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Emotions in Provincial Government Communications?

No. Institutionalized Communications.

A Case Study of Provincial Government of Alberta, Canada

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Abstract

Emotion is a common concept in daily life and have been extensively studied across various disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and media and communications. Despite the undeniable role of emotions in communication, their use within government communications, particularly at the provincial level, remains relatively understudied. This study aims to explore the utilization of emotions in provincial government communications, focusing on the role of communications advisors in harnessing emotions to effectively convey government messages.

While governments are primarily responsible for disseminating factual information and informing policy, emotions inevitably play a part in shaping communication strategies. This research seeks to understand how emotions can be effectively integrated into government communications and identify potential barriers to their utilization. In the context of provincial government, communications advisors serve as key actors responsible for shaping the emotional tone and content of government messages.

Through interviews with communications advisors, this study aims to uncover their perspectives on the use of emotions in government communications and their strategies for effectively incorporating emotional elements into messaging. The finding reveals that emotions may not be inherently crucial and their utilization in government communications is significantly shaped by institutionalized communication practices. This in turn influences the strategic incorporation of emotional appeal within provincial government communications.

Given the limited existing research on government communicators, this thesis aims to contribute valuable and practical insights to the broader field of government communications research. By shedding light on the role of emotions in provincial government communications and the practices of communications advisors, this study adds depth to our understanding of how emotions are utilized in the governmental context. Ultimately, this research seeks to inform and enhance government communication strategies by highlighting the importance of emotional resonance in engaging and connecting with citizens.

Keywords: *Emotions, provincial government communications, use of emotions, Alberta, Canada*

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Introduction

When you think about government communications, what do you think of? Is it the political talk that grabs your attention, or maybe it's the different programs and rules that affect you directly? Do you see government communication as one big organization for the whole country, or do you think about how it's tailored to fit your local area? Have you ever thought about who actually creates the communication materials? Like the videos you watch on TV or the news stories you see on social media, who's behind them? What power do these communications professionals have? What efforts would they put in to make the government seem trustworthy? And how do they use feelings to make sure their messages hit home?

Government communications are a complex web of strategies, messages, and channels that aim to inform, engage, and influence citizens (Hofmann, et al., 2013). And government communicators face a myriad of challenges that extend beyond mere promotion. Trust, political engagement, policy nuances, legal constraints, budget limitations, and economic fluctuations all shape the landscape of governmental messaging (Bennett & Entman, 2001).

Within this context, the role of emotions in communication strategies emerges as a compelling area of exploration. Emotions are frequently highlighted as vital components of effective strategic communication. However, there is limited guidance on their appropriate use, especially in the government setting. Using emotions is crucial for persuasion, as attitudes comprise both cognitive and emotive components, resulting in predictable physiological responses that enhance the impact of messages on behavior, thereby supporting policy objectives (Dennison, 2023).

However, effective use of emotions in government communications is not without its challenges. Governmental institutions must strike a good balance between emotional appeal and factual accuracy. While emotions can evoke powerful responses and foster engagement, they must be grounded in truth and transparency to maintain credibility (Blind, 2006). The incorporation of emotional elements into communication strategies raises thought-provoking questions, such as whether citizens demonstrate a stronger preference for factual information or emotional appeals when interacting with governmental messaging. Furthermore, a critical examination of the limitations surrounding the use of emotions in provincial government communication emerges as a pivotal aspect of this study.

In the pursuit of understanding government communication dynamics, this study aims to delve deeper into the roles of these communications professionals within a provincial government system, particularly focusing on their perspectives regarding the integration of emotions into communication strategies.

This research holds personal significance as I currently serve as an intern within the provincial government of Alberta. Prior to joining, my understanding of provincial government communication was limited. However, in my capacity as an intern, assisting communications advisors across various ministries, I've observed the strict adherence to non-partisanship and the necessity for maintaining neutrality in messaging. This observation prompts the following research questions:

RQ1: How can emotions be effectively woven into government communication strategies by provincial government communications advisors?

RQ2: To what extent do emotions involve in government communications?

RQ3: What are constraints of the use of emotions within the provincial government context?

