry pressures and technological change driving them to pack journalism, they also have a lack of access to useful, new, different scoops, leads and information from primary sources. Within this pack journalism, this competition and hyper vigilance over other outlets and their content, there is also the development of cannibalization of copy. Participants in the interviews openly discussed their practices of borrowing, recycling and finding inspiration in their

colleagues and competitors' work. This they explained was usually done when they lacked access to that new information or quotes and need to ensure their outlet also covers the same important angles as their competition. It is happening more and more.

Phillips argues that business pressures and technological advances have pushed towards homogeneity and the reuse and copying of work. She recognizes the important investment (time and financial) needed for investigative work, finding new scoops and differentiation, and she also acknowledges the industry-wide access to most secondary information. What Phillips does not seem to consider is the question of access and how it can drive the pack. Her journalist-centrist work does consider the many pressures of the industry as well as the interplay between journalists, PR practitioners and information subsidies. The journalist interviews show us directly how these concepts are developing in Canada. But here the problem is not changing practices, poor work and methods, nor an unwillingness to seek out difference and break from the pack; it is an inability to do so. These journalists are routinely blocked from access to primary sources, scoops and exclusives, and have developed a reliance on secondary sources, documents and information which most of the time are strategically crafted and seemingly homogeneous. While participants spoke of using news wire services and recycling copy, they also start off on the same side of the great wall, with access to the same information. Even when considering a new alternate source and the political fondness in Canada for mediums such as Twitter, we again see an inability to break from the pack. The use of Twitter as a source, according to participants, is treated as a last resort and sometimes the sole chance of

finding an unscripted directly attributable quote or comment from a primary source. But even with Twitter, within seconds, that differentness, that scoop, is instantly available to the whole pack.

This reliance on secondary sources is certainly partially due to industry pressures, but according to participants, it is mainly due to the heightened government control over access to those differentiating and important primary sources. These interviews further support Phillips' warnings about pack journalism and the cannibalization of copy. The interviews show that these trends stem from a routinized dependence on information subsidies and give consideration to other forces beyond journalists' control contributing to pack journalism and the cannibalization of copy in Ottawa. When considering these phenomena within the interviews with Canadian political journalists, pack journalism and cannibalization are even more pertinent, even amplified. Here there are a smaller number of outlets, a precise beat with defied source targets. Journalists are being denied any opportunity for difference. With the possibility of an exclusive or a direct conversation consistently denied, they are left with a plethora of crafted information subsidies, disseminated to all their colleagues and competitors. The bubble of Ottawa's federal politics and the lack of direct access to government officials can only heighten the development of pack journalism and the cannibalization of copy in Canada.

The line of questioning in the interviews asked about the usual first steps and the practices used to collect information, as well as the actual reactions to and success of these practices. All participants expressed certainly a desire and continuous attempts to access direct interactions with key sources, but their overall tone was that

of exasperation over their consistent denial. While there are many elements which feed into and have helped develop the proliferation of sameness, the lack of access controlled by the PR management of the current Conservative government has certainly helped drive this trend within the Canadian political beat. Overall the result is the repetition and reuse of less informative and less direct information on a mass scale.

It would be unreasonable to assume that journalists have traditionally had consistent unlimited direct access to the primary sources and information they have wanted and needed. It would be unreasonable to think that they should also have unlimited ease of access when they want and need it. Encountering roadblocks and finding alternative routes and sources is certainly well understood to be part of journalistic work. There is no such thing as a free lunch. Digging, questioning and scrutinizing are at the core of good journalism. Good journalists never simply take things at face value. Journalists are not meant to be simple conduits for government information. Conversely, politicians and governments alike deserve and require a certain level of privacy to allow them to develop policy and implement effective governing. But as Ericson et al. (1989) describe, these institutions are also required and expected to be more open than organizations in the private sector, or even the courts. They must minimize the secretive 'back regions' of their organization, operate in the accessible 'front regions' and be held to account by journalists acting in the interests of the public.

