SOCIAL CEOS: TWITTER AS A CONSTITUTIVE FORM OF COMMUNICATION

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Katerina Girginova, B.A.

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Katerina Girginova, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Leticia Bode, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Tweeting CEOs present an enigmatic space of personal and professional media use, which can be understood simultaneously as an extension and a blurring of the traditional organization. While there does exist ample literature containing prescriptive practices about how CEOs ought to tweet, there is a scarcity of descriptive research, detailing how they actually tweet. Through content analyses and personal interviews of a diverse group of ten CEOs this paper begins to address this gap by asking the question: what is the role of CEOs’ personal tweeting practices in the communicative constitution of an organization (CCO)? Then, through the application of McPhee and Zaug’s four flow framework (2000) to the data we emerge with a better understanding of the use of Twitter from the author’s perspective and observe several connections between CEOs’ personal tweeting habits and CCO. In turn, we gain some instructive glimpses into the intricate DNA of the modern organization.
This writing is dedicated to my family, who have long constituted my reality in better ways than I could have ever imagined. Thank you!

Also, special gratitude goes to my professors, friends, and mentors, as well as Dr. Bode and Dr. Meltzer who have supported me throughout the thesis process and shared their invaluable knowledge and ideas.

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INTRODUCTION

We are immersed, on a daily basis, in a multitude of organizations; from our schools to our gyms and workplaces. Therefore, it is in our best interest to better understand their DNA. A growing body of scholarship housed under the term ‘Constitutive Communication of Organizations’ (CCO), attempts to unravel this very DNA by analyzing communicative episodes as the building blocks of organizations. However, as communication tools have evolved, specifically with the relatively recent proliferation of social media, new challenges and opportunities have arisen for the CCO scholar.

Take for example the explosion of social media, such as Twitter, in the workplace. This trend began around 2008-2009, when various corporate communication departments started to experiment with the application (Postman, 2009). Albeit a little more slowly and vigilantly, CEOs have also began to adopt this medium into their personal repertoire of communication. Research suggests that while this may not be a mass practice yet, it is a growing trend (IBM Survey, 2012), which is worth exploring from a number of perspectives.

From a business standpoint, studies suggest that customers are 82% and 77% (respectively) more likely to trust and buy from companies whose leaders personally engage with social media (BRANDFog, 2012; Cruz & Mendelsohn, 2012). Yet, we know relatively little about CEOs’ personal tweeting. From an academic standpoint, tweeting CEOs are a relatively new concept, which has yet to be explored and which could provide fertile ground for research on organizational communication in the 21st century.
Furthermore, CEOs’ personal tweeting practices present somewhat of an enigmatic space for exploration. Since CEOs are often, inextricably linked to their companies (and vice-versa), any personal Twitter account is likely to be connected, at least implicitly, to the brand that the CEO represents. Thus, CEOs’ personal Twitter accounts straddle the borderline between personal and professional media. Moreover, CEOs’ communication enters an undefined space of private and public tensions, and reaches potentially vast and unbeknown audiences - this has all yet to be explored.

Consequently, this creates a ripe space for research and leads us to the main question driving this study: *what is the role of CEOs’ personal tweeting practices in the communicative constitution of an organization?* Although there are a number of existing studies examining Twitter uses of organizations, we still know relatively little about CEOs’ personal practices or perspectives on the medium. Thus, this study addresses the main research question and some of the extant gaps in the scholarly literature by a) elucidating CEOs’ personal Twitter practices, b) exploring the constitutive role of ten CEOs’ personal Twitter uses in the broader context of organizational communication and c) applying one specific CCO framework, McPhee and Zaug’s four flows (2000), to a real data set.

This paper proceeds by introducing the various key dimensions of tweeting CEOs, furnishing and discussing some original research, and drawing larger implications for the study of CCO through the emergent findings from CEOs’ personal Twitter use. Chapter 1 looks at some
relevant literature on Twitter, the CCO perspective, and the various theories and concepts for framing the digital presentation of the self. As Nyström (2008) notes, it is rare to see the emergence and enactment of a professional identity because this identity is “often the result of a dynamic relationship between different life spheres,” (pg. 1). Perhaps, Twitter’s interface affords us some unique opportunities by allowing us to glimpse behind the scenes at ten CEOs’ personal accounts, and to see the seemingly public performance of the CEO identity and its confluence of all of the various life spheres.

Thus, Twitter emerges as quite a useful tool for understanding the public leader of most organizations, the CEO, and for shedding some light onto the constitution and evolution of an organization. Since tweets, in their native form, are already a form of textualized discourse which is recorded and preserved, their meanings become more permanent and widely accessible (McPhee, 2004; Taylor, 1993). Unlike its predecessors, the memo, conference call, meeting, or press release, Twitter offers a unique and supposedly unfiltered, public and participatory access to CEOs. Indeed, the inclusion of social media into the corporate spectrum of communication tools has paved the way for an unprecedented potential for organizational immediacy, participation, transparency and authenticity – particularly from an outsider’s perspective (Postman, 2009). These changes are worth considering in terms of how they translate into the present organizational reality.

Chapter 2 presents the architecture behind this research by discussing the specific methodology used to collect and analyze data. In brief, this study draws on the content analyses and interviews
of ten CEOs to illuminate their perspective on the tweeting process – an angle which has yet to be undertaken in scholarly research – and thus, gives an intimate look at the CEOs’ tweeting behaviors from the perspective of the authors themselves. Then, using McPhee and Zaug’s (2000) four-flow communicative framework, which categorizes communication into four constitutive functions, we begin to unpack CEOs’ Twitter practices, as part of a larger organizational communication spectrum.

Chapter 3 presents the findings and inferences from this research by illuminating the polysemic nature of communication via Twitter, and explaining the nuances of CEOs’ information sharing behaviors in relation to their roles as organizational leaders. This study concludes with Chapter 4, by summarizing the findings, discussing some limitations of the research and providing suggestions for future exploration.
This chapter reviews the relevant literature in order to ground this study and to develop an argument about the role of tweeting CEOs in the communicative constitution of organizations.

Constituting an Organization

Hall and Tolbert (2005), argue that “organizations are a dominant component of modern society,” (pg. 1). In brief, an organization can be defined as:

“A collectivity with a relatively identifiable boundary, a normative order (rules), ranks of authority (hierarchy), communication systems, and membership coordinating systems (procedures); this collectivity exists on a relatively continuous basis, in environments, and engages in activities that are usually related to a set of goals; the activities have outcomes for organizational members, for the organization itself, and for society,”

(Hall & Tolbert, 2005, pg. 5).

Although somewhat cumbersome, the above definition draws attention to several important points. First, is the notion that most of our daily lives are, indeed, influenced by various types of organizations. From our workplace to our gyms, we are immersed in an intricate web of organizational structures whereby a deeper knowledge of their functions can also translate into a better understanding of our place within society and of ourselves.
Second, Hall and Tolbert’s definition hints at a key component of organizations: communication, which can help us to unravel the organizational puzzle. The authors specifically mention the importance of communication in organizations and thus conjure up several of McPhee and Zaug’s constitutive flows, including membership negotiation and self-structuring. Notably, Hall and Tolbert introduce communication as a significant organizational activity, and as closely related to concepts such as rules, hierarchy and boundaries.

This paper goes one step beyond Hall and Tolbert’s definition by specifying the relationship between communication and these other organizational concepts, such as rules for instance, by adopting the Communication as Constitutive of Organizations (CCO) perspective. In essence, this means that communication is not only related to rules but is the very mechanism through which we create, uphold and demolish our organizational rules (CCO and specific frameworks of CCO are discussed in more detail on pages 20-33).

Kuhn (2008) argues for a similar take on organizations by stating that the traditional academic approach to understanding organizations conceptualizes communication as a mere carrier of information, at best. Yet, if we are to move beyond this static, pre-ordained and transaction-based view of an organization, we need to be able to account for its complexity and dynamism and thus, to more actively engage with the role of communication. Kuhn notes that looking at organizations in textual terms, such as tweets, allows us to analyze transactions and interactions both within and outside of the organization. He advocates for this communicative turn in
organizational studies because it factors in for the dynamic, ongoing and analyzable construction of organizations.

This paper agrees with Kuhn’s reasoning and takes the stance that communication is central to the processes of organizing as well as to the concept of organizations. Furthermore, it argues that the introduction of social media into the workplace has had several profound effects on the modern constitution of organizations. For instance, it is possible to connect the rapid adoption of social media such as Twitter, into the workplace with the organizational demand for greater transparency in the early 2000’s (Postman, 2009; Li, 2010).

Postman (2009), states that the traditional meaning of transparency refers to finance; “the use of transparency in this sense became widespread in the aftermath of the scandals and business failures of the dot-com crash. These events launched corporate financial transparency into the forefront of our culture’s consciousness,” (pg. 9). In turn, CEOs’ uses of personal Twitter accounts may be read in the wider context of a move toward organizational transparency (Li, 2010), and understood as a significant modification in consumer’s expectations.

If communication does shape our organizations then it follows that a change in communicative behaviors could lead to different organizational formations. Indeed, scholars argue that the introduction of social media into the workplace has opened the door to increased organizational authenticity, transparency, immediacy, participation, connectedness and accountability (Postman, 2009). In short, the adoption of social media such as Twitter into the workplace has
simultaneously been the result of, and has resulted in, some notable changes in the communicative repertoire of our organizations; changes worthy of further exploration.

One of the changes is a blurring of the relationship between consumers and organizational employees. Lafely, CEO of consumer products at Proctor and Gamble is famously quoted saying, “consumers are beginning in a very real sense to own our brands and participate in their creation,” (Kumar & Reinartz, 2012, pg. 362). Similarly, Dijck (2009), states that new methods of organizational communication not only make for new affordances on behalf of the communicator, but also on behalf of the audience. He argues that “user agency is cast… as participatory engagement, in contrast to the passive recipients of earlier stages in media culture,” (pg. 42). Ansari and Phillips (2011) further analyze the potential impact of open communication and posit that unorganized and geographically dispersed groups, such as customers, can have cumulative and transformative effects upon an organizational field. Nonetheless, general, blanket claims about the democratic and liberalizing effects of social media ought to be critically examined.

**Digitizing CEOs**

It is possible to categorize the communicative evolution of CEOs under three loosely defined but significant transformations in the past century: textualization, mediation and digitization. CEOs have long been textualized; their words have been recorded in various lettered and numerical forms such as accounting sheets, which have made it possible to preserve, disseminate and make more permanent the CEO and his or her thoughts. With the advent of electronic technologies,
such as the radio and television, CEOs began to be mediated, too. Their images could be seen by larger audiences on the news, for instance, and their messages could travel farther and faster than before.

Then, with the birth of the internet and social media, CEOs became digitized. In their digital form, at least in theory, CEOs were enabled to communicate almost instantaneously, across the world and in a manner that allowed for near synchronous interaction with a wide, direct audience. These three, loosely defined transformations build upon each other and the presence of one certainly does not preclude the presence of another. They do however, carry unique affordances and favor specific relationships between companies and customers. For instance, in the case of digitized CEOs, choosing to create a publicly-accessible, personal Twitter account can be interpreted as a form of organizational or self publicity. However, it is also a courageous act, which makes one increasingly open to the public and to its scrutiny.

This point is heightened through Melewar’s (2003) work on corporate identity, where he presents the notion that quite literally everything, which can be linked to an organization makes up its overall corporate identity. In turn, this allows for seeing CEOs’ Twitter practices in a different light; CEOs’ personal tweets, however seemingly banal, shape and reinforce their professional identities as well as aid in the construction of an organizational image. As such, CEOs are at the forefront of organizational communication and are certainly key figures in the constitution of organizational reality.
Indeed, many CEOs assume the role of the main spokesperson for their organizations, thus “personifying what their companies stand for with external constituencies,” (Park & Berger, 2004, pg. 96). Given this outward facing role of the CEO, many years prior to the inception of social media, scholars concluded that being visible and interacting positively with outside constituents has become an “unwritten part of every CEO’s description,” (Garbett, 1988, pg. 96). It then follows that better understanding a CEO’s communicative practices would be a key step toward unraveling the larger picture of organizational communication.

According to IBMs’ 2012 CEO Survey, 57% stated social business as a top organizational and personal priority and 75% shared that they were investing in social data analysis. However, Schick (2013), highlights that a company or CEO cannot just expect “to go from ‘liking’ to ‘leading’,” (n.p.). In other words, social technologies take dedication and “their success depends on the involvement of leadership,” (ibid). This seems to be a further reason for the need to bridge the scholarship on organizational-level social media use with the research on the individual-level, CEO practices.