In justifying this thesis, it's essential to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of emotions and the diverse ways they are studied and understood across various fields. As the researcher, I am aware of the extensive body of literature on emotions, ranging from psychological and neuroscientific perspectives to sociocultural and philosophical viewpoints. While there is ongoing debate and diverse perspectives on the nature, origin, and function of emotions, this study focuses specifically on their use within the context of government communications and is not approached here from a neuroscientific standpoint. Emotions play a crucial role in shaping human behavior, perceptions, and decision-making processes, and their effective integration into government communication strategies can have significant implications for public trust, engagement, and governance effectiveness (Erhardt, et al., 2021). By exploring how emotions are woven into government communication strategies, this thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role emotions play in shaping public perceptions of government actions and policies. While recognizing the complexity of emotions, the focus remains on their practical application within provincial government communications, without delving into neuroscientific explanations.

Literature review

This literature review aims to explore the role emotions play within government communications in other studies, particularly focusing on their utilization in provincial government contexts. Central to this literature review is an examination of how emotions can be effectively harnessed by provincial communications advisors to enhance engagement, trust-building, and resonance with diverse public audiences. Within provincial government contexts, communication advisors often operate amidst unique socio-political landscapes and regional dynamics (Jones, 2023). This review aims to unfold the various ways in which provincial communications advisors can leverage emotions to navigate these complexities, including tailoring messaging to resonate with local identities, cultural sensitivities, and community expectations.

Moreover, an exploration of the factors that influence the utilization of emotions by provincial communications advisors is essential in this study. From organizational culture and resource constraints and public sentiment, a combination of internal and external factors may shape the decision-making processes of communication professionals (Jones, 2023). By synthesizing existing literature on emotions in government communication, provincial communication strategies, and the role of communications advisors, this review aims to provide insights that inform both theoretical understanding and practical application. It seeks to contribute to the use of emotions in communication practices that are responsive, empathetic, and create meaningful dialogue and collaboration within provincial governance frameworks.

Government communications

In general, government communications often include a complex combination of strategies, mechanisms, and platforms aimed at facilitating transparency, engagement, and the dissemination of information pertinent to public affairs (Bennett & Entman, 2001). Government communications encompass a wide range of activities and channels through which governments communicate with citizens, stakeholders, and the public at large (Government of Canada, 2024) . These activities may include the dissemination of information through press releases, official statements, websites, social media platforms, public events, and advertising campaigns. The overarching goal of government communications is to facilitate transparency, accountability, and public participation in the democratic process (Government of Canada, 2024).

According to Government of Canada (n.d.), government communications are characterized by a commitment to openness, accessibility, and inclusivity. The Canadian government employs a multi-channel approach to communication, leveraging traditional media outlets, digital platforms, and direct engagement with citizens to disseminate information and foster dialogue. Government communications in Canada are guided by principles of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to the needs and interests of Canadians. Moreover, government communications in Canada are also subject to regulatory frameworks and ethical considerations that govern their conduct. This includes adherence to laws and regulations related to data privacy, advertising standards, accessibility requirements, and freedom of information. Government communicators in Canada must navigate these regulatory landscapes while upholding the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and accountability (Government of Canada, 2024).

When it comes to disseminate information about policy initiatives, emergency protocols, or public health measures, governments utilize various strategies to convey their messages to their citizens (Kealey, 2019). Beyond the mere act of informing, governments also have to connect with the public on an emotional level. Emotions, both positive and negative, serve as powerful tools that can significantly impact how messages are received, interpreted, and acted upon by the public (Dennison, 2023). Understanding the role of emotions in government communications is essential for comprehending the complexities of public engagement, trust-building, and democratic governance in contemporary society.

Emotions
What can emotions do in government communications?
Emotions play an essential role in government communications, shaping perceptions, influencing attitudes, and driving behavior among citizens (Erhardt, et al., 2021). Understanding the interplay between emotions and communication is crucial for governments seeking to foster trust, engagement, and legitimacy among their constituents.

Firstly, emotions serve as powerful motivators for action and decision-making (Lerner, et al., 2015). Government communications that evoke positive emotions such as hope, pride, or empathy can inspire citizens to support policies, participate in civic activities, and contribute to the common good (Cemazar, 2023). Meanwhile, negative emotions like fear, anger, or

frustration can mobilize individuals to demand accountability, challenge injustice, and advocate for change (Cemazar, 2023). By tapping into these emotional triggers, governments can stimulate public opinion, shape public discourse, and drive societal progress.

