

# Navigating the Digital Jungle: Social Media's Relationship to Journalism

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an examination of the relationship between journalism and social media in 2022. It begins by exploring the current landscape of journalism in the digital age and to what extent the benefits of social media are being harnessed by journalists, and what can happen when social media is misused by journalists. It continues with analyses of interviews with eight practicing Canadian journalists on their experiences working with social media and their employers' expectations of them.

This thesis maintains that, despite its downfalls, social media remains a valuable tool for reporters and newsrooms. It also recognizes that there is a significant gap in communication when it comes to the expectations of how social media should be used by journalists and how they are currently using it. It concludes with a proposal of emerging best practices and potential stipulations for the future implementation of newsroom social media policies.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*Reporters and Journalists occupy a funny space in public consciousness as semi-public personas. People can read our work; they can see our faces...depending on the brand we're associated with we can get a measure of public profile. We're also just people and we're not that special.<sup>1</sup>*

Ayesha Barmania, founder of the Peterborough Currents news outlet, gives the above response when asked for their opinion on journalists who are punished for or even fired over their conduct on social media. By keeping in mind this notion of the journalist as both public figure and regular citizen, this thesis will explore the extent to which journalists should be using social media and the ways in which news media organizations should be aiding their employees in a new digital jungle.

The field of journalism is no stranger to adaptation. Journalists had to adapt to advent of the printing press, the inception of the radio news show, the birth of television broadcast news, and now have been facing the beast of online news distribution for the past two decades. While we have been busy trying to navigate the maze of digital news content production, a new challenge was lurking around the corner: the boom of social media usage and the grip it now has on our daily lives. With the constant growth in social media popularity and use, journalists now find themselves having to adapt once more, but without the tools to do so successfully in an ever-shifting battle ground.

Social media is rapidly becoming one of the primary ways that people are sharing and receiving information. As of 2021, Statista reported 2.9 billion monthly active

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<sup>1</sup> Ayesha Barmania, interview by author, January 2021.

Facebook users.<sup>2</sup> Twitter boasts a robust 206 million monetizable daily active users.<sup>3</sup> In 2019, Instagram pulled in 815 million monthly users.<sup>4</sup> These numbers are staggering and forecast to grow with each year according to Statista research. Social media lends itself to all content, and with its prolific use, it was inevitable that it would become a stomping ground for news information as well. With the ease of access to internet connections and the portability of smartphones, many Canadians are choosing to use social media as their go-to avenue for consuming news content. That number is now as high as 95%, according to a study published by News Media Canada in 2021.<sup>5</sup> With the audience moving to alternative means of news consumption, it is critical for journalists to adapt to new means of news delivery alongside them.

This idea was previously explored in a study by Andrew Duffy and Megan Knight that examined the way social media policies have engaged in boundary-setting thus far. As of 2019, that study found that news organizations' social media policies are dominated by "underlying, unshifting ideologies: reputation, credibility, and above all concern that their integrity, independence and impartiality might be called into question."<sup>6</sup> As of 2022, this thesis has found that this is still the case when examining a multitude of social media policies at Canadian news organizations. The question that now arises is what is to be done about this sustained problematic approach.

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<sup>2</sup> "Countries with the most Facebook users 2022," Statista, July 15, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268136/top-15-countries-based-on-number-of-facebook-users/>

<sup>3</sup> "Countries with the most Twitter users 2022," Statista, March 22, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries/>

<sup>4</sup> "Instagram: Number of global users 2020-2025," Statista, May 23, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/183585/instagram-number-of-global-users/>

<sup>5</sup> "Daily newspaper circulation data," News Media Canada, July 2021, [https://nmc-mic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/SNAPSHOT-2021-REPORT\\_Total-Industry-FINAL-01.31.2022.pdf](https://nmc-mic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/SNAPSHOT-2021-REPORT_Total-Industry-FINAL-01.31.2022.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Duffy and Megan Knight, "Don't be stupid: The role of social media policies in journalistic boundary-setting," *Journalism Practice* 13, no. 8 (2019): 961-965

## **1.1 Research Question and Rationale**

The main research questions to be explored in this thesis are as follows: What is the future of the relationship between journalism and social media? How do journalists and their employers navigate these waters? By exploring the complex relationship between journalism and social media and examining the experiences of practicing journalists, this thesis will foster a better understanding of the best newsroom social media practices. This research would be beneficial to the larger journalistic community for multiple reasons. Firstly, the aggregation of ethical guidelines and techniques that journalists follow and impose upon themselves will promote industry-level knowledge-sharing and the production of more effective methods of navigating social media as a journalist. Secondly, this research will contribute to existing newsroom ethics guidelines or journalism practice standards by proposing stipulations for contemporary policies on social media use through the aggregation of the guidelines and techniques shared by interviewed reporters. Through this research, it may be possible to secure an understanding of a new and omnipresent digital tool for reporting and open possible research avenues into further digital reporting techniques as we continue to stray from the roots of traditional print media.

This research comes at a critical point in journalistic history, where the industry is being pushed towards digital forms of reporting with the rapid decline in legacy media nipping at its heels. In February of 2022, Million Insights, a market research database, published a study on the current state of social media advertising and its predicted growth. As of 2021, the report indicated that the social media advertising market was

valued around USD 115 billion and was projected to grow to 226 billion by 2028.<sup>7</sup> Of the platforms listed as prominent players in the social media advertising market, Facebook and Twitter are among the top social sites. With 42% of Canadians in 2018 choosing to use social media for news consumption, it is clear where the audience is looking to be catered to. It is key for news media companies to see these trends and adapt to a new revenue model if they want any hope of bringing their legacy organizations into a new age of journalism. With such an evident struggle between journalists and media organizations to establish expectations and online boundaries in the past decade, it is plain to see that a mutual understanding needs to be found for the journalism industry to adapt successfully to new methods.

## **1.2 Research Methodology**

Much of the analysis and basis for proposed policy updates in later chapters is drawn from interviews conducted for the purpose of this study. Eight media personnel (see Appendix A) were interviewed total: three freelance reporters, three full-time reporters, and two individuals in editorial positions. With their combined experience, these interview subjects collectively represent a cross section of new media organizations such as iPolitics, Peterborough Currents, and the Narwhal, and legacy media organizations such as the Toronto Star, the Ottawa Citizen, and the CBC. Interview subjects were chosen based on their employment status, with the desire to include both full-time reporters beholden to one organization's social media policy, and freelance reporters who

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<sup>7</sup> "Social Media Advertising Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report by Platform (Desktop, Mobile), By Industry Vertical (Retail, Consumer Goods), By Region (North America, Europe, APAC, CSA, MEA), And Segment Forecasts, 2021 – 2028," Million Insights, February 2022, <https://www.millioninsights.com/snapshots/social-media-advertising-market-report>

must conform to the expectations of each organization they have a contract with. Individuals in editorial positions were selected and contacted with the intent to gain a more thorough understanding of both the enforcement of social media policies and the implementation and goals of the policies currently in place. Through this means of selection, it was expected that a broader understanding of the current landscape of social media policies could be acquired. In addition to selection based on employment status, snowball sampling was used to acquire other interview participants in the social or professional circles of previously interviewed journalists. All prospective interview subjects were contacted with a letter of invitation explaining the purpose of this study and the request to forward the information to a relevant colleague should one come to mind. Once interest was expressed and contact was made, all journalists were invited to take part in a separate, hour-long interview over the Zoom video communication platform in order to accommodate out-of-province participants and be mindful of COVID-19 precautions for local participants as dictated by Ottawa Public Health officials at the time the interviews took place. Interview questions were developed with the intent to discover how currently practicing journalists are interfacing with social media policies: where these policies are posted and accessible at their current organizations, how comfortable they feel reporting on social media given the current content of these policies, what self-imposed ethical guidelines they follow, and more.

In addition to content from interviewed reporters, an analysis of publicly available social media policies from major news organizations is included in chapter four. The intent behind this section of analysis is to inspect what is currently being asked of reporters and pinpoint the values of news organizations through the language chosen and

guidelines included in these policies. Furthermore, its intent serves to discover if there are common values across different news media organizations. Policies were chosen that corresponded with the reporters interviewed in order to align interview responses with the associated policies that served to evoke these responses.

### **1.3 The Current Landscape: Social Media Misconduct and its Consequences**

The context for this research stems from the disparity between news organization expectations and the understanding of these expectations by the reporters who find themselves on the frontlines of social media news coverage. Notably, this thesis will explore the result of social media misconduct by reporters and the ways in which misconduct is handled by employers. By examining this phenomenon, we can begin to establish clear and realistic expectations and operating methods that are conducive to the highest rate of success. Recent years have shown examples of the different ways news organizations have chosen to handle social media misconduct and provided a springboard for the analysis of current newsroom social media policies in the form of this thesis.

The discrepancy between the expectations of newsrooms and the understanding of reporters often creates spaces for conflict that are only exacerbated by the rapid-fire nature of social media. Information that is posted is public and has the potential to be shared widely within a few clicks and moments of its publication. This means that what may have been minor errors or perceived commentary can quickly be taken out of context or snowball into a larger issue that causes harm or damage to the subject of the error. This reflects poorly on the journalist and the media organization they represent, leaving newsrooms to administer corrections or consequences under the watchful eye of the public. In some cases, these consequences have gone so far as termination of employment

at a media organization over public online commentary or perceived injustice by the social media audience.

Ahmar Khan and Lauren Wolfe are two examples of reporters who were reprimanded in recent times over social media commentary that was quickly perceived as unethical by journalistic standards. Both cases resulted in either brief or permanent termination of employment at their respective news agencies and garnered a lot of online attention. The attention and coverage of these cases granted by social media allows them to be broken down and examined in ways not possible before anyone had the ability to go online and comment about it. By understanding what led to these extreme consequences, the news industry will be able to implement preventative measures to avoid future situations like them and foster efficient and effective means of news distribution on social media.

#### **1.4 The Intersection of Personal and Professional Identities: Social Media Case Studies**

In the case of Ahmar Khan, the tension arose from a tweet he made discussing statements from Canadian hockey commentator Don Cherry. During a Sportsnet broadcast, Cherry expressed his displeasure with immigrants not purchasing and wearing poppies for Remembrance Day. After this comment aired, Khan posted a tweet calling for Cherry's segment to be cancelled, saying that Cherry's "xenophobic comments being aired weekly [was] deplorable."<sup>8</sup> By the next day, CBC had instructed Khan to remove the tweet, as it did not align with their social media standards of journalistic practice. Rogers Media,

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Goldsbie, "CBC had employee delete tweet critical of Don Cherry," Canadaland, November 14, 2019, <https://www.canadaland.com/cbc-had-employee-delete-tweet-critical-of-don-cherry/>

which maintains editorial control over its broadcasts, decided to fire Cherry for his divisive comments.<sup>9</sup>

After this, Khan approached Canadaland to share with them that CBC management instructed him to delete the tweet and that he felt a discussion needed to occur pertaining to journalists of colour being silenced by CBC policies.<sup>10</sup> Khan's employment at the CBC was terminated shortly thereafter, though management made a statement indicating that Khan's tweet was not the instigating factor behind it, but rather comments he had made in private chats and his decision to leak internal decisions to an outside news source.<sup>11</sup> Shortly after this, an arbitrator ruled that Khan had a reasonable expectation to privacy over his personal communications and that the CBC could either reinstate his contract for a minimum of four months or offer him four months compensation.<sup>12</sup>

The specific terms of Khan's termination over private communication and leaked information are not the point of interest in reviewing this case study. The relevance of this situation arises from the initial point of conflict between Khan and his employer. Khan's first tweet over Cherry's "xenophobic" comments acts as a catalyst for analysis over journalistic expectations. In the ruling, the CBC expressed that Khan was instructed to take down his tweet because it went against their social media mandate pertaining to

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<sup>9</sup> Goldsbie, "Critical tweet."

<sup>10</sup> Goldsbie, "Critical tweet."

<sup>11</sup> Mark Gollom, "CBC wrong to fire reporter who told news site he was forced to delete tweet critical of Don Cherry: arbitrator," CBC, January 14, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/khan-cbc-canadaland-tweet-cherry-fired-arbitor-1.5873539>

<sup>12</sup> Gollom, "Wrong to fire."

journalistic standards.<sup>13</sup> The relevant stipulation in that journalistic standards document states the following:

The expression of personal opinions on controversial subjects, including politics, can undermine the credibility of CBC journalism and erode the trust of our audience. Therefore, we refrain from expressing such opinions in profiles or posts for any account which identifies or associates us with CBC/Radio-Canada.<sup>14</sup>

However, since the 1991 Broadcasting Act, CBC's mandate has pledged to "reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada."<sup>15</sup> A reporter using their platform to call out divisive and racialized comments made on national television seems to act in accordance with recognizing Canada's multicultural and multiracial nature. Had Khan felt he was acting in accordance with this mandate and his own personal beliefs, the lines between ethical reporting and a moral obligation become harder to navigate. It is in these spaces of uncertainty that conflict arises, and the necessity of journalism becomes a forum for easy critique by mass anonymous users online. This situation with Khan, and his desire to speak on tension relating to journalists of colour and media organization policy poses a few interesting questions. Primarily, how do we navigate the intersection between professional expectations, and issues of personal identity? This is a question that the industry has been wrestling with for a few years now, but the fast-paced nature of the social media sphere exacerbates tensions in new ways. This concept will be further explored through the interview questions posed to reporters participating in this study.

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<sup>13</sup> Gollom, "Wrong to fire."