The Self on Twitter

As Norris and Porter (2011) note, the new media landscape requires drastic practical and conceptual reforms in the way we understand CEOs and organizations as well as the way they interact with various constituents. According to the authors, one of the biggest challenges laden in these reforms is the creation of an e-version(s) of the self, which can appeal to multiple
audiences. This challenge of creating an authentic yet polysemic version of the self certainly applies to Twitter where increasingly more CEOs are opting to be digitized; they are creating not only corporate but also personal Twitter accounts.

Siles (2012), states that “technologies are cultural artifacts that materialize or temporarily freeze contingent social relations and processes in singular contexts,” (pg. 409). Twitter can certainly be seen as one artifact which freezes and displays the social relations and the constitutive forces of communication. It can also be understood as one mechanism which CEOs use to construct ‘the self’... and, by extension, their organizations.

We may turn to several notable scholars, to help us better contextualize practices of the self on Twitter. In particular, we will draw upon Hogan’s concept of an ‘exhibition’, which is based largely upon Goffman’s notions of ‘performance’ and ‘front and back stage’. Briefly, Goffman’s (1959) concept of performance refers to the notion of us enacting certain roles in our day-to-day life; for instance, enacting the role of a CEO. Front and backstage behavior refers to specific enactments; a CEO may be very confident font stage, before a room of investors however, he or she may be very nervous in a more private and backstage area, such as an office prior to the meeting.

Nonetheless, while Goffman’s work has been widely used to study social media practices, it has also been noted for its limitations when it comes to understanding of today’s mediated communication environment (Hogan, 2012). CEOs’ personal Twitter accounts provide one
example of this limitation as they combine front and back stage performances into one, single viewing area: the Twitter interface. As a result of such challenges, Hogan has proposed several adaptations to Goffman’s work via the concept of ‘exhibitions’.

Hogan argues that the world is not only a stage (reference to Goffman), “but it is also a library and a gallery… a participatory exhibit” (2012, pg. 377). Thus, Hogan provides an updated perspective on Goffman’s (1959) concepts of identity performance and front and backstage behavior, in order to account for the specific nuances of new media. Exhibitions, offer a conceptual framework for understanding identity performance in the new media environment and are defined as pre-composed acts of self-disclosure, which can be viewed by an anonymous audience at asynchronous intervals to the time of production (Hogan, 2012).

Notably, the concept of an exhibition implies some level of curatorship, too. This occurs both at the level of the artist (read: CEO) and the exhibition space (read: the Twitter platform). In the case of Twitter, the curatorship role is performed by the user interface and the various algorithms that structure Twitter to display information in a certain manner. By this, I mean that something such as the chronological display of tweets via the Twitter interface results in an imposed communicative structure, which shapes our experiences and a CEOs’ presentation of the self. This chronological bias is a technological feature worthy of note in this study.

As Hogan states, the curator “knows who is considered an appropriate audience member for this content and who is not,” (pg. 378). Therefore, we may begin to theorize CEOs’ social media
presence on Twitter as an exhibition which “lives on for others to view on their time,” – not just when the actors are prepared to perform (pg. 377). (To that end, Twitter employs some 700 engineers to ensure its smooth operation (Jordan, 2012), and ultimately, to enhance and produce the public performance of the CEOs and other users.) Indeed, this possibility for asynchronous communication is yet another technological feature to be noted for its role in the CCO process and through Hogan’s notions of curatorship, we may start to consider the role of technology in the construction of CEO and organizational performances.

Yet, how do CEOs choose which behaviors or communicative episodes to feature in their exhibitions? According to Papacharissi (2012), an online presentation of the self must “convey polysemic content to audiences, actual and imagined, without compromising one’s own sense of self,” (pg. 1989). A certain level of performativity and preparation is associated with this presentation, which potentially sits at odds with the often held notion of knee-jerk tweet production.

Marwick and boyd (2010), probe further into the question of what is acceptable to publish on Twitter by offering the theory of the lowest-common-denominator; a philosophy of sharing, which “limits users to topics that are safe for all possible readers,” (pg. 126). We may expect to see this theory in action in the CEOs’ Twitter feeds because as successful persons in the public eye, they are likely keenly aware of their communication and its implications. As a result, we could expect that CEOs would want to be well received and have positive connotations drawn to their organizations.
Wenger’s theory of multimembership (1998), is yet another concept that may help us situate CEOs’ Twitter practices. Through multi-membership, the acknowledgment of belonging to various communities, CEOs are able to reconcile what would otherwise be defined as multiple, perhaps even competing, performances of the self. Wenger’s (1998) theory of the nexus of multi-membership explores the various and sometimes conflicting memberships and behaviors that one has to reconcile in one’s daily life. For instance, a CEO who uses Twitter for personal purposes is potentially faced with reconciling many diverse aspects of his or her private and professional life under the use of one medium. Wenger states that this task can be challenging as “elements of one repertoire may be quite inappropriate, incomprehensible or even offensive in another community,” (pg. 160). As such, boyd’s theory of the lowest-common-denominator (2008) may come in hand when unpacking how CEOs choose one repertoire over another.

**CEOs on Twitter**

It seems to be quite the challenge to read a popular business publication today without coming across some mention of social media. Schick (2013) suggests that “large corporations are increasingly adopting social media to communicate both internally and externally,” (pg. 3), whereby practitioners are adopting “nearly six different types of social media tools professionally,” (ibid). This is supported by a study from Case and King of Fortune 200 companies (2010), which suggests that companies use much internal social media – 78% use
wikis and blogs. Amongst the highest Twitter engaging industries are IT, followed by Telecommunications and General Retail (Case and King, 2010).

Advice on how CEOs’ ought to use Twitter – and in some cases even warnings against using it – is also plentiful (Samuel, 2009; Williams & Scott, 2012). Yet, what is missing once again is a sustained academic analysis of Twitter uses from the perspective of the CEOs themselves. With the exception of one notable work by Geho, Smith and Lewis (2010), there is a gap in the scholarly body of works exploring CEOs’ personal uses of Twitter. In brief, Geho, Smith and Lewis examine the Twitter uses of entrepreneurs and small business owners (though not explicitly CEOs or exclusively personal Twitter accounts). Their findings show that 93% of the small business owners had heard of Twitter but only 23% of them were using it (pg. 4).

However, Shaywitz (2012), writes that “founding entrepreneurs, of course, seem to have a very different phenotype,” (n.p.) in terms of their relation to their companies. “Many (entrepreneurs) view their businesses as a direct form of self-expression, and are keen to be the authors of their own lives” (ibid). Thus, a personal Twitter account seems to be a natural fit for many of these small business entrepreneurs although, as Shaywitz continues, “it’s also true that in contrast to CEOs of multinational corporations, they probably have much more to gain and much less to lose,” (ibid.). By that, the author likely means that CEOs of smaller, less well-known companies have less public pressure and scrutiny over their media behaviors. Therefore, if they were to tweet inappropriately, the repercussions could likely be less severe. Similarly, if they were to
find a useful niche for Twitter, their emerging businesses could reap larger benefits than those of already large and well established companies.

Further, Geho, Smith and Lewis’ (2010) study found that the majority of the Twitter users (77%) were categorized as occasional or rare visitors and the most frequent purpose (79%) of tweets was marketing and promotion (ibid.). This latter finding sits at odds with most of the extant research about high profile users’ Twitter practices, which typically shows promotional content is a low feature in tweets (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Case and King, 2010; 2011).

For instance, Pear Analytics (2009), discovered that the biggest category of tweets in a study of the general population fell into pointless babble (41%), followed by conversations (38%) and then self-promotion (6%). A study by Case & King on Fortune 200 companies (2010) found that Twitter was primarily used for news distribution. Another study by Case and King on Fortune 50 companies (2011) found that 85% of Tweets related to news distribution while marketing purposes remained very low.

Since there are almost no studies of CEOs’ personal Twitter uses to draw upon we may, indeed, turn to others in the public eye, such as celebrities, for further guidance. Such a search does seem to be more fruitful and yields several interesting insights. For instance, Marwick and boyd (2011) argue that “Twitter demonstrates the transformation of ‘celebrity’ from a personal quality linked to fame to a set of practices that circulate through modern social media,” (pg. 156). Celebrity,
seen as a practice, becomes something which can be studied and quantified more easily; it also translates well into viewing the concept of ‘CEO’ as a communicative practice.

In a study of celebrity uses of Twitter, Marwick and boyd (2011), contend that ‘celebrity’ is practiced on Twitter “through the appearance and performance of backstage access,” (pg. 139). This conjures up notions of communities of practice and of social constructionism of both roles and relationships. CEOs who share personal information, such as their lunch preferences, perform a similar, seemingly backstage-revelatory act. Marwick and boyd note that “while celebrity practice is theoretically open to all, it is not an equalizer or democratizing discourse. Indeed, in order to successfully practice celebrity, fans must recognize the power differentials intrinsic to the relationship,” (ibid). This is certainly true in the case of CEOs as well.

High-profile CEOs often have thousands, if not millions of followers. However, in some cases, they only follow a fraction of those people back. The Twitter interface, or what Hogan (2012) may call the role of curatorship, is quite an important accomplice in the practice of CEO or celebrity on Twitter as the visible follower/following counts reinforce the above-mentioned power dynamic. On that note, it is necessary to briefly introduce Twitter before we can fully engage in analyzing how it is used to construct organizational realities.
Twitter: Theorizing the medium

In brief, Twitter is a microblogging service, which allows users to post small parcels of digital content, containing up to 140 characters of text, images, links or videos, onto the web (Twitter, 2013). Twitter launched in 2006 and has since grown to handle over a billion tweets per couple of days - this equates to nearly 6,000 tweets per second (Ingram, 2012). Dick Costollo, CEO of Twitter, describes the microblogging service as “the pulse of the planet,” (Ingram, 2012, n.p.); a network of the zeitgeist. According to Costollo, the service levels the playing field for people in the public eye, such as celebrities and CEOs, by allowing them to engage directly with their audience without the filters or constraints of publicists and other media outlets. This democratizing rhetoric must again, be taken with a slightly critical approach in this study, since CEOs may be free, in theory, to post whatever content they wish on Twitter yet, in practice, there still remain plenty of professional filters and constraints.

In 2011, Twitter announced 100 million active users, whereby an active user is defined as one who logs into their account at least once per month. This definition of ‘active use’ is quite striking however, because although many users appear to fall within the active category, around half of them (40%) had not posted any content (tweeted) in the last month (Bosker, 2011). Global Web Index Online (2013) calls this the growth of the active-passive user. This type of Twitter behavior raises definitional and practical questions and does not necessarily seem to be beneficial or particularly flattering for CEOs. Therefore, we would expect that most CEOs who do have a public Twitter would be more active than Twitter’s definition suggests.
Who is on Twitter and how do they use it? A Pew Internet Study (2012) found that “8% of online adults now use Twitter on a typical day and, notably, 55% of these active users participate on mobile devices (Bosker, 2011). This has some implications for the site of organizations, meaning that as employees and CEOs work on mobile devices, an organization is no longer defined by or confined to its physical location.

What enables these changes to a large extent is the uptake of new technology and subsequently, scholars argue that technology is part of an organizational text and an important constitutional component (Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Taylor, Groleau, Heaton, & Van Every, 2001; Güney & Cresswell, 2012). For instance, “only through the CCO view can we account for the symbolic and material agency of technology-as-text in the writing of a super-structure of agencies into patterns that stabilize the ongoing conversation, establish precedence between the stakeholders in the conversation, and constitute organization,” (pg. 164). In other words technology, which in our case is Twitter, is not to be taken for granted but rather to be seen as integral to the communicative process which constitutes organizations. Indeed, technology is often an invisible but powerful constituent of our realities (Latour, 1992; 2013).

This study will consider Twitter, and broadly speaking technology, as a part of the constitutive nature of communication and one of the interesting functions of particular note is a blurring phenomenon, that Marwick and boyd (2008) calls a collapse of contexts. “Like much social media, Twitter creates a ‘context collapse’ (boyd, 2008) in which multiple audiences, usually
thought of as separate, co-exist in a single social context,” (pg. 145). For instance, CEOs can tweet something public while in a very private space, such as the breakfast table at home. Similarly, they can also tweet something personal while in a professional space, such as the office, and have it read by potentially unknown audiences, including influential business partners.

To that end, Jacobs (2009) states that “business and industry is no longer marked by location and material spaces such as office, but rather by what we do such as responding to email late at night or on weekends,” (n.p.). Similarly, CEOs are now marked and judged by additional criteria, which did not previously exist, such as their mediated selves and social media communication. It is to be expected that the CEO tweets analyzed in this study exhibit a collapse of contexts and that they support the new business and organizational reality described here by Jacobs. Before we do delve into an analysis of how the CEOs’ personal tweets and the role of technology can constitute organizations, it is important to describe clearly what we mean by that.

The CCO Approach

Scholars often trace the communicative turn of organizational studies to the work of Karl Weick (1969, 1979), who described the term organization as a verb as opposed to a noun. Weick’s work suggested that an organization is composed of coordinated processes and ongoing exchanges - quite a departure from previous fixed notions, which defined the organization as a static entity (McPhee & Zaug, 2000; 2009). Weick drew attention to the social construction and human
agency involved in organizations, arguing that communication was no longer just a container; it was the very substance through which organization occurred.

Since one of the fundamental implications of Weick’s research was that organizing happens in social interactions, the next step was for scholars to start exploring the nature of those interactions. Putnam (1983), suggested that communication “created and recreated the social structures that formed the crux of organizing,” (pg. 53). Later, Smith (1993), became one of the first scholars to extend this notion by engaging directly with the relationship between communication and organization (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009).

Smith proposed three categories of relationships between communication and organization; containment (communication occurs within some organizational boundaries), production (communication is the outcome of other processes), and equivalence (communication is synonymous with organization), (Smith, 1993). Despite this progress, neither Smith nor her colleagues had yet articulated a specific framework for the types of communicative processes that occur in, and ultimately create organizations.

McPhee and Zaug’s four flows model emerged out of this chain of research. It was first presented at a conference in 2000, under the title The Communicative Constitution of Organizations: A Framework for Explanation, and became one of the first recorded uses of the phrase ‘Communicative Constitution of Organizations’, abbreviated as CCO. (It is worth noting that around the same time several other strands of research emerged, which also study the broad
notion of CCO, but under different names.) The general idea behind CCO is that communication is the fundamental action or, to use a metaphor, the building blocks used to construct, sustain, alter and demolish organizations (McPhee & Zaug, 2000).

Thus, the four flows model was created in the context of growing inquiry into the idea of communication being constitutive of organizations and came as a response to the mounting need for clarification on the perspective. The four flows filled in the blanks that had been left by previous attempts to theorize the idea of CCO by stating clearly one way that communication can constitute organizations through four distinct flows comprising of key communicative processes. The four flows framework also served to reconcile the numerous strands of previous, interdisciplinary research into one, holistic explanation (See Figure A).

The Four Flows

McPhee and Zaug contend that their framework draws on four significant contributions to the CCO perspective; “the idea of process, the question of equivalence, the idea of structure, and the idea of power,” (2000, pg. 26), while adding a fifth one; multiplicity. The four borrowed contributions come directly from the works of Weick (1969; 1979), Smith (1993), Boden (1994), Taylor (1993), and Deetz and Mumby (1990), respectively. The fifth emerged out of the synthesis of these contributions and the resulting realization of the complexity laden in organizations alongside the insufficiency of one model or flow to explain the intricacies of constitutive communication alone.
The four flows include: Membership Negotiation, Organizational Self-structuring, Activity Coordination, and Institutional Positioning. These flows are equally important and analytically distinct however, they are not necessarily separate in practice and are open to various combinations. Since this study draws heavily from McPhee and Zaug’s (2000) four-flow framework in order to better understand CEOs’ personal tweeting practices in the larger context of organizational communication, it is important to clearly define and operationalize each of the flows. Below is a more detailed definition of the key constructs of this study:

Figure A: McPhee & Zaug’s Four Flow Framework
Membership Negotiation

Membership Negotiation is the establishment, maintenance or transformation of a relationship with an organizational member (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). This can be both an outward and inward or an external and internal form of communication. For instance, a job interview would be a clear example of how a new membership is negotiated; a membership which would impact the organization. Notably, this flow highlights the role of human agency in the constitution of organizations.

In the case of membership negotiation on Twitter, this flow could manifest itself when CEOs reply or tweet at customers and enter into a relationship with them or, when CEOs congratulate their own employees and thus, reinforce those employee’s organizational memberships. Of course, membership negotiation is more complicated than that because it is dependent upon our understanding of the concept of an ‘organizational member’ and thus, raises a fundamental issue: what does it mean to be a member?

According to Rafaeli (1996), there are various shades of membership, whereby “membership is a matter of degree,” (pg. 6). In this sense, membership is a loose variable, which can be understood as a form of relationship with a company and its existing members. We can therefore define membership as a relationship based on temporal, physical, hierarchical or legal parameters, for instance (ibid). This is, of course, a simplified definition, which becomes particularly interesting since it involves the negotiation of power dynamics.
As tables A and B demonstrate, all of the companies under investigation are in the business of providing some form of goods to consumers. In the past decade there has been a clear paradigmatic and epistemological shift in these businesses since companies now tend to interpret membership not just in the sense of a staff member but in the sense of their customers and suppliers, too (Ansari & Phillips, 2011). Therefore, the following analysis was sensitive to this dynamic and intended to capture any reference in the CEOs’ communication to persons or groups who were either employees, customers or important contacts.

**Organizational Self-Structuring**

Organizational Self-Structuring, which in this paper will be referred to as Self-Structuring, can be understood as stereotypical organizational communication (McPhee and Zaug, 2000). McPhee and Zaug offer two definitions to further clarify this flow: first, Self-Structuring can be understood as “any process that serves to steer the organization or any part of it,” (pg. 36). Second, and slightly more elaborate, is that Self-Structuring “does not directly concern work, but rather the internal relations, norms, and social entities that are the skeleton for connection, flexing, and shaping of work processes,” (ibid.).

In essence, Self-Structuring is the skeleton behind the organization and much like the skeleton, it concerns internal processes by nature. This could include formal and tangible communication, such as contracts and organizational charts. In terms of how this flow can manifest itself in the
CEOs tweets, it would include mentions of things such as official policies, hierarchies and earnings releases.

**Institutional Positioning**

Institutional Positioning specifically refers to positioning within the social order of other institutions. As defined by the authors, Institutional Positioning is specifically outward facing and operates at the macro-level. This type of communication flow exists to “negotiate the terms of recognition of the organization’s existence and place,” (McPhee & Zaug, 2000, pg. 39), within the broader landscape of other organizations.

Possible communication partners for this flow include suppliers, customers, competitors and collaborators (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). This flow is particularly important because “organizations exist in human societies that already are organized,” (ibid., pg. 41) therefore, new and existing organizations need to continuously position themselves and find ways to maneuver within their surrounding environments. In terms of specific Twitter content, Institutional Positioning would consist of communication targeted at some specific, external organizational entity.
Activity Coordination

Activity Coordination can be defined as “the process of adjusting the work process and solving immediate practical problems,” (McPhee & Zaug, 2000, pg. 38). Activity Coordination is primarily an internal process, whereby organizational workflows, challenges and decisions may be addressed. Furthermore, McPhee and Zaug state that the concept of cooperation is probably the best example of Activity Coordination however, they do make it clear that organizational members can coordinate in both constructive and destructive efforts. This flow could be seen in the form of communication about immediate or recent work-related tasks.

The Four Flows Model: Several Notes

It is beneficial to add three footnotes to the four flows: First, the four flow framework allows for both a micro and a macro level perspectives of an organization. It can be inferred that Self-Structuring and Activity Coordination pertain primarily to micro-level activities, while Membership Negotiation and Institutional Positioning conjure up macro-level interactions. Combined, the four flows could suggest a variety of micro and macro interactions, which are flexible to account for the global, mobile nature of the modern organization. This is something which previous explanations for constitutive organizational communication have largely failed to do (McPhee & Zaug, 2000).
Second, it is important to note that although not thoroughly elaborated, McPhee and Zaug have suggested direction arrows for their flows (See Figure A). Since the authors themselves do not focus on explaining what these arrows or directions of flows mean, it would appear that this part of the framework is not fully developed and thus, not a key point in the constitutive process. Arguably, communication can flow in a number of directions on CEOs’ personal Twitter accounts and as a result, the proposed directions of flows from McPhee and Zaug will not be addressed further in this study.

Third, although the authors again do not delve into details about this point, they do state that a variety of message flows are necessary in complex organizations because they “require distinct types of relations to four “audiences”,” (2000, pg. 21). This statement is important because it implies a focus on the receiver and on multiple messages, meanings and interpretations. The authors introduce the term ‘complex organizations’, which is never quite defined but perhaps, hints at the idea that complexity is a function of multiple flows and combinations of audiences – not necessarily physical location or size of organizations.

**Applications**

Unfortunately, there are only a few applications of McPhee and Zaug’s model to real-life data (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott 2008; Browning, Greene, Sitkin, Stutcliffe & Obstef, 2008; McPhee & Iverson, 2009). These studies do show a breadth of application of the framework however, they do not delve into more than one organization or into mediated communication –
something that the present study will address. In brief, Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2008) study how employee-abusive organizations come into existence and are sustained via a confluence of communication flows. The authors apply the four flows and extend the existing theory by suggesting a fifth; syncretic superstructure. Syncretic superstructure accounts for “larger cultural and historical discourses that underpin the constitution of organizational life,” (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008, pg. 310). The authors state that the additional flow represents “deeply rooted beliefs and ideologies that are strongly influenced by culture and history,” (pg. 311).

Browning et al., (2008) conduct a constitutive flows analysis based on a larger set of data collection on process improvement methods in the United States Air Force. The authors present three examples, which are drawn from document analyses, observations and interviews in order to examine the confluence of flows in the entrepreneurial context, and to better understand Mitchell’s notion of constitutive complexity (2003). Finally, McPhee and Iverson (2009), also apply the four flows framework to a case study of the Comunidad de Cucurpe community. The authors deconstruct the case study of this particular community by categorizing particular incidents into the four flows. By doing this, they also demonstrate the interrelatedness of the flows and their application to complex organizations over extended periods of time.

Again, these examples present three diverse application of the four flows framework; both in terms of subject matter and methodology. In each case the four flows framework is also somewhat modified or combined with other concepts in order to be optimally useful for studying
a specific organizational phenomenon. This free appropriation suggests that the four flows framework is perhaps, too broad or, as an alternate interpretation, conveniently flexible to allow for a wide range of study approaches.

Critique and Alternate Models

While McPhee and Zaug’s four flow framework is recognized for its theoretical efficacy (Browning et al.), and for taking an important step toward unpacking the constitutive nature of communication, it has also been met with some criticisms. Some of the main critiques include a vacillation between the micro and macro and an unclear nature of the constitution process, whereby in some cases it appears as though the authors are advocating for a bottom up approach and in others, a top down approach toward building organizational theory (ibid).

Further, Browning et al., question the lack of attention paid to the constitutive roles of non-human actors such as computers, office spaces, signs and texts. They conclude that “if the idea of the communicative constitution of organizations makes any sense, it is for us on the sole condition that the concept of “communication” is extended to what non-humans do,” (pg. 142). This is an important criticism, which will be addressed in this study through the specific focus on the role of CEOs’ Twitter in interactions.

Taylor (2009) also critiques the four flows model primarily on the grounds of a lack of specificity. For instance, he notes that the flows do not explain “how organization is generated in
interaction,” (pg. 154). The four flows are rather vague and do not take “account of the properties of language and the practices of language-users,” (pg. 181). As a response, Taylor suggests a more in-depth focus on language, through the lens of coorientation; “a simultaneous relationship to something to be done and to others with whom one is doing it,” (pg. 155).

Taylors’ coorientation model is a valuable alternative approach to CCO and, is worth noting, that it is a well-tested framework used to study the emergence of organizations. Nonetheless, coorientation tends to take a more granular approach to studying communicative episodes, which McPhee and Zaug critique for being overly micro-oriented and insufficiently organizationally-focused (2009). They argue that the four flows framework is broad enough to encompass a variety of organizations and yet specific enough to the organizational communication realm.

Another area of critique posed to the four flows by Putnam and McPhee (2009), is that there is “limited guidance as to how CCO interfaces with material reality,” (ibid., pg. 202). In essence, the question of whether the four flows are applicable to real organizations remains to be answered. The present study will be one such application of the four flows framework and will also present an interesting context for the study of multiple audiences since Twitter collapses distinctions between constituencies into one large group of ‘followers’.

Finally, Putnam, Nicotera and McPhee (2009) contend that the framework contains an arbitrary naming convention (pg. 13), and that the four flows are reductionist, in that they limit all organizational phenomena to four specific labels, which could easily be termed otherwise.
Browning et al. (2000), suggest that the ‘organizing’ or the constitution of organizations takes place at the intersection of the four flows and further, that varying combinations of flows create different types of organizations further complicating the measuring and establishing of the individual flows. Nonetheless, in order to be able to measure these organizational differences, it is necessary to start with a common set of tools which, necessitates some level of generalization and is provided by the four flows framework.

Despite some of the model’s weaknesses depicted above, the critique does point toward a sustained engagement with CCO and a springboard for further research. At the forefront of this future agenda lies a clarification of exactly how and through which actions communication can be constitutive, as well as a need for a practical application and validation of the flows and attention to the role of technology. More specifically, an exploration into the digital construction of organizations remains to be tested and will be one of the applications of this study.