Moreover, emotions play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of government credibility and trustworthiness. Research by Lu & Hong (2022) indicates that emotional resonance can significantly impact how messages are received and interpreted by audiences. Government communications that convey authenticity, empathy, and sincerity are more likely to resonate with citizens and foster trust in governmental institutions (Lu & Hong, 2022). Meanwhile, messages perceived as manipulative, deceptive, or detached from public sentiment can erode trust and undermine the legitimacy of government authority (Lu & Hong, 2022).

Furthermore, emotions influence the effectiveness of communication strategies in navigating crises and managing public perceptions during challenging times (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024). During emergencies or crises, governments often rely on emotion-laden communication to convey urgency, provide reassurance, and mobilize resources (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024). By demonstrating empathy, transparency, and decisiveness in their communications, governments can mitigate panic, alleviate uncertainty, and instill confidence in their crisis response efforts (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024).

However, the role of emotions in government communications also presents inherent challenges and risks. Emotional appeals can be perceived as manipulative or exploitative if not grounded in genuine concern for the public welfare (Noggle, 2021). Moreover, emotions are subjective and can be interpreted differently by diverse audiences, leading to varying responses and interpretations of government messages (Bennett & Entman, 2001). In the age of digital media and social networking, emotions can spread rapidly and unpredictably, amplifying the impact of government communications and shaping public opinion in real-time (Bennett & Entman, 2001).

Impacts of positive emotions on government communications

As aforementioned, positive emotions wield a considerable influence on government communications, offering both advantages and potential pitfalls in shaping public perceptions and fostering civic engagement (Lu & Hong, 2022) . Among the wide range of positive emotions, such as hope, joy, excitement, and optimism, their strategic integration into government messaging can significantly impact the efficiency and effectiveness of

communication strategies (Lu & Hong, 2022). According to Coombs & Tachkova (2024), one notable advantage of incorporating positive emotions into government communications lies in their ability to inspire trust, confidence, and cooperation among citizens. For instance, after natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, or wildfires, government agencies often employ hope communications to reassure affected communities and instill confidence in the recovery process (Appadurai, 2007). Government officials may deliver speeches or issue press releases emphasizing the resilience of affected communities, the availability of disaster relief resources, and the commitment to rebuilding stronger and more resilient communities. By highlighting success stories, achievements, and opportunities for collective progress, governments can instill a sense of optimism and empowerment among citizens, motivating them to actively participate in civic life and contribute to the common good (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024).

Positive emotions in government communications also have the potential to strengthen social cohesion and foster inclusive dialogue among diverse stakeholders. By emphasizing shared values, aspirations, and aspirations, positive messaging can transcend political divides and foster a sense of unity and mutual respect (Wang, et al., 2022). For example, initiatives that celebrate cultural diversity, promote social inclusion, and recognize the contributions of marginalized communities can cultivate a sense of belonging and solidarity among citizens (Wang, et al., 2022). Moreover, positive emotions such as joy and gratitude can facilitate meaningful connections between government officials and constituents, fostering empathy, understanding, and collaboration in addressing pressing challenges and advancing shared goals (Wang, et al., 2022).

A typical example of positive emotions is hope. Hope-based communication serves to counteract cynicism, disillusionment, and disengagement that may arise within democratic societies (Dennison, 2023). In an era characterized by political polarization, economic uncertainty, and social upheaval, the ability of politicians to instill hope can be "a powerful antidote to despair" (Dennison, 2023, pp. 3). For example, in response to economic uncertainty, government communications advisors can launch a campaign highlighting stories of resilience and success, showcasing how individuals have overcome past challenges. Through messages of hope and confidence in the nation's ability to rebound, they inspire optimism and reassure citizens that better days are ahead. Furthermore, hope-based communication fosters a sense of shared purpose

and collective agency among citizens, encouraging active participation in democratic processes and civic life (Stitzlein, 2020). According to Open Global Rights (2019), while fear, anger, and sadness may prompt immediate responses to perceived threats or injustices, hope provides a forward-looking perspective that encourages individuals and communities to envision a better future and work towards it together. Similarly, while anger may mobilize people to demand accountability or protest injustices, hope can offer a vision of reconciliation, progress, and healing (Appadurai, 2007). When the government is navigating periods of doubt and facing numerous uncertainties, hope can indeed be a valuable way to communicate. In times of crisis or ambiguity, conveying messages of hope can provide a sense of reassurance and direction amidst the chaos (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024). For example, during an economic recession, many citizens are facing financial uncertainty and job losses. Hope communications can offer reassurance and direction. Communications advisors could share success stories of individuals who have bounced back from financial setbacks, provide information about available resources and support services, and communicate the government's commitment to implementing policies aimed at stimulating economic growth and creating job opportunities, giving citizens hope for a brighter economic future.

However, the inappropriate use of positive emotions in government communications may also pose challenges and risks. For instance, overly optimistic or unrealistic promises can erode trust and credibility if they fail to materialize or address underlying issues effectively (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024). Similarly, excessive emphasis on positive messaging may obscure the complexities of policy issues, leading to a lack of transparency and accountability in governance processes. Moreover, inauthentic or insincere expressions of positivity can backfire, triggering skepticism and cynicism among citizens and undermining the legitimacy of governmental authority (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024).

Impacts of negative emotions on government communications

Negative emotions can significantly influence individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, thereby shaping the landscape of democratic participation and trust in governmental institutions. First of all, negative emotions such as fear or concern can effectively convey the urgency and importance of certain issues (Rowe & Fitness, 2018). When governments communicate about potential threats or risks, using negative emotions can prompt citizens to take immediate action

or pay closer attention to the message (Bloodhart, et al., 2019). Negative emotions can also influence behavior by encouraging individuals to adopt more responsible or proactive behaviors. One outstanding example can be campaigns that evoke guilt or shame related to environmental conservation may encourage people to adopt more sustainable practices (Bloodhart, et al., 2019). Additionally, negative emotions are excellent tools to build empathy (Zaki, 2020). Government communications that tap into negative emotions can foster empathy and solidarity among citizens (Zaki, 2020). Messages that highlight the struggles of marginalized communities or the hardships faced by vulnerable populations can evoke empathy and prompt individuals to support policies aimed at addressing social inequalities (Zaki, 2020). Moreover, negative emotions can serve as powerful motivators for change (Fahkry, 2023). When government communications highlight problems or issues that need addressing, individuals may be more inclined to take action to resolve these issues or support policies aimed at addressing them (Fahkry, 2023).

As an example of negative emotions, fear-based government messaging can instill apprehension, urgency, and compliance among the public by highlighting potential threats or risks associated with specific issues or events (Reserl & Bradley, 2017). This strategy often employs dramatic imagery, alarming statistics, and urgent language to convey the severity of the situation and prompt immediate action (Steelman, et al., 2014). For instance, campaigns addressing natural disasters may use fear-based tactics to emphasize the importance of preparedness and evacuation. However, while effective in raising awareness and mobilizing rapid responses, fear-based communications also raise ethical concerns and risks, including panic, confusion, and distrust among the public. Moreover, they can exacerbate social divisions and inequalities, particularly among vulnerable population (Hansson, et al., 2020).

Negative emotions, such as fear, anger, and distrust, in government communications can severely undermine democratic engagement by fostering a climate of skepticism and disengagement among citizens (Erhardt, et al., 2021). For instance, during times of crisis or uncertainty, governments often resort to fear-inducing messaging to compel compliance or justify policy decisions. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous governments worldwide utilized fear-based appeals to emphasize the severity of the situation and promote adherence to public health guidelines (Hyland-Wood, et al., 2021). While such strategies may yield short-term compliance, they can also exacerbate public anxiety and affect trust in governmental authorities

if perceived as alarmist or exaggerated (Hyland-Wood, et al., 2021). When citizens perceive governmental communications as manipulative, deceptive, or lacking transparency, they are more likely to experience heightened levels of distrust (Erhardt, et al., 2021).

The impact of negative emotions is particularly pronounced in the digital age, where social media platforms serve as conduits for the rapid dissemination of information, both accurate and misleading (Jalonen, 2014). The spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories on social media can stoke fears and sow distrust in authoritative sources, undermining public confidence in the government's ability to address pressing issues effectively (Mikhaeil, 2021). Furthermore, the pervasiveness of echo chambers and filter bubbles in online spaces can reinforce pre-existing biases and insulate individuals from diverse perspectives, making it increasingly challenging to foster a sense of civic unity and shared purpose (Mikhaeil, 2021). Therefore, to mitigate these drawbacks, governments must strike a balance between informing the public about risks and fostering resilience, preparedness, and community solidarity through transparent, accurate, and empathetic communication strategies (