<sup>14</sup> "Journalistic standards and practices," CBC, <https://cbc.radio-canada.ca/en/vision/governance/journalistic-standards-and-practices>

<sup>15</sup> "Mandate," CBC, <https://cbc.radio-canada.ca/en/vision/mandate>

The case of Lauren Wolfe puts into perspective another common struggle when navigating social media bias and perception. Wolfe, who worked for the New York Times, tweeted that she felt “chills” when Joe Biden’s plane landed at Joint Base Andrews before his inauguration. A Vox article on the situation reveals that, based on the political context of Wolfe’s tweet, “critics began flooding the Twittersphere with criticism of Wolfe and allegations of wider-spread anti-conservative bias among journalists.”<sup>16</sup> The tweet quickly gained a lot of negative attention from right-wing members of the public, and Wolfe’s position at the New York Times was terminated not long after. Similar to the CBC response, the New York Times claimed that the termination was not on the basis of a singular tweet, and that Wolfe had been warned before over “borderline political” tweets. This of course goes against their social media guidelines, of which the relevant stipulation reads:

In social media posts, our journalists must not express partisan opinions, promote political views, endorse candidates, make offensive comments or do anything else that undercuts The Times’s journalistic reputation.<sup>17</sup>

Also listed in the New York Times social media guidelines is the following stipulation that introduces a grey area when considering an appropriate response to Wolfe’s social media conduct:

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<sup>16</sup> Anya van Wagtenonk, “Did the New York Times fire an editor over a tweet? The Lauren Wolfe controversy, explained,” Vox, January 26, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/2021/1/24/22247390/lauren-wolfe-new-york-times-tweet-chills>

<sup>17</sup> “Social media guidelines for the newsroom,” New York Times, October 13, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/editorial-standards/social-media-guidelines.html>

Be transparent. If you tweeted an error or something inappropriate and wish to delete the tweet, be sure to quickly acknowledge the deletion in a subsequent tweet. Please consult our social media corrections policy for guidance.<sup>18</sup>

The addition of this in the policy begs the question of why the situation was handled the way it was. Since there is a precedent in place for deleting inappropriate tweets, why is it that course of action could not be taken for Wolfe? A deletion and transparent explanation of the tweet could have sufficed according to this policy, yet Wolfe's position was terminated instead. Where then does the New York Times draw the line between public correction and termination of position? This uncertainty can be nerve-racking for reporters of any news organization in a similar position, and even more so for future journalists when the Times is one of the most respected news organizations to date. In response to this, some journalists tweeted in defence of Wolfe, questioning the rationale behind the company's decision to fire her. They feared the situation with Wolfe could "open a door for journalists to be targeted with the threat of unemployment based on perceived or overblown offences."<sup>19</sup> Felicia Sonmez, a national political reporter at the Washington Post also tweeted in the aftermath of Wolfe's termination, saying that "knee-jerk firings in response to online harassment campaigns only further embolden harassers – and put ALL journalists at risk."<sup>20</sup> Of note, CBS journalist Wesley Lowery posted a lengthy Twitter thread in the aftermath giving his thoughts on termination over social media comments made by journalists. Three key points made by Lowery that help inform this thesis are as follows:

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<sup>18</sup> "Social media guidelines."

<sup>19</sup> Anya van Wagtenonk, "Did the New York Times fire an editor over a tweet?"

<sup>20</sup> Van Wagtenonk, "Fire an editor."

- There is a difference between objectivity of process and individual objectivity
- Journalists are humans and as such possess inherent biases
- Journalists should be judged on the fairness of their work, not their personal opinions<sup>21</sup>

In addition to these points, Lowery also makes an argument for a new lens through which terminations like this should be examined. Lowery concludes his thread by stating that “gutless and reactionary responses to bad faith online outrage are more embarrassing to and undermining of perceived integrity of a media institution than whatever the staffer tweeted.”<sup>22</sup> With every move by reporters online being questioned by the public, news organizations must also remember that actions they take will be scrutinized and influence public opinion of the organization as well. In order to continue progressing and avoiding situations like these in the future, it is critical that employers refine their policies to make their expectations clear.

## **1.5 Breakdown**

Chapter two of this thesis examines the evolution of the usage of social media for journalism. A review of Twitter, a popular social platform for journalists, and the timeline of its introduction to news helps to establish the precedent for social media’s utility to journalism. Additionally, an examination of successful social media business practices will guide future posting on these sites.

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<sup>21</sup> Wesley Lowery (WesleyLowery), “as I’ve told prior bosses directly, gutless and reactionary responses to bad faith online outrage are more embarrassing to and undermining of perceived...,” Twitter, January 24, 2021, <https://twitter.com/wesleylowery/status/1353418076495237120>

<sup>22</sup> Lowery, “As I’ve told prior bosses...”

Chapter three explores the outcomes of social media usage for journalism and the perceived benefits of its use for the purpose of news dissemination. Through examination of the mechanics of different social platforms and an analysis of the pros and cons of these mechanics, guidelines can be formed conducive to the most effective use of each site.

Chapter four establishes a common ground among social media policies and how journalists are expected to conduct themselves in online public forums. An analysis of current social media guidelines and journalism ethical standards documents sets the scene for a discussion on the effectiveness of current policy and carves a space for the proposal of new stipulations for these policies.

The conclusion provides a comprehensive breakdown of other successful means of social media business and proposes a new blended identity for the digital journalist in 2022. A last look at best emerging practices will help form the basis for proposed updated stipulations to bolster current social media policy and provide newsrooms with clear guidance on the most effective means of communication with their staff over social media conduct and use.

## **1.6 Summary**

This chapter has presented the concept of analyzing social media potential for journalism and has situated this analysis within the context of uncertain expectations and reactionary measures by news media companies when it comes to social media misconduct. Examining case studies that question what the precise expectations and standard operating procedures of news organizations are has foreshadowed a key element of the discussion of how social media should be used for journalism. This chapter has

also introduced a framework for understanding the journalist as a person as presented by Wesley Lowery that will help inform the navigation and revision of newsroom social media policy conducted in this thesis. The following chapter focuses on the evolution of social media as a journalistic tool and an examination of successful social media circulation of news stories.

## Chapter 2: Evolution of Social Media Usage in Journalism

Social media has been serving journalism as a tool for reporting for over a decade now, yet this thesis argues that we as journalists have never truly harnessed its full potential. In order to understand and map out a path for future use of social media, it is key to first understand our previous timeline of social media use to establish the precedent of its benefit to journalism. Twitter, being the main platform for the social media savvy journalist in today's day and age, offers the clearest examples towards establishing this precedent. Shortly after Twitter's creation, it was put to the test as a journalism tool. According to Alfred Hermida, a digital media scholar, Twitter established itself as an emerging outlet for the dissemination of information during major events like the 2006 California wildfires, the 2008 US presidential elections, the Mumbai massacre, and the Iranian election protests of 2009.<sup>23</sup> Hermida argues in his paper that "micro-blogging systems that enable millions of people to instantly to communicate, share and discuss events happening around them" are a new form of collective intelligence. During the Iranian election protests, news sources posted live updates including a combination of traditional news reporting and unverified tweets and videos from people on the ground in Tehran.<sup>24</sup> This supplemental information from citizen social media accounts can be searched, filtered, and posted at a much faster rate than a journalist can report alone from the scene of a protest and has the effect of enriching the reporting in times of crisis. It also acts as a useful barometer to journalists when searching for where the conflict is, who is involved, and what information is most critical to get out to the public at a given

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<sup>23</sup> Alfred Hermida, "Twittering the news: The emergence of ambient journalism," *Journalism Practice* 4, no. 3 (2010): 1.

<sup>24</sup> Hermida, "Twittering the news," p. 4.

moment. From this instance, we can see that the first advantage social media poses is access to remote communities and real-time updates in periods of tension and conflict at a rate that journalists could not achieve through traditional reporting methods.

Twitter continued to prove itself as an invaluable source for real-time on-the-ground information during the Haitian earthquake of 2010. An article from the Guardian posted at the time of the earthquake breaks down exactly how valuable social media proved to be during the disaster. At the time of the earthquake, CNN immediately assigned someone to scanning social media and watching their iReports page, an online portal for readers to submit videos of news events to CNN for distribution.<sup>25</sup> In one evening, CNN received 218 earthquake reports from citizens reporting in and an additional 212 reports of missing loved ones in the hope that CNN would be able to connect individuals. Mercedes Bunz, the journalist behind the article, assured that situations like this demonstrate how journalists using social media do more than just report during disasters:

The traffic CNN produces with this strategy makes it obvious that today the kpb of a news organisation in case of a disaster is not only to report but also to connect. Giving the victim a voice, helping the victim finding relevant information, as well as informing the public but also providing them a possibility to connect with the victim and help.<sup>26</sup>

The article goes on to explain that the Guardian and the BBC also immediately turned to social media, “combining tweets from the area” with the work of the reporters they had

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<sup>25</sup> Mercedes Bunz, “In Haiti earthquake coverage, social media gives victim a voice,” January 14, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/pda/2010/jan/14/socialnetworking-haiti>

<sup>26</sup> Bunz, “Haiti earthquake coverage.”

available on the ground.<sup>27</sup> This is critical as traditional and primary means of communication were down and unavailable due to the destruction of the earthquake, making it nearly impossible for information to get in or out of the area without social media coverage. Returning to the establishment of the precedent for social media use, the Haitian earthquake demonstrates that the second key advantage of social media comes in the form of user-generated content that can be gathered and spread at faster rates than a journalist on the ground can report.

In more contemporary times, Twitter has proven its longevity as a valuable tool for information collection during the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 that took place across the United States. Journalism as an industry is no stranger to freedom of the press violations when reporting in high-tension periods or areas of conflict, but during the summer of protests for the Black Lives Matter movement, press freedom violations reached record highs. According to the United States Press Freedom Tracker, law enforcement officers were responsible for most of the attacks, and an astounding 238 press freedom violations occurred in 2020, with more than three quarters happening during the protests.<sup>28</sup> With the protests creating an environment unfit for members of the press, social media again became a key player in newsgathering and first-hand accounts of what was happening on the ground. Social media's ease of access and mass communication methods allowed it to become the meeting place for organizing rallies, spreading information, and providing photo and video evidence of the violence during the

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<sup>27</sup> Bunz, "Haiti earthquake coverage."

<sup>28</sup> Courtney Douglas, "Amid Black Lives Matter protests, a crushing moment for journalists facing record attacks, arrests at the hands of law enforcement," Committee for the Freedom of the Press, September 4, 2020. <https://www.rcfp.org/black-lives-matter-press-freedom/>

protests. Similar to the role it played during the Haitian earthquake, social media also allowed people to connect with each other amidst the chaos of the protests and get information from direct sources when news outlets could not handle being everywhere at once. The Black Lives Matter movement cements the third advantage of social media: reach for information dissemination; not just to members of the public, but also directly to journalists monitoring social feeds for circulating news.

With these three advantages in mind, access, harnessing user-generated content, and reach, we can establish the precedent for how we have been using social media as journalists thus far. By examining these three instances of Twitter's value, it is clear to see that the journalism industry currently has a very one-sided relationship with social media. In the exchange of give and take, typically journalists have leaned more towards the "taking" side of the spectrum. While this may be beneficial to us on a case-by-case basis for newsgathering and source locating, it is not the most optimal use of social media for journalism. By examining successful ways to exist on social media and evening out the playing field between journalists and their audience, journalists will be able to more directly impact the benefit received by themselves and their news organizations.

## **2.1 Viral Marketing: The Steps to Success on Social Media**

To maximize our usage of social media, it is key to understand what a successful social media existence looks like. In order to qualify one story as successful over another it is key to first establish the markers of success on social media. An examination of the traits of a successful social media post combined with the aspects of a successful news story will enable us to qualify the anticipated rate of success of any given news story post.

Tony Pec, co-founder of *Y Not You Media*, claims that there are "five things any business

owner, entrepreneur or brand can do on social media to generate business and grow their brand.”<sup>29</sup> These five things are as follows:

1. Post with purpose and provide value
2. Provide unique content
3. Engage others
4. Show some personality
5. Be consistent<sup>30</sup>

While journalism likes to set itself apart from typical businesses through its ethical codes and practical standards, as an industry it still functions on some of the similar methods of more traditional business organizations. As such, it can still benefit from learning from and implementing these pillars of brand growth on social media. Of note to journalism is pillar three, and to a lesser extent four, in the above list. Pec claims that social media platforms “reward activity, so the more active you are in liking, commenting and messaging people, the more of that you will probably receive.”<sup>31</sup> Journalists do not actively deal with monetary exchange with their audiences, though they do peddle the product of their reporting, and could stand to gain an increased readership from adopting this pillar into the social media routine. Replying to comments on social posts or article links demonstrates a level of gratitude and interest in the audience’s thoughts on the behalf of the journalist, in turn creating a more loyal audience base that will continue interacting with shared stories and posted content. The fourth pillar, show some

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<sup>29</sup> Tony Pec, “Five tips for success on social media,” Forbes, October 21, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2020/10/21/five-tips-for-success-on-social-media/?sh=554d2e634226>

<sup>30</sup> Pec, “Five tips.”

<sup>31</sup> Pec, “Five tips.”

personality, is described by Pec as letting people get to know you and your business. Pec assures that “people buy from people and businesses that they like, but if they don’t know you, they won’t be able to make the decision to like you.”<sup>32</sup> There should still be a professional separation from the journalist and the audience but cultivating an online presence on social media is extremely beneficial to improving the trust, credibility, and transparency a journalist can have associated with them.

Keeping in mind Pec’s five pillars of social media success, we can compare them with pillars of successful journalism to determine the potential effectiveness of a news story to a particular social audience. In their book *The Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel outline several principles of journalism that directly align with Pec’s pillars of success.<sup>33</sup> The table below shows the direct relation between these two conceptual groupings:

**Table 1 A comparison between Pec's pillars of social media success and Kovach and Rosenstiel’s principles of journalism**

<b>Pec’s Social Media Pillars</b>	<b>Kovach and Rosenstiel’s Principles</b>
Post with purpose and provide value	Journalism must strive to keep the significant interesting and relevant
Provide unique content	Journalism’s first loyalty is to citizens
Engage others	Journalism must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise

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<sup>32</sup> Pec, “Five tips.”

<sup>33</sup> Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2014), 22-23.

Show some personality	Journalists have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience
Be consistent	Journalism's essence is a discipline of verification

**Journalism must strive to keep the significant interesting and relevant.**

Kovach and Rosenstiel describe this principle in the following way: “effective writing about news can be found at the intersection of civic clarity, the information citizens need to function, and literary grace.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Pec explains his concept of posting with purpose and value as contributing to building your brand or generating more business and that one of these purposes can be to add value through education. When we combine these two pillars, we can see that journalism can succeed on social media when placed in the framework of fulfilling a specific purpose. Whether it be through supplementary comments attached with the story link or subsequent replies to their original posts, journalists can harness an audience by explaining what it is their content offers.

**Journalism's first loyalty is to citizens.** Kovach and Rosenstiel highlight the journalistic value created when “those who report the news are not obstructed from digging up and telling the truth – even at the expense of the owners’ other financial interests, the funders’ political agenda, or the sponsors’ products.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Pec’s pillar of providing unique content is fulfilled when the content you put out “[provides] value to your audience and [provides] insight into you, your business, your story, and

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<sup>34</sup> Kovach and Rosenstiel, *Elements of Journalism*, 211.