The literature has established that the relationship between journalists and their sources is one of tug-of-war. Although both parties are meant to partake in the

give and take, this relationship has never been one of equals. Sources have the upper hand in their choice to divulge. They have a vested interest in disseminating positive information all while minimizing access to their 'back regions', where the actual work takes place. What these interviews have shown is that the current tug-of-war within Canadian political journalism is heavily one-sided. Here the relationship between journalists and their sources is once removed and the limited interactions they do have consist of a one-sided reception of highly managed and strategic information. As one respondent described when she received a phone call directly from the PMO with a scoop, the story was not the supposed scoop, but the fact that the PMO contacted her to give her information. Over time there has been a set understanding on how this current government operates in relation to journalistic work. It controls information.

When considering the limitation of access to primary sources, of sameness and of pack style journalism, both Kovach & Rosenstiel (2007) and Phillips (2010) offer a possible solution. Although both works mainly blame the industry itself for the issues facing journalism today, and give little consideration to the practical reality of accessing sources and information, neither of them focus their work on strictly political journalism. Despite this, they offer a solution to the broad profession of journalism. Both argue that investigative journalism, based in rigorous verification practices, is the only way to move journalism away from sameness, to keep it informative and to continue to keep powers accountable. Pressures from the implementation of PR and technology, Kovach & Rosenstiel (2007) state, are weakening methods of verification, pushing journalists to rely on simply asserting

facts, which in turn is leading to sameness. These pressures have made them become more passive receivers rather than gatherers of information and they argue, only more diversity of views in the news is the way to possibly attain more journalistic ‘truth’ (p.87). For them transparent and rigorous verification practices are the only way to combat perceptions of biased news and the effects of the aforementioned pressures on journalists. They mention the need to more clearly identify sources, find attributable information and establish a method of verification within one’s work to attain journalistic ‘truth’. Journalists in these interviews echo Kovach, adhering to these same values and practices. In fact, the interviews seem very much in line with Kovach & Rosenstiel. For example, the use of online publication and its opportunity to give more developed accounts, offer direct links to the information used and other related content is for Kovach & Rosenstiel (2007) an excellent example of transparency. This is a practice the interviews proved is being implemented by journalists for the same reasons.

Phillips and Kovach & Rosenstiel reinforce the idea of difference as vital to the news industry. But Phillips argues difference can only emerge from more rigorous investigative journalism, which can only happen when journalists have more autonomy over their time and their work. These interviews show excellent examples of journalist-driven practices geared at circumventing the barriers they encounter to information. The development of data mining journalism and the use of ATIPs clearly demonstrates the adherence of these journalists to investigative and verification practices in their work. It also highlights the difficulty and the time and resource demands of these practices. In both cases these are journalist-driven efforts

made possible by self-learning and the devotion of countless unpaid hours. Each participant described their own investigative work via use of one of these practices, being done over long periods of time, on the side, when they can while juggling their daily workloads. Certainly a better investment of resources and commitment to these practices on the part of media outlets would help enable more investigative work and practices in the industry. While these authors again put responsibility for better journalism on the already burdened shoulders of journalists, what about the government and its very apparent role in an attempt to control the political sphere?

Conclusion

“You are only as good as your sources.” This is a saying that was frequently expressed by journalist participants over the course of the research interviews. In one sense it comes off as a very simple summation of excuses, which removes the journalist and his self-responsibility over the outcome of his journalistic work. It also removes the journalist from the intrinsic relationship he ultimately has with his sources. In a way it blames the other, and the various impediments he may encounter in finding ‘good’ sources for his work. But in another way it also makes apparent the great importance of the relationship between journalists and their sources and the described unequal tug-of-war in which these journalists partake daily. This Master’s thesis has made very apparent the absolutely core importance of information within the journalistic work and outside of that, within democracy and a functioning democratic society. The way in which journalists gain access to the information they need to write informative news seemed so mundane to these professionals, for whom journalistic practices have become second nature. Yet through the analysis of these interviews, it is apparent that these practices, or the inability to perform them, have much larger repercussions for a great number of people.

The media are often condoned as simple reproducers of the status quo, conduit pipes of prepackaged information, only giving voice to the elite and powerful members of society. Yet these interviews and literary discussion, have outlined the dynamic, multilayered and difficult relationship journalists have to the information they seek and transmit. At the core of collecting information there is a very complex interaction between journalists and those from whom they seek information, and the

sophisticated concerted efforts of government PR and news management are dominating that relationship.