Indeed, the most valid criticisms facing McPhee and Zaug’s framework are perhaps, a lack of application and attention to the role of technology; the present study will address both of these points. The remaining criticisms against McPhee and Zaug’s framework, such as a reductionist approach and unclear relationship between micro and macro structures are not so pertinent to this study. Arguably, there is no one framework for understanding the CCO process which is ‘correct’ and a framework, by nature is reductionist. Furthermore, Twitter tends to collapse contexts, thus blurring the micro and the macro, which therefore would not be seen as a fault of the four flows framework but rather as a desirable function.
As a conclusion, McPhee and Zaug highlight three specific values of their framework: an “explanation of the power and efficacy of organizations in the West-dominated world today,” (2000, pg. 32), an uncovering and understanding of organizational members’ own communicative practices, thus “potentially allowing members to understand their own communication better,” (ibid.) and “a template by which to detect, diagnose, and assess novel organizational phenomena,” (ibid.). This study indeed, hopes that the framework will yield some insights into the constitution of modern organizations, CEOs’ Twitter practices and novel organizational phenomena.
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

The following chapter discusses the overall design of the study, the research goals, and the data collection and analysis procedures.

Study Design

Since many companies hire communication professionals to handle social media, corporate Twitter accounts are rarely the direct work of the CEOs themselves. Personal accounts however, especially in the case of smaller-sized businesses, are much more likely to derive directly from the CEOs’ hands and thus, to be a more authentic representation of the CEOs in question. Nonetheless, while it appears that having a personal presence on Twitter is a growing trend amongst CEOs, it also remains an understudied mode of communication.

This study explores the tweeting practices of 10 CEOs through an analysis of their tweets and follow-up personal interviews. An important, though loose distinction is to be made between CEOs’ personal Twitter accounts and practices (accounts held and used by the CEOs themselves), and corporate Twitter accounts and practices (accounts held and used by companies, which are often managed by communication staff). This study specifically engages with the former, CEOs’ personal Twitter practices which again, comprise a largely under-examined organizational space.
Study Sample and Data Collection

The sampling strategy of this study was concerned with capturing the personal tweeting practices of a diverse range of CEOs. The criteria for selecting CEOs therefore, were threefold: (i) CEOs had to be the ones doing the tweeting themselves, (ii) supplementary data, such as the possibility of conducting personal interviews, needed to be available, and (iii) the CEOs ideally had to have diverse personal and professional backgrounds (from one another) and to represent a range of industries. Naturally, these criteria limited the pool of available CEOs for this study however, they also guaranteed a higher level of access and quality of data.

The CEOs were ultimately identified via an online search and selected through a convenience sample (with the exception of David Barger, CEO of JetBlue, whose interview was obtained through an opportune, in-person encounter) More than 40 CEOs were initially contacted via email or other electronic message, such as LinkedIn mail, and about a quarter replied positively to participating. Of the CEOs who were contacted, the highest success rate came via email communication, where CEOs responded almost instantaneously. In fact, the majority responded within an hour of the email request being sent; the rest of the CEOs typically responded within a day. Interestingly, soliciting CEOs for this study via Twitter did not yield much success as none replied through this medium (for more information about my experience with Twitter see Appendix 3).
The CEOs and staff interviewed for this research were very forthcoming about either being the ones doing their own tweeting or, conversely, having other people do it for their company (again, the CEOs selected for this study were only the ones who said they handled their own Twitter accounts). Therefore, it is with a high degree of certainty that the 10 CEOs studied here did, indeed, produce their own Twitter content and it was not the work of ghostwriters. Furthermore, although this sample was not large or randomly selected, it was diverse and so it gives us greater confidence in any trends we observe across all CEOs (Tables A and B show key characteristics of the study sample).

The 10 CEOs who are presented in this study come from a range of backgrounds, locations, and industries based in the United States. In addition, all 10 CEOs are considered active users on their personal Twitter accounts and were willing to share information about their practices through personal interviews. (For the purposes of this study an active user is defined by the Twitter company’s standard as one who accesses his or her account and/or tweets at least once per month however, all of the CEOs in this sample were much more active than that). Again, personal access to the CEOs was crucial to the sample selection, because as Miles and Huberman (1984) note, “with qualitative data one can… assess local causality and derive fruitful explanations,” (pg. 22).
Table A: Profile of CEOs and Companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>CEO</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Founder?</th>
<th>Year **</th>
<th># employees</th>
<th>Revenue 2012</th>
<th>Location ***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zoom Active</td>
<td>Dallas Alexander</td>
<td>Web Design Company</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>AZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JetBlue</td>
<td>David Barger</td>
<td>Airline Company</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>15,000+</td>
<td>$86 million (2011)</td>
<td>NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazen Careerist</td>
<td>Ed Barrientos</td>
<td>Self Branding</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintain Marketing</td>
<td>Kathleen Booth</td>
<td>Marketing/Branding</td>
<td>Yes (co- founder)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$683,000+ (2011)</td>
<td>MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoulder2Shoulder</td>
<td>Ken Falke</td>
<td>Veteran Media &amp; Technology</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>VA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumazi</td>
<td>Sumaya Kazi</td>
<td>Social Networking Consulting</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veenome</td>
<td>Kevin Lenane</td>
<td>Video content extraction</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zillow Inc., Furia Rubel</td>
<td>Spencer Rascoff</td>
<td>Real Estate Information</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>300+</td>
<td>$145 million (2011)</td>
<td>WA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications, Inc.</td>
<td>Gina Rubel</td>
<td>Integrated Marketing agency</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>$750,000+ (2011)</td>
<td>PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziglar Inc.,</td>
<td>Tom Ziglar</td>
<td>Inspirational Talks/Self</td>
<td>No (family member of founder)</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>TX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Founder refers to whether the CEO in question is also a founder/founding member of the company.

** Year refers to year the company was founded.

*** All locations are within the United States; the abbreviations refer to the State where the company is based.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CEO</th>
<th>Date Joined Twitter</th>
<th>Total Tweets</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Following</th>
<th>Has a Corporate Twitter Account?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dallas Alexander @dallasalexander</td>
<td>Aug. 12, 2010</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>60,067</td>
<td>27,101</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Barger @davebarger</td>
<td>Jan. 9, 2011</td>
<td>1687</td>
<td>4543</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Barrientos @SnowCrash65</td>
<td>March 31, 2009</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen Booth @WorkMommyWork</td>
<td>Aug. 19, 2010</td>
<td>1,775</td>
<td>1,336</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken Falke @kens2s</td>
<td>June, 12, 2011</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumaya Kazi @sumaya</td>
<td>April 23, 2007</td>
<td>11,144</td>
<td>26,152</td>
<td>21,422</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Lenane @kevinlenane</td>
<td>Dec. 1, 2011</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spencer Rascoff @spencerrascoff</td>
<td>Jan. 16, 2009</td>
<td>8,767</td>
<td>42,129</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina Rubel @GinaRubel</td>
<td>Sep. 23, 2008</td>
<td>6,651</td>
<td>4,932</td>
<td>5,104</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Ziglar @TomZiglar</td>
<td>Oct. 30, 2008</td>
<td>7,128</td>
<td>77,839</td>
<td>28,943</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Joining date (which is not necessarily the same as the date of first tweet) is backtracked using the online application whendidyoujoin twitter.com. In most of the cases above there was a several day delay between when the CEOs joined Twitter and when they sent their first tweet.

** Values taken on 03/17/2013 and account for the whole Twitter output of each CEO to that date.
Once the CEOs were identified and they consented to being a part of this study, the data collection took place in two stages. First, each CEO’s Twitter feed was actively monitored for a period of 3 months, from October 1st – December 31st, 2012. All tweets during that period were then extracted using NVivo10; in total 2,086 tweets were recorded.

This date range was specifically chosen due to its seasonal affordances; holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the New Year fall within this range and often call for an increase in natural communication. In addition, the Presidential election and debates also happened to fall within this period as well as Hurricane Sandy, which became the largest Atlantic tropical storm on record. These events had an impact on many of the CEOs’ organizations and thus, on their Twitter communication, too.

Second, personal telephone interviews were conducted, which lasted on average for about 25 minutes. On five occasions, when a CEO was not available for a personal telephone interview, he or she completed a questionnaire by email (See Appendix 1). In total, four of the interviews with the CEOs were conducted over the phone, one was conducted in person, and five were administered via email questionnaire. To ensure consistency amongst the data, the CEOs were asked similar questions regarding their Twitter practices, which incorporated Flanagan’s (1954) critical incident technique, prompting CEOs to give story-like examples of successful or unsuccessful Twitter practices. In addition, all phone interviews were transcribed, totaling 17 pages of text.
Data Analysis

In order to obtain a rich, contextualized picture of CEOs’ personal tweeting practices this study employed two data gathering processes including monitoring and analyzing CEOs’ tweets over a period of 3 months and conducting a set of interviews with each of the CEOs. The triangulation of the content analysis (the systematic analysis of CEOs’ tweets) with the interviews (those personally conducted with the respective CEOs), made for higher levels of validity and reliability in the findings (Krippendorff, 2013). This dual data analysis offered a more contextualized set of findings, along with the ability to observe the level of reflexivity and correlation between CEOs’ prescriptive and descriptive Twitter practices. We first turn to how this study addressed the Twitter analyses, followed by a brief discussion of the handling of the interview data.

Developing a Coding Scheme

According to Krippendorff (2013), coding is defined as “the process of categorizing, describing, evaluating, judging, or measuring descriptively undifferentiated units of analysis, thereby rendering them analyzable in well-defined terms,” (pg. 381). Coding is used in this study to help tease out information about the CEOs’ actual Twitter practices, which may not be readily apparent or available through the non-systematic reading of tweets or the conversations held with the CEOs. For the purposes of coding in this study, each tweet is considered to be a single, unique unit of analysis.
Nonetheless, since no prior coding scheme for categorizing CEO tweets existed, the coding scheme developed for this study had to both borrow and create. Broadly speaking, two notions were coded for: the general type of tweet, which borrowed from Ehrlich & Shami’s (2010) categorization (addressed in more detail below), and the specific flow classification, which was developed through an iterative, data driven process. The new coding scheme was fine-tuned on a sample of 100 tweets from non-participant CEOs, and was tested for agreement using a second coder (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2006).

**Applying the Coding Scheme**

The first set of information that the tweets were coded for was a general typology. The framework for this typology came from Ehrlich and Shami (2010), who conducted a study on employee microblogging practices inside and outside of the workplace. The authors discovered that all organizational microblog posts could be categorized under one of six groups: status, information, retweet, question, direct question and direct post. In brief, ‘status’ is an action-focused tweet and answers Twitter’s canonical question, *what’s happening?* ‘Information’ refers to sharing some form of general, non-personal, news. A ‘retweet’ is the tweeting of another’s message, ‘question’ is the general asking of information from non-specific others, ‘direct question’ is the asking of information from specific others and finally, ‘direct post’ is the directed message to another (See Table C for more details).
While the general logic of Ehlrich and Shami’s typology was well suited to this study, one of the six categories needed to be adapted and one was removed in order to best capture the data at hand. During the test coding of 100 CEO tweets it emerged that ‘information sharing’ was a prevalent practice but also a highly nuanced one. Thus, coding all tweets simply as ‘information sharing’ missed important distinctions between messages which, for example, shared personal information; “Love, love, love James Taylor” versus company-promotional information; “Sales Force is a Cloud Computing King”.

Therefore, the ‘information’ category was fine-tuned and ultimately split into five information sub-categories, in order to account for the nuances in the CEOs’ tweets. These nuances distinguished between providing information that is general, personal, business-oriented, company-specific and company-promotional (Table D offers a summary of this information). In addition, the direct question category was removed since it did not come up in the sample coding and would be sufficiently acknowledged under the existing ‘question’ and ‘direct post’ labels, should the need arise.

In sum, Ehlrich and Shami’s typology was used to process all of the tweets on a general level and thus, to add an extra descriptive layer to them. This layer added color to our understanding of how the various flows were composed. Furthermore, where tweets could not be categorized under the four flows, Ehrlich and Shami’s categories still offered a description of the data.
### Table C: Modified Twitter Typology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directed Post: provides information and is specifically directed at someone, via '@username'.</td>
<td>“@SuccessntheCity So glad I’m now following you on Twitter.”</td>
<td>DP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweet: resends information, typically identified by markers such as ‘RT’, or ‘via’.</td>
<td>“RT@ QWDF” … Retweeted by…</td>
<td>RT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask Question: looks for and/or elicits a response.</td>
<td>“Anyone know if there’s an easy way to view just unread emails in Notes?”</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status: answers the canonical ‘what’s happening?’ Activity-focused, includes greetings but excludes the past.</td>
<td>“Just started reading about tomorrow’s potential storm” “Good morning World. It’s going to be even better after a cup of coffee”</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Information (general): gives general insights, comments, opinions, news and links.</td>
<td>“Love this. #Leadership lessons from #GeorgeWashington.” “Can’t focus at work? Be sure to eat #Breakfast &amp; eat before drinking coffee”</td>
<td>Info (G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Information (personal): provides humor, irony and lighthearted information about the self.</td>
<td>“Love, love, love James Taylor” “My new Microsoft Surface Pro reminds me of my first girlfriend: fast, pretty and way to complicated to ever understand”</td>
<td>Info (P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Information (business): gives general information about business-related issues.</td>
<td>“Girl power! More Women in the Workforce Could Raise GDP by 5% <a href="http://hub.am/R9ltSp">http://hub.am/R9ltSp</a> by @sahewlett via @HarvardBiz”</td>
<td>Info (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Information (company): refers to information about the CEO’s own company as well as to other companies.</td>
<td>“#AmericanExpress to roll our mobile #shopping via #Twitter” “@salesforce is hiring”</td>
<td>Info (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Information (company-promotional): refers to promotional information about the CEO’s own company as well as other companies.</td>
<td>“@MatrixGroup is so excited to launch the new site for Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards” “Salesforce is a Cloud Computing King”</td>
<td>Info (CP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second set of information that the tweets were coded for was flow-specific. Below is the operationalization of McPhee and Zaug’s four flows:

**Table D: Four Flow Categorization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flow</th>
<th>Examples/Operationalization</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership Negotiation</strong></td>
<td>is a form of direct or indirect communication with others, such as recruitment or reinforcement of existing members/employees. This flow is not organizational-specific.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“@FranklinNicole Thx for the mention. How are things? How’s biz? Miss you at the @MatrixGroup holiday party”</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“@MatrixGroup seeks a project manager”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self Structuring</strong></td>
<td>refers to any mention of official internal procedures, policies and feedback.</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. A shared link to evaluation or policy document</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Positioning</strong></td>
<td>is a form of external communication, which negotiates relationships with other companies and institutions. This flow can include sharing promotional information about other companies and certain instances of networking.</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“@salesforce! #2 on @BloombergNews @businessweek 50 --- #2/50 best performing”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity Coordination</strong></td>
<td>refers primarily to internal work processes, such as challenges, tasks, and protocols. Also includes information about the CEO’s own workflow and whereabouts.</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“@MatrixGroup PMs &amp; Directors have been discussing task management apps. Anyone tried #TheSecretWeapon?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Important rule @MatrixGroup: Don’t let your boss make a mistake”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notably, a tweet may be coded as representing multiple flows and it can also have several layers of description, such as a being a direct post and an information sharing practice simultaneously.
In addition, during the coding process special attention was “paid to the intent of the words, not just the content”, (Ehlrich & Shami, 2010, pg. 44). For instance, a tweet could appear to be a form of general information exchange:

```
hey @spinnakr check the tshirt in the @DingmanCenter vid @adamsfallen is the princess of schwag
http://t.co/U8psDWla reppin #dctech all day
```

- Kevin Lenane, CEO of Veenome

However, when its context (in this case the ongoing conversation and hashtags) is taken into account, this tweet reveals that the CEO is talking about an important industry event. Therefore, the meaning of this tweet changes to become an example of company promotional information, institutional positioning and/or membership negotiation as well.

To ensure a high level of reliability among the coding of tweets, a second coder checked a sample of 200 tweets (roughly 10% of the total sample) across all CEOs. On average every 5th tweet was cross-checked and ultimately over 90% inter-coder agreement was achieved. Again, an iterative process was employed to correct notable differences.

In addition to this manual processing of data, software such as Nvivo, Topsy and wordcounter.com was used to elicit supplementary information and visualizations, which would have been challenging to do by hand. This included obtaining a list of the most frequently used words in the whole 2,086 tweet sample (achieved through the use of the Nvivo and wordcounter.com software), and a timeline of cumulative and individual CEO Twitter activity (via Topsy).
Interview Data

The data obtained from the Twitter content analysis was supplemented by personal interviews and email questionnaires from the CEOs. The primary purpose of this additional data collection step was to provide a rich, contextual and qualitative backdrop for the understanding of CEO Twitter practices (Krippendorff, 2013). All interviews were transcribed and analyzed. A grounded theory approach was then taken (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in order to interpret the interview data, which was not uniform in casing or content. The qualitative findings are presented in the discussion section as an aid to the interpretation of the Twitter practices of the CEOs.
CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the content analyses and interviews with CEOs, which yielded some insightful findings and a mosaic of Twitter practices. While no two CEOs were found to have the same tweeting behaviors, there were some emergent and distinct patterns. The following section first provides a general overview of the ten CEOs’ tweeting uses (See Appendix 2 for a more detailed portrait of individual CEO tweeting practices), then delves into a discussion about how the four flows manifested themselves within the sampled tweets, and concludes with other emergent patterns and the broader implications for the CCO perspective.

How do the CEOs use Twitter?

The most common CEO responses to the question ‘why do you use Twitter?’ were to establish themselves as industry experts, to connect with others, and to grow their personal brands. Then, unanimously, the CEOs stated that their Twitter accounts were at least somewhat business-oriented; four CEOs said their personal Twitter account was mainly professional in nature, and six stated that it was a hybrid of personal and professional use. None said their Twitter account was purely personal.

This does beg the question that if CEOs’ personal accounts can be so readily connected to their organizations, do they cease to be personal? Yet, it also presupposes an explanation that perhaps, the CEOs in question are so deeply embedded within their organizations, and vice versa, that a
personal Twitter account, which highlights this relationship is potentially, quite an accurate presentation of these CEOs as people.

A closer look at the average CEOs’ Twitter activity can be seen in Figures B and C:

**Figure B: Average Twitter Activity**

![Figure B: Average Twitter Activity](image)

Figure B shows that CEOs’ tweeting practices seemed to ebb and flow. Notably, some of the highest peaks occurred in early and late October and coincided with the 2012 presidential debates (October 3-22) and hurricane Sandy (October 22-29). In fact, these peaks were not mere coincidences with those important dates - they had a direct correlation with many of the CEOs’ Twitter outputs. This suggests that most CEOs were engaging with not just their organizations but also the world around them; this will be discussed further under the section titled Activity Coordination.

**Figure C: Average CEO Tweeting Times**

![Figure C: Average CEO Tweeting Times](image)
Figure C shows that two thirds of all tweeting occurred within the loose boundaries of the working day: 7am-7pm. However, another third of the tweeting took place between 7pm-7am, or what could be considered outside of normal working hours for most people. This was the case for all CEOs and not just a function of their average, which was telling on several levels and shed some light on organizational and personal practices.

Upon a first reading, it was possible to conclude that tweeting outside of work hours suggests the CEOs do tend to use Twitter not only as a work-related medium but also as a personal tool. Upon a closer reading, however, it was also possible to conclude that work, particularly in our technologically-enabled society, has no clear boundaries for these CEOs – or their recipients. It is worth mentioning that a portion of the tweets which were sent between 7am-7pm do seem to be pre-scheduled (this was confirmed in a couple of the interviews) and yet, there were still many outside working hours tweets, such as the one below by Spencer Rascoff, CEO of Zillow, which reinforced the blurred work-boundary reading:

"I've replied to 732 emails from @zillow Premier Agents in the last few hours. 27 emails remain in my inbox. Time to call it a day. (Sent at 5:13am)

- Spencer Rascoff, CEO of Zillow"

The interview with Suamaya Kazi, CEO of Sumazi, also supports the idea of an integrated relationship between CEOs’ personal Twitter practices and their daily lives. Kazi stated that there was no timeframe that she specifically set aside for her tweeting; instead, she noted that when she woke up, she would naturally turn to her phone and be met with a slew of notifications
from Facebook, family and friends, emails and, amongst them, tweets. Then, as the day progressed, she would use her personal Twitter account whenever the occasion organically arose. The fact that Twitter updates appeared alongside personal and professional information on the same mobile platform, her phone, is already an indication of a blurred work-personal life space. This also echoes the majority of the CEOs’ responses that although a personal account, Twitter is still seen primarily as a business or hybrid tool.

Kazi’s view of how Twitter fits within her lifestyle was corroborated by most CEOs with the exception perhaps, of Ed Barrientos, CEO of Brazen Careerist. Barrientos noted that he used Twitter primarily in the mornings for news-related purposes. He shared that Twitter had become his primary news source, replacing the role of the newspaper and even news websites. A closer look at Barrientos’ tweeting times does show that 74% of his tweets were sent between the hours of 7am-1pm while only 8% were sent between 7pm-7am. Interestingly, Barrientos not only used Twitter for receiving curated news (a passive form of Twitter engagement), he also then shared his findings via his personal account (an active form of engagement). This practice was prevalent across most CEOs and will be elaborated upon in the Information Sharing section.

Regardless of time of tweets, most of the CEOs made it clear that Twitter was a sustained effort and one that required dedication and time. Those CEOs who did not tweet as regularly, also had a sense of that, and typically voiced their concerns about their less frequent engagement in their interviews. Kathleen Booth, CEO of Quintain Marketing, particularly highlighted that if you are in the business of media of any kind – and especially if you are recommending Twitter to your
clients – then you need to personally practice what you preach. Yet another anecdote, which implies that Twitter use is connected to the broader spectrum of organizational communication.

**The Four Flows**

The findings from the content analysis of 2,086 CEO tweets did provide examples of the four flows, suggesting that the CEOs’ personal Twitter accounts were related to their organizations but perhaps, in less direct and traditional ways than might be expected. The most frequently encountered flow was a public and exhibitory form of Activity Coordination which, I argue, can be partially explained by some features of the medium. Further, the finding that certain flows, such as Self Structuring (which is the sharing of official documents and policies on Twitter) were not prevalent also suggests that the medium has some characteristics, which make it inherently better suited to specific practices and flows.

The most important finding however, was that of a ‘non-flow’, or of the fact that some 63% of the total tweets analyzed could not be categorized as fitting into one of the established four flows (See Figure D). This finding, I argue, is indicative not so much of the banal or non-organizational nature of CEOs’ personal tweets but rather of a new organizational reality, where constitution occurs through social interactions, which are less structured and physically bound to an organization than they may have been before. This needs to be taken into consideration as an important aspect of CCO research.
Below are the findings relative to each flow, followed by a discussion of emergent practices and the overall efficacy of the four flows as a framework for studying the notion of CCO.

**Activity Coordination**

Figure D shows that the most prevalent flow amongst the CEOs was Activity Coordination, representing on average 19% of the total CEO tweets. With the exception of a few CEOs, this was also the most commonly encountered flow on their individual Twitter feeds. Examples of Activity Coordination include travel and important or interesting work updates (either future or just passed).
Excited & honored to be speaking at the #TEDxBayArea Global Women Entrepreneurs event at LinkedIn HQ this Sat! http://t.co/KVQxO1Dy

- Sumaya Kazi, CEO of Sumazi
Just returned to Seattle after my last business trip of 2012. So happy.

- Spencer Rascoff, CEO of Zillow

The frequency of Activity Coordination tweets, such as travel updates, highlights the hybrid nature and focus of the CEOs’ Twitter accounts. It also appears, in a sense, that through the use of Twitter the physical organizations are extended to include whatever region of the world the CEOs are present in. In these instances, regardless of the size of the organization, the CEOs momentarily embody their companies themselves.

Furthermore, the coded tweets for Kevin Lenane, CEO of Veenome, highlighted a property work, which is specifically true of entrepreneurs (or those with the entrepreneurial spirit): work is a constantly evolving, boundary-less process, which may happen while watching television, traveling or eating dinner with a colleague.

Stuck on a train, stopped in the snow somewhere in NJ. Wish i was watching #dcweek #dctech keynote. Will consume @skeevis morsels instead

- Kevin Lenane, CEO of Veenome

Indeed, the mobile nature of Twitter does make it easy, perhaps even desirable, for CEOs’ to give snapshots or exhibitions of their work and thoughts on the go.
An interesting application of Activity Coordination can particularly be seen in the tweets of David Barger, CEO of JetBlue. Barger was one of several CEOs who tweeted more actively during and post hurricane Sandy in October, 2012. In part, this can be explained by the fact that his company’s headquarters are based in New York and were directly impacted by the hurricane. Barger tweeted information on a regular basis to propagate the coordination efforts of his large company, as well as to send out flight operation updates and to boost staff morale.

A huge thank you to our Crewmembers, for supporting our Customers and each other during #HurricaneSandy! How are you doing?

- David Barger, CEO of JetBlue

Reading through the storm period of tweets of Barger really gives a sense of immediacy and a feeling of living through the disaster with him. Various leadership qualities emerge, whether in the sense of coordinating a large team or being proactive within the local community to seek out updates and to propagate relevant information. These types of tweets serve to humanize the CEOs while at the same time solidifying their positions as leaders.

Figure E shows the most frequently encountered words in the Activity Coordination category:
From this information we can tease out a general trend toward immediacy, whereby words such as ‘today’, ‘new’ and ‘just’ suggest action and presence, while words such as ‘great’, ‘thank’ and ‘top’ imply positive occurrences. The fact that there is such a skew toward positive, immediate commentary implies a strong level of curatorship on behalf of the CEOs.

In sum, Activity Coordination is the most prevalent flow and it is instrumental in the constitution of an organization through the recording and disseminating of (loosely defined) important events. Notably, Activity Coordination takes on a slightly different meaning here than perhaps, was originally intended by McPhee and Zaug since it refers to primarily external communication.

With the exceptions of Barger and Rascoff, which are addressed further on under the section titled ‘Big Birds, Small Birds’, the personal Twitter feeds of the other CEOs, who are all from smaller-sized companies, were used primarily to coordinate activities with outside
constituencies. This makes sense on a practical level – people in small companies do not need Twitter to communicate with one another since they can probably lean over to the person on the desk next to them and share their thoughts. Thus, Activity Coordination for the CEOs of these smaller companies took on a much more external dimension by fostering a form of communication with people and constituencies who would not typically be related to the organization. As Kazi, CEO of Sumazi (a small start-up company) said, Twitter for her was a community of likeminded strangers.

**Membership Negotiation**

Membership Negotiation was the second most frequently encountered flow totaling up to 14% of the sampled tweets (See Figure D). For the most part, membership negotiation was achieved through implicit communication with non-organizational persons:

To my new followers, allow me to introduce myself: [https://t.co/4Y54uCn](https://t.co/4Y54uCn)

- Sumaya Kazi, CEO of Sumazi

In her interview, Kazi mentioned that she had many more followers on her personal Twitter account (26,256), versus her corporate Twitter account (1,903) and that she felt like it was an achievement to ‘convert’ somebody who was first her personal follower to then become a follower of the corporate account, too. She mused at the fact that she was still surprised at why so many people would find her personal life so interesting. She also noted that typically, the more platforms (meaning multiple Twitter accounts and other forms of social media) a person
engages in, the stronger their brand loyalty would typically be. This was corroborated by Tom
Ziglar, CEO of Ziglar Inc., who stated that true fans of the Ziglar organization followed it across
Twitter, Facebook and other platforms.

Membership Negotiation also occurred through more explicit tweets, which served to either
directly seek new organizational members or to reinforce the status of persons already affiliated
with the organization:

We're hiring! If you know a Software Engineer interested in working @Sumazi, let us know!
http://t.co/VDzYRkET #jobs #hiring #sanfrancisco

- Sumaya Kazi, CEO of Sumazi

I'm looking at the account of an @zillow Premier Agent who has received 104 contacts from Zillow
shoppers in the last 30 days. She's stoked.

- Spencer Rascoff, CEO of Zillow

Alexander Dallas, CEO of Zoom Active, stated that his personal Twitter account lowered the
cost of new customer acquisition. This is consistent with market research, which suggests that a
personal or emotional connection with a brand or organization is key for establishing a loyal
customer base (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Frequent words in the Membership Negotiation flow include sentiments of praise and a focus on
others:
Notably, the status separation between CEOs and their followers was somewhat heightened via the Twitter interface. With the exceptions of Ken Falke, Kevin Lenane and Gina Rubel, the other CEOs had numerous more account followers than people they followed themselves. In some cases, this discrepancy was as high as 136:1 followers to people/accounts followed. This information is pertinent to the Membership Negotiation flow as it shows discrepancies in power dynamics: although both followers and CEOs are seemingly able to communicate freely via Twitter, the CEOs ultimately are the ones in higher demand and in a position to reaffirm others’ membership. Marwick and boyd call this practice ‘micro-celebrity’, whereby the power dynamic is a key differentiation between CEOs (the micro-celebrities) and their followers (2011).

Of course, CEOs are also dependent upon the favorable perception of their followers and Membership Negotiation is key for the constitution of any organization; this likely explains the overtly positive tone of the CEO tweets. Furthermore, if a CEO does not have many followers or receives frequent negative comments from them that, too, becomes public information and
reflects poorly upon the CEO and organization in question. It then seems that both the CEO and his or her communication partner(s) must enter into a mutually agreeable public exhibition. The CEOs, on their part, often used a friendly and accessible tone, and acknowledged positive comments from followers by either retweeting them or replying to them.

There were other notable variations of the Membership Negotiation flow, too. For example, Gina Rubel, CEO of Furia Rubel Communications Inc., Kathleen Booth and Tom Ziglar all created and maintained an audience through regular activities such as scheduled Daily PR news releases, free EBook promotions, and inspirational quotes (respectively). These CEOs publicized their organizational releases on their personal Twitter accounts thus, linking themselves to their organizations and organizational followers, and creating a level of consistency, geared at attracting and retaining members.

In sum, Membership Negotiation was a key process in the CEOs’ tweeting behaviors and occurred on both, organizational and non-organizational levels. Ultimately, one could argue that every tweet is a form of Membership Negotiation – reaffirming and reminding followers of their relationship to the CEO through the receiving of their tweets. Nonetheless, this paper opted for a more concrete approach, which categorized tweets primarily based on their direct communication with another person or constituency.
Institutional Positioning

Institutional Positioning was the third most frequently encountered flow, at 4% of the total sampled tweets. The low frequency was consistent with previous research, which found that celebrities, sports stars and even companies tended to shy away from what could be considered direct promotional communication on Twitter (Case & King, 2012; Hambrick et al., 2010). Instead, the typical form of Institutional Positioning involved positive acknowledgments of others in the same industry:

Congrats @jeremys and @yelp on their pre-announce and M&A. $YELP
Excited to welcome @hotpads to the @zillow family. http://t.co/ilxQ1ZN8

- Spencer Rascoff, CEO of Zillow

It appeared that by acknowledging others in the same industry, CEOs could position themselves as direct/indirect colleagues of theirs. Furthermore, and especially within smaller companies or those in which the CEOs openly appropriated the brand, Institutional Positioning also seemed analogous to self positioning:

At the @HaasFounders mixer. Great group to learn from & share with. Thanks @berolz for running this great network! http://t.co/2sk9jbe6

- Sumaya Kazi, CEO of Sumazi

For instance, networking events, presentations, and in some cases, conferences all allowed the CEOs to mingle with others in their industry. Given that the CEOs are so deeply engrained
within their organizations, self positioning can be synonymous with Institutional Positioning and vice versa (Melewar, 2003).

There were also numerous examples of the Institutional Positioning flow in non-overtly business oriented situations:

RT @MikeBloomberg: I know all NYers join me in thanking FDNY, NYPD & other 1st responders for their heroism & commitment to the safety of our citizens #Sandy

- David Barger, CEO of JetBlue

Two carloads of clothes and supplies headed to NY/NJ with the Red Cross. http://t.co/t2VcTbQd

- Gina Rubel, CEO of Furia Rubel Communications Inc.,

In these instances, the CEOs would position themselves and their institutions in a favorable light of a certain constituency. In the case of Barger (above), he chose to position himself and by extension, his organization, in alignment with the community of New York. In the case of Rubel, also above, she chose to connect her organization to the Red Cross – a non-directly work related partnership that is likely mutually beneficial. As noted here, Institutional Positioning does not have to be limited to direct business competitors; it also extends to other organizations, such as the Red Cross, or geographic communities in these instances.

The word frequency chart in Figure G again, shows that the most regularly encountered words within Institutional Positioning were those of positive sentiments and acknowledgments - notably, the word ‘women’ appeared as well.
The mentions of women in the workplace (sometimes referred to through different words such as ‘females’, which do not appear on the table above) were somewhat of a surprising finding. These mentions could be seen equally across both, female and male CEO tweets. For instance, female CEOs such as Booth and Rubel (See Figure H) openly stated on their Twitter profiles that they were mothers in addition to successful business owners, and male CEOs, such as Barrientos and Rascoff, shared information in support of women in the workplace.
This trend seemed to be a safe and appealing form of Institutional Positioning, aligning with the modern-day working reality in the United States, where women make up nearly half of the workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Averages 2012).

In sum, Institutional Positioning featured in our sample in several different ways; through direct mentions of competitors, indirect self-positioning and references beyond business (but still to legitimate organizations, associated with good causes) to encompass other institutions and the female workforce. These types of positioning all reinforce the wide and intricately connected functions of organizations and highlight the notion that there are many ways in which an institution can be positioned within its landscape. Of course, this is all achieved through communicative acts and more specifically, a diverse combination of messages to a mix of audiences.
Self Structuring

The Self Structuring flow was almost non-existent in the sample, with the notable exception of a tweet from Barger:

Thank you to @JetBlue’s 14,500 Crewmembers for delivering a solid Q03 profit of $45M. 7+M customers enjoyed "The JetBlue Experience!"

- David Barger, CEO of JetBlue

Perhaps, the most obvious explanation for the lack of Self Structuring tweets could be that this sort of communication is traditionally reserved for more ‘serious’ and controlled environments. Since Self Structuring implies official documents, which can often be confidential, it would appear that a more fixed environments and known audience would be preferable (for instance, a targeted email or letter from the CEO could control for both of these factors). Although in his tweet Barger discussed topics which fell under the Self Structuring flow, it seemed that he was very much on the safe side with his tweet since it was positive and constructive toward a strong organizational image of JetBlue. In fact, it almost bordered company promotion.

Nonetheless, it could be argued that the CEOs did exhibit a variation of Self Structuring communication, which was not quite recognized by the four flows. By sharing thoughts on Twitter about certain work processes (see tweets from Lenane and Rascoff below), CEOs were openly ruminating on organizational performance, which could ultimately filter into the official practices and structures of their own organizations. However, it was difficult to tell with conviction whether comments such as the ones below were an unwritten company policy, practice, tip, or just a CEO’s passing thought.
Nothing is more overemphasized and pointless than the elevator pitch.

- Kevin Lenane, CEO of Veenome

Thinking to myself: if there are 50 SDEs and 50 designers here at #swsea, why haven't we hired them all yet?! http://t.co/dajOhjsj

- Spencer Rascoff, CEO of Veenome

Perhaps, the lack of Self Structuring information on the ten CEOs’ Twitter feeds is simply because the accounts were, after all, somewhat personal. It may be that the corporate Twitter accounts featured a higher percentage of Self Structuring information, which the CEOs saw as inappropriate to post on their personal accounts. Yet, another reason why it was rare to see examples of the Self Structuring flow in the CEOs’ tweets could be that Twitter as a medium tends to be forward facing, based on current information and trends, while Self Structuring as an activity tends to be reflective and based on historic precedent. Needless to say, Self Structuring is a strong component of CCO and probably the most overtly connected to it however, it either did not feature in this sample or, perhaps, featured in less explicit ways.

The ‘Non Flow’

A key finding from the content analysis of the CEOs’ personal Twitter communication was that of the ‘non-flow’. The vast majority, 63% of the tweets (See Figure C), in this sample suggested that CEOs’ personal communication did not readily lend itself to categorization within one of
McPhee and Zaug’s four organizational flows. To an extent, this finding was to be expected and could mean that the CEOs’ use of Twitter is, indeed, a personal one that cannot necessarily be classified as pertaining to the larger spectrum of organizational communication. The ‘non flow’ finding could however, also be interpreted in another way.

Since CEOs’ personal communication is often, inextricably linked to their role as a CEO - specifically on a public platform such as Twitter, where seven out of the ten CEOs announced their role as a CEO on their Twitter profile - it is probably naïve to assume that the explanation for the non-flow tweets is simply that they are not related to organizational communication. Rather, drawing from the CCO approach, one could assume quite the opposite; that those non-flow tweets are still a vital part of the process of organizational communication and of the constitution of an organization. Therefore, it is likely going to be more fruitful to seek an alternative explanation.

One such explanation is that the non-flow tweets, the majority of which pertained to relationship formation, self positioning, organizational culture and open leadership, are crucial to the success of any organization but are not always easily quantifiable or explicitly business-related in nature. Many of the non-flow tweets also shared information or retweeted interesting links and articles (see tweet below).

Israel live-tweeting its military campaign against Hamas. Fascinating. [http://t.co/FM55g7I0](http://t.co/FM55g7I0)

- Spencer Rascoff, CEO of Zillow
This task, for instance, is not readily categorized as ‘organizational work’ and thus, as pertaining to one of the four flows. It does however, position the CEOs and by extension their companies as though and industry leaders, respectively. That, in turn, implies a certain cutting-edge and savvy-ness to the company, which can lead to positive Institutional Positioning, Membership Negotiation and so on. In this manner, we are able to see how, albeit tangentially, seemingly work-irrelevant CEO tweets can filter in and be connected to the larger organizational picture.

Worth noting too, was that the CEOs who had the lowest percent of non-flow tweets in their feeds, Barger (23%) and Rascoff (46%), were the CEOs of the two biggest companies. In comparison, the average non-flow tweets for the other CEOs’ was 69%. This is similar to the idea that the CEOs of these companies used Twitter, to a large extent, as an organizational tool to foster cohesion and a sense of corporate culture amongst the existing members (addressed further on page 77). It also suggests that the CEOs of bigger, more established companies tend to use Twitter more as an organizational communication medium and perhaps, experience greater pressures to do so.

In sum, the non-flow tweets featured many important communicative acts for any organization. These included relationship building, information sharing, and self positioning amongst others. Each of these activities can serve an important function in an organization and can certainly serve to constitute organizational realities. As such, it is beneficial to take note of these CEOs’ tweets as yet another component of CCO.
Still, Figure I shows that the majority of tweets (almost 50%), fell within the Direct Post category. This means that the CEOs often communicated directly with someone or with specific constituencies. Since all of the CEOs interviewed stated that their personal Twitter account was a professional or hybrid tool (though never a personal one alone), it is probable that those communicative episodes are telling about the CEO and his or her brand.

**Figure I: CEO Tweet Typology**

Figure J shows word frequencies very similar to those in the other flows. This is intriguing as it reinforces the notion that the non-flow shares some similarities with the other flows and warrants some consideration itself. If the CEOs are using similar language across the flows to construct their messages, then it is plausible that their messages are somewhat similar in nature and need to all be considered as part of the organizational reality.
Notably, it was quite rare for the CEOs to use Twitter to ask questions, which suggests that the medium is timely in terms of general news updates but perhaps, not so timely in terms of specific information acquisition. (One exception, though not organizationally-related, was Kazi’s question tweet for perfume suggestions from her Twitter followers - she got five responses and in turn, had responded to them, all within less than 20 minutes.) Twitter, in this study, appears as an exhibitory medium in the sense of sharing and retrieving information at one’s convenience rather than at specific moments. This flexibility highlights a less participatory and immediate side to the application.

The lack of questions on behalf of the CEOs also potentially highlights another important feature of Twitter, which is the status distinction between the CEOs and their followers. As evidenced by this sample, the CEOs’ role is mainly to supply information and to provide answers rather than to pose questions and to seek information from their followers. This presents an intriguing
power dynamic, centered on knowledge and information access. Followers come to the CEO for information; not vice versa.

**Combinations of Flows**

It may be somewhat surprising that given the 140 character limit to the tweets, certain ones could still be classified as belonging to more than one flow (See Figure K). The tweet below, for example, combines elements of Activity Coordination and Membership Negotiation, along with a flavorful personal commentary:

> At Morgan Stanley HQ for investor dinner talking @zillow. Full bar setup in the corner. Very Mad Men-esque.  
> - Spencer Rascoff, CEO of Zillow

Figure K demonstrates the various combinations of flows that were encountered in the CEOs’ tweets, whereby multiple flows occurred in around 10% of the total sample. The most prevalent was Activity Coordination and Membership Negotiation (as demonstrated in the tweet above), which seemed to be a natural fit in terms of CEOs explaining what they were doing and whom they were doing it with. This is consistent with the notion that a crucial part of a CEOs’ job is to network, make appearances and ultimately, communicate (Park & Berger, 2004).
The significance of these multiple flows and multiplicity of meanings draws attention to the idea that communication, by its very nature, is polysemic. Even given the 140-character limit tweets could still evoke multiple flows and meanings, which have implications for the constitution of various organizational functions. Furthermore, these CEOs’ tweets hint at the fact that they are aware that their messages could be read by a multitude of audiences and therefore, should be suitable for variety of people.

**Information Categories**

Indeed, information sharing was the most prevalent activity on Twitter as 86% of the total tweets coded shared some type of content (See Figure L). This practice, which can be referred to as thought leadership, has recently received some notable attention particularly in the popular
business literature (Brenner, 2013). The idea of sharing relevant content was also noted by most CEOs when asked why they tweet; a typical answer would be something along the lines of *to establish myself as an expert within a certain area*. In addition, the notion of thought leadership helps to explain why CEOs may be more keen on giving information as opposed to asking for it. Gina Rubel, CEO of Furia Rubel Communications Inc., noted that her local and business community looked up to her as a leader in terms of information sharing.

The most prevalent form of information sharing fell within the ‘General’ category (26% of all CEOs’ tweets), which encompassed comments, opinions, news (non-business or company related), and links. This highlights the social nature of Twitter and of the CEOs’ tweeting practices. It also suggests that the accounts studied were, indeed, hybrid in nature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Category</th>
<th>% Weight*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Info (General)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info (Business)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info (Company)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info (Company Promotional)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info (Personal)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second and third most prevalent information sharing categories were Business and Company related (23% and 15%, respectively). These categories further established a connection between the CEOs and their organization and the low ratio of company promotional information was consistent with previous research, which suggested that public eye figures (celebrities), do not tend to use their Twitter accounts for heavy promotional reasons (Park & Berger, 2004).
The low sharing of personal information, however, was somewhat surprising since the Twitter accounts studied were after all, CEOs’ personal accounts. On the one hand, this quite possibly reinforces the notion that it is not truly possible for these CEOs, who are in the public eye, to assume a separation between their roles as organizational leaders and their day-to-day personal lives. Low personal information sharing could be seen as an act of cautiousness, where the CEOs choose to stay away from over-sharing personal information, which could end up connected in non-intended or non-desirable ways to their companies. On the other hand, tweets such as those below, add a human factor to the CEO and make him or her more relatable as a person:

A romantic night with my wife, a glass of wine, and an earnings call recording. #thatsmylife

- Spencer Rascoff, CEO of Zillow

Celebrating Mom's successful cornea transplant this morning at IHOP. Please pray for the donor family.

http://t.co/YW6dlUjS

- Tom Ziglar, CEO of Ziglar Inc.,
An interesting finding is the mix of types of information prevalent in the tweets which, can be partially understood using Marwick and boyd’s notion of collapsed contexts. The authors suggest that Twitter collapses contexts and audiences into one frame, which can go to explain how CEOs can talk about their children’s school teacher and business developments in the same stream of public communication.

**The role of technology**

One of the criticisms of McPhee and Zaug’s framework was the lack of consideration of technology in the CCO process. However, several findings from this study, such as the concept of exhibitions and the chronological display of information, support the notion that technology does shape the way that CCO occurs.

For instance, once out into the public sphere, tweets can be seen as artifacts of a CEO and his or her organization. Lenane, in his interview, mentioned that his Twitter feed was akin to an interests and hobbies section on a resume, which highlights an important temporal aspect of communication via Twitter. To borrow from Hogan’s (2012) concept, Twitter is a space for public exhibitions, whereby communication receives an air of durability and an option to be viewed at one’s convenience. A CEO’s remarks about their travels, sports teams or political views all present pieces of curated information, which assemble over time into a Twitter feed or, as Lenane might say, a personal interests and hobbies exhibition for the world to view.
The idea of exhibitions further supports the constitutive nature of communication; once put into writing a comment, a compliment, a thought or a sentiment becomes tied to an author and to his or her organization. It enters the space of our collective memory of an organization and although it may not be as decisive as a financial earnings statement, it certainly can weigh in on the construction of organizational impressions. In this sense, Twitter becomes an audience-centric communication tool; valuable for activities such as presenting the self to others and networking, which have long contributed to the crux of the CEO job (Park & Berger, 2004). Subsequently, Twitter exchanges become a form of communicative display; exchanges which are left as artifacts of relationships and ideas. While this Twitter feature is by no means specific to CEOs alone, it does appear to be more pronounced in their case as they are already figures in the public eye.

The chronological nature of Twitter’s interface is another important consideration when explaining CEOs’ uses of the medium. As evidenced by the most frequently used words by the CEOs, (‘great’ and ‘new’) there appears to be a link between the structure of the Twitter interface and the content of the CEOs’ tweets. The chronological feature of the tweet display favors the newest posts and is especially conducive to a timely and sensationalist approach to information sharing.

For example, most tweets tend to be activity or new information focused, hence the high percentage of the Activity Coordination flow. The portable nature of Twitter also makes it easy for CEOs to log in and to update the world on their whereabouts. This focus on the ‘now’ and on
the ‘what’s happening’ does not necessarily leave much room for deliberation (this is quite literally dictated by the 140 character limit, too) and certainly favors the quick and the new. Notably, where further information was necessary or available, many of the CEOs’ tweets provided links to additional content. This ability in and of itself is a feature of the technology since it makes it possible to move from one platform to another and to experience the content and CEOs’ thoughts via different media; Instead of describing her morning breakfast at the Sumazi headquarters, Kazi could just share a photograph from the rooftop, showing the sunset and her oatmeal.

Another salient feature, the concept of tracking and measuring of success, emerged from the personal interviews with the CEOs. Since most of the CEOs interviewed dedicated a significant and consistent effort to being active on their personal Twitter accounts, it seemed likely that they had some form of indication about the success of their practices in order to keep tweeting. This indication came through the concept of tracking and data analysis – a feature enabled through the technology of Twitter and other partnering applications.

Although there was a divide on whether the CEOs had a specific strategy for their personal Twitter use (two out of the ten interviewed stated that they had no strategy and one was quite determined not to censor himself at all), the CEOs unanimously were aware of the reach of their message. For example, Ziglar noted that he used trackable links to see how far and wide his content had spread and Rascoff, in another interview, had even stated that he had three screens at work; one for work, one for email and a third dedicated to monitoring Twitter (Hagey, 2012).
The ability to track almost instantaneously the online effects of your communication or, the general perceptions toward you and your company, is something unique to the digital CEO. This form of feedback, facilitated by technology, allows for the fast modification of an exhibition, if necessary. Yet, as evidenced by Rascoff’s practice, it is also something, which requires a conscious effort and an integration into one’s life. Of course, not everything about a CEOs’ personal Twitter output is trackable – Kazi emphasized this point in her interview and stated that it is not just about numbers. Positive or negative sentiments and affects arising from CEOs’ tweets are not necessarily readily apparent, which also perhaps, goes to explain the broader trend of hesitation from the CEO population about using Twitter.

**Big Birds, Small Birds**

Notably, company revenue or years in business did not have a significant impact on the CEOs’ Twitter output but the size of the company did. In cases of larger organizations, such as Barger’s JetBlue and Rascoff’s Zillow (with over 15,000 and 300 employees, respectively), Twitter became used simultaneously as a megaphone to amplify the CEO’s voice, and as a glue, to promote company culture and cohesion. In the cases of these larger organizations Twitter did indeed fit a unique space as a communication medium; while in the past most employees in large companies would not have had a daily reason to communicate with – or to hear directly from – their CEOs, Twitter opens up (at least theoretically) this possibility. In addition, Twitter promotes a different type of instantaneous communication; one which could be targeted primarily at employees (as Barger openly stated in regards to his personal Twitter
use) or to the general public. Arguably, in larger organizations, Twitter serves as much of an internal function as it does an external one and in doing so, displays artifacts of the organization and organizational members - not just the CEO. This is not the case in smaller organizations where face-to-face exchanges are readily available. In the case of smaller organizations, such as Kazi’s Sumazi and Booth’s Quintain Marketing, Twitter took more of the role of a relationship-builder with the wider public. As demonstrated by these organizational differences, the uses of Twitter seem to come down to audience, whereby the main variable is the audience size. Therefore, we can potentially predict certain behaviors and uses from the CEOs based on the size of their organizations.

**Beyond the Organization**

CEOs such as Lenane, Booth and Kazi tweeted live during the Presidential Election debates in 2012 and all of the CEOs, without exception, engaged in some form of political talk. Barrientos, Booth and Falke also used Twitter as a way to rally others into participating in non-profit causes:

“Speek” up to save your fellow ape. For every @SpeekApp sign-up and call this week, a donation goes to WWF: [http://t.co/Xb1hWLRM](http://t.co/Xb1hWLRM)

- Ed Barrientos, CEO of Brazen Careerist

Furthermore, there were notes of American exceptionalism by CEOs such as Barger, Falke and Rubel.

Voted! Proud to be an American!!

- Ken Falke, CEO of Shoulder2Shoulder
Arguably, this type of communication could be noted as a broader form of Institutional Positioning, whereby the CEOs aligned themselves with a cause or even a country and its presumed values. Political, social and national engagement extended the role of the CEO beyond his or her organization and into the larger public sphere. In a sense, the CEOs are public leaders and have shown to use their Twitter accounts to further establish this position. In turn, organizations are further embedded into the social fabric as providing and signifying more than their direct business.

**Positive Reinforcement**

This study illuminated an overtly positive, humorous and congratulatory tone in the CEOs’ tweets. According to the word frequency charts it appeared that one of the most used words, which showed up in every CEOs’ list regardless of their industry or personal background, was ‘great’. Although the actual frequency of the word ‘great’ was usually around 1% of all of the words in the sample (in other words not that high), it was still notable and reinforced the overall trend of complimentary communication and positive sentiment. Perhaps, this was a function of the public-ness of the tweets. Since the CEOs seemed keenly aware of their online visibility, they also would likely be cautious of attaching any negative attention to themselves or their organizations.
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The following chapter summarizes the key research findings and conclusions, discusses some limitations of the study and suggests avenues for future research.

Through the interviews and content analyses of 2,086 tweets, we emerged with an image of CEOs’ personal tweeting practices as a curated exhibition of a CEO and of a modern organization. In other words, these CEOs’ tweeting practices were hybrid acts of constitutive communication (hybrid in the sense that the tweets were both personal and professional in nature), which showed selective snapshots of interactions that constituted images of the CEOs’ organizations and of themselves. In addition, through the lens of these CEOs’ Twitter accounts, we saw a blurring and extending of what would be considered traditional organizational communication topics, members, and temporal and spatial boundaries.

The application of the four flows framework demonstrated a heavy slant toward Activity Coordination communication which, in retrospect, seems somewhat natural given the structure of the medium. This paper argues that Twitter does predispose, to an extent, a form of communication which is terse and action-focused, making it apt for updates from the CEOs about their whereabouts and current activities. The chronological tweet display was one instance where Twitter, arguably had some impact upon the expectations and resulting communicative practices of the CEOs.
The prominent display of the follower/followed by count on the CEOs’ Twitter profiles was another case where the digital interface potentially impacted interaction as it highlighted power dynamics laden within the communicative partners. These two points are not intended to present a technologically deterministic argument but rather, to call attention to the technologically formative components of communication which, have the potential to affect our range of interactions. Furthermore, if communication is to be seriously studied as the means through which organizations are constituted, then as Browning et al., (2008) stated, the medium of communication and its affordances do need to be taken into account.

While most Activity Coordination was concerned with the sharing of CEOs’ whereabouts or other relatively light-hearted organizational information, there was one notable example of a different use. During Hurricane Sandy, several of the CEOs showed a powerful application of Twitter as a timely and important communication tool in moments of organizational crises. This type of organizational Twitter use certainly warrants further exploration and has the potential to become a valuable resource in many organizations’ crisis communication response plans.

Membership Negotiation and Institutional Positioning, the second and third most prevalent flows (Self Structuring was almost non-existent), were significantly less frequent than Activity Coordination however, they still depicted a blurring of traditional organizational members and environments. Indeed, it did appear as though there was no typical way that the CEOs in this study used their Twitter accounts. Instead, a mosaic of uses emerged, whereby each CEO created his or her own pattern of use. In turn, this made the personal accounts and the CEOs appear
authentic. As Mr. Lenane mentioned, for some CEOs, the personal Twitter account was akin to
the hobbies and interests section on a resume. For others, it was more of a tool for civic
engagement and information sharing, and for others still, Twitter served as an important
megaphone for creating a sense of cohesion and company culture amongst large, geographically
dispersed groups of employees.

The one notable pattern that did emerge from this sample was strongly related to company size.
The CEOs of the two larger companies (Barger and Rascoff) showed higher percentages of
McPhee and Zaug’s flows or, of what could be considered more traditional communication and
used Twitter frequently as an internal communication tool to foster company culture.
Nonetheless, the most salient finding amongst the flows was probably that of the non-flow or, of
the large percentage of flows, which could not be categorized under McPhee and Zaug’s existent
framework.

The non-flow term described a range of tweets, often casual and social in nature. Of course, real
organizational spaces certainly involve plenty of non-work related exchanges such as ‘water
cooler’ conversations, office gossip and sports talk. However, one of the main differences
between these types of face-to-face conversations and their counterparts on the Twittersphere is
the audience; in the case of office gossip, the participants are frequently clearly defined,
organizational members and therefore, the communicative act is closely tied to the daily reality
of that organization and its employees.
In the case of Twitter, these conversations can, and often do, happen with non-explicitly organizational actors. In that sense, it becomes more challenging to pinpoint the communicative act (or in our case flow) and its exact relation to an organization and to CCO. Nonetheless, this is not to say that these communicative acts are unimportant - they still filter into the broader organizational reality and perhaps, call for a re-conceptualization of the traditional office space, organizational member and understanding of the components of CCO.

It is worth mentioning here that McPhee and Zaug first presented their four flow framework in 2000 – about six years prior to the emergence of Twitter and many of the other social media we see as firmly embedded within organizations today. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect the four flows to be fully accommodating to these communicative evolutions but despite this preamble, McPhee and Zaug’s framework was still effective in allowing us to conceptualize CEOs’ tweets as a constitutive form of organizational communication. In addition, the four flows framework assisted us in seeing the CEO and his or her organization in terms of a textualized process, which made it possible to make a quantitative conclusion, corroborated by the qualitative interview data, that CEOs’ personal Twitter accounts were ultimately an extension of organizational communication, and a part of the CCO.

Where McPhee and Zaug’s framework was less effective was in its ability to capture the social or relational piece played by much of the CEOs’ communication; in other words, all of the tweets that fell under the ‘non-flow’. Nevertheless, while the non-flow finding was probably the most indicative result within this study to corroborate the idea of organizational boundary
blurring, the sample studied here was perhaps not large enough for us to be able to conclude with certainty what the non-flow exactly entailed. In some instances, the non-flow tweets shared similarities with other tweets, which were successfully categorized under specific flows. In other instances, the non-flow tweets were significantly different and they represented more closely the idea of casual communicative exchanges than one of the established four flows. Further exploration with a larger sample would be needed to draw concrete conclusions here.

In addition, two other limitations did emerge: first, for practical reasons, this study was limited to the exploration of ten CEOs, all based within the United States. This inevitably placed some limitations upon the extractability of the findings. Although a diverse sample, it would be intriguing to be able to compare content analysis and interview results across categories of CEOs, which would require more participants and perhaps, some future research. Second, since communication is a dynamic exchange and one of the implications of this study was that people, who are not traditionally considered organizational members, now have access to the CEOs via Twitter it would be useful to have more information on these people that the CEOs were in contact with. Of course, the focus in this study was predominantly on CEOs’ tweets but looking at their followers’ tweets and exchanges would paint a fuller picture of interaction and its constitutive properties.

Still, the present study does serve to further CCO inquiry and to extend the three previously mentioned projects, which apply McPhee and Zaug’s framework, into the digital realm. This paper concurs with these previous studies in that the four flows, in their present state, are not
able to fully capture the full range of modern communication that is constitutive of organizations. However, similar to those studies, the present research appreciates the flexibility of McPhee and Zaugh’s framework and acknowledges it as a positive feature of their work. Perhaps, after all, it may not be necessary to add an additional flow but rather to redefine the existing ones so they can better encapsulate the modern reality and communicative environment of organizations.

To conclude, this study suggests that an organization is more than just a combination of work-related events; it is a dynamic space of interaction, where multiple communicative flows, messages and people converge to create organizational realities. Furthermore, this study also implies that organizations are not fixed entities that spew out products but rather, that they are dynamic spaces, composed of real people who increasingly engage with their surrounding environments. As CEOs continue to adopt Twitter and, generally speaking social media, scholars are presented with the opportunity to unpack their communicative acts and to shed light on their practices as telling of 21st century organizations, leaders, and societal trends.
APPENDIX 1: CEO Questionnaire

Georgetown University
Consent to Participate in Research Study
INTERVIEW & SURVEY QUESTIONS*

STUDY TITLE: (Social CEOs)  PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: (Katerina Girginova)
TELEPHONE: (240-237-5460)

1) Why did you decide to engage with Twitter?

2) How do you use Twitter?

3) Is this medium primarily a personal, professional, or hybrid tool for you?

4) What identity or messages are you trying to convey via Twitter?

5) Do you believe your use of Twitter affects your identity as a CEO? If so, how?

6) Do you believe your use of Twitter has an impact on your organization? If so, how?

7) In what ways does Twitter use affect your daily work in your organization?

8) In what ways does Twitter use affect your daily interactions in your organization?

9) Who is your audience?

10) Please add any additional thoughts:

* The same questions will be used in both, online surveys distributed via email and phone interviews to ensure consistency of data.
APPENDIX 2: Portraits of a Tweeting CEO

Dallas Alexander

![Dallas Alexander Twitter Profile]

Dallas Alexander Tweet Flows

- Activity Coordination: 17%
- Membership Negotiation: 17%
- None: 50%

Dallas Alexander - Tweet Time

- 7:00AM - 12:59PM: 30%
- 1:00PM - 6:59PM: 20%
- 7:00PM - 12:59AM: 15%
- 1:00AM - 6:59AM: 35%
Ed Barrientos

Edward Barrientos
@SnowCrash66
Angel investor, entrepreneur, songwriter, avid outdoorsman, technologist, CEO of Brazen Careerist
Great Falls, Virginia, USA

620 TWEETS 180 FOLLOWING 836 FOLLOWERS

Ed Barrientos - Tweet Flows

Ed Barrientos - Time of Tweets
Kathleen Booth

Mom, stepmom, wife, CEO of @Quintila, entrepreneur, and master juggler. Wine, great food, and running (not all at the same time!) keep me sane.
http://www.workmommywork.com

1,785 TWEETS 794 FOLLOWING 1,042 FOLLOWERS

Kathleen Booth Tweet Flows

Kathleen Booth - Time of Tweets

7:00AM - 12:59PM: 29.91%
1:00PM - 6:59PM: 44.44%
7:00PM - 12:59AM: 1.23%
1:00AM - 6:59AM: 25.31%
Kevin Lenane

Kevin Lenane
@kevinlenane
co-founder, @Veenome
Washington DC: http://veenome.com

Kevin Lenane Tweet Flows

% of total flows
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%

Activity Coordination
Membership Negotiation
Institutional Positioning
None

Kevin Lenane - Time of Tweets

7:00AM - 12:59PM: 27.27%
1:00AM - 6:59AM: 13.64%
7:00PM - 12:59AM: 56.82%
1:00AM - 6:59AM: 2.27%
Gina Rubel

Author, Marketing Strategist, Legal Marketer, Agency CEO, Media Source, Social Media, Speaker, Blogger, Attorney & Mom
@FurlaRubel @theptlawyer #SM #PR #SEO
Pennsylvania - about.me/Ginarubel

6,674 TWEETS 5,018 FOLLOWING 4,952 FOLLOWERS

Gina Rubel Tweet Flows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flows</th>
<th>% of total tweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity Coordination</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Negotiation</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Positioning</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gina Rubel - Time of Tweets

- 7:00AM - 12:59PM: 34%
- 1:00PM - 6:59PM: 28%
- 7:00PM - 12:59AM: 16%
- 1:00AM - 6:59AM: 23%
APPENDIX 3: Some Reflections On My Time With Twitter

As part of my immersion in this project, I decided to start my own Twitter experiment. I’ll admit, although I did occasionally follow others’ tweets previously, I did not have a Twitter account myself. So, I thought it only fitting that if I were to write convincingly about a communication phenomenon, then I ought to experience it myself.

Some days, Twitter felt addictive and other days I stalled at the idea of finding something to write. On the prolific days thoughts would cascade down, linking to each other and before I knew it I would find myself thinking in tweets. Everything all of a sudden sounded like a good comment to be tweeted. Rather soon I found I had to limit myself on posts because they came quickly but also, at times, spiraled into the banal. I have never been one to share my lunch preferences with the world and I was decided on keeping this Twitter feed focused on my thesis experience. That, of course, limited the content I could share and made me think that we don’t naturally filter our thoughts – they come in at unknown times and on colorful topics – but rather, we train ourselves to do so. There was something about Twitter that made me want to put aside that filter, at least for a while, and talk about that Sushi…

Another intriguing aspect of my Twitter experience was gaining and loosing followers. I didn’t make any conceited efforts to achieve either but felt a symbolic pat on the back when I gained an unknown user from the UK and, similarly, felt a ‘what did I do wrong?’ sensation when I lost an equally unknown follower from the US. It is worth noting that I was anonymous in my tweets, which also allowed me to feel more comfortable. I don’t think I would have wanted to share anything – and have my name stuck to it – had I not had this layer of anonymity by going under the account name GeorgetownStudy versus my own name. In hindsight this probably limited people’s tendency to follow me because they were not sure who I really was.

Ultimately, I agree with the CEOs in this study; Twitter has to become a part of your life to be useful and you need to have a purpose for using it in order for it to be effective. It is also necessary to put in the time to build relationships if you would like to experience the medium to its fullest. My intention was simply to create a Twitter account during the period of my thesis but I think that had I built a following and a stronger rapport with others on Twitter, it would have been more difficult for me to say goodbye. After all, that was the biggest attraction of this experiment for me; having some sort of semi-social outlet during my thesis process, which would allow me to anonymously speak my mind and, perhaps, have an equally anonymous other come across my thoughts from the other end of the world.
References