<sup>35</sup> Kovach and Rosenstiel *Elements of Journalism*, 78.

your team.”<sup>36</sup> On both sides of the divide, there is an emphasis on providing value to unique audiences and remaining objective to a central narrative. Remaining independent from outside forces like employers and sponsors directly provides value to the audience as Pec highlights, while also providing that business insight into how journalism remains loyal to matters of civic value over a paycheck. Social media fits into this niche by providing a consistent mill of story ideas that, when reported on, provide both value to the audience as Pec recommends, and show that stories are coming from the communities covered and not from advertiser influencing as Kovach and Rosenstiel instruct on. This combination of tactics increases your perceived reliability and relatability to your audience and garners additional faith in your organization.

**Journalism must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.**

Kovach and Rosenstiel consider this element satisfied when the forum is made available “to all parts of the community, not just those who are most vocal and thus most present in social media, or those who are demographically attractive to those selling goods and services.”<sup>37</sup> As aforementioned, Pec believes that engaging with an audience will reward more reciprocal engagement with your posted content,<sup>38</sup> so it stands to reason that if journalists are participating in conversations occurring in the comments of their social posts, they will continue to feed this forum with further intellectual rigor. There is no obligation to interact with the audience beyond the initial sharing of a story, but a journalist would be remiss not to engage further with the comments sections of their posts. A wealth of constructive criticism, corrections, and further leads can come from

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<sup>36</sup> Tony Pec, “Five tips for success on social media”

<sup>37</sup> Kovach and Rosenstiel *Elements of Journalism*, 198.

<sup>38</sup> Tony Pec, “Five tips for success on social media”

these comments and improve the overall depth and meaning behind a reporter's initial story.

**Journalists have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience.** This principle is perhaps the most intriguing for a journalist in the digital age, because it recognizes and accepts all individuals as carrying their own opinions that add value and layers to their reporting. Kovach and Rosenstiel insist that “every journalist, from the occasional citizen sentinel or freelancer to the newsroom, to the manager who visits the boardroom, must have a personal sense of ethics and responsibility – a moral compass.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Kovach and Rosenstiel claim that “only in a setting in which all can bring their diverse viewpoints to bear can the news have any chance of accurately anticipating and reflecting the increasingly diverse perspectives and needs of American culture.”<sup>40</sup> On the business side of things, Pec assures that it is critical to “add personality to what you put out on social media,” and that you can let an audience get to know you through sharing information about your business, such as “why you got started, what your goals are, things you like, what your company culture is like and more.”<sup>41</sup> When we combine these two mission statements together, we can begin to see the validity in journalists recognizing and disclosing their personal biases in the reporting process or on their social accounts. Recognizing bias and outlining a contingency plan for how to approach these biases can greatly improve an individual reporter's existence on social media.

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<sup>39</sup> Kovach and Rosenstiel *Elements of Journalism*, 266.

<sup>40</sup> Kovach and Rosenstiel *Elements of Journalism*, 266.

<sup>41</sup> Tony Pec, “Five tips for success on social media”

**Journalism is a discipline of verification.** This principle again highlights that journalists are also regular individuals who possess unique biases. The discipline that this principle refers to instead is the method of newsgathering and reporting:

When the concept of objectivity originally migrated from social science to journalism, it was not meant to imply that journalists were free of bias. Quite the contrary.... The call for objectivity was an appeal for journalists to develop a consistent method of testing information – a transparent approach to evidence – precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work.<sup>42</sup>

The way in which we can apply Pec’s pillar of consistency in this situation would be to attach it to the method of verification. Consistency in a reporter’s method of distribution should not be the goal, as social media presents unique audience engagement opportunities, but rather the consistency should apply to their method of verifying consumed newsworthy content. It is still critical that journalists follow the same methods and processes of verification of user-generated content as they do with sources and first-hand accounts out in the field.

## **2.2 Summary**

This chapter has established the precedent for social media’s value as a news tool, including the three main advantages it offers: access to communities both imagined and geographical, a wealth of user-generated content that can supplement on the ground reporting by journalists, and reach of newsworthy information both from journalists to audiences, and from the wider internet sphere to journalists. The next chapter focuses on

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<sup>42</sup> Kovach and Rosenstiel *Elements of Journalism*, 107.

the perceived outcomes of social media as identified by news organizations and journalists. It also features a breakdown and analysis of major platform mechanics and inherent cultures to lay the groundwork for proposing simple ways for journalists to begin to navigate these spaces in Chapter five.

### Chapter 3: Outcomes of Social Media as a Journalistic Tool

Chapter two has established that social media boasts robust potential when used in three main contexts: access to communities, audience engagement and collection of user-generated content, and networking reach for both sources and stories. With this established context, it is time to now apply the framework to different industry-level threats to examine how social media can act as a balm to current issues. The gradual centralization of traditional local newspapers into mass media conglomerates like Postmedia and Torstar has had a detrimental effect on the news industry in the past two decades and creates the perfect environment for social media to thrive as a supplementary tool for journalism. The loss of local newspapers through direct closings or mergers with other outlets has led to a severe decline of in-depth news coverage in the communities that may not have access to larger national news sources or who do not see their stories being told due to lack of resources. This phenomenon, known as news deserts, has been described in the following way: “a community, either rural or urban, with limited access to the sort of credible and comprehensive news and information that feeds democracy at the grass-roots level.”<sup>43</sup> Journalism was founded and pursued in the hope that information could be more widely democratized, and through this sharing of knowledge, change could be fostered. The loss of traditional print news outlets in small communities directly uproots these ideals and forces us as journalists to leave communities to fend for themselves in the global arena of information exchange. The number of closed local news outlets is reported to be at least 2,200 in the United States since 2005 according to the

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<sup>43</sup> Whitney Joiner and Alexa McMahon, “The lost local news issue,” Washington Post Magazine, November 30, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/interactive/2021/local-news-deserts-expanding/>

Washington Post.<sup>44</sup> Similar trends are being seen in Canada, where the Local News Research Project reports that there have been 468 newspaper closings across 333 local communities from 2008-2022, with community newspapers contributing to 359 of these closures.<sup>45</sup> While roughly 468 closed outlets does not sound like a lot in comparison to the 2,200 lost in the United States, the concerning trend that has been revealed is the lack of supplementary news sources to replace those lost. The same Local News Research Project report reveals that, since 2008, 204 new local news outlets have been launched. Of these launched, they cover 143 communities compared to the 333 communities left without local news.<sup>46</sup> The discrepancy between the ratio of closures to launches poses a concern for journalism that should be at the forefront of the minds of mass media organizations: how long will we be able to sustain this trend of closures before we have significantly failed the public as the mouthpiece of democracy? Social media in part can be the first step in the process towards diversifying our stories and sources once more.

### **3.1 Operational Definitions of Media Organizations**

The majority of new outlets that we have seen opening in Canada have been created by new independent media owners to fill the gaps, as opposed to well-known media chains like Postmedia, Metroland, or Torstar.<sup>47</sup> Digital news start-ups, often referred to as “new media” in distinction from “traditional” or “legacy media,” pose a new and exciting prospect for local news geographically as well as on a community basis.

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<sup>44</sup> Joiner and McMahon.

<sup>45</sup> “Local News Map Data August 1, 2022,” Local News Research Project, <https://s35582.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/LocalNewsMapDataAugust2022.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> “Local News Map Data,” Local News Research Project.

<sup>47</sup> H.G Watson, “Over 250 Canadian news media outlets have closed in the last 10 years,” J-Source, October 4, 2018, <https://j-source.ca/over-250-canadian-news-media-outlets-have-closed-in-the-last-ten-years/>

Prior to examining these new media companies, it is critical to qualify what is meant by these terms. For the purpose of this thesis, *Canadian legacy media* will refer to media and news reporting companies that meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. A strong presence on television, radio, or in print during the late 1900s;
2. A revenue model previously or currently based primarily on subscriptions and advertising (including the transfer of the traditional revenue model into digital advertising);
3. At one point focused on a model of news reporting that prioritized mass information dissemination over audience engagement.

*New media* will refer to any media and news reporting companies that meet at least one of the following criteria at the time of their inception:

1. A primarily or totally digital presence and means of content distribution;
2. A focus on audience engagement and feedback equal to that of the focus on newsgathering and news dissemination;
3. Self-identifies as serving a specific geographical community or minority grouping, or as an independent news media organization (little or no affiliation with advertisers).

More and more media outlets are opening to service communities or minorities that do not see the same representation of their issues as many communities in Canada do. The Narwhal, a Canadian digital media start-up founded in 2018, prides itself on being a non-profit journalism organization, relying on member support and donations to keep providing readers with comprehensive news content. Through this, the Narwhal meets the operational definition of a new media organization in all three criteria categories. The

distinct separation from advertisers means that their journalism is directly supported by those they cover in return for their valued product and that they are not beholden to outside influence from stakeholders.<sup>48</sup> Postmedia, on the other hand, is the proud owner of hundreds of traditional news outlets across Canada. One such outlet, the Ottawa Citizen, will serve as an example for a legacy media outlet. The Citizen, which was founded in 1845 as the Bytown Packet, remains Ottawa's longest running daily broadsheet newspaper.<sup>49</sup> While now also circulating a digital version of their paper, the Citizen still relies on its old business model of advertiser revenue as their main means of monetary support. This trend remains true of many of the "star" and "sun" named newspapers that Postmedia controls.

### **3.2 Perceived Benefits of Social Media Usage: Journalists**

With the predominant negative aspects of social media (troll culture, misinformation, baseless attacks against journalists), it can be challenging to see why journalists would find it to be useful for their work. However, there is a relatively large show of support for social media from working reporters. The primary draw according to the eight reporters interviewed for the purpose of this study was access to the audience. There is a steady increase in social media membership, and more and more this is where the audience is gathering to engage in daily conversation. As such, reporters have begun to gather in these spaces as well in order to meet the audience in a communal space. The following is a selection of quotes from reporters interviewed for this study, explaining the justification for using social media as part of their daily jobs.

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<sup>48</sup> "About Us," The Narwhal, <https://thenarwhal.ca/about-us/>

<sup>49</sup> Randy Boswell, "A window into history: A trip back to the Citizen's fascinating beginnings, 175 years ago," Ottawa Citizen, January 3, 2020, <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/175-years-and-counting>

Anastasia Holleman, freelancer:

I use it pretty much all the time. It helps to find story ideas, it helps with researching aspects of certain stories, it even serves as a barometer of public interest in XYZ story.<sup>50</sup>

Elizabeth Payne, Ottawa Citizen:

Life would be a little more difficult, especially covering something as fast moving as the pandemic, without access to Twitter. It's where people who comment on the news hang out. You get a good sense of what's happening around the world.<sup>51</sup>

Ayesha Barmania, Peterborough Currents:

We consider each platform that we're on a product that needs a dedicated strategy...we have been putting our efforts into Facebook and Twitter because those are the platforms we associated with the audience we are trying to go for.<sup>52</sup>

Joyce Grant, freelancer:

My website is a place to store my journalism, but social media is where people learn about it. I'm a big proponent that you should think about where your audience is, but also the culture that you feel at home in. If you try to use social media that you're not comfortable with, you will screw it up.<sup>53</sup>

Kelsey Johnson, iPolitics:

Especially for political reporting, there's just too many announcements that are only made on Twitter. The news breaks on Twitter. A government minister will

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<sup>50</sup> Anastasia Holleman, interview by author, December 11, 2021

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Payne, interview by author, January 24, 2022

<sup>52</sup> Ayesha Barmania, interview by author

<sup>53</sup> Joyce Grant, interview by author, February 28, 2022

tweet, or they'll announce a cabinet shuffle on Twitter, or someone will get a scoop, and everyone is chasing it. It's the in the know area and I really don't know how you can be a political reporter and not be on Twitter.<sup>54</sup>

Gavin Johnson, freelancer:

It's integral in the sense that it's something that is good to get a quick feel for what a certain portion of a population thinks...open-source research platforms that track Twitter movements are usually 2-3 hours ahead of any other form of reporting on rough movements of frontlines [during conflict].<sup>55</sup>

As can be seen from these statements, each reporter has their own personal motivation for using social media as part of their daily job, but all of their statements generally amount to the same ends: identifying an audience and doing what you must to reach them where they are. In a few responses, we saw hints of the other two functions of social media, engagement with user-generated content, and reach for networking. Particularly of note is Johnson's response about political reporters not being able to do their jobs without constant access to social media. By nature of gathering information for stories, journalists are often beholden to the schedules of other people and the need to observe politicians where they break news is another example of this constraint. Another common theme identified by reporters in the above statements was social media acting as a barometer for understanding the public. This quick survey of public interest also aids a journalist or news organization in deciding what stories deserve more urgent coverage, due to the timeliness of the discussion surrounding that topic.

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<sup>54</sup> Kelsey Johnson, interview by author, January 13, 2022

<sup>55</sup> Gavin Johnson, interview by author, February 18, 2022

### 3.3 Perceived Benefits of Social Media Usage: News Organizations

Now that there is an established understanding of what journalists are getting out of social media use, it is necessary to examine the same argument from the perspective of news organizations. In order to propose policy updates that are actually effective in stopping miscommunication and punishment between journalists and their employers, there must be a point of comparison between the differing motivations. Ryan Adam, VP of strategic organization at Torstar, said in an interview that social media literacy has become an integral part of a journalist's job description in 2022. "It's not a nice to have anymore, it's a need to have," he said of social media technical skills.<sup>56</sup> For Torstar, Adam outlined a few key advantages of social media usage including exposure of news content, aggregation of wider audiences, increased potential for editorial creativity in the form of chosen medium, and a continuously shortening feedback loop.<sup>57</sup> Jessica Smith Cross, editor for Queen's Park Briefing at iPolitics, had similar things to say of the team of reporters she oversees:

Everyone uses social media to keep abreast of what's happening and also to share their own stories and connect with potential sources. It's most useful in newsgathering: you can follow the news, find sources, and learn what's happening.<sup>58</sup>

In both instances, it seems that the perceived benefits of news organizations are similar to those of reporters when considering the priority placed upon acquisition of sources and potential stories. Adam presents a new realm of consideration with the identification of

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<sup>56</sup> Ryan Adam, interview by author, March 11, 2022

<sup>57</sup> Adam

<sup>58</sup> Jessica Smith Cross, interview by author, March 9, 2022

the potential for editorial creativity. This will surely be a factor that puts the Toronto Star ahead of other legacy media organizations when it comes to successfully harnessing social media. The foresight to adapt to a new journalistic tool in terms of editorial creativity visually, aurally, and digitally will allow the Toronto Star to explore new ways of posting and framing stories that will flourish amongst social media audiences.