It is important to note these interviews have its limitations. Firstly they have a very narrow scope that encompasses only print political news journalism, performed in Ottawa by journalists writing for outlets with national reach. They consisted of 8 participants who are justifiably a representative sample. The format of qualitative, semi-structured interviews as a mode of research also has its shortcomings, as the researcher must base findings on the accounts of human subjects. These are subject to bias, and to their own intentions to convey truthful accounts of their experiences or present themselves most positively. There is risk that these accounts are not truthful, or censored in an effort by the subjects to protect themselves. There is risk that participants were not forthcoming or exaggerated certain elements. However, in the spirit of examining journalistic practice, which itself most values this exact method of research, it is also the most suitable way to approach questions of practical use of methods. It is the most relevant way to examine the experience of the current changes and pressures in their profession, and the best way to ask precise questions to those actively engaging with and experiencing the examined phenomena.

These interviews did not show much change in actual practices of information collection in journalism. In fact the findings were much in line with the contemporary literature concerning journalistic sourcing practices. What was found is an adaptation of practices, reactive measures and adjustments to the environment of political news journalism in Canada under this current government. It was found that mass changes in the industry and vast new platforms through which to research information and

produce content were secondary forces afflicting journalists ability to fulfill societal and professional expectations of transparent and objective informative journalism. The interviews showed that in fact their source—the Canadian government— itself posed the biggest impediment to fulfilling journalists’ needs to access, collect and verify information on issues of federal and parliamentary affairs in Canada.

This research did not examine the final product of journalistic work. A content analysis of output by these same journalists, as well as an examination of the information they collected, would have informed the research from a cause and effect perspective. Yet this was much too large a task and scope for the purpose of a Master’s level thesis. It does leave open important questions regarding the further consequences of limited access to information. If journalists are unable to have access to different or primary sources, what effect does this ultimately have on the information to which citizens subsequently have access? How do proliferation of distanced information and the lack of difference across outlets affect citizens and their understanding of political issues? Considering these questions, journalists are not the only ones on the outside of the government wall. Citizens are found here as well. Whether or not they are aware of this is a different story. The interview findings support the literature and vice versa, establishing that government remains the primary target for journalism because of its expected duty to keep them to account. Heightened PR use and strategic management has limited access to primary information via primary methods, creating a reliance on prepackaged information and secondary information subsidies, creating sameness across the industry.

Kozolanka's (2006) work precedes this study but raises important questions directed at the role of government in this situation. For her there is a "fine line between government promotion and defense of government policy and promotion and defense of the ruling parties' policies," and the methods used to arrive at the latter ((Franklin, 2003, p.52) as cited by Kozolanka, 2006, p. 354). What then is an appropriate or acceptable professional distance politicians can have from journalists and the issues and questions regarding them and their work? What is an appropriate use of PR tactics and strategy a government can use to communicate with journalists and ultimately voters? Where does organization-wide strategic management and control over communications cross the line into censorship? And what can journalists really do about it? This interview research cannot answer these questions. It does give an account of the effects of the current government's controls over access to information, and can lead to further research examining the eventual effect of prolonged limitations on journalistic practices.

With political journalism so heavily grounded in the hierarchy of sources they seek and the ethics and duties they must fulfill, these interviews do portray journalists as 'handcuffed' in a sense by their sources. Carlson and Franklin (2011) describe journalists as bound by the information they seek, the practices they can use and their duty to find it, but also by the pressures and impediments they encounter from both their industry, and as we have seen, their sources.

More investment into and more rigorous practice of investigative journalism were proposed as counter measures to these source-driven impediments. This presupposes changes in the media industry to provide more funding and more time

allotment. Investigative factions do exist in media outlets today, but were not included in the scope of this research. An examination of these, and their practices and experience would certainly help supplement these interviews and shed better light on what rigorous work can and is really being done within the current context of political journalism.

Furthermore, this repeated reinforcement of needed verification practices begs clarification. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) admit that these are not set practices or steps to be taken, and what verification consists of are highly personal and contextual choices. The explication of individual notions of verification was not highly apparent within the interviews either. In a profession self-admittedly learned on the job, the notion of rigorous verification is left slightly ambiguous. Practices like crosschecking, triangulating accounts from many sources, data journalism and ATIPs seem to be how journalists regularly verify their information. But again perhaps a better commitment from the industry in developing and supporting these efforts can help clarify and develop verification methods, as well as implementing these within journalism curriculums.

