**Perception and Use of Twitter as a Work Tool: The case study of Israeli senior media professionals**

**ABSTRACT**

Twitter is one of the most popular social networks in existence and has become a key tool for journalists around the world. As in many other countries, most news professionals in Israel have an active Twitter account, even though adoption of Twitter in broader Israeli society has been minimal. This study aims to understand how senior Israeli news professionals use Twitter for their personal and professional needs and what beliefs they hold concerning Twitter’s role in their lives. Senior media professionals with active Twitter accounts (n = 63) were asked to respond to a questionnaire that included closed and open questions to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The former allowed for identifying how respondents adopted, used, and evaluated Twitter for journalistic use. The latter added information about user experiences and personal perceptions of Twitter. This study highlights the unique patterns in which Israeli journalists use Twitter.

**Keywords:** Twitter, innovation adoption, journalism, work tools, new media, Israel

**1 Introduction**

Twitter is one of the world’s most popular social networking sites, with three hundred million active accounts (Statista, 2021). In most Western countries, Twitter has been adopted in impressive numbers by regular citizens and celebrities, elected officials, and other political figures, as well as by businesses, news organisations, and news professionals, most of whom regard it as one of their central areas of activity. Israeli political figures and news professionals have adopted Twitter as a work tool, in line with their counterparts in other countries (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2020). Notably, Twitter is not as popular among Israel’s general population as in many other countries (Statista, 2021).

The current study examines the role that Twitter plays in Israeli senior media professionals’ private and professional lives by asking the following questions. How do these senior media professionals use Twitter? For what purposes? How do they view its importance? The study collected data from leading Israeli journalists who operate active Twitter accounts and work for prestigious Israeli news organisations.

**2. Theoretical background**

*2.1 Adoption of new communication technologies in Israel*

The many ways in which technologies and ideas are diffused, adopted, and implemented are fertile ground for theories and models about the interactions between people and technology. The adoption and dissemination processes of technologies depend on the characteristics of the technological innovation, the social framework involved, the identity of the “agents of change”, and decision-making processes (Rogers, 2003). Other studies have suggested that cultural and economic policies can hinder or encourage technology adoption (Dholakia and Kshetri, 2001). Perceived usefulness is deﬁned as “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance” (Davis 1989, p.320). Venkatesh and Davis (2000) suggest that technology adaptation depends on experience and subjective norms.

Comparative measurements of the degree to which new communication technologies and the various active platforms that accompany them are adopted around the world show that Israelis are among the most enthusiastic adopters of such innovations. This includes the most popular social networking sites (Statista, 2021). Various studies have examined the central role played by mobile phones in Israeli society (Schejter and Cohen 2002, 2013) and, later, the ever-increasing status of the smartphone (Author et al., 2019; Author et al., 2017; Author et al., 2014). The accepted explanations for the impressive smartphone adoption rates in Israel are based on particular characteristics of Israeli society, including a tendency toward close familial connections accompanied by a habit of staying informed about relatives’ well-being (Almog, 2004; Yair, 2011), an unstable security situation that raises personal and national anxiety levels (Schejter 2008; Yair 2011), and a general Israeli fondness for technological innovations (Author et al., 2019; Author et al., 2021; Cohen and Lemish, 2003; Schejter and Cohen, 2002, 2013).

In recent years, WhatsApp has become one of the most popular apps in Israel. A study conducted among Israeli WhatsApp users (Author et al., 2019) revealed impressive adoption rates. An additional study examining WhatsApp usage patterns during wartime showed that the application fulfilled important functions identified with traditional communications tools, chiefly the provision of news updates of what was happening at the front (Author et al., 2015). These findings also highlight relatively low adoption rates for Twitter among Israel’s general population (Statista, 2019). However, different adoption rates between Israeli society and sub-populations such as Israeli news professionals call for closer scrutiny. In the current study, we wish to expand our understanding of this phenomenon by examining how Israeli news staff use Twitter in practice and perceive it as a journalistic work tool.

*2.2 Journalistic practices and norms*

Researchers of journalism view journalists’ work as a product of a complex tapestry of factors driven by professional constraints and journalistic practices and norms (Deuze 2005, 2002; Gans, 2007; Schudson, 2001; Weaver et al., 2007). Objectivity, lack of bias, neutrality, and the aspiration to present reality “as it is” feature prominently among the values that shape Western journalists’ work. Even though it is recognised today that complete objectivity is impossible, this principle remains a supreme guiding value among most journalists active in centrist media (Cook 2001; Schudson, 2001; Zelizer, 2004). One key consequence of this dominance of the principle of objectivity in journalism is that journalists aspire to broaden their circle of sources and ensure the reliability and efficiency of these sources (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1986). Schudson (1997) defined this well, writing, “One study after another comes up with essentially the same observation… the story of journalism, on a day-to-day basis, is the story of the interaction of reporters and officials” (p.14). In their broad study, Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) discovered that most United States journalists consider the core of their work to be providing a professional interpretation of the reported events.

Another prominent characteristic of Western journalists’ work is a tendency for journalists to rely on colleagues in the field they are covering for brainstorming, crafting commentary, and mutual reinforcement. Zelizer (1993) explicitly defined journalists as an “interpretive community”, a definition that both aligns with and enriches the familiar research concept of “pack journalism” (Russell, 2003).

Deuze (2005) developed what he defined as the “journalists’ ideology”, a common professional philosophy for most news staff active in centrist journalism in Western countries. The five main components of that “journalists’ ideology” are five values: providing service to the public, objectivity (including neutrality, fairness, and credibility), professional autonomy, immediacy (in the sense of ensuring that up-to-date information is disseminated as efficiently as possible), and working according to the ethical principles that are accepted and agreed upon by other members of the profession. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) also stated that the norms that guide journalism include a commitment to truth, ensuring professional autonomy, meticulousness regarding news quality and reliability, surveillance of power centres in organisations, and more.

While studies that focus on the unique characteristics of online journalism and the professional norms that govern it have identified differences between veteran and new journalists, the core principles appear to remain the same (Agarwal and Barthel, 2015; Deuze, 2005; O’Sullivan and Heinonen, 2008).

Research on Israeli journalism has identified many similarities between Israeli journalists and their peers in other Western countries regarding the relative salience of professional norms (Shamir, 1988; Tsfati, Meyers and Peri, 2006; Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2014). This study examines how Israeli news staff see Twitter’s effects on their professional functioning and their ability to act in accordance with the journalistic norms above.

*2.3 New communication technologies in the service of journalists*

The changing characteristics of the journalistic new media toolbox have sparked significant research interest (Deuze and Marjoribanks, 2009; Garrison, 2000; Reich, 2005; Singer, 2005; Tandoc and Vos, 2016; Weaver and Willnat, 2016; Kligler-Vilenchik andTenenboim, 2020). Research on the effects of these new tools on journalists’ functioning and output has produced mixed results, with some scholars ascribing far-reaching effects to new media tools while others found no effects at all (Reich, 2005). The age of new media enabled the birth of online journalism, the most significant competitor to traditional journalism to arise since traditional journalism was established. However, the age of new media also enriched the journalistic toolbox with several new and handy tools: the Internet, email (Author, 2005; Garrison, 2000; Maier, 2000), social networking sites (Paulussen and Harder, 2014; Tandoc and Vos, 2016; Weaver and Willnat, 2016), blogs (Hermida, 2009; Singer, 2005; Kligler-Vilenchik and Tenenboim, 2020), and the smartphone. In a study that examined the effects of the Internet becoming a primary journalistic tool for political journalists in the U.S., Author (2005) found that variance in patterns of use of this new tool can be explained by, among others, the characteristics of journalists’ work and by the professional norms that guide them.

Unlike most scholars, Reich claimed in 2005 that the Internet and other new media technologies as work tools did not change journalism. According to Reich, journalists continued to use landline phones as their most popular means of gathering information. Are Reich’s observations still correct today?

*2.4 Twitter as a journalist work tool*

Twitter was launched in 2006 as a service that functioned as both a microblogging service and a social networking site, accessible through a website or an application adapted for smartphones (Kwak et al., 2010). Twitter often functions as a news outlet when it comes to dissemination of information (Pentina and Tarafdar, 2014). It plays a significant role in disseminating raw information globally (Parmelee and Bichard, 2011).

In recent years, the increasing presence of reporters, commentators, and news presenters on Twitter has spurred considerable research on journalism and Twitter (Broersma and Graham, 2013; Hermida, 2009, 2010, 2012; Lasorsa et al., 2012; Parmelee 2014; Usher et al., 2018; Molyneux and Mourão, 2019; Bane, 2019; Wihbey et al., 2019; McGregor and Molyneux, 2020). Coddington et al. (2014) defined Twitter as “The central circulatory system of information among reporters” (p.394). They analysed the use of Twitter as a work tool by political reporters, asking whether these reporters stuck to norms of objectivity, expecting to find that the reporters relied more on tweets from sources and less on examinations of facts. In his study of Columbian journalists on Twitter, Garcia-Permodo (2017) found that many, especially elite reporters, did not strictly adhere to norms of objectivity and expressed their voices and points of view rather frequently. However, other key journalistic norms were kept and followed. Lasorsa et al. (2012) analysed Twitter use among American journalists from the perspective of centrist journalistic norms. The researchers found that especially journalists from medium-sized or smaller media organisations often voiced personal opinions, exposed work processes, or engaged in other behaviours that could make them appear less distant and objective. Lasorsa (2012) found that female journalists tend toward transparency and disclose personal details more than male journalists. Other researchers (Hermida 2010; Hermida et al. 2014; Paulussen and Harder, 2014; Wihbey et al., 2019; Hernández-Fuentes and Monnier, 2020; McGregor and Molyneux, 2020) demonstrated how use of Twitter has expanded the number of sources available to journalists. Revers (2014) discusses how intensive journalistic activity on Twitter creates tension between news organisations’ desire to control their staff and the ethos of transparency that is a key pillar of journalistic objectivity. In another article, Revers (2015) refers to Twitter’s considerable significance as an endless fount of political information relevant to journalists’ work. Cozma and Chen (2013) examine Twitter’s contribution to the professional activity of foreign correspondents from the point of view of media organisations. Swasy (2016) discusses pressure among journalists to maintain a visible Twitter presence.

Bruns and Burgess (2012) show how Twitter has become a useful medium for speedy dissemination of news items, particularly breaking news. They also highlight that some news organisations remain hesitant, with some fearing that recognition for Twitter activity by their staff will go to individuals rather than to the news organisations they are part of. The resulting loss of credit on an organisational level could harm news organisations’ clout and, by extension, their ability to instantly insert their representatives into important events.

Despite the increasing evidence that Twitter has been adopted as a journalistic work tool in Israel, this topic has not yet received sufficient research attention; Tenenboim’s (2017) study of how Israeli journalists use Twitter wartime is a rare exception. Therefore, our first research question focuses on exploring how Israeli media professionals use Twitter. Our second research question scrutinises how Israeli media professionals perceive Twitter and its effects on their personal and professional activities**.**

**3 Method**

This study uses a research method that combines quantitative and qualitative data to examine Twitter’s role in the lives of Israeli news professionals. Our research questions focus on how Israeli journalists, commentators, and news editors use Twitter to achieve their personal and professional needs, and how they believe Twitter influences their lives.

There is no list or database of senior media professionals who are active on Twitter. Since Israel is a small country with relatively few legacy or digital media channels, we attempted to sample the entire relevant population of journalists. We created a list of names that included news reporters in eleven fields, commentators, television, and radio news anchors in Israel. Our media professionals came from three national television channels, the five online news sites with the highest number of visitors, five popular print newspapers, and two national radio stations. We then searched the Twitter accounts of those media professionals and identified 100 accounts that were active at least once during the month preceding the study.

All senior media professionals with active Twitter accounts identified as our target population were contacted directly and personally through telephone calls and email. Respondents were asked to return a questionnaire that included closed and open questions. We achieved a high response rate (78% of the relevant population, n = 63) within one month. Data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis allowed us to identify patterns of Twitter adoption, daily usage of Twitter, and appraisal of Twitter’s use for journalistic work. The qualitative analysis enriched this quantitative analysis with in-depth information about how individuals used Twitter and found it personally significant. Creswell (2009) argues that combining quantitative and qualitative methods has many advantages, saying: “The combination of strengths of one approach makes up for the weaknesses of the other approach” (Creswell, 2009: 12).