With similar perceived benefits of social media identified by both reporters and legacy media higher ups, we are left with the question of why some reporters are still being punished for their conduct online and left unsure of how to navigate this tool. This space of uncertainty begs to be explored, for if not differing goals being the cause of tension, there must be a miscommunication error at another level. Current social media policy remains insufficient in communicating the expectations of news organizations, and this is where that uncertainty festers and creates issues between employee and employer. Before analyzing different social media policies, which will be explored in chapter four, there is benefit in first understanding the way that social media platforms function and serve us as journalists.

### **3.4 Mechanics of the Media: The Pros and Cons of Social Sites**

This thesis maintains that social media literacy will be an invaluable aspect in the progression of the journalism industry. For reporters to do their best work as storytellers, it is paramount they learn new ways to put pen to paper, or keyboard to social site as it were. As established through interviews with both reporters and news media organizations, there are three main beasts of the social media sphere: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Indeed, in a 2021 ranking by Visual Capitalist of the top fifty most visited sites in the world, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram rank solidly at third, fourth, and

sixth respectively.<sup>59</sup> Aside from these three, other social sites that are of keen interest to journalists are Tumblr, Pinterest, and the Generation Z clubhouse that is TikTok. Each of these sites boast their own unique social experience and house a different audience and culture that can be difficult for a journalist to navigate when breaking into that community. “I don’t know how a journalist could get away with not being active on social media, at the very least to understand the culture of it, that’s like 80 percent of the game,” said Joyce Grant in her interview.<sup>60</sup> Grant is the writer behind TeachingKidsNews, a website that teaches media literacy to younger audiences. Grant went on to present a concept that will guide the following assessment of different social media sites: social media can be imagined as a large building, and in every room, there is a different party going on hosted by one of the social media sites. “You walk into the Twitter party and you have to understand what’s going on: who the little cliques are over here, who are those people at the bar, what clothes they’re wearing and how that speaks to what they’re talking about,” Grant explained.<sup>61</sup> When you enter a new space for each social site, the way of speaking changes, the age range changes, and the culture of the party changes. This is critical, because “when you don’t understand the culture, you can really make big mistakes that make you look inept, and you miss out on the nuance” of these various social groupings.<sup>62</sup>

Keeping in mind Grant’s metaphor of different parties and partygoers, it is necessary to conduct an analysis of not only the mechanics but the inherent culture of

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<sup>59</sup> Dorothy Neufeld and Joyce Ma, “The 50 most visited websites in the world,” Visual Capitalist, January 27, 2021, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-50-most-visited-websites-in-the-world/>

<sup>60</sup> Joyce Grant, interview by author

<sup>61</sup> Grant

<sup>62</sup> Grant

each social site. In doing so, guidelines can begin to be formed that make it more accessible for journalists of any age or background to navigate these platforms.

Additionally, examining what reporters and media organizations identify as the benefits of each social site will further promote industry-level knowledge sharing of beneficial techniques.

### **3.4.1 Friends and Followers: Facebook at a Glance**

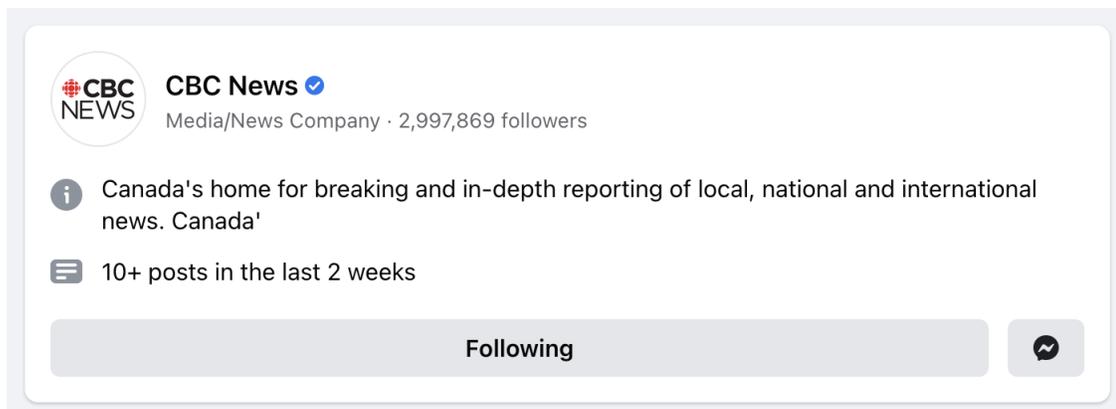
Facebook was launched in 2004 as a closed social platform exclusive to Harvard students before its public global launch of 2006.<sup>63</sup> At its core, Facebook aims to connect users to anyone in their lives, be it friends, family, coworkers, or businesses they know and love. As of 2022, there are approximately 30.6 million Facebook users in Canada with a primary demographic consisting of 25 to 34-year-olds, closely followed by 35 to 45-year-olds.<sup>64</sup> The main user interface of the site features a home page, referred to as the Facebook Feed, where all content is curated per user. The feed features an aggregation of all status updates (text posts, photos, videos, livestreams, etc.) that are shared by individuals on their “friends” list: the people they have chosen to connect with on Facebook. Status updates posted by a user can only be seen by those they have connected with and added to their friends list by default, but there is also an option to set your post to public and allow anyone with an account to search for that information. Aside from private accounts, users have the option to create pages dedicated to any interest, concept, or group, usually in the public eye. Typical Facebook pages include those of bands,

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<sup>63</sup> Chenda Ngak, “Then and now: A history of social networking sites,” CBS News, July 6, 2011, <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/then-and-now-a-history-of-social-networking-sites/8/>

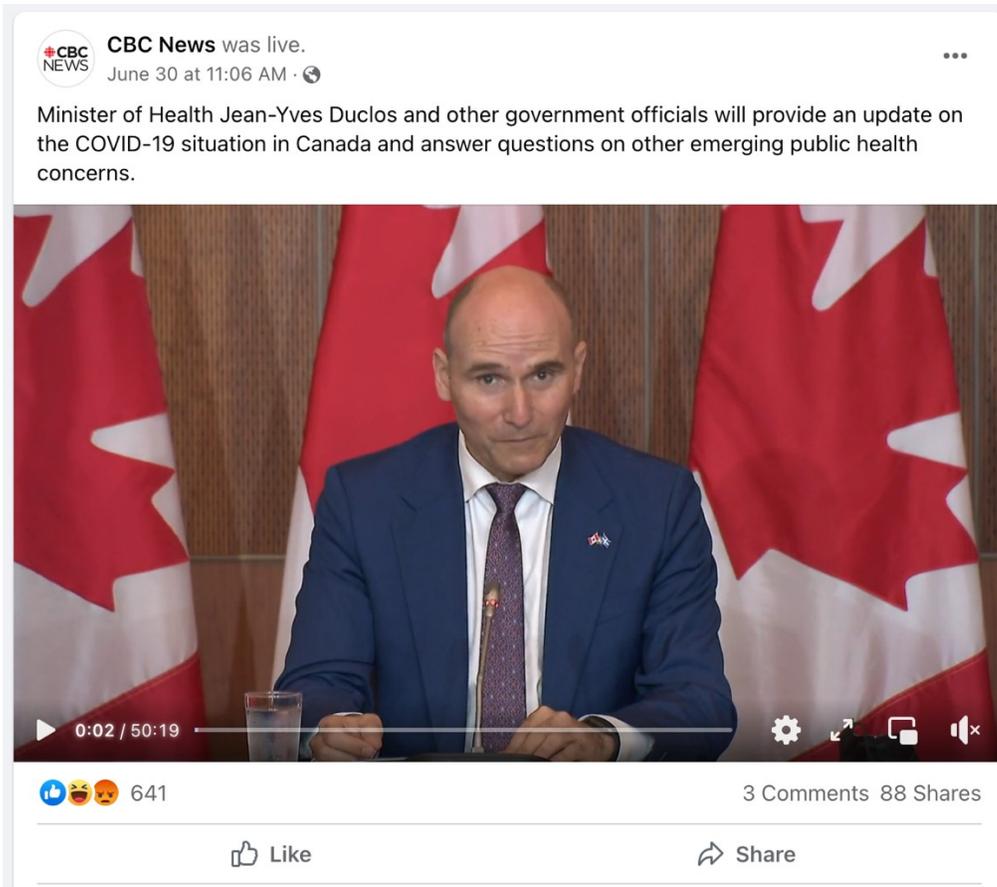
<sup>64</sup> “Canada: Facebook users 2022, by age group,” Statista, July 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/863754/facebook-user-share-in-canada-by-age/#:~:text=The%20majority%20of%20users%20were,13%20to%2017%20years%20old>

public figures, and businesses. These pages can be followed by users to have their posts and content show up in the aggregated Facebook Feed, and easily shared to a user's network of Facebook friends. This social networking aspect of content sharing is where Facebook makes itself a worthy site for journalists. Many major news organizations have Facebook pages that serve as a steady stream of all news articles posted to their websites. With just a few clicks, users can follow a page to receive their updates, and interact with all previous posts made.



**Figure 1. The Facebook Page for CBC News. Listed are the number of followers, a description of the Facebook page, and an overview of the content to be expected. Captured from the CBC News page of the Facebook search function.**

Examining the Facebook page for CBC News allows for an understanding of the common use of Facebook for a news media organization. As seen in figure 1, it takes merely the click of a button to begin receiving news updates to a user's Facebook feed, simplifying the process of acquiring news compared to being delivered traditional print news and making this an accessible format to a wide audience of readers. When inspecting the user interface of the CBC News Facebook page at length, the style of posting becomes evident. CBC News typically posts several times a day: all including hyperlinked stories and the lead of the story as can be seen in figure 2.



**Figure 2** An example of a Facebook post by CBC News on a COVID-19 update as delivered by government officials. The post in question was a live video feed of a government briefing and displays the interactions the post garnered. Captured from the CBC News page.

From the moment of sharing, users can easily interact with a post through liking, commenting, and sharing to their own page, with the option to append their own commentary separately from the post. The unique benefit Facebook poses to journalism lies in the nature of what is included – or rather, not included – in this additional commentary. The “friends” mechanic of locking personally shared content to only people you have approved typically results in close relations being the main inhabitants of a friends list and changes the culture of interaction between a user and any given content they interface with in a way that is unique to Facebook. The key difference Facebook

makes is that it strips away a layer of the anonymity that is present on most other social media platforms. In the aftermath of social media mass communication, psychologists have coined the term *online disinhibition effect*, “in which factors like anonymity, invisibility, a lack of authority and not communicating in real time strip away the mores society spent millennia building.”<sup>65</sup> A respondent in a Pew research article on fake news echoed this sentiment by claiming that “trolls know that their methods are effective and carry only minimal chance of social stigma and essentially no other punishment.”<sup>66</sup> Essentially, there is a strong correlation between anonymity and the compulsion to post inflammatory or divisive statements online or engage in harassment campaigns against other people or groups. Facebook social circles, as aforementioned, are primarily composed of people a user knows or has met in real life, completely stripping away the sense of anonymity and increasing that chance of social stigma and punishment. Should a user decide to go after a journalist or news organization, as is common in online fora,<sup>67</sup> their actions will be put on display for all their personal and real-world contacts to witness, potentially hampering their will to go through with their actions. This aspect has turned Facebook into a tool for journalists to curate their audiences and receive real-time feedback on their work that results in constructive criticism as opposed to baseless attacks and critique as seen on other social sites. Despite this common ground, there is

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<sup>65</sup> Joel Stein, “Why we’re losing the internet to the culture of hate,” *Time*, August 29, 2016, <https://time.com/4457110/internet-trolls/>

<sup>66</sup> Lee Rainie, Jenna Anderson, and Jonathan Albright, “The future of free speech, trolls, anonymity, and fake news online,” Pew Research Center, March 29, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2017/03/29/the-future-of-free-speech-trolls-anonymity-and-fake-news-online/>

<sup>67</sup> Emma Buchanan, “It sucks being a journalist online today. It’s dangerous, too,” *The Tyee*, March 23, 2022, <https://thetyee.ca/News/2022/03/23/Internet-Toxicity-Threat-Press-Freedom-Newsrooms-Response-Slow/>

still slight variation in the use of the platform by different journalists. Elizabeth Payne, a health reporter with the Ottawa Citizen, says her primary use of Facebook as an individual reporter is as a means of contacting sources. “People want to reach you. People still phone me, many people reach me through email, but lots of people contact me via Twitter, and some Facebook,” Payne said, with a steadily increasing amount of people choosing to use social media to reach out over the last few years.<sup>68</sup>

### **3.4.2 Forum of the Public: Navigating the Twittersphere**

Twitter is an online microblogging platform that launched in 2007 and is likely the number one social media site used by journalists to date. Twitter’s focus is text-based “tweets” (status updates) that are constrained to 280 characters per message, though videos and photos can be attached to tweets as well to enhance the text-based means of information delivery. Twitter’s character limit, which used to be maxed out at 140 per tweet, is what qualifies the platform as a “microblog” social network. Users are expected to send out short, snappy, real-time updates on what is going on in their lives that are then shared to the timelines of their followers. Twitter also incorporates several features that made it unique to other social sites at the time, and that continue to set it apart as an efficient site for news distribution. Different from Facebook, tweets can be seen by anyone who comes across your post in a search result of keywords if you do not have a locked private account. This increases the audience of each post exponentially compared to Facebook, and to an even higher extent when individual users harness the tagging system. Twitter tags are created to identify any topic that users want to join a discussion about. Whether it be #CDNPoli for Canadian politics, #Oscars for all the Hollywood