If verification in itself is not so clear as a practice, let alone better and more investigative journalism, how are journalists meant to truly verify the information they have access to? What does that really mean? If across the board journalists are receiving the same lines from the same places and the same limited pool of people, how are they really expected verify this information? Where are they to go? What is the expectation? If ATIPs come back unfruitful (after 6 months of waiting), those

closest to the information are unavailable, and questions are constantly left unanswered, what are they supposed to do?

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) propose a relatively simple answer—which is echoed by The Canadian Association of Journalists' penned letter to Canadian Journalists to counter the current government controls via this method as well. If journalists are left with so many unanswered questions and a lack of information to fill their copy, the authors propose that they list these unanswered questions within their work. They explain that traditionally journalists are taught not to appear unknowing and to organize and present facts of the matter, likely for reasons of journalistic objectivity. But, considering the experience found in these interviews, it seems a very good way to highlight the actual lack of information and bring attention to the practical barriers journalists face. In a way they do this when mentioning sources' refusals to answer, or unavailability to comment. The authors call for more than this to better explain to the audience their own lack of information access. Listing the questions they sought to answer but are left unanswered would be a good way to fulfill transparency and the journalistic truth in their work. It could signal to the audience the context of their work, questions and the issues at hand in an objective way. It would help signal to the audience the level of access to information and the answers journalist realistically have. Perhaps this simple solution could drive better accountability in the face of such a delimitation of government's lack of engagement and exchange of useful information with journalists.

The tug-of-war will always be in play between journalists and their sources. And in the face of intense pressures both from their own industry and their sought out

sources, journalistic practices of information collection seem quite resilient and adaptable. Journalists' own acknowledgement of the shortcomings of their practices, and the pressures and barriers they face, shows that these issues are top of mind within the industry. This also portrays journalists as proactively trying to surmount these hurdles within the day-to-day practice of their profession.

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Appendix 1

Geneviève Tilden MA Thesis Research

Interview Guide:

Review with participant Carleton REB consent form and sign

Participant information

- Name
- Current news outlet, past news outlets
- Career details (years, beats, interests)
- Education
 - Any formal education or training in journalism?
 - Other education? Apprenticeship or experience?

Daily routine, everyday practices

- Thinking about the last story you wrote, or one you are working on now,
 - What are the steps you take to collect the information you need to write a news story?
 - Who do you generally seek out as sources for political news stories?
- How do you make use of:
 - Phone, email. Internet
 - Press releases, statements, briefs, library/archives, ATIP
 - Interviews

On The Hill

- PG privileges
 - QP, Parliament access, committees, scrums, Ins Outs

Human sources

- Direct interviews?
- With who? MPs? Directors, Communications departments, Staffers?
- Informants? Secret sources? Success/failure/use?
- Relationship/network management

Public relations

- What is your experience/relationship with professional communicators/ PR agents?
- Private sector? Public sector?

- Press releases, embargoed information

New technology

- Describe to me the ways in which you use:
 - The internet
 - Search tools
 - Databases (i.e. stats can)
 - Social media, blogs, niche

Information

- What is a sufficient amount of information?
- What do you do/ how do you to crosscheck or verify the information you have collected?
- Do you regularly find 'enough' information?
- Do you feel satisfied with what you can find?
- What is 'enough' information/sources for a story?
- How often to you feel you do not have enough or sufficient information for a story?
- What do you do in this case?

Has the process of collecting information changed in any way over the course of your career?

(If yes) How? What is your experience with this change?

In your own words, what do you think is expected of you in your sources?

- Balance? Truth? Objectivity?
- What does this mean to you?
- Taught in school?
- Learn on the job?
- If you have had traditional journalism training, think back to what you were taught in school, how to collect? Where? who? Etc.
- Do you use this in your work? Daily practice?

Change

- What ways would you like to improve your work?
- What ways would you like to improve your daily experience?
- What would you like to learn/have/do to improve your
 - Work
 - Experience
 - Interactions

- Ability to collect

NOTES/ NEW QUESTIONS: