

**“The Word On The Tweets”:**

**An investigation of the relationship between professional media’s portrayal and public perception of Indigenous homelessness**

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## **Abstract**

The Indigenous peoples of Canada are disproportionately represented in the Canadian homeless population. One in fifteen Indigenous peoples lack stable housing major urban areas, a rate eight times higher than non-Indigenous individuals (Head, 2019). Yet, these statistics either remain unknown or are mere numbers to the general public, which may never have the chance to converse with or even encounter an Indigenous homeless individual in their day-to-day lives. For this reason, professional media hold the power to influence narratives about the Indigenous homeless population. In other words, the media plays a crucial role in impacting the public's perception of these communities in need. The collective consensus regarding the Indigenous homeless community greatly dictates their social realities by influencing civic actions such as voting and donations. Yet, reports regarding the Indigenous homeless community's portrayal within professional media and how that affects general public perception is lacking. This study aims to address this research gap by systematically coding and analyzing a total of 500 newspaper articles and tweets between 2017 and 2021. Using the software program NVivo, frequently mentioned themes in each source were coded as either being positive, negative, or neutral. The frequency of themes in newspaper articles and tweets were then analyzed to identify whether there was any correlation between themes discussed in the newspaper articles and discussed on twitter. The study hypothesized that Indigenous homelessness would be negatively discussed in professional media due to the structural barriers built upon the existing judicial and social systems, and that professional media would strongly impact public perception on Indigenous homelessness. However, these hypotheses are disproved as the results of this data set concludes that Indigenous homelessness is mainly positively addressed in both professional and social media. Professional media is also shown to either insignificantly or inconsistently influences public perception on Indigenous homelessness.

## Introduction

Canadians value their personal rights, freedom, and independence from financial restraint (Exploring Canadian values, 2016). For this reason, it is unsurprising to see negative sentiments expressed about homeless populations that many see as a financial drain on society and a setback to taxpayers. For example, a tweet from a Twitter user in 2020 stated: “I feel like a lot of homeless people are lazy and content... I’m not busting my a\*s so you can stand on the corner begging me for what I got” (Twitter Post by Ko K., 2020). Without an unbiased and empathetic portrayal accessible to the general public from professional media, the homeless population is often presumed to possess or lack qualities that explains their “deserved” state. In a study done by Phelen et. al (1997), for example, they found that those who most severely stigmatize the homeless population tend to frame individual failure as the reason for their predicament. It is crucial that we understand where the personal sentiments of the general public come from given that their information, or lack thereof, shapes their beliefs. More specifically for the purposes of this study, we need to understand whether mainstream media affects the personal perceptions of individual Canadians when it comes to the homeless population.

Professional media acts as a socializing agent. The perceptions the media spreads creates shared ideologies within communities, ultimately manifesting into collective actions that sustain or change social realities. Studies find that a hostile public perception of homelessness is nurtured by derogatory language used by politicians, the public, and the media (Speak & Tipple, 2006). The conversation around homeless perceptions and the media is particularly salient for racial relations in Canada. For example, First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples comprised 20-50% of Canada’s homeless population in major urban areas in 2019 (Head, 2019). Thus, when we discuss issues of homeless representation, it is an issue that affects the Indigenous people of Canada disproportionately compared to other groups in Canada due to the historical marginalization and persecution of Indigenous communities.

The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015) pledged to support Indigenous peoples in reclaiming their Indigenous spirituality, healing and sense of identity, which the government admits, had historically been taken from them along with their land. However, six years after this statement, the 2021 Focus Canada survey suggests that only 5% of Canadians mentioned “the need for reconciliation or more support for the Indigenous Peoples” as their immediate thought when asked about Canada’s Indigenous Peoples (Canadian public opinion about Indigenous Peoples and reconciliation, 2021). Such imagery of this group creates a discrepancy between the ways the Canadian government aims to assist in rebuilding the Indigenous identity and the social reality that is perceived by the general public. On the other hand, positive narratives describing Indigenous homelessness purported by the news can influence personal preferences for donating, voting to impact policy, or simply exercising empathy towards this community.

Emerging Canadian literature has begun to trace and understand the relationship between homelessness and structural factors outside an individual’s control (Thistle, 2017). For example, shifting the blame for Indigenous homelessness from individual failure to Canada’s colonial history and intergenerational trauma tied to, forceful displacement, forced assimilation, and the

stripping of Indigenous peoples of their homeland. For example, Beaulieu and Stewart (2014) recognize how the removal of Indigenous children from their homes during the recently abolished residential school system and “Sixties Scoop” eras contributes to homelessness in a cultural, communal and spiritual sense. Further, the current Canadian legal and judicial regulations are built by settlers, and fail to encompass Indigenous rights and identity as part of the national fabric (Christian Aboriginal Infrastructure Developments). The term, “Indigenous homelessness” itself, thus, carries a complex weight of Canadian history and a call for permanently dismantling structural barriers contributing to the housing struggles and mental disbelonging of Indigenous peoples in their homeland.

The Environics Institute’s 2016 national survey on non-Indigenous Canadians attitude toward Indigenous peoples found that 36% of their knowledge on Indigenous peoples is obtained from newspapers (Canadian Public Opinion on Aboriginal Peoples, 2016). Despite the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples among the homeless population in Canada, “[h]omelessness remains one of the most misunderstood and least documented social policy issues of our time.” (Ralph Nunez & Cybelle Fox, 1999). There has been a lack of literature that reports Canadian professional media’s portrayal and its effect or lack thereof on public ideologies about this social issue. The lack of existing texts, as well as the historically and structurally founded urgency contribute to the following research questions as the foundation of this study.

#### **Research Question 1:**

How is Indigenous homelessness being discussed by professional media, through newspaper articles and in social media, through Twitter? More specifically: what is the tone being used (positive, neutral or negative) and what are the topics Indigenous homelessness is being associated with?

#### **Research Question 2:**

Is there a correlation between professional media’s portrayal of Indigenous homelessness and public perception as expressed on the social media platform Twitter?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Creating Narratives on Homelessness:**

Research suggests that issues are not inherently perceived to be problematic, but are instead socially constructed by a collective definition (Hrast, 2008). Social narratives substantially impact an individual’s senses of self and their outward projection towards society as a whole, in which biases can worsen existing social issues. For example, a qualitative study conducted with 27 homeless individuals under the shelter system found that many of the participants feel a devalued sense of self, with senses of alienation and isolation (Boydell et al., 2000). The same study also demonstrates how the stigmatization faced by the homeless community manifests into barriers that impede homeless individuals’ ability to overcome substance addictions and abuse. Thus, the first step to create solutions to homelessness is by understanding the way it is being framed — a narrative that would convince the general public and institutions to cooperatively foster a more comprehensive approach to the issue (Jacob et al., 2003). The question comes to:

do narratives actually construct social problems? What kind of narratives are circulating about homelessness?

### **Professional Media: A Tool to Shape Reality?**

#### *The Media and Public Perception*

As the world grows increasingly connected, yet somehow ever so polarized through the development of technology, the media holds the power to frame, assimilate, and structure information about social problems now, more than ever. Hence, the news acts both as an information source and reflective agent of public interests (Wahl et. al, 2002). A study by Iyengar and Kinder (2010) indicates that depending on the cultural and financial background and needs of certain communities, information on news sources often circulate around “echo chambers”. This phenomena may become dangerously blindsiding unless individuals consciously seek out opinions opposing the main sources of news they consume. Thus, it is extremely important to understand what is being reported in the media as it holds leverage to mobilize public support for solutions and policy making.

#### *The Media and Policy Impacts*

Although there has been a lack of research specific to the media portrayal of homelessness and policy impacts, a study in the United States examined the relationship between news sources from TV media and political participation using structural equation modeling (SEM) (Joˆreskog, 1993). The study concluded that media bias plays different roles in different contexts, but confirmed a certain extent of political influence enforced by the media. Despite the obvious differing political, social and cultural climates between the United States and Canada, these results serve as a reference in solidifying the question: does the media shape political outcomes in a democracy? Although there has been no definite answer to this query, the influence of public opinion in a democratic social system all the more pushes the importance to study the relationship between media and public perception.

### **Indigenous Homelessness in Academic Literature**

Indigenous homelessness, specifically in Canada, has mainly been studied with the goal of understanding the unique circumstances surrounding Canada's Colonial history. Christensen (2017) challenges the singular definition of homeless, especially in the context of Indigeneity, as the word “home” itself evokes emotions and sentiments that makes it impossible to merely conceptualize “homelessness” as the state of not being sheltered. Many of the problems society often associates Indigenous communities with, such as substance abuse, often finds roots in their disconnect from their desire to feel a sense of belonging (Stewart, 2016). Through connecting with their land spiritually and culturally, Indigenous communities establish meaning and identity. Yet, this way of living has been stripped from them, often leading to street life and perpetual cycles of poverty. In Canadian academia, there has been a literature gap on the effects of media

portrayal on Indigenous homelessness. Based on the review of limited literature on the topic of Indigenous homelessness, this study is developed based on the following hypotheses:

### **Hypothesis 1:**

Indigenous homelessness is negatively addressed in professional media through newspaper articles due to the structural barriers built upon the existing judicial and social systems, which further perpetuates negative stereotypes of this community.

### **Hypothesis 2:**

Professional media strongly impacts public perception on Indigenous homelessness, which will be reflected on Twitter (i.e., similar themes will be discussed in newspaper articles and tweets).

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study consists of professional and social media content analysis. The content analysis was focussed on contributing factors of Indigenous homelessness in its historical, political, social, and urban contexts. The collection of newspaper articles was sourced from the database, ProQuest, while tweets were directly sourced from Twitter. The search terms of “Indigenous OR Aboriginal OR First Nations AND Homelessness” are applied for newspaper article collection while the hashtags #IndigenousHomelessness and #AboriginalHomelessness were used to search Twitter. The use of tweets to access public opinion was previously done in a study by Cohen (2020) who argued that Tweets are an imperfect substitute to well-collected polling data and surveys. The use of twitter data in this study is adopted due to the time and financial constraints imposed by a 8-week timeline and the single-researcher-led nature of the study. NVivo was used to code dates and common themes in the depictions of the homeless community within both the newspaper articles and the tweets.. The application of content analysis in this study applies both quantitative and qualitative procedures. The categorization of themes and interpretation of such being positive, negative and neutral are subjective but through critical analysis of the emotional and rational responses elicited in the context of which each theme is described in.

### **Sample**

Newspaper articles were sourced from 12 Canadian news publishers in the time frame of 2017-2021. This is a Canadian nationwide study, not restricted to any specific region, so newspaper publishers were inclusive of newspaper publishers located across Canada. These newspaper sources were chosen based on their highest total number of total published articles in comparison to other sources. Chosen newspaper sources include *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *The Winnipeg Sun*, *The Brandon Sun*, *Calgary Herald*, *Edmonton Sun*, *Edmonton Journal*, *Vancouver Courier*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Times - Colonist*, *The Winnipeg Free Press*, and the *Waterloo Region Record*. A total of 250 newspaper articles and 250 tweets are included and analyzed in this study.

## Coding System

The development of the coding framework took reference from Chen and Lawries' (2021) *Newspaper depiction of mental and physical health* and Richter et al. (2011)'s *Homelessness Coverage in Major Canadian Newspapers, 1987-2007*. The former provides insights for the categorization of positive, negative and neutral themes in the assessment of the sentiment newspaper articles are written in. In particular, the impacts of phrases focussing on physical and mental health are categorized according to the associations that would elicit various emotional responses from readers. Instances suggested in the study include vocabulary such as "cure" that would be categorized as positive, "death" as negative and "trial drug" as neutral. Richter et. al's organization of sub themes also informs the categorization of certain phrases under the main themes, such as "housing-related issues", "economic factors", "illegal activity", and so on.

The categorization of keywords or phrases that would fit into this coding system is also determined based on the context of which they are described. However, the assumption that a newspaper article or tweet would only consist of one of the three themes does not stand as a newspaper article or tweet may simultaneously contain a positive and negative theme. Moreover, the time and resources this study possesses does not have multiple researchers discerning whether a newspaper article or tweet should fall under the positive or neutral category in the case of it having 2 positive themes and 2 neutral themes. Hence, the number of themes would be calculated relative to the total of positive, neutral and negative themes per year and per the total articles between 2017-2021. These percentages are the primary agents of data analysis.

Positive themes in this study are categorized by their emphasizing a structural or sociological approach to the issue of Indigenous homelessness. In other words, positive themes are those that elicit affirmative perceptions of Indigenous homelessness as a complex issue with a tremendous amount of historical and structural reasons behind it, and it should not be defined by the simple explanation of individual responsibility. Neutral themes include general causes of and information about Indigenous homelessness that the public would benefit from knowing. Lastly, negative themes include events and social phenomena that would lead the readers to associate the Indigenous homeless population to that are generally labelled as criminal-like or unwanted, which would generate significantly negative emotions such as anger and disgust, found by a study by Park (2015). This coding system is more elaborately demonstrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Coding system for newspaper articles and tweets**

Tone	Source	Date	Theme	Description
Positive	<i>A 'forward focused' look at indigenous homelessness</i> Author: Theobald, Claire Publisher: Edmonton Sun	03/30/2017	Calls For Government Action	"Just as government has played a role in creating dispiriting policies that effectively destroyed

				indigenous culture, Thistle said there is room for government to support indigenous communities in rebuilding.”
Neutral	<i>Wintry weather puts chill on homeless shelters; Numbers of destitute needing a place to sleep climbs as the temperature drops</i> Author: Bill Kaufmann Publisher: Calgary Herald	11/09/2017	Shelters	“Staff at Canada's largest homeless shelter are assembling kits to ward off frostbite, as the return of colder weather brings a rise in shelter use in the city.”
Negative	<i>Homeless 'pinch' hits women in Fraser Valley</i> Author: Nick England Publisher: The Province	10/05/2017	Addiction	“A high proportion of homeless women live in the Fraser Valley and resource workers in the region say there is a dire need for affordable and supportive housing for those fleeing abuse with their children or struggling with addiction.”
Positive	Twitter Author: David Rider Username: @dmrider	12/06/2017	Colonization and Residential Schools Impact	“Shaking Off the #Colonial Inheritance: #Homeless #Indigenous #Youth Resist, Reclaim and Reconnect, @homelesshub : <a href="http://ow.ly/k8w230cMajM">http://ow.ly/k8w230cMajM</a> ”
Neutral	Twitter Author: Jane George Username: @sikugirl	05/26/2020	Covid-19	“#Montreal's reopening increases #COVID19 risks for homeless, says #Indigenous coalition   Nunatsiaq News”

Negative	Twitter Author: LJP Username: @LJP4abetterOz	12/31/2020	Poverty	“Not to mention the cutting of #jobseeker to below the poverty line, the number of #homeless, state of #INDIGENOUS people and the #jobless all leading to issues of #publichealth.”
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## Findings

As seen in Table 2, the tone of newspapers on homelessness in Canada are mainly positive. More specifically, positive themes comprised 46.4% of the total themes among all articles from 2017-2021 compared to negative themes, which comprised 18.9% of the total themes, and neutral themes, which comprised 34.7% of the total themes. When assessing how the tone of articles has changed over time, however, we notice a 9.1% decrease in positive themes in articles between 2017 (50.9%) and 2021 (41.8%). This 9% decrease in positive themes was driven by a 10.7% increase in neutral themes (from 27.1% in 2017 to 37.7% in 2021) and a 1.5% increase in negative themes over the same period (from 22.0% in 2017 to 20.5% in 2021).

**Table 2: Tone of Articles over time (number of themes in each category)**

Tone	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Row Total
Positive	109 <sup>1</sup> (50.9%) <sup>2</sup>	136 (50.0%)	116 (42.3%)	135 (46.8%)	92 (41.8%)	588 (46.4%)
Neutral	58 (27.1%)	89 (32.7%)	92 (33.6%)	118 (41.0%)	83 (37.7%)	440 (34.7%)
Negative	47 (22.0%)	47 (17.3%)	66 (24.1%)	35 (12.2%)	45 (20.5%)	240 (18.9%)
Total	214 <sup>3</sup> (100%)	272 (100%)	274 (100%)	288 (100%)	220 (100%)	1268 (100%)

*Goal: What is the distribution of positive, neutral, and negative themes in newspapers. How has that changed over time.*

<sup>1</sup> Number of positive themes mentioned in newspaper articles in 2017

<sup>2</sup> Percentage of positive themes relative to the total of all positive, negative and neutral themes mentioned in newspaper articles in 2017

<sup>3</sup> Total of positive, negative and neutral themes found in newspaper articles in 2017

Moreover, the tone of newspaper articles move away from positive between 2017 to 2019: we see a 8.6% decrease in positive themes, a 6.5% increase in neutral themes and a 2.1% increase in negative themes. However, the data suggests that COVID stalled the trend with a significant increase in neutral themes: we see a 7.4% increase between 2019 and 2020, which contributes to an overall increase of 13.9% between 2017 and 2021. Negative themes also dropped by 11.9% from 2019 to 2020 while a slight (4.5%) increase is seen in this time period. By 2021, the trend’s prior course is continued, as positively themed articles fell back to 41.8%, closer to the 42.3% seen in 2019, neutral themes fell by 3.3% to 37.7% in 2021, negative themes rose up to 20.5%, closer to the 20% range in 2019.

These trends are explained by a significant increase of “Covid-19” related themes that are categorized under neutral. As publishers and journalists of newspaper sources witness while reporting the ways Covid-19 impacted Indigenous homelessness in 2020, it could be due to heightened “journalist empathy” (Sillesen et al., 2015) that they would shift focus on reporting ways Indigenous homelessness can be and have been supported, which explains the increase in positive themes, such as “call for government action”, while negative themes such as “prisons” would be less of a concern in these years, leading to specifically decreased negative themes.

**Table 3a: Positive themes mentioned in newspaper articles over time (Ranked from most to least., referring to how many articles mention them.)**

Positive Themes	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Call for Government Actions	22	10	11	13	9	<b>65</b>
Humanizing Indigenous Stories	7	17	16	23	1	<b>54</b>
Quotes Supporting Indigenous Homelessness	16	8	3	13	11	<b>51</b>
Federal Budget	6	15	8	5	7	<b>41</b>
Past Government Injustices	15	4	3	7	10	<b>39</b>
Government Pledge	4	10	8	9	7	<b>38</b>
Debunking Racism <sup>4</sup>	5	7	8	13	1	<b>33</b>
Reconciliation	6	3	9	5	7	<b>26</b>
Addressing Racism <sup>5</sup>	5	5	6	9	1	<b>26</b>
Victim	4	4	7	4	2	<b>25</b>

<sup>4</sup> The theme “Debunking Racism” include **explanations** of how racism contributes to worsened Indigenous homelessness as well as the perception of such

<sup>5</sup> The theme “Addressing Racism” includes **descriptions** of racist events and actions that would worsen Indigenous homelessness as well as the perception of such

Work done by Government	5	3	3	5	8	<b>24</b>
Efforts Supporting Issue	0	13	2	3	6	<b>24</b>
Colonization and Residential Schools Impact	4	3	5	4	5	<b>21</b>
Addressing Systemic Issues	0	6	0	4	0	<b>20</b>
Barrier Breaking Descriptions	3	3	3	2	4	<b>15</b>
Humanizing Descriptions	2	5	3	4	0	<b>14</b>
Federal Investment	2	5	2	1	4	<b>14</b>
Anti Stereotypes	0	3	3	5	3	<b>14</b>
Call For Policy Changes	1	6	3	1	2	<b>13</b>
Urge For Individual Actions	1	2	3	2	4	<b>12</b>
Discrimination	0	3	5	1	0	<b>9</b>
Collaborative Initiatives between Indigenous and Gov	1	1	2	1	0	<b>5</b>
Indigenous Led Approach	0	0	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
Call for NGO Actions	0	0	1	1	0	<b>2</b>

*Goal: Tables 1a describes the general trends of differently tone, as interpreted by themes in newspaper articles, this is being more specific about what themes in each category (+, -, 0) are being used, whether they are changing over time*

Positive themes mentioned in newspaper articles are mainly comprised of 2 large umbrellas of topics: government related topics and structural causes of Indigenous Homelessness specific to Indigenous peoples.

The theme “Call for Government Actions” was mentioned in 65 articles from 2017 to 2021, ranking first among all positive themes. This theme, along with other government related themes, including “Federal Budget”, “Government Pledge”, “Work Done By Government”, “Federal Investment”, “Call for Policy Changes” and “Collaborative Initiatives between Indigenous and Government”, are mentioned in a total of 200 articles. These themes mainly address Indigenous homelessness in relation to the government, implying a heavy role of responsibility held by the government in aiding this issue. More specifically, the majority of these themes are related to financial decisions made by the government such as the distribution of tax dollars. Much of the government’s role is to reconsider the ways Indigenous homelessness, or broadly, Indigenous communities are funded. A possible explanation could be the expectation that the Canadian

Liberal Party, which had been in power in the 2017 to 2021 time frame would make efficient use of its progressive tax system (Making Sure Everyone Pays Their Fair Share, 2022) in supporting social issues in urgent need in Canada.

On the other hand, themes reporting structural causes of Indigenous Homelessness specifically to the history of Indigenous peoples include “Humanizing Indigenous Stories”, “Quotes Supporting Indigenous Homelessness”, “Past Government Injustices”, “Debunking Racism”, “Reconciliation”, “Addressing Racism”, “Colonization and Residential Schools Impact”, “Addressing Systemic Issues”, “Barrier Breaking Descriptions”. “Anti Stereotypes”, “Discrimination” and “Indigenous Led Approaches”. These 12 themes were mentioned in 349 newspaper articles between 2017 and 2021. These themes emphasize Indigenous homelessness as a structural issue, with many social systems that perpetuate the disadvantages of historically drawn back communities. The large proportion of these themes indicate Professional Media’s emphasis on creating a more empathetic approach towards understanding the unique issue of Indigenous homelessness, which bridges the gap of misunderstanding between the general public and the Indigenous homeless and, more generally, Indigenous communities as a whole. As Jacobs (2021), a United Nations worker specializing in initiatives with Indigenous women emphasizes, "Racism is just a lack of education"; these themes serve as a source of education, for which a deeper dive into the alternate reasons of Indigenous homelessness that may not come first to the mind for the general public are explored.

The third category of positive themes include general attempts to humanize Indigenous homelessness, but not as specific to the historical and structural causes of such. For instance, “Victim”, which appeared in 25 newspaper articles, and “Humanizing Descriptions”, which was mentioned in 14 articles between 2017 and 2021.

The last category include the relationship between Indigenous homelessness and public responsibility. These themes include “Efforts Supporting Issue”, which discusses Individual and NGO actions that spoke up or acted upon bettering the Indigenous homeless situation, appearing in 25 articles between 2017 and 2021. Other themes include “Urge for Individual Actions”, mentioned in 12 articles and “Call for NGO Actions”, mentioned in 2 articles between 2017-2021. These themes both create a space for which individuals are encouraged to think about Indigenous homelessness not as an out of reach social issue, but rather as something that they can contribute to supporting, whether if it means from a distance or directly through volunteering.

**Table 3b: Neutral themes mentioned in newspaper articles over time (Rank, from most to least. Referring to how many articles mention them.**

Neutral Themes	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Shelters	22	12	18	20	24	94
Pointing out that Indigenous are Overrepresented Among Poor and Homeless	11	13	9	22	5	60

Addressing Indigenous Homelessness Specifically	3	13	11	11	18	<b>56</b>
Mental Health	12	9	12	7	7	<b>47</b>
Housing	4	10	19	9	2	<b>44</b>
COVID-19	0	0	0	25	18	<b>43</b>
Youth	0	12	5	6	2	<b>25</b>
Police	0	13	10	5	0	<b>28</b>
Finance	5	6	2	2	5	<b>20</b>
Public Health	1	1	5	11	2	<b>20</b>
Public Safety	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>

*Goal: Tables 1a describes the general trends of differently tone, as interpreted by themes in newspaper articles, this is being more specific about what themes in each category (+, -, 0) are being used, whether they are changing over time*

Mentioned in 94 articles between 2017 and 2021, the neutral theme, “Shelters” is significantly represented among neutral themes describing Indigenous homelessness. The goal of newspaper journalists here is mainly to inform the public about the conditions of shelters, who stays in shelters, why or why not homeless individuals decide to stay in shelters, as well as what shelters that have an overrepresented Indigenous population are essentially like. These descriptions remain neutral in tone due to them being descriptive, which effectively educates the public on social realities that they may not be exposed to regularly unless consuming news and media reporting related information.

In total, the next category mentioned across 169 articles include “Pointing out that Indigenous are Overrepresented Among Poor and Homeless”, “Addressing Indigenous Homelessness Specifically” (categorized an article addresses normal homelessness, but parts focussing on indigenous specific statistics and facts this sample size does not include newspaper articles that only address homelessness without the keyword Indigenous), “Youth” and “Police”. These themes specifically address groups that are affected by and involved in the issue of Indigenous homelessness. For instance, the proportion of Indigenous peoples among homeless individuals, and the fact that youth significantly comprise a percentage of the Indigenous homeless population. On the other hand, the police, as a force anointed with responsibility to maintain social order is also a group that is directly involved in this issue, leading to reflections such as: are the police trained specifically to cope with Indigenous homelessness?

Further, neutral themes, such as “Mental Health”, “Housing”, “Covid-19” and “Finance” are, in a total, mentioned in 154 articles between 2017 and 2021. These themes speak to the potential causes of Indigenous homelessness that are generally motivated by unexpected social events or social climate specifically to different the state of the world. Specifically, we see a spike of

“Covid-19” in 2020, from 0 to being mentioned in 25 articles in 2020 and 18 articles in 2021. This is due to the obvious beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, and journalists mentioning Indigenous homelessness in the context of this urgent and impactful time.

Lastly, “Public Health” and “Public Safety” are, in total, mentioned in 21 articles between 2017 and 2021. These themes describe Indigenous homelessness as a “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968). They serve to remind readers that Indigenous homelessness is an issue with far-reaching impact that could be experienced by anyone in the general public. For instance, the increased homeless rate is often shown to be positively correlated with likelihood of victimization (Roebuck, 2018). In addition, not only are Indigenous homeless individuals especially at risk for Covid-19 infections, the fact that this virus is highly transmittable indicates that the spread of virus within this population does not necessarily stop within this borderless community who are unable to “stay home” (Population At-Risk, 2020).

**Table 3c: Negative themes mentioned in newspaper article over time (Rank, from most to least. Referring to how many articles mention them.**

Negative Themes	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Addiction	13	10	12	6	13	<b>54</b>
Substances	8	8	13	12	9	<b>50</b>
Poverty	13	4	9	2	3	<b>31</b>
Violence	7	5	8	7	11	<b>30</b>
Murder	1	4	7	1	4	<b>17</b>
Prison	0	3	8	3	0	<b>14</b>
Mental Illness	3	4	3	1	0	<b>11</b>
Welfare	0	5	2	0	3	<b>10</b>
Death	1	0	4	3	1	<b>9</b>
Unemployment	1	4	0	0	1	<b>6</b>

*Goal: Tables 1a and 1b are general trends, this is being more specific about what themes in each category (+, -, 0) are being used, whether they are changing over time*

### ***Discussion***

Negative themes mentioned in newspaper articles between 2017 and 2021 can mainly be grouped into 2 categories: potential consequences of Indigenous homelessness that would be labelled as socially unacceptable and unwanted, which would elicit negative emotions being one, and what people may perceive as the negative causes of Indigenous homelessness that are generally rooted in biases.

Negative themes such as “Addiction”, “Substances”, “Violence”, “Mental Illness” and “Unemployment” are common keywords that may appear in the media, associated with Indigenous homelessness and other socially undesirable states of being. They are often provided as some of the general causes of Indigenous homelessness. These mentions often associate the subject of discussion, in this case, Indigenous homelessness with feelings of alienation and disgust. These themes are mentioned across 151 articles in total between 2017 and 2021.

“Poverty”, “Murder”, “Prison”, “Welfare” and “Death”, on the other hand, are mentioned in 81 articles in total between 2017 and 2019. As this category of negative themes mainly discuss the consequences of Indigenous homelessness. They would unsurprisingly elicit negative reactions or negative associations from readers as they are reminiscent of criminalization and the association of lacking wealth.

**Table 4: Tone of Articles and tweets over time (number of themes in each category)**

<b>Tone</b>		<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Row Total</b>
<b>Positive</b>	Articles	109 (50.9%)	136 (50.0%)	116 (42.3%)	135 (46.8%)	92 (41.8%)	<b>588</b> <b>(46.4%)</b>
	Tweets	22 (55.0%)	20 (47.6%)	24 (72.7%)	12 (36.4%)	20 (50.0%)	<b>98</b> <b>(52.1%)</b>
<b>Neutral</b>	Articles	58 (27.1%)	89 (32.7%)	92 (33.6%)	118 (41.0%)	83 (37.7%)	<b>440</b> <b>(34.7%)</b>
	Tweets	12 (30.0%)	17 (40.5%)	7 (21.2%)	14 (42.4%)	14 (35.0%)	<b>64</b> <b>(34.0%)</b>
<b>Negative</b>	Articles	47 (22.0%)	47 (17.3%)	66 (24.1%)	35 (12.2%)	35 (20.5%)	<b>240</b> <b>(18.9%)</b>
	Tweets	6 (15%)	5 (11.9%)	2 (6.1%)	7 (21.2%)	6 (15.0%)	<b>26</b> <b>(13.8%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>Articles</b>	<b>214</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>272</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>274</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>288</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>220</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>1268</b> <b>(100%)</b>
	<b>Tweets</b>	<b>40</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>42</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>33</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>33</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>40</b> <b>(100%)</b>	<b>188</b> <b>(100%)</b>

*Goal: What is the distribution of positive, neutral, and negative themes in newspapers and tweets. How has that changed over time. How are these related (if they even are).*

Similar to newspaper articles on Indigenous homelessness in Canada, the tone of tweets is for the most part positive. More specifically, there is a 52.1% of positive themes among all themes in the

total tweets between 2017-2021, 13.8% of negative themes, and 34% of neutral themes. The percentage of positive themes in tweets is 5.7% more than the percentage of positive themes in newspapers, (52.1% in tweets compared to 46.4% in newspapers). The percentage of neutral themes in tweets is marginally less than newspapers by 0.7% (34.0% in tweets compared to 34.7% in newspapers). The percentage of negative themes in tweets is 5.1% less than newspapers (18.9% in newspapers compared to 13.8% in tweets).

Overall, positive themes constitute the majority of the themes in both newspapers (46.4%) and tweets (52.1%); neutral themes make up a secondary percentage in both newspapers (34.7%), and tweets (34.0%); negative themes constitute the least percentage among the total, comprising 20.5% in newspapers and 15.0% in tweets.

From 2018 to 2019, we see a significant 25.1% increase in positive themes mentioned in tweets (47.6% in 2018 to 72.7% in 2019). A possible explanation could be Scheer's defeat in the 2019 Canadian Federal Elections. Conservative voters could have been fatigued from this result and taken a backseat, where as liberal voters, voting for Trudeau's 2019 Liberal Campaign's more progressive tax system were in full force celebrating this victory. Thus, the substantial increase of positive themes in 2019 is most likely reflective of the large portion of positive themes focussing on the government's financial role on this issue.

In 2020, the percentages of neutral themes in both newspaper articles and tweets rise to a very similar percentage (41.0% for newspaper articles and 42.4% for tweets) and the trend continuing throughout 2021, when neutral themes dropped in both newspaper articles and tweets, (37.7% for newspaper articles and 35.0% for tweets). The percentage of neutral themes in both newspaper articles and tweets may be an indicator that the Covid-19 pandemic was an urgent issue to both newspaper journalists and publishers as well as the general public who may or may not be consuming media from newspaper articles, as both of these parties are living through the pandemic with feelings of uncertainty and fear.

Yet, we see a drop of 11.9% in negative themes for newspaper articles from 2019 to 2020, versus a 15.1% increase in negative themes for tweets in the time period. There is also a significant shift in positive themes in tweets, which dropped 36.3% from 2019 to 2020 (72.7% in 2019 and 36.4% in 2020). Conversely, newspaper articles have a mild (4.5%) increase in positive themes from 2019 to 2020. A possible explanation would confirm the assumption that twitter users may not be consuming newspaper articles. While they may be adopting a scarcity mentality, they freely express their feelings on social media, perhaps anger and frustration towards the government's increased financial support towards Indigenous homelessness instead of them, who may also be experiencing unemployment and other crises during this difficult time. On the other hand, newspaper journalists may be observing the challenges experienced by the Indigenous homeless community first hand as they are reporting, which would lead to them leaning towards positive rather than negative descriptions. Thus, this would suggest that hypothesis 2 is spurious, as a causal relationship between newspaper articles and tweets is not suggested by this data set.

**Table 5a: Positive themes mentioned in newspaper articles and tweets over time (Rank, from most to least. Referring to how many articles/tweets mention them, not including how many times mentioned within article/tweet.)**

<b>Positive Themes</b>		<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Total</b>
Call for Government Actions	Articles	22	10	11	13	9	<b>65</b>
	Tweets	1	2	1	0	1	<b>5</b>
Humanizing Indigenous Stories	Articles	7	17	16	23	1	<b>54</b>
	Tweets	5	4	5	4	2	<b>20</b>
Quotes Supporting Indigenous Homelessness	Articles	16	8	3	13	11	<b>51</b>
	Tweets	1	1	2	1	2	<b>7</b>
Federal Budget	Articles	6	15	8	5	7	<b>41</b>
	Tweets	1	1	0	1	1	<b>4</b>
Past Government Injustices	Articles	15	4	3	7	10	<b>39</b>
	Tweets	0	0	1	0	1	<b>2</b>
Government Pledge	Articles	4	10	8	9	7	<b>38</b>
	Tweets	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Debunking Racism	Articles	5	7	8	13	1	<b>33</b>
	Tweets	0	1	2	1	1	<b>5</b>
Reconciliation	Articles	6	3	9	5	7	<b>26</b>
	Tweets	1	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Addressing Racism	Articles	5	5	6	9	1	<b>26</b>
	Tweets	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>

Victim	Articles	4	4	7	4	2	<b>25</b>
	Tweets	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Work Done by Government	Articles	5	3	3	5	8	<b>24</b>
	Tweets	0	1	0	1	0	<b>2</b>
Efforts Supporting Issue	Articles	0	13	2	3	6	<b>24</b>
	Tweets	3	3	2	0	2	<b>10</b>
Colonization and Residential Schools Impact	Articles	4	3	5	4	5	<b>21</b>
	Tweets	2	0	2	1	1	<b>6</b>
Addressing Systemic Issue	Articles	0	6	0	4	0	<b>20</b>
	Tweets	0	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
Barrier Breaking Descriptions	Articles	3	3	3	2	4	<b>15</b>
	Tweets	1	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Humanizing Descriptions	Articles	2	5	3	4	0	<b>14</b>
	Tweets	3	1	2	0	2	<b>8</b>
Federal Investment	Articles	2	5	2	1	4	<b>14</b>
	Tweets	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Anti Stereotypes	Articles	0	3	3	5	3	<b>14</b>
	Tweets	0	1	0	0	1	<b>2</b>
Call for Policy Changes	Articles	1	6	3	1	2	<b>13</b>
	Tweets	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Urge for Individual Actions	Articles	1	2	3	2	4	<b>12</b>
	Tweets	1	1	0	0	2	<b>4</b>

Discrimination	Articles	0	3	5	1	0	<b>9</b>
	Tweets	1	1	1	1	0	<b>4</b>
Collab Between Indigenous and Gov	Articles	1	1	2	1	0	<b>5</b>
	Tweets	0	0	1	1	0	<b>2</b>
Indigenous Led Approach	Articles	0	0	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
	Tweets	2	1	2	0	1	<b>6</b>
Call for NGO Actions	Articles	0	0	1	1	0	<b>2</b>
	Tweets	0	1	0	0	1	<b>2</b>

The number of positive themes most mentioned in newspaper articles is not reflected in tweets from 2017 to 2021. For instance, although “Call For Government Action” was mentioned a total of 65 times from 2017 to 2021 in newspaper articles, it was only mentioned a total of 5 times in tweets during the same time period. Due to the nature of each tweet being shorter in length compared to newspaper articles, each tweet often includes less themes than a newspaper article. Hence, the same sample size of tweets has a smaller number of themes mentioned in each category, as reflected in the table 4a, 4b and 4c. Due to the smaller number of tweets that mentioned each theme, themes from each category are emphasized if they meet the threshold of being mentioned in 5 tweets.

Positive themes in tweets that reach the threshold of being mentioned in a minimum of 5 tweets include “Humanizing Indigenous Stories”, “Efforts Supporting Issue”, “Humanizing Descriptions” “Quotes Supporting Indigenous Homelessness”, “Colonization and Residential Schools Impact”, “Indigenous Led Approach”, and “Debunking Racism” (the order of mentions is ranked from most to least tweets). These themes emphasize shedding light on allowing an empathetic understanding towards the structural and historical reasons for Indigenous homelessness while fostering an attempt to view each Indigenous individual as a human being of dignity, whether they are in a leadership position, leading their communities towards betterment, or are homeless and in need of support. The numbers of tweets mentioning positive themes, as opposed to newspaper articles, thus, does not reference the government’s role in Indigenous homelessness substantially. Therefore, the data suggests that there is not a causal relationship between positive themes mentioned in newspaper articles and tweets.

**Table 5b: Neutral themes mentioned in newspaper articles and tweets over time (Rank, from most to least. Referring to how many articles/tweets mention them, not including how many times mentioned within article/tweet.)**

Theme		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
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Description of Shelters	Articles	22	12	18	20	24	<b>94</b>
	Tweets	1	2	1	1	1	<b>6</b>
Pointing out that Indigenous are Overrepresented Among Poor and Homeless	Articles	11	13	9	22	5	<b>60</b>
	Tweets	2	3	1	2	1	<b>9</b>
Addressing Indigenous Homelessness Specifically	Articles	3	13	11	11	18	<b>56</b>
	Tweets	2	1	1	2	3	<b>9</b>
Mental Health	Articles	12	9	12	7	7	<b>47</b>
	Tweets	2	2	0	1	2	<b>7</b>
Housing	Articles	4	10	19	9	2	<b>44</b>
	Tweets	3	2	1	2	0	<b>8</b>
COVID-19	Articles	0	0	0	25	18	<b>43</b>
	Tweets	0	0	0	1	2	<b>3</b>
Youth	Articles	0	12	5	6	2	<b>25</b>
	Tweets	1	2	1	1	1	<b>6</b>
Police	Articles	0	13	10	5	0	<b>28</b>
	Tweets	0	4	2	3	1	<b>10</b>
Finances	Articles	5	6	2	2	5	<b>20</b>
	Tweets	0	1	0	0	2	<b>3</b>
Public Health	Articles	1	1	5	11	2	<b>20</b>
	Tweets	1	0	0	1	1	<b>3</b>
Public Safety	Articles	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
	Tweets	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>

*Goal: Tables 3a are general trends, this is being more specific about what themes in each category (+, -, 0) are being used, whether they are changing over time.*

Neutral themes mentioned in Tweets between 2017 and 2021 that meet the threshold of 5 tweets are “Pointing out that the Indigenous populations is “Overrepresented Among Poor and Homeless”, “Addressing Indigenous Homelessness Specifically”, “Police”, “Mental Health”, “Youth” and “Description of Shelters” (the order of mention is ranked from most to least tweets). The ranking of these neutral themes create a specific trend or picture as they did in newspaper articles. There are 3 evident groupings of neutral themes here. The first group that are mentioned in the most tweets are “Pointing out that Indigenous are Overrepresented Among Poor and Homeless” and “Addressing Indigenous Homelessness Specifically”, “Police” and “Youth”, which specifically addresses groups that are affected by and involved in the issue of Indigenous homelessness; this group was mentioned in 34 tweets in total. Secondly, “Housing” and “Mental Health”, which describes the general causes of Indigenous homelessness are mentioned in a total of 15 tweets. Lastly, “Description of Shelters” alone was mentioned in 6 tweets. The neutral themes mentioned most in tweets, although, is not the “Description of Shelters” like it is in newspaper articles, but the ones that reach the threshold of 5 tweets are all themes that are mentioned in the most newspaper articles. Thus, there may be potential influences between newspaper articles’ portrayal of neutral themes about Indigenous homelessness with that of the expression of these tweet publishers, but the current data set is not comprehensive enough to determine this relationship with certainty.