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<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth Payne, interview by author

movie drama, or #LifeHacks for tips and tricks from everyday people, the tagging system remains the easiest way to join a larger global discussion online. Users can track topics by clicking on these tags and scrolling through any tweet that has included the relevant tag.<sup>69</sup> Twitter also features a manual timeline curation mechanic known as lists. Introduced in 2009 and refined in 2019, lists allow users to follow accounts and optionally add them to specific lists of their choosing<sup>70</sup>. For example, one user may choose to follow several news media companies or journalists and add them to a list called “News.” The user can then switch between their default timeline of everyone they follow, or to a list and only see tweets and content from users on that list. Due to this, Twitter has served as a place for several niche online communities to gather and have their own discussions in a public sphere. The concept of the public sphere, coined by Jürgen Habermas, conceptualizes a space in which “private individuals assemble to form a public body” and behave with “the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest.”<sup>71</sup> When examining Twitter at face value, it is easy to draw the lines between Habermas’s theory of the public sphere and Twitter’s forum of open, and largely unregulated, global discussion. Furthermore, news media as a function of the public sphere flourished on Twitter from its inception. While the initial draw to Twitter was for celebrity people-watching, businesses quickly realized the potential for a wide audience

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<sup>69</sup> “Twitter,” Britannica

<sup>70</sup> Harry McCracken, “Twitter’s big bet on topics and lists is just getting started,” *Fast Company*, December 31, 2019, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90446827/twitters-big-bet-on-topics-and-lists-is-just-getting-started>

<sup>71</sup> Jürgen Habermas, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964),” *New German Critique*, no. 3 (1974): 49–55. <https://doi.org/10.2307/487737>.

and began to post updates and information about promotions for their services. In a similar vein of celebrity people-watching, political leaders saw the benefit of gaining traction and attention through younger audiences on social media.<sup>72</sup> The 2008 US presidential election demonstrated the influence Twitter could have when candidates Barack Obama and John McCain took to Twitter and MySpace in an attempt to network with the public. Obama, who remains the highest followed account in the world,<sup>73</sup> was successful in securing more than four times as many Twitter followers as McCain, ensuring that “future candidates would include a social networking presence as part of their media strategies.”<sup>74</sup> Ryan Adam, who previously highlighted the critical importance of social media for audience curation, was the media lead for the Obama for America team during that 2008 election and acted as a senior advisor for media relations again in 2012.<sup>75</sup> While not traditional businesses, new media organizations can and should be harnessing the same social networking strategies when it comes to social media use and building a brand; a concept that Adam likely adopted from the Obama campaign successes into his own personal views for social media use in a newsroom. a topic which will be explored more in chapter six.

These varied features have allowed for Twitter to become the favoured platform for journalists, in part because it allows users to keep track of the news they care about through searching tags, and in part by making itself a readily minable archive for potential sources, experts, and story ideas as previously stated by a variety of interviewed

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<sup>72</sup> “Twitter,” Britannica

<sup>73</sup> Barack Obama (BarackObama), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/BarackObama>

<sup>74</sup> “Twitter,” Britannica

<sup>75</sup> Ryan Adam, “Experience,” LinkedIn, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ryan-adam-6ba410167/details/experience/>

journalists. In the past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic it has been especially hard for journalists to connect with sources through traditional means with heavy restrictions being placed on travel and in-person meetings. Social media however grants access to all these communities and individuals at instant rates according to Payne:

It gives me direct real-time access to people like scientific experts, doctors, and so forth who comment on things as they come. That sometimes points to stories and gives me a pretty good roundup of what's happening in terms of reporting around the world on the pandemic. There are many people who that's how they contact me and that's how I contact them.<sup>76</sup>

Without this decentralized means of communication, there is a very real possibility that many critical news stories would not get the attention they deserve, simply because reporters either could not contact sources for them, or the stories never crossed their radar to begin with.

### **3.4.3 Photo Finish: Instagram and the Potential for Photojournalism**

With Twitter setting the stage for many popular mechanics (such as the hashtag), it is unsurprising that other social sites have attempted to emulate some of these features. An attractive draw to Instagram comes from its potential for photojournalism as well as for big data stories that have a strong digital or graphical representation of the news content. The main user interface of Instagram features a main feed of all the content posted by the accounts a user follows. A conceptual combination of Facebook and Twitter, on Instagram you can either lock your account to approved friends or leave your account open to any new followers who come across your page. The second and most critical

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<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Payne, interview by author.

feature of Instagram for the purpose of journalistic benefit, is the search function. Instagram has heavily adopted Twitter's use of hashtags and integrated them into the main culture of the platform. A study cited by the News Guild of New York shows that on Instagram, hashtags are the main currency of interaction. Posts that have at least one hashtag associated with them receive 12.6 percent more engagement than posts without hashtags.<sup>77</sup> Similar to Twitter, Instagram users are able to follow specific hashtags they are interested in, posing significant interest to journalists hoping to reach new audiences should they be able to harness the correct tagging etiquette when posting. Justin Sablich, who penned the News Guild of New York article, recommends mixing in basic category-based hashtags into a caption, as well as mixing in community tags.<sup>78</sup> These community tags are general tags such as #picoftheday or #fitness that apply to a wide range of content and serve the purpose of further boosting your posts to potential new audiences. There is also an emphasis on carefully curating your visual material to be pleasing to the viewer's eye. When clicking on an Instagram user's profile, all of their previous photos are displayed in a tiled format displaying thumbnails of their posts. At a quick glance this affords a journalist the chance to curate a portfolio of images and graphics that convey a meaning very quickly in order to draw a user in to stay. Sablich recommends considering the following when curating your profile:

If you're a reporter, share a few behind the scenes shots from your latest story. If you're an editor, consider taking a screenshot of a visually impressive interactive

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<sup>77</sup> Justin Sablich, "Three ways journalists should be using Instagram," The News Guild of New York, February 2, 2019, <https://www.nyguild.org/front-page-details/three-ways-journalists-should-be-using-instagram>

<sup>78</sup> Sablich

project your team worked on. Also, pay special attention to the captions, which can add a lot of value to your post, and know that hashtags can make a big difference on Instagram, unlike most other social media platforms.<sup>79</sup>

A downside to Instagram however is that it is not optimized for sending users back to a news organization's website. Instagram does not allow users to include hyperlinks in the captions of their posts but does allow them in the bio of a user, creating an inconvenient extra step that diminishes the click-through rate of readers to the website. Recognizing that each platform possesses a unique culture, specific challenges, and specific advantages will lead to the most successful existence of journalists in each digital space. The incorporation of unique social media strategies per platform will be explored further in the policy recommendations section of chapter five.

### **3.5 Summary**

This chapter has examined the way in which social media is supplementing traditional reporting through filling the gaps in growing news deserts across Canada. Additionally, it has also provided insight into what journalists and news organizations hope to get out of social media use and has shown that goals between these two groups are extremely similar in nature. It has posited that current social media policy is the reason for the tension between reporters and news media organizations to set the stage for an examination of policy in the following chapter. This examination will focus on several major media organizations and their respective policies, breaking down what they instruct their reporters to do, and how this aligns with their established goals.

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<sup>79</sup> Sablich

## Chapter 4: Newsroom Social Media Policies

A guiding factor during the conception of this thesis is the current lack of adequate guidelines and explicit expectations in place for reporters using social media. A Digiday article examining social media policies from the American journalism industry refers to this as an evergreen issue, and describes the problem in the following way:

Newsrooms have often struggled to find the right balance between setting boundaries for what their journalists can post online as representatives of their media outlets and giving them the freedom to use social media platforms as a channel to engage with audiences, improve transparency around reporting and distribute content.<sup>80</sup>

The trend described by Digiday is no different in Canada. Many news organizations either have stagnant policies from the advent of social media gathering dust on shelves or no effective policy regarding social media at all. The consensus over what appropriate social media conduct looks like according to American policy seems to be focusing on facts and avoiding bias, misinformation, gossip, and political or partisan endorsements.<sup>81</sup> While this speaks true to the general mission statement of journalism, it can be harder to navigate exactly what that means on social media, where everything said is to a massive, faceless audience one click away from critique. Attaining such a broad audience coupled with the quick-paced nature of social media creates the perfect melting pot for the words of journalists to be perceived in undesirable ways or be quickly taken out of context to the detriment of both the poster and the organization. Due to this, it is critical for

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<sup>80</sup> Sara Guaglione, "The Digiday guide to news organizations' social media policies," Digiday, June 1, 2021, <https://digiday.com/media/the-digiday-guide-to-news-organizations-social-media-policies/>

<sup>81</sup> Guaglione.

newsrooms to examine and update their social media policies to best protect and prepare their employers for an online space. This section will focus on an examination of current newsroom policy for social media use and conduct and will aim to discover if there is a distinction between the way legacy media and new media handle their employees in a digital space.

It is reasonable to expect that CBC, Canada's national news organization, would be a guiding source when it comes to a robust social media policy and that the most notable organization would be emulated by smaller, younger news organizations. With this expectation in mind, an analysis of the CBC's social media policy is necessary to establish whether they are truly a leading force in the industry. CBC possesses a Journalistic Standards and Practices policy that is publicly available and contains a specific section on use of social media as part of their organization. Additionally, the CBC also has a Social Media Guidance document, which was last updated in 2017 and outlines expected behaviour and highlights frequently asked questions. The Social Media Guidance document contains five main guiding principles, which are as follows:

1. Think before you post
2. Respect internal policy and confidentiality
3. Respect your professional responsibilities and legal commitments
4. Beware of disclaimers
5. Consult third-party terms and conditions<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> "Social Media Guidance," CBC/Radio-Canada, October 2017, <https://site-cbc.radio-canada.ca/documents/vision/governance/social-media-guidance-oct-2017-en.pdf>

These guidelines primarily deal with the legal conditions under which CBC reporters are posting online and has very little to do with actionable advice when it comes to the type of social media conduct that we have seen result in punishment in the past. Stipulation one (think before you post) explains more on the expectation, but there is still not much substance in the actual advice. “Consider the implications of each post you make on social media,” reads the description, “if you wouldn’t say it on live radio or television, reconsider posting it on social media.”<sup>83</sup> Again, there is very little actionable substance in this policy, nor does it consider the immediacy of social media that is not inherent in radio and television news. With an increasingly short feedback loop and the emboldening cloak of anonymity discussed in chapter three, simply making a judgement call based on a completely different news medium is no longer an efficient or effective means of filtering social media posts. Stipulation two refers journalists back to several different ethics, practices, and standards documents, only one of which contains a section on social media use. In that journalistic standards document, the CBC outright states that they are “consistent in [their] standards, no matter what the platform.”<sup>84</sup> With how varied the different news mediums are, the CBC is in fact doing itself a disservice by assigning the same overarching guidelines to all forms of news dissemination. We attempt to adapt our storytelling between radio, television, and print, so why would we not adapt our policy expectations and actionable guidelines for a new and varied tool?

Also included in the journalistic standards and practices document is a section on personal use of social media, which serves the most purpose to practicing journalists and

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<sup>83</sup> “Social Media Guidance,” CBC.

<sup>84</sup> “Journalistic Standards and Practices,” CBC.

employees of the CBC. Of the seven guidelines posted for personal use (see Appendix B.1), five of them specifically protect the CBC against any perception of bias or misconduct by the audience and instruct journalists against doing anything that could harm the reputation of the CBC. The remaining two policies touch on avoiding perceived endorsement of any content through interacting with social media posts and inform journalists that their social media conduct could reflect which story assignments they may receive based on perceived bias.<sup>85</sup> Lastly, in introducing the use of social media section, the document states that CBC recognizes “there are specific challenges raised because social media create an intersection of personal and professional roles and identities,” but fails to instruct their employees on how they should be navigating this challenging intersection.<sup>86</sup>

Torstar is slightly more hands-on with its social media policy, but, like the CBC, still puts a primary emphasis on not harming the reputation of the organization. The Torstar social media policy (see Appendix B.2), applicable to all its subsidiary news companies, features ten key points to guide employees through their navigation of social media platforms. In a similar vein to the CBC policy, Torstar emphasizes the following things:

1. Staff must not do anything on social media that damages the company’s reputation for fair journalism.
2. Journalists must not use social media to criticize or undermine the company, their colleagues, or the work of their colleagues.

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<sup>85</sup> “Journalistic Standards and Practices,” CBC.

<sup>86</sup> “Journalistic Standards and Practices,” CBC.

3. Journalists should not use social media accounts to register for partisan events, even if those groups are private or marked as secret.

These stipulations meet the expected instruction against defaming the news media organization or calling to doubt its credibility as a reliable news source. However, where the Torstar social media policy differs from the CBC policy is in its last two stipulations:

1. If a reader's comments are inconsiderate or could be considered trolling, it's best not to respond. Journalists are encouraged to block or mute someone who is making threatening, abusive or harassing comments. It is never appropriate to threaten someone or direct profanity at them.
2. A staff member who feels threatened by someone on social media should inform their supervisor immediately. Torstar has policies in place to protect its journalists.

These two stipulations set a critical precedent for Torstar employed journalists when it comes to navigating interactions on social media. While the CBC policy provides only vague advice and threatens disciplinary measures, Torstar gives actionable instructions for how to deal with negative online attention, and what to do next if you feel it is escalating in severity. This kind of policy inclusion is one that several interviewed journalists felt would be effective and necessary for a contemporary social media policy. "Seminars and guidance for people on how to respond when they're getting a lot of negative media might be as useful as a policy," suggested Payne in her interview.

Barmania had similar thoughts in their interview:

You can't hide behind your byline anymore; all of our Twitter profiles are public, and people can just DM us the most horrible things and that happens because of

our jobs. Employers need to take that seriously and provide supports to staff...there is an obligation to protect your people.

Keeping in mind these sentiments, Torstar seems to have the upper hand over the CBC policy when it comes to the inclusion of a framework for support systems.

Postmedia Network is Canada's other massive news media conglomerate, owning more than 130 news brands with notable inclusions of the Ottawa Citizen, the Montreal Gazette, the National Post, and various "Sun" and "Star" branded papers in communities across Canada.<sup>87</sup> Postmedia Network has a thirteen-page publicly accessible code of business conducts and ethics document, but this document does not include a section on social media usage or regulation. Within the code of business and ethics, the following line is delivered:

While this Code does not provide specific guidance on all situations Postmedia Personnel may encounter at work, the importance of Postmedia Network's reputation should be kept in mind and Postmedia Personnel should not do or condone any activity that could damage it.<sup>88</sup>

Again, the same sentiment of "mitigate your behaviour to protect the company" can be seen in the phrasing and instruction of this document. Many Postmedia Network subsidiaries have no publicly posted social media policy, so for the purpose of this analysis, the focus will be on the Montreal Gazette as a representative of the kind of values that Postmedia might enforce on their assets. The Montreal Gazette posted its social media policy in May of 2012, and it does not appear to have been updated or

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<sup>87</sup> "Brands," Postmedia, <https://www.postmedia.com/brands/>

<sup>88</sup> "Code of business conduct and ethics," Postmedia Network Canada Corp, November 2017, <https://www.postmedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/PNCC-Code-of-Business-Conduct-112017.pdf>

reposted since this date. The Gazette’s policy features many of the same themes we have seen thus far but does touch on one interesting and new phrasing we have yet to see in the examined social media policies: “Mind the medium.” This policy stipulation elaborates by focusing on three main actions of social media: voice, interaction, and reaction.

**Table 2 A breakdown of the mind the medium policy and how it fits into three critical categories of social media navigation**

Voice	Interaction	Reaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People are following you because they are interested in your reporting, expertise, and voice</li> <li>• Know your voice but remember that voice is not opinion</li> <li>• Never make statements on behalf of the Gazette</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be a good listener and don’t ignore people who are engaging you in productive ways</li> <li>• Foster connections by responding to readers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you encounter criticism, count to 10</li> <li>• Don’t take it personally</li> <li>• Use common sense<sup>89</sup></li> </ul>

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<sup>89</sup> “The Gazette’s social media policy,” Montreal Gazette, May 2012, <https://montrealgazette.com/news/the-gazettes-social-media-policy>

Despite being a ten-year-old policy at this time, it still holds one of the most interesting concepts examined thus far and takes a point of view that other new organizations have not. This stipulation keeps in mind that social media is first and foremost a platform for engagement in a way that other mediums of news dissemination are not. Previously, a reporter would give the news to an audience in a very one-way interaction. The audience would receive their news, and then contact an editorial department to offer feedback or criticism should they be interested in doing so. Social media eliminates that feedback loop and swaps it out for an increasingly rapid-fire response rate, wherein reporters have the opportunity to foster a community more so than just a passive audience. By actively encouraging your reporting team to take advantage of this feedback loop and curate loyal readers, the Gazette not only guarantees itself the positive brand perception that all news organizations seem to crave, but also actively creates opportunities for journalists to explain their process and demonstrate credibility and transparency with the audience.

Of the reviewed major media organizations, the general consensus on how social media should be used in a newsroom is to be objective, avoid being perceived as partisan, and avoid doing anything that could cause your newsroom an embarrassing headache. Considering the CBC journalistic standards and practices document contains an in-depth breakdown on reporting expectations for all main reporting beats,<sup>90</sup> it is concerning that there is a distinct lack of guidelines for social media beyond vague moral assurances.

In the realm of new media organizations, a surprising number do not have publicly posted social media guidelines. Rabble media, which is among the first digital

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<sup>90</sup> “Journalistic Standards and Practices,” CBC

media organizations in Canada,<sup>91</sup> does however have a publicly posted policy (see Appendix B.3) and it features concrete, actionable advice for contributors to their site in direct contrast to the policies posted by mass media organizations. Rabble highlights four guidelines and offers explanation for each:

1. Tone: treat people with respect on social media even if you disagree with them, ignore those who are abusive or offensive.
2. Dealing with abuse: report abuse to social media platforms but do not respond to the comments or escalate the situation.
3. Accuracy: only retweet and share information from verified sources, if you make an error take down the post to prevent the information from spreading and post an explanation.
4. Legal, privacy and copyright: you are legally responsible for what you say on your social media accounts.<sup>92</sup>

The Rabble policy still features the bare bones legal disclaimer to protect the organization, but unlike the observed mass media organizations, 75 percent of it focuses on clear instructions on how to deal with common situations. There is a clear expectation to act with grace and professionalism as dictated in stipulation one. In case of immediate danger, reporters are instructed to call 9-1-1, and if not report the abuse to the social site and block the offender before reporting to their editor. In stipulation three there are clear criteria for what information can be interacted with and passed along to further audiences. Of the policies examined thus far, Rabble poses the most effective contender for social

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<sup>91</sup> “About rabble.ca,” Rabble, <https://rabble.ca/about/>

<sup>92</sup> “Social media guidelines for contributors,” Rabble, <https://rabble.ca/social-media-guidelines-for-contributors/>

media success given its clarity, succinct instructions, and explanation of the chain of command for reporting issues. Given this robust policy, it would be expected that journalists working for Rabble Media would be successful in their social media navigation.

#### **4.1 The Freelance Experience: Navigating Policies**

While full time journalists have the ease of mind of following the social media policies put in place by their employers, freelance journalists have a slightly different experience. When hired on contract for stories by different media organizations, they are expected to be acting in accordance with the policy of the organization they are working with. As has been established, many mass media organizations either have a very minimal policy, or simply have no effective policy whatsoever. This has led freelance journalists to develop their own personal guidelines and policies when posting online. Citing interviews by journalists, above all there seems to be a dedication to accuracy as the main guiding factor for a social media post. Due to the fact that freelance reporters work for a variety of clients, their social media presence essentially becomes a portfolio for their journalistic aptitude. This means it is critical for them to have a strong, credible presences on their given social platforms. Joyce Grant also highlights the correct use of the hashtag filtering system and keeping in mind the call to action as two of her guiding factors when making a social media post. “What is the call to action? Who is the audience, and what do I want them to do when they see this?” she explains.<sup>93</sup> In her freelance work, Anastasia Holleman has never come across any formal guidelines for posting when she is contracted by a media organization. Instead, when she posts on social media, she

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<sup>93</sup> Joyce Grant, interview by author

considers it a wealth of constructive criticism and feedback.<sup>94</sup> Gavin John, a freelancer who has worked with the Globe and Mail, CBC, and the Narwhal, places the highest value on objective reporting compared to other reporters interviewed. John follows a unique method of breaking down a story for social media to ensure his tweets are as factual as possible. According to John, step one should be ensuring your social media is professional and leaves very little opportunity for those who want to criticize you to get a foothold or create the possibility for confrontation.

My opinion is ethics aren't conditional... There needs to be guidelines on how you conduct yourself. It's this idea of you reap what you sow... be a professional. It's that idea of standards online, we should view social media as a CV.<sup>95</sup>

Gavin also presents a call to action that journalists have a responsibility to demand change of their organizations when it comes to reactionary firings: "we have to ask ourselves why they're doing that. If journalists are upset about it, do they have an acceptable policy? No? Demand one." It is clear from sentiments like these from freelance reporters that the relationship between journalists and their news organizations is rocky at best when it comes to social media. In order for any journalist to thrive on employment from a news organization, it is clear that they need to be included in the discussion of updating existing policy.

## **4.2 Summary**

This section has served to establish a baseline commonality between current social media policies: that news organizations largely protect their own reputation in their posted

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<sup>94</sup> Anastasia Holleman, interview by author.

<sup>95</sup> Gavin John, interview by author.

guidelines for social media conduct. Very few policies include resources to increase social media literacy, guidelines for who to contact over anonymous hate online, or actionable advice on how to navigate a rapidly changing digital community. This baseline criteria for how a journalist should act on social media will provide a springboard for the suggestion of contemporary policy updates to come in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

The introduction to this thesis established the context for this research by examining the current tensions between newsrooms and their reporters over miscommunication and online conduct. The purpose of this research was to establish the best method for journalists and newsrooms to work together, to foster a better understanding of effective ethical guidelines, and to produce effective recommendations for contemporary social media policies and strategies. Chapter two of this thesis explored the precedent social media set for being an effective tool and compared successful elements of journalism with successful elements of social media marketing and engagement to clarify effective social media strategies for journalists to adopt into their digital routines. Chapter three aggregated the perceived benefits of using social media as dictated by news organizations and individual journalists in order to understand and identify where the sources of tension between these two groups emerge in order to better suggest a more successful symbiotic relationship. Chapter three also included an examination of the essential mechanics of the three main social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and identified advantages and disadvantages that these platforms afford as a baseline for proposing a unique social media strategy for each site. Chapter four established a common ground among social media policies and what it is that reporters are expected to do on social media. Identification of the common flaws in these policies across media organizations provides the basis for suggesting new policies that will occur in this chapter. The groundwork for the original goals of this thesis has been set across these chapters, and now the framework can be fleshed out into fully formed suggestions directly to news organizations moving forward with social media as a tool in their newsrooms. It has also

laid the groundwork for the examination and proposal of a new blended role for journalists in a social media space, for we must adapt to new means of engagement with our journalism, our audience, and ourselves.

With an established set of benefits and setbacks of social media use for journalism, it is now possible to identify specific actions and methods that can be used to ensure the most positive outcome of our conduct on social media. This chapter focuses on how social media should fit into the role of a current digital reporter, including the relevant technical skillset required to maximize the use of this tool, and what role a journalist should be playing in the public sphere today. It begins with an examination of a relevant online business position that journalists would do well to emulate. Journalists in their pursuit of stories become de facto experts in a number of fields through absorption of knowledge from sources. In a similar vein of adapting to new information, this thesis proposes the adaptation of journalists into a chameleon of sorts, observing and emulating skills taken from interdisciplinary existences online. Journalism already shares the table with marketing and public relations, as many of the tactics these disciplines use, we use for the purpose of selling ourselves and our storytelling as the product. In the social media paradigm shift, marketing and PR tactics were transformed into one of the most successful businesses online: influencer marketing.

### **5.1 Turning Eyes into Income: The Influencer Business Model**

Influencer marketing is one of the most notable ways to turn existence on social media into a viable career. The business model lies in the following simplified concept: influencers have access to eyes, and companies will act as sponsors to gain access and turn those eyes towards their products and services. Negating any true passions for what

they do or other noble causes, the drive behind online existence on any social platform is to garner attention. In order to monetize the experience of social media, it is imperative that one has an audience that has pledged just enough loyalty to them to keep coming back and interacting with their posts, tweets, YouTube videos, Instagram photos, or any other means of online content production. Those who have achieved some form of social media fame have done so because they have been able to curate a specific audience which enjoys the content they produce.

The potential for revenue arises once a social media personality has achieved this community base. Some revenue will be made as a result of their community: either through interaction with social media accounts or through supplementary subscription-style sites like Patreon. Many social media sites even include a built-in donation system so users can send money directly to the creators of whatever content they are viewing. Twitter recently launched its Tip Jar feature in May 2021, allowing users to donate money through third-party payment services to their favourite tweeters.<sup>96</sup> This feature is not contained to specific content creation categories, so anyone with a charming enough business pitch is able to solicit donations directly within the social media app. Deeper than surface-level fan interaction and support, the possibility for sponsorship arises.

Influencer marketing still relies primarily on an advertising-based model, much in the way journalism saw in its most lucrative golden age of print advertising. Companies who want to push their products can do so with extreme efficacy by simply sponsoring the correct social media influencer and gaining access to more tailored audiences than

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<sup>96</sup> Todd Spangler, "Twitter launches 'tip jar' to let you send money to your favorite Tweepers," Variety, May 7, 2021, <https://variety.com/2021/digital/news/twitter-tip-jar-launches-1234968733/>

ever before. The legwork of gaining access and trust to a curated community is done by the influencer, who also benefits from this loyalty, and they can then sell their community to companies in exchange for material or monetary gain. These trade agreements often take place in the form of product tests and reviews, and recommendations of certain goods and services to the audience, who sees the influencer as some sort of trustworthy or credible figure. This type of advertising has shown to be extremely effective according to Google consumer insights, which reported that nearly sixty percent of consumers used online videos as a means of inspiration for making a purchase in 2018.<sup>97</sup> In addition to free material objects, partnered sponsorships often include affiliate links to the products they're reviewing, wherein an influencer will earn a portion of the profits from sales of the product. Coupon codes are also often included in sponsored reviews in hopes of enticing more viewers into completing a purchase. This leads to further sustained generation of revenue should the community of viewers be interested enough in purchasing the product for themselves.

This type of business model is of note to journalists using social media today and should be considered when examining the most effective presence of a journalist on social media. It is critical to preface this by touching on the inherent bias in the influencer business model, as there is plenty of room for unethical practice. There is no guaranteed transparency when it comes to influencer marketing, and it is possible for reviewers to lie about their interest in a product in order to still generate sales and benefit from a sponsorship deal. There may also be an inherent pressure or perceived expectation from

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<sup>97</sup> "How people shop with YouTube," Google/Ipsos, July 2018, <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/consumer-trends/online-video-shopping-inspiration-statistics/>

an influencer that they must be positive in their review in order to keep their sponsorship deal, which may lead to unethical behaviour. Journalists are in part protected from some of this potential unethical behaviour, as any journalistic content outside of editorials should be void of conjecture and opinion on a journalist's part. There should not be the same pressure to leave a "positive review" on a story as in a product sponsorship due to the nature of news reporting relying on a factual account of an event. The concept of "Journalist as Influencer" borrows not from the monetary side of the business model, but from the marketing and promotional side of it. The relevance to journalism lies in the tactics used by influencers to market themselves as a commodity to their audience. Indeed, Ayesha Barmania has already been implementing some of these tactics in the social media strategy for Peterborough Currents. In their interview, Barmania described the concept of the content marketing funnel – the process by which Peterborough Currents turns an initial audience into members who will willingly pay to support the journalism they produce. This funnel outlines four levels of interaction: engaging surface level → reading stories → sharing stories with other circles → supporting the product produced (in this case, journalism). According to Barmania, social media is critical to the success of the content marketing funnel.<sup>98</sup> This is the space wherein the content marketing funnel thrives, where the audience meets to be exposed to this content and hopefully further engage with it in a way that traditional means of news circulation cannot hope to achieve.

An article for the Telegraph by Allegra Hobbs further examines the idea of the journalist as an influencer and the traps that writers can fall into when attempting to

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<sup>98</sup> Barmania, interview by author.

promote themselves online. It tells one cautionary tale of Shannon Keating, a writer for BuzzFeed who had written a viral essay that had “rendered her a de facto influencer.”<sup>99</sup> Of note, Keating says the following: “I’d much rather people check up on me to read my latest article, not to learn whether or not I’m still with my girlfriend.”<sup>100</sup> This is one of the pitfalls that journalists must carefully navigate in order to preserve their status as credible sources of information. There needs to be a focus on the marketing of the skills and qualities that make a good journalist instead of a focus on the marketing of journalists as people or online personalities. As Ryan Adam has said of the Toronto Star, it is critical to always be thinking about social media when building an audience,<sup>101</sup> and social media influencers have created an industry around the perfect form of audience curation.

Social media has made itself a host for any and all content and acts as a meeting ground for millions of diverse individuals. In order for journalists to properly fit into these digital communities and harness their benefits for journalistic purpose, it is critical that we approach social media with diverse tactics. By taking an interdisciplinary approach to social media usage for reporting, journalists and news organizations alike will be able to execute tactics commonly used in marketing and public relations spheres to garner public interest and loyalty. By examining the influencer business model, we will be able to adapt more successfully to what an online audience demands of someone before they hit that follow button and lend their eyes to a journalist’s words. As previously discussed, a benefit of social media usage to journalists is the click-through

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<sup>99</sup> Allegra Hobbs, “The journalist as influencer: How we sell ourselves on social media,” *The Guardian*, October 21, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/oct/20/caroline-calloway-writers-journalists-social-media-influencers>

<sup>100</sup> Hobbs

<sup>101</sup> Ryan Adam, interview by author

rate on shared article or website links. Having the largest possible audience to speak to will ensure a larger click-through rate, and thus more traffic or success for the news website. Journalists need to remain cautious in how they market themselves however, as being seen as an accurate and truthful information source should still be the number one priority of journalists in online spaces.

## **5.2 Emerging Best Practices and How We Adapt**

A critical consideration of journalism should be identity of the self. In order to best move forward and anticipate success, we as an industry must be willing to turn the mirror inward and consider our unique viewpoints and how this affects us as journalists. An article that touches on this concept of changing social media conduct comes from Barbara Allen, the director of college programming at Poynter and previously a journalist for two decades.<sup>102</sup> In the article, Allen poses the question of how schools should be advising journalism students when it comes to social media. She examines the traditional viewpoint most seasoned journalists tend to hold that personal opinion should be firmly separated from professional journalistic work. She challenges this idea by presenting the concerns of new journalists entering the field: “For many emerging journalists, issues labeled by legacy media as “political” are simply the facts of their existence.”<sup>103</sup> According to her, gender identity and race being labeled as “political issues” is causing many young journalists to worry about entering the field.<sup>104</sup> In an attempt to figure out how to navigate these contradictions, Allen offers a number of questions to inspect when

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<sup>102</sup> “Barbara Allen,” Poynter, <https://www.poynter.org/author/ballen/>

<sup>103</sup> Barbara Allen, “Conduct on social media may look different for journalists in the future. Let’s start figuring it out now,” Poynter, June 21, 2020. <https://www.poynter.org/newsletters/2020/conduct-on-social-media-may-look-different-for-journalists-in-the-future-lets-start-figuring-it-out-now/>

<sup>104</sup> Allen

thinking through one's social media conduct. Of note to the examination of this thesis are the following three questions:

1. What role do you believe your personal social media posts play in your professional development?
2. What is your obligation to your audience?
3. What is your purpose in posting?<sup>105</sup>

These questions can help guide, but we are still entering a period of growing pains while the industry attempts to adjust to the paradigm shift from objectivity as the be all end all for journalism, and the new recognition that we as journalists are human beings first and foremost and possess our own flaws and biases. Using Kovach and Rosenstiel's elements of journalism, which already recognizes that personal objectivity remains separate from occupational objectivity, or objectivity of method, we can begin to propose corrections to the inherent bias that journalism has against itself: that we as reporters are meant to be flawless agents of the public.

### **5.3 Suggested Policy Updates and Guidelines for Individual Reporters**

Journalists and news organizations are actively trying to find their places in social media communities, to varied degrees of success. The following section will be an examination of current social media tactics, followed by a proposed update to the stipulation in question. The three guiding categories in proposing updates to current social media guidelines will be policy implementation, proactivity and reaction, and consideration of staff. Firstly, journalists interviewed for the purpose of this thesis collectively identified specific things they would like to see covered in their newsroom social media policies in

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<sup>105</sup> Allen

order to best set them up for online success. These desired elements are guidance on work-life balance, the inclusion of seminars to handle negative attention, and increased protection in place for journalists.

*Work-Life Balance.* Journalists are no stranger to long, awkward hours of work. Whenever news breaks, they are on the clock, if not mandated by their employers, simply because we possess a common desire to gather and tell stories to whoever is willing to listen. In a journalist's daily job, there is already a common discordance in the work-life balance. The scales frequently tip primarily towards work. An article for the National Press Club by Jill Geisler examines this truth for the journalism industry.

Ask any sports reporter whose home team makes the playoffs. Any broadcast meteorologist tracking severe weather. Any newsroom swarming major breaking news. Any reporter — from investigative to features — digging into a project they know will touch minds, hearts and make a difference. They are deeply engaged, energized and committed. Is there work-life balance in those moments? Nope.

The scales are tilted toward fulfilling work.<sup>106</sup>

When we take into consideration the omnipresence of social media, we see ourselves on a rocky slope. As much as news is breaking constantly down the newswire and in the newsroom, it is circulating at exponentially higher speeds online. Social media truly is the beast that never slumbers when it comes to news potential. As mentioned in chapter three by Kelsey Johnson, it is common practice for government officials to announce updates and critical news on Twitter, and for other political reporters to race each other to

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<sup>106</sup> Jill Geisler, "Let's replace the term 'work-life balance,'" The National Press Club, October 18, 2021, <https://www.pressclubinstitute.org/2021/10/18/lets-replace-the-term-work-life-balance/>

the scoop. This constant existence of waiting for information at a moment's notice only adds to the uncertainty over how reporters should be using social media. Instead, Geisler advocates for achieving work-life harmony, which means "getting the best out of every aspect of our lives...it means bringing our whole selves to work and taking time away from work for life's joys and challenges."<sup>107</sup> Functionally, what this establishment of work-life balance can look like with social media is imposing specific times where you as a journalist are stepping away from social media. Muting notifications for social platforms or making use of the do-not-disturb function that many phones have can be the start of personal tactics for journalists to begin acquiring more harmony in their relationship with social media. On a broad strokes policy basis, the inclusion of specific language denoting these tactics and expressly communicating those journalists are not expected to be monitoring social media in their off-work hours will already set in motion the potential to change unhealthy work habits.

*Seminars on how to handle negative attention.* A key concern that was identified by nearly all reporters interviewed was the potential to get trapped in troll culture and swept away by online negativity. As established in chapter three, internet trolls often feel emboldened by their sense of anonymity and will feel free to make baseless attacks against reporters whose views they do not agree with. Rabble Media was the only news organization examined that had an explicitly outlined strategy for what to do when confronted with anonymous online hate and abuse. While there is a general understanding in social media culture that best way to deal with trolls is to block them or ignore them, it can feel harder to manage when journalists have a semi-public persona

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<sup>107</sup> Geisler.

that puts them on a stage for a larger audience than most personal accounts would normally acquire. The inclusion of specifically outlined avenues of communication for when these issues arise would greatly benefit any career that possesses an online presence. The language in the Rabble Media policy (see Appendix B.3) is specifically very approachable to employees and clearly outlines the steps for how to deal with online abuse as it comes up. It is necessary for news organizations to establish a chain of command for dealing with these issues, and clearly include this structure in their policy. There should not be an expectation or status quo of employers leaving journalists to deal with these situations alone simply because they are not occurring on the company's branded accounts. Additionally, as indicated by the desire for seminars, formal workplace training for both employers and employees on how to handle negative attention online would greatly prepare both bodies to deal with situations in a calm, rational manner, instead of what Lowery called a "gutless and reactionary" way of handling these situations.<sup>108</sup>

*Protection in place for journalists.* In a similar vein to having dedicated method for dealing with trolls online, journalists would like more protection from their organizations when facing harassment online. Barmania described it best in the opening statement of this thesis: journalists have a measure of public profile in part because of the news organizations they represent.<sup>109</sup> Due to this, newsrooms have an obligation to support their journalists when faced with masses of online hate. Using again the Lauren Wolfe case study for a practical application, many prominent journalists online rushed to

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<sup>108</sup> Wesley Lowery, "as I've told prior bosses directly..."

<sup>109</sup> Ayesha Barmania, interview by author

Wolfe's defence when they learned the New York Times had terminated her contract.<sup>110</sup>

This suggested policy update, supported by statements from journalists, posits that Wolfe should have expected more protection from her organization against the waves of right-wing online attacks, rather than a reactive firing over the notoriety of the original tweet context. If a journalist maintains an objective method, then a news organization should not hesitate to try to remove a journalist from a situation like this one. News organizations should take extra care in a political context when every comment that can be made can have the effect of being divisive and inflammatory despite the initial intent of the post.

Aside from the above-mentioned updates journalists would like to see, the course of this research has resulted in further suggestions for policy updates on the basis of collected interviews. In addition to what currently practicing journalists would like to get out of social media policies, this thesis maintains that a social media strategy or contingency plan would greatly benefit every media organization that is attempting to carve out a space for themselves online. The proposed social media strategy will need to be tweaked for the purpose and to the benefit of each news media organization, but at its core each strategy should include the following elements: a guideline for the type of post/story that will do well on each social site, a list of resources offered by each site for reporting users who actively promote vitriol online, an annual review of current policy along with opportunities for reporters to provide feedback, and a company-wide plan for growth on social sites and how reporters can contribute to this brand building.

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<sup>110</sup> Anya van Wagtenonk, "Did the New York Times fire an editor over a tweet?"

*Platform guidance.* Chapter three of this thesis examined the mechanics and cultures of specific social sites, to the benefit of journalists who are not familiar with navigating these spaces yet. Using this analysis as a guideline, this thesis proposes the inclusion of a breakdown of platform culture in any company's social media contingency plan. In order to maximize the utility of social media, it is key that reporters can understand what the context is they are posting in. Training and guiding reporters to monitor the culture of their chosen platform can prevent missteps and tension when posting. Joyce Grant describes this as "constantly knowing what's happening" and "the waters [your post] is going to be swimming in."<sup>111</sup> Context is extremely critical to the balance of intent versus perception on social media, and it is paramount that a journalist understands the greater cultural context when posting something. If devastating news has broken about conflict in war, or a fatal shooting, then a journalist may decide to hold off on sharing a certain story or making a certain post. The intent behind the post may have been good at heart, but the "waters it's swimming in" may be unwelcoming at the time and result in perceived or overblown offence on behalf of the journalist and their employer. Including guidelines and language in a social media plan that directly instructs journalists to monitor and learn the culture of different platforms will be directly conducive to social media success. In addition to the cultural barometer, a guideline of what posts will do best in each social site will be extremely beneficial to practicing journalists. Each platform lends itself to specific medium of storytelling, with the general breakdown as follows: Twitter as a host for print news for links and click through traffic to a website, Facebook as a platform for video broadcast journalism and livestreamed

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<sup>111</sup> Joyce Grant, interview by author

news, and Instagram as a palace of visuals and graphics. Possessing an understanding of these truths and implementing that into a social guidance strategy will allow not only reporters to effectively package their news content but allow editors to assign stories in the most effective ways with the most compelling elements.

*Resources.* While also necessary to have internal avenues for reporting abuse on social media, it is also key that news organizations point to resources offered by social media platforms. Not every reporter has the same level of media literacy, therefore is it key for organizations to prepare all employees equally with the tools for success. Including a proactive breakdown of the user reporting mechanic on each social site and how to block or mute certain accounts will help to prevent certain tensions before they can evolve into full blown issues that need to be dealt with by employers. It can be argued that journalists should be capable of familiarizing themselves with these tools on their own time but given the industry-wide acceptance of social media's utility and the expectation of its use, the responsibility then falls to the news organization to ensure their staff are provided the tools to succeed.

*Annual Review and Feedback Opportunities.* The main issue that has been highlighted throughout the course of this thesis has been the lack of sufficient policy related to journalism guidance on social media platforms. Those organizations that do have policies in place do not possess contemporary stipulations or updated expectations from the initial conception of the policy five or more years ago. Social media is a constantly evolving world, and policies need to be kept up to date to reflect and better prepare for that. A functional way this could be applied in a newsroom would be through the creation of an annual review board for the organization's social media policy. This

review board would be responsible for overseeing the evolution of the social media policy and updating it on a yearly basis to ensure that the standards and expectations of the news organizations are as relevant to current social media function as possible. Additionally, to best tailor the social media policies to current social media function, it is critical that reporters and editorial staff are given opportunities to provide feedback and share experiences they have had in the field with this review board. This way, newsrooms can be certain that their policies are related to ongoing problems, and not struggles we had with social media in the 2010s. It also gives journalists the opportunity to be actively involved in the drafting of the policies, improving communication and overall confidence in personal actions online.

*Growth and Branding Plan.* As previously discussed, influencer marketing affords a wealth of effective tactics that journalism should aim to emulate when considering audience curation and brand recognition. All media organizations should implement a dedicated branding plan if they hope to succeed on social media, and this plan should cover reporters' online conduct. However, there needs to be a shift away from a regulatory brand policy and towards a more guiding policy. Currently, the social media policies of many legacy news organizations, such as the CBC, are extremely brand-focused and clearly communicate that the interest and image of the company is the most important thing to consider. This mentality of protecting the assets in their current state denies organizations the opportunity for brand growth. Instead of considering how we can protect the brand, the question instead should be phrased in the following way: How can we consolidate and grow our brand with our journalists at the frontline of communication? This takes away the "us and them" mentality that places the journalist in

direct conflict with their own organization and instead transforms the journalist into an asset that needs to be properly prepared to succeed. The brand growth and recognition plan will need to be adapted for each media organization as well depending on their goals for growth and specific audience demographics, but at a base level it can include a section for journalists on effective audience engagement that will be conducive to personal growth. Journalists are the pillars that a media organization rests on, so it is critical that there is a solid foundation of social media presence for a media organization to truly benefit.

#### **5.4 Looking Forward: Avenues for Further Research**

This thesis has focused on the relationship between journalism and social media, and more specifically how journalists and media organizations should be working together in order to maximize the benefit of this relationship. This thesis has argued that it is critically necessary for both journalists and media organizations to work together in navigating this change, rather than it solely being the responsibility of either of these groups to adapt. Chapters three and four demonstrated that the social media goals of these groups are largely the same, but there is a prevailing issue of communication, despite the irony this begs from a profession of language and storytelling. Should journalists and news organizations become equals in the move towards an increasingly digital storytelling format, it is possible for journalism to flourish as never before among younger audiences, enough so to supplement the older audience that remains loyal to traditional journalism.