**4 Quantitative analysis**

*4.1 Profile of the respondents*

We will first sketch a profile of our survey participants. Sixty-three news staff, including senior news presenters, correspondents, and commentators, responded to the questionnaire. All the respondents were Jewish, and the vast majority (75%) were men. Most respondents (68%) were 25 to 45 years old. Under-25s were disproportionately represented (13%) considering the working environment (news organisations). A smaller percentage of respondents (6%) were over 65. About two thirds of the respondents held university degrees (66%), and one quarter had completed post-high school studies outside the academic world.

When asked to characterise their role in the journalistic enterprise, 37% of respondents defined themselves as correspondents, 22% as commentators, and 10% as presenters. The rest used mixed definitions because they held dual roles or could not clearly differentiate between their roles. Most respondents (60%) were veteran media staff who had been active in the field for over ten years, with 12% active for over twenty years. About one quarter had been active for between five and ten years in journalism. Fewer than 5% of respondents had less than two years of experience. Respondents hailed from a wide range of news organisations that employed a diverse range of media as means of communication. There was no clear dominance of one specific area of coverage among the survey participants (for example, 11% focused on domestic news and politics, 8% on the economy, and 7% on sports).

*4.2 Usage patterns*

45% of respondents reported that they had been active on Twitter for at least two years. A further 18% had been operating their Twitter accounts for one to two years. The other survey participants reported having used Twitter for less than one year, with 3% only joined the network in the three months leading up to the survey.

The survey findings show that Israeli news staff use Twitter chiefly in a professional context: 64% of the respondents tweet only as part of their work as journalists, and 77% of their tweets are aimed not at the public but at fellow journalists. However, only 18% of the respondents tweet under their name on a Twitter account that belongs to the news organisation for which they work.

*4.3 Evaluating Twitter as a journalistic work tool.*

In line with Weaver and Wilhoit’s (2016) study of American journalists, the current study finds that Israeli journalists have a generally favourable impression of how Twitter influences their work. The respondents gave Twitter a positive evaluation (see Figure 1). Most of the news people considered Twitter “an excellent work tool” (75%), so much so that they “cannot see how they could work without it at this point” (54%). Only a small minority (5%) agreed with the statement, “Twitter annoys me.” Six statements on a Likert scale were used to create a positive attitude index toward Twitter (Cronbach’s alpha =.80).

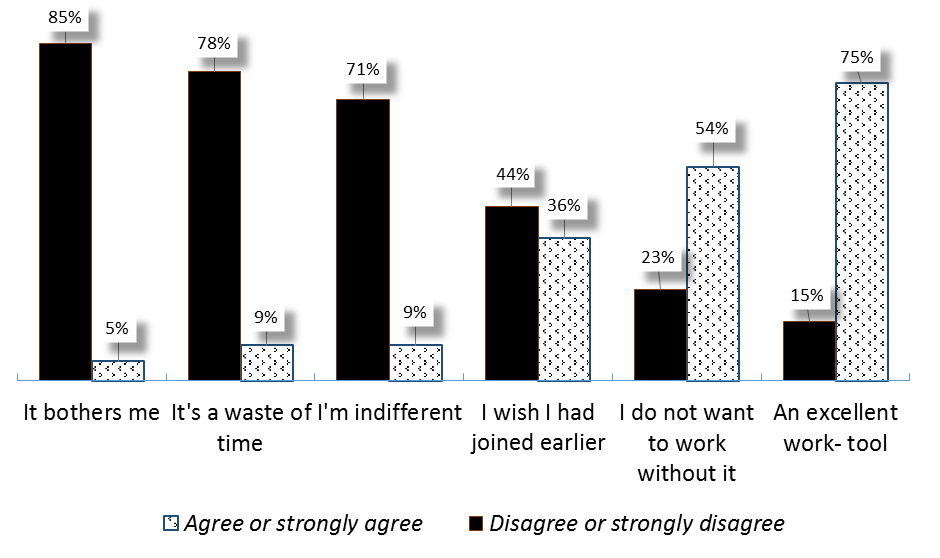
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Figure 1: Journalists’ perspectives on their use of Twitter

*4.4 Twitter’s presumed influence on the journalistic arena*

When asked to evaluate Twitter’s influence on their work (See Figure 2), half of the respondents state that Twitter plays a vital role in determining the media’s agenda; only 7% claim that Twitter is irrelevant in this regard. Likewise, 51% say that the atmosphere on Twitter influences news staff, and 56% believe that Twitter is intended for, and directed at, the journalistic community. Using a Likert scale, six statements were used to form an index of the presumed influence of Twitter (Cronbach’s alpha =.75).

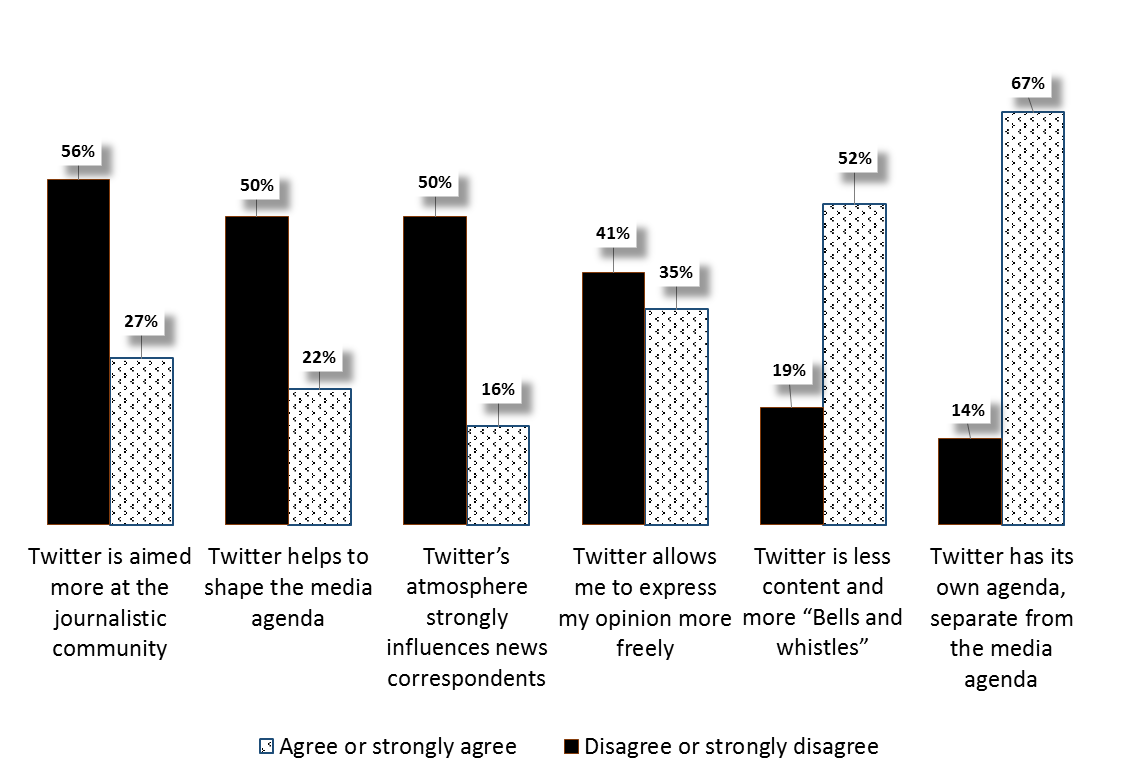


Figure 2: Perspectives on Twitter’s role in journalistic work.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test the hypothesis that the attitude index varied by whether the respondent maintained an active Twitter account. A significant difference (*F* (4, 52) = 2.03, *p* < .05) was found in the positive attitude index. Those at the higher end of the positive attitude index had been active on Twitter for over two years (M = 4.29, SD = .71). Those at the lower end had been active for less than three months (M = 3.5, SD = .44). Therefore, the first hypothesis was confirmed.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test the second hypothesis. The presumed influence index varied according to when the respondent had held an active Twitter account. A significant difference (*F* (4, 51) = 3.088, *p* < .05) was found in the presumed influence index. Those at the higher end of the presumed influence index had been active on Twitter for over two years (M = 3.56, SD = .56), and those at the lower end had been active for less than three months (M = 3.0, SD = .47). Thus, the second hypothesis was confirmed.

We found no significant relationships between the respondents’ seniority levels (years as a media professional) and other characteristics relating to their work, education level, or gender.

**5 Qualitative analysis**

The analysis of the responses to the open questions on the questionnaire revealed seven primary reasons for adopting Twitter: (1) curiosity, (2) encouragement and pressure from within the system, (3) the potential for receiving quick updates and expanding one’s range of sources, (4) the desire to present a unique voice to colleagues, communities, and actors relevant to one’s field, (5) the desire to reach new audiences, (6) the desire to “not be left behind” and (7) the possibility of quickly and effectively “staking out territory”. Let us elaborate on these with a few examples:

(1) **Curiosity**.

Most respondents mentioned being attracted to Twitter as a medium because it was new and intriguing. For example, one correspondent argued that he had adopted Twitter due to “my curiosity and investigative observation of the discourse in digital media”. Another correspondent noted that he had noticed that “other friends used it, and it intrigued me”. Another journalist described her motivation for adopting Twitter as “Curiosity to find out about the said medium that was not so popular in Israel in its time not among journalists in Israel, but it has gathered momentum in the world.”

(2) **Encouragement and pressure from within the system.**

In the spirit of Bruns and Burgess (2012), Swasy (2016), and others who endorsed Twitter’s importance for news organisations, many survey participants noted that internal pressure and encouragement were part of their reasons for adopting Twitter. As one correspondent wrote: “Recently, the system has opened to everyone, and Twitter has become a necessity.” Another journalist joined Twitter due to a request from the news desk, and a third because of “pressure from colleagues, pressure from the digital department”.

(3) **The potential for receiving quick updates and expanding one’s range of sources**.

One of the most prominent reasons for joining Twitter that survey participants mentioned was gaining access to fast updates and expanding their range of sources on a new platform. One journalist explained his reason for adopting Twitter: “Following sources’ round the world. ... The possibility to communicate with them and receive updates in real-time. I became engrossed in Twitter during the Gaza flotilla raid in 2010, during which the activists widely used Twitter as part of their activities. So Twitter became an important source of information.” Another journalist noted: “The nuclear talks between Iran and the world powers—most of the updates come from Twitter. After that, I understood that the worlds of ‘breaking news’ and of journalism are primarily there.” Finally, a senior news editor provided a unique viewpoint: “When I began as a night news editor, I needed ‘fillers’—supplementary stories that ‘fill’ the world when nothing is happening here. So I opened Twitter to be updated on the ‘tweets’ from foreign media sources. Then I discovered how dominant Twitter activity is for our correspondents.” This finding aligns with similar studies in the field (i.e., Hermida 2010; Hermida et al., 2014; Swasy, 2016; Usher et al., 2018), though wartime circumstances may alter these tendencies, as described by Tenenboim (2017).

(4) **The desire to present a unique voice to colleagues, communities, and actors relevant to one’s field.**

Due to ethical, professional, and other limitations, most news correspondents cannot express their opinions as part of their news coverage. Twitter gives them a platform to make their voices heard, particularly to entities that are valued and relevant to their work. As one of the news correspondents wrote in response to the question about their motivation for adopting Twitter: “The wish to write my opinion regarding certain issues (in brief) and humorously and freely.” Another journalist notes that “you can say things in Twitter that you did not say when broadcasting or convey a little of what lies behind the scenes. The public likes what lies behind the scenes.” Comparing patterns of Twitter usage among Israeli and international correspondents during the 2014 Gaza war, Tenenboim (2017) found that Israeli journalists who wished to promote critical voices in the middle of the patriotic wartime atmosphere did so in a sophisticated way by retweeting others instead of tweeting their own opinions.

(5) **The desire to reach new audiences**.

Another primary factor for choosing Twitter as a work tool and a new sphere of activity was journalists’ desire to reach audiences that they would not previously have considered consumers of news. For example, a veteran journalist noted: “I began following colleagues in my field of coverage and saw that I could contribute information and increase the dissemination of my sector, particularly to a focused community.” Another noted, “the wish to open up to new, younger, communities that use social media on the Internet and do not listen to Reshet Bet [radio station]”. Swasy (2016) noted that the new potential audiences found on Twitter - on a global level - were among the main explanations for the overwhelming adoption of this new journalistic work tool. Enli and Simonsen (2018) found similar findings in a recent study.

(6) **The desire to “not be left behind”.**

This desire is one of the key factors noted by respondents. As soon as Twitter became a significant platform for journalists, even those who were not early adopters understood that staying away from Twitter might cost them personally and professionally. One media professional admitted that what had led him to join Twitter was “the understanding that this is the future, and I need to be in several areas”. Another journalist noted that he wanted “to be relevant. The news begins on Twitter.” A third revealed “understanding that there is an active arena here that it is worth being part of... [It is] a valuable tool, and I did not want to remain behind.”

(7) **Effectively “staking out territory”.**

For respondents, this means making good use of the speed by which new information spreads to new communities on Twitter to ensure that scoops and other journalistic achievements are attributed to those responsible for them. One journalist called this “the ability to be updated about events in real-time and be the first to bring the content”.

**6 Discussion**

Park (2012) suggested that dissemination and adoption models should be examined in an integral manner to predict the use of technology in general and Twitter in particular. Park’s primary finding was that the decisive factor for using Twitter is a subjective evaluation. The primary factor inhibiting use of Twitter is its lack of compatibility. Following Park’s ideas, the impressive adoption rates of Twitter among news professionals worldwide hint that we can attach decisive importance to people’s subjective evaluation of Twitter as a technological tool during its adoption, and even more so among a small group of Israeli journalists. Roger’s (2003) list of preconditions to the successful adoption of innovations may offer another important clue: Twitter’s unique characteristics strongly comply with journalistic practices and norms. Journalists can use Twitter as a work tool and expect that Twitter will help them improve their work performance. In this sense, we can argue that Israeli journalists’ perceptions of Twitter as a work tool and their usage patterns show that this group of news professionals is no exception to the global (and mostly Western) trend.

Based on the findings of this study, we argue that Twitter’s adoption as a journalistic work tool and a space for new journalistic activity in Israel is comprehensive and carries deep significance for local news professionals. Moreover, in line with survey findings on the various aspects of the Internet’s adoption as a journalistic work tool published over a decade ago (Author, 2005), the current study determined that respondents’ perception of Twitter’s potential as a new work tool was influenced by how long it they had been using the platform. In any case, Twitter has perceptible influence on the journalistic sphere.

The current study is based on a sample of volunteers who are not necessarily representative of all Israeli news professionals who use Twitter. While our attempt to reach senior media people in Israel with a Twitter account was successful, we must avoid overly general conclusions. We must also note that this study examines subjective evaluations of use of a technological tool. We asked our respondents to reflect on their own decisions, the goals they set for themselves, and their functioning as media professionals. It stands to reason that the answers they provided were subjective and influenced by a range of factors connected with how the self and the professional intersect. This is part of the reason why we included open-ended questions that could result in information that added depth to purely quantitative data. It is important to note that both Twitter as a platform and Twitter’s relationship with media organisations are dynamic. For example, an organisation may make a strategic decision to encourage or obligate its employees to use Twitter in pursuit of its goals. The level of exposure that tweets get in mass media outlets can temporarily or permanently affect people’s attitudes toward Twitter and the importance media professionals ascribe to it. Therefore, the current study findings must be examined in their context. Future studies should further investigate Twitter’s role as a journalistic tool and the range of ways it may impact the work of news professionals. In the Israeli context, future studies should aim to better understand the differences between Twitter’s centrality among specific groups and its limited use among the general population, especially compared with other social networking sites.

Research on Twitter as a journalistic work tool and a journalistic sphere in the Western world has flourished in recent years. However, the topic has rarely been studied in the Israeli context. The current study demonstrates Twitter’s central and distinctive role among Israeli news professionals, contributing significantly to our understanding of Twitter as a global phenomenon.

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