These numbers reflect that Twitter users who tweet regarding Indigenous homelessness are most concerned or expressive about Indigenous homelessness in the larger social context. In other words, these tweets are establishing the understanding that Indigenous homeless individuals are part of a larger group of the homeless population, while there are Indigenous specific issues that have to be addressed. In addition, the fact that Indigenous youth homelessness and the Indigenous homeless community’s interaction with the Police should also be brought to attention by the general public via this social media platform. The second and third grouping of themes also reveal the twitter users who published these tweets wish to inform the general public about their personal knowledge, be it from personal encounter or word of mouth the reasons why this social issue is present as well as the ways some Indigenous homeless individuals are living under the shelter system.

**Table 5c: Negative themes mentioned in newspaper articles and tweets over time (Rank, from most to least. Referring to how many articles/tweets mention them, not including how many times mentioned within article/tweet.)**

Theme		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Addiction	Articles	13	10	12	6	13	<b>54</b>
	Tweets	1	1	0	1	1	<b>4</b>
Substances	Articles	8	8	13	12	9	<b>50</b>

	Tweets	0	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
Poverty	Articles	13	4	9	2	3	<b>31</b>
	Tweets	2	2	1	1	2	<b>8</b>
Violence	Articles	7	5	8	7	11	<b>30</b>
	Tweets	1	1	0	2	0	<b>4</b>
Murder	Articles	1	4	7	1	4	<b>17</b>
	Tweets	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Prison	Articles	0	3	8	3	0	<b>14</b>
	Tweets	1	1	0	2	1	<b>4</b>
Mental Illness	Articles	3	4	3	1	0	<b>11</b>
	Tweets	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Welfare	Articles	0	5	2	0	3	<b>10</b>
	Tweets	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Death	Articles	1	0	4	3	1	<b>9</b>
	Tweets	0	0	1	0	1	<b>2</b>
Unemployment	Articles	1	4	0	0	1	<b>6</b>
	Tweets	1	0	0	0	1	<b>2</b>

*Goal: Tables 3a are general trends, this is being more specific about what themes in each category (+, -, 0) are being used, whether they are changing over time*

Negative themes are mentioned significantly less than positive and neutral themes among tweets between 2017 to 2021, similar to what we saw in newspaper articles. Only one theme — “Poverty” reached the threshold of 5, being mentioned in a total of 8 tweets between 2017 to 2021. The other negative themes hover between the range of 2 to 4 tweets, with “Murder”, “Mental Illness” and “Welfare” being mentioned in 0 tweets. Thus, the publishers of these tweets strongly emphasized the lack of financial ability of the Indigeneous homeless, but did not show the same emphasis as newspaper articles did, on negative themes such as “Addiction” and “Substances”, which are common causes of homelessness. The causal relationship between negative themes mentioned in newspaper articles and tweets, again, appears spurious as reflected in this data set.

## **Conclusion**

### **Hypothesis 1**

Firstly, this study concludes that Indigenous homelessness is for the most part, positively discussed in both professional media, through newspaper articles and social media, through Twitter.

Although positive themes are moving towards a decreasing trend going into 2019 for newspaper articles, the Covid-19 pandemic substantially increased the percentage of neutral themes and slightly increased the percentage of positive themes in 2020, revealing Canadian journalism's empathetic lean when reporting on this issue during a challenging and uncertain time in Canada. Professional media places a tremendous emphasis on the Canadian government's role in supporting Indigenous homelessness, especially in terms of finances and public policy, as well as the structural causes contributing towards Indigenous homelessness. Particularly, Colonial histories and systemic structures are often discussed to humanize the Indigenous homeless population and explain their overrepresentation of the homeless. The call for individual and NGO to act upon this issue is secondary in comparison to that of the government. Shelters and the social groups involved in the issue of Indigenous homelessness dominate the neutral category, with Covid-19 related issues significantly taking up neutral themes despite only being mentioned for 2 years after the pandemic began in 2020. Negative themes mainly discuss some of the negative causes of Indigenous homelessness, such as substances and addiction, along with negative consequences such as death and murder.

Twitter users who tweet regarding Indigenous homelessness mainly write about positive themes, similar to professional media. Tweets in this data set mainly discuss stories that humanize and support Indigenous homeless individuals against racism, but rarely address government responsibility in this issue. Tweets also tend to address Indigenous homelessness as part of the larger social context, including its general causes and different groups that interact with the Indigenous homeless. Negative themes are mentioned substantially less compared to positive and neutral themes. This, however, could be due to a less comprehensive sample size in this study owing to the limited hashtags used to populate the data set.

### **Hypothesis 2**

This study found that despite positive themes being discussed as the majority in both newspaper articles and tweets, trends of themes being discussed in these two mediums do not consistently match with one another. Professional media, thus, either insignificantly or inconsistently influences public perception on Indigenous homelessness. However, these results could be due to a non-comprehensive sample size, as well as limited time and resources due to the Project's singular researcher led nature. Therefore, the relationship between professional media's portrayal and public perception of Indigenous homeless must continue to be investigated in future studies, with a larger sample size of newspaper articles, tweets and a larger time frame.

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