However, in the proposal of an interdisciplinary approach, there remains avenues to be explored. For example, what other professions could journalists emulate in order to

further maximize the benefit they receive from being active on social media? How deeply do issues of identity effect our ability to remain objective in our methods and how does newsroom policy either mitigate or oppress these issues? How do we remain true to ourselves and our online audience when there are things we must leave at the door that could potentially inform and enrich our reporting to new levels? This thesis has laid the groundwork for the examination of these questions and established the importance of both newsroom and employee coordination when it comes to navigating an industry-wide paradigm shift.

## Appendices

### Appendix A - Interviewed Reporters

The following individuals completed hour long interviews through Zoom for the purpose of this study:

Subject	Credentials	Location	Interview Date
Anastasia Holleman	Freelance reporter, currently independent and posting stories to Medium.com.	Edmonton, AB	December 11, 2021
Gavin John	Freelance reporter. Has worked with the Globe and Mail, CBC, The Narwhal	Calgary, AB	February 18, 2022
Joyce Grant	Freelance reporter. Has worked with Metroland papers previously. Currently working on TeachingKidsNews, a media literacy website for young audiences	Toronto, ON	February 28, 2022
Kelsey Johnson	Fulltime employed by iPolitics.	Ottawa, ON	January 13, 2022
Elizabeth Payne	Fulltime employed by the Ottawa Citizen	Ottawa, ON	January 24, 2022

Ayesha Barmania	Co-founder of Peterborough Currents. Previously worked freelance for CBC.	Peterborough, ON	January 25, 2022
Jessica Smith Cross	Editor in Chief at Queen's Park Briefing (iPolitics).	Toronto, ON	March 9, 2022
Ryan Adam	Vice President of Strategic Operations for Torstar	Toronto, ON	March 11, 2022

## Appendix B - Interview Questions

### Legacy Media

1. How important would you say social media is to your newsroom?
2. How would you describe social media fitting into a reporter's role?
3. Who is considered a social media journalist in your newsroom?
4. Do you give social media special consideration when planning a story or hiring a reporter?
5. If so, what technical or digital skills do you like reporters to have?
6. What platforms do you like reporters to use or be familiar with and why have you chosen those ones?
7. How did your newsroom handle the switch from a print-based industry to a primarily digital industry?
8. When did using social media first become a conversation in your newsroom? Did you want reporters using it at first?
9. When did your newsroom first implement a social media policy?
10. How has this policy changed since it was first implemented? What new things have been added or removed?
11. Where is your social media policy posted and how can reporters access it?
12. When is the first time reporters are introduced to your social media expectations?
13. What do you consider the most important elements of a social media policy for a newsroom?
14. What elements do you have in your social media policies?
15. What are the biggest challenges newsrooms have with social media?

16. How do you avoid these challenges?
17. How do you make your expectations clear to the reporters in your newsroom?
18. How is a situation handled when a reporter does something against your social media policy?

#### New Media

1. How important would you say social media is to your newsroom?
2. How would you describe social media fitting into a reporter's role?
3. Who is considered a social media journalist in your newsroom?
4. Do you give social media special consideration when planning a story or hiring a reporter?
5. If so, what technical or digital skills do you like reporters to have?
6. What platforms do you like reporters to use or be familiar with and why have you chosen those platforms?
7. When your news organization was founded, how did you think social media usage would factor into it?
8. When did your newsroom first implement a social media policy?
9. How has this policy changed since it was first implemented? What new things have been added or removed?
10. Where is your social media policy posted and how can reporters access it?
11. When is the first time reporters are introduced to your social media expectations?
12. What do you consider the most important elements of a social media policy for a newsroom?
13. What elements do you have in your social media policies?

14. What are the biggest challenges newsrooms have with social media?
15. How do you avoid these challenges?
16. How do you make your expectations clear to the reporters in your newsroom?
17. How is a situation handled when a reporter does something that goes against your social media policy?

#### Full-Time Reporters

1. How integral is social media to your job as a reporter and why?
2. To what degree do you use social media?
3. What social media platforms do you use and why are those your preferred ones?
4. How would you describe a social media journalist? Would you consider yourself one?
5. What are the primary elements you post on social media for a news story?
6. What do you think are the benefits of posting these elements on social media?
7. What is the benefit of having a social media presence as a journalist?
8. How much content do you post on social media? How much are you expected to publish as dictated by your news organization?
9. Would you consider being active on social media part of any reporter's job, or a separate task that only some reporters should take on?
10. Are there more social-media oriented reporting positions in your newsroom?
11. How clear do you think the expectations are on journalists at your organization when it comes to posting on social media?
12. What kind of elements are included in your organization's social media policy?

13. What would you identify as the key elements in your organization's social media policy?
14. What, if anything, would you say is missing from your organization's social media policy?
15. Do you have your own personal policy that you try to follow when operating on social media? What does it include?
16. When you make social media posts outside of work hours, what expectations must you adhere to?
17. Can you describe a situation where you've felt uncertain about what you're planning to post on social media and what made you uncertain about it?
18. Can you describe a situation where you or a reporter you know has gotten into trouble or faced a consequence from posting something on social media?
19. When you were hired for your job, how much of an emphasis was put on using social media? Was it mentioned at all in your hiring process?
20. What are your thoughts when it comes to news organizations firing reporters based on social media comments or conduct?

#### Freelance Reporters

1. How integral is social media to your job as a reporter and why?
2. To what degree do you use social media?
3. What social media platforms do you use and why are these your preferred ones?
4. How would you describe a social media journalist? Would you consider yourself one?

5. When your story is picked up by a news organization, how insistent are they that you also make posts on social media? Has it ever been stated in a contract that you need to use social media as well?
6. What are the primary things you post on social media for a news story?
7. What do you think are the benefits of posting these things on social media?
8. How much content do you post on social media? How much are you expected to publish as dictated by the news organization?
9. Would you consider being active on social media part of any reporter's job, or a separate task that only some reporters take on?
10. How do you go about finding out the social media policy of a news organization when your story is picked up by them?
11. How do you ensure you understand and follow the expectations set out for you?
12. What are some of the most common elements that you see in social media policies?
13. Why do you think these are the most common elements? What is important about them?
14. What, if anything, is missing from most social media policies you come across? What do you think should be added?
15. Do you have your own personal policy that you try to follow? What does it include?
16. When not working for a media organization, what standard are you held to for making social media posts? What if they are personal updates?

17. When you make social media posts while not working for a news organization, what guidelines do you follow?
18. Can you describe a situation where you or a reporter you know has gotten into trouble or faced a consequence from posting something on social media?
19. Can you describe a situation where you've felt uncertain about what you're planning to post on social media and what made you uncertain about it?

## Appendix C - Newsroom Social Media Policies

This Appendix contains attachments pertaining to the different currently posted social media policies of news organizations.

### C.1 CBC Policies



CBC/RADIO-CANADA

# SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES BE YOU. BE SMART. DON'T COMPROMISE THE ORGANIZATION OR YOUR JOB.

#### THINK BEFORE YOU POST

Consider the implications of each post you make on social media sites/services; people will be able to see what you post for a long time. A helpful rule: If you wouldn't say it on live radio or television, reconsider posting it on social media. Remember, CBC/Radio-Canada brands, logos and trademarks can only be associated with official pages and accounts. When in doubt, contact [corposocial-grp@cbc.ca](mailto:corposocial-grp@cbc.ca).

#### RESPECT INTERNAL POLICY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

We are accountable for our actions on- and off-line. These guidelines complement and reinforce pre-existing corporate policies on privacy, security, *Code of Conduct* and ethics, including:

- [CBC/Radio-Canada Policy: Code of Conduct](#)
- [CBC/Radio-Canada Policy: Conflict of Interest and Ethics](#)
- [CBC/Radio-Canada Policy: Information Security and the Responsible Use of Technology Assets](#)
- [CBC/Radio-Canada Policy: Personal Information and Privacy Protection](#)
- [Terms of Use – CBC/Radio-Canada Digital Services](#)
- [CBC/Radio-Canada Policy: Political Activity](#)
- [CBC/Radio-Canada Journalistic Standards and Practices](#)  
↳ Section: Use of Social Media

#### RESPECT YOUR PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND LEGAL COMMITMENTS

In your role you may be privy to private and confidential information. Respect it. For example, do not comment on legal or financial matters including non-public financial or operational information unless you are an official spokesperson and have the approval of Legal Services to do so. If you have concerns regarding ethics or conflicts of interest, you can always contact the office of the [Values and Ethics Commissioner](#).

#### BEWARE OF DISCLAIMERS

While good in theory, disclaimers such as "All opinions expressed here are my own" can lull one into a false sense of security and do not negate the expectations of behaviour laid out in the *Code of Conduct*.

#### CONSULT THIRD-PARTY TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Before uploading or sharing content, consult and ensure you're comfortable with third-party terms and conditions. Make sure you have the necessary rights to any content being posted on third-party sites.

## WHEN ISSUES ARISE

Issues happen and can escalate quickly online. CBC/Radio-Canada has an established process in place for managing potential issues and risks to our brand and reputation. To mitigate risks and protect CBC/Radio-Canada's reputation, stay aware of what is happening on your social media accounts.



If an issue arises related to CBC/Radio-Canada, please contact [corposocial-grp@cbc.ca](mailto:corposocial-grp@cbc.ca) who will escalate the issue appropriately.

## Personal Use of Social Media



When we use social media, we should remember two of our principles: impartiality and integrity. We recognize there are specific challenges raised because social media create an intersection of personal and professional roles and identities.

With that in mind, our journalists - including casual and temporary staff as well as interns - should consider the following:

- In our social media activity, we are mindful of our professional association with CBC.
- We maintain professional decorum and strive to do nothing that could bring CBC into disrepute.
- We understand that what we say and do on social media can reflect on ourselves, our colleagues and on CBC as a whole.
- In particular, the expression of personal opinions on controversial subjects, including politics, can undermine the credibility of CBC journalism and erode the trust of our audience. Therefore, we refrain from expressing such opinions in profiles or posts for any account which identifies or associates us with CBC/Radio-Canada. The question we should ask ourselves: if someone saw the content of this account, could they determine that we work at CBC?
- We recognize that nothing we express on the Internet can be considered truly private. So we understand that comments on accounts we intend to be exclusively personal and private can damage our personal credibility, and that of CBC as a whole.
- We consider perceptions created when we share, republish, link, or interact with other people's content. We strive to avoid having such actions appear to be endorsements. When appropriate and possible, we provide context.
- We understand that should our social media activity create a perception of bias, it would influence decisions editorial leaders make on who can cover certain stories.

## C.2 Torstar Social Media Policy

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Torstar journalists are always Torstar journalists.

Journalists are encouraged to be themselves and find their own voices on social media, but it's important to remember that the content they post and the way they conduct themselves can have an impact on reader trust, the journalistic reputation of our newsrooms, our brands and the company's public standing. This is true regardless of the privacy settings on a journalist's account, their profile description or whether they consider an account personal.

This policy applies to all editorial staff across all Torstar newsrooms. Other newsroom and corporate policies, such as those governing corrections, ethics and the business code of conduct, also apply to social media use.

Here are the key points:

- Staff must not do anything on social media that damages the company's reputation for fair journalism. That includes making partisan or offensive comments, endorsing candidates or – with the exception of opinion columnists – taking sides on issues our newsrooms are covering.
- Torstar journalists must not use social media to criticize or undermine the company, their colleagues or the work of their colleagues.
- Fact-based analysis by reporters is not opinion. In areas of reporting expertise, social media can be an effective platform for using facts to authoritatively point out lies, questionable behaviour, baseless claims and policies unsupported by evidence, even if doing so leads to a perception of being negative to one side of a public debate.
- Torstar opinion journalists have the same wide latitude to express opinions on social media as they are given on our other platforms.
- Torstar journalists must not purchase followers or pay for any service to artificially inflate their social media following.
- Except for reporting purposes, Torstar journalists must not join partisan groups on Facebook or elsewhere – even if those groups are marked “secret.” Journalists should not use social media accounts to register for partisan events. If they wish to join a group for reporting purposes, they should identify themselves and consider how their posts would be interpreted if made public. When in doubt, journalists should talk to a supervisor, especially if they feel the need to join a group anonymously.
- Staff should not use social media to make customer service complaints or lobby politicians. Their grievances may be frustrating, but they are likely to be treated differently because of their position.
- Torstar encourages journalists to listen and interact respectfully with readers who engage them in productive ways.
- If a reader's comments are inconsiderate or could be considered trolling, it's best not to respond. Journalists are encouraged to block or mute someone who is making threatening, abusive or harassing comments. It is never appropriate to threaten someone or direct profanity at them.
- A staff member who feels threatened by someone on social media should inform their supervisor immediately. Torstar has policies in place to protect its journalists.

## C.3 Rabble Media Social Policy

7/21/22, 8:26 PM

Social media guidelines for contributors - rabble.ca

Welcome! This is a beta version of the new rabble.ca website which is still undergoing final testing. [Read more](#)



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### Social media guidelines for contributors

Your personal social media accounts are personal and are owned by you. However, if you could be publicly associated with rabble.ca then we expect you to abide by the following guidelines on social media, particularly in posts relating to your work for rabble.

**1. Tone:** always treat people with respect and professionalism on social media, even if you disagree with them. Ignore those who are abusive or offensive, and avoid public arguments on social media, with colleagues, contributors or others. If in doubt, do not respond.

**2. Dealing with abuse:** Make sure you are safe. If someone is in immediate danger 911. Report abuse to social media platforms but do not respond or escalate – block or mute troublemakers so you do not see their posts. If you feel threatened, tell your editor.

**3. Accuracy:** only share or retweet verified information from trusted sources; do not blur fact and opinion. If you make a mistake or repost inaccurate information, delete the post with errors to prevent it spreading further, and make a new post explaining what has happened. Use common sense and think twice before you post.

**4. Legal, privacy and copyright:** You are legally responsible for what you say online on your personal social media accounts. Do not make derogatory or defamatory comments (this includes retweeting/liking other people's

<https://rabble.ca/social-media-guidelines-for-contributors/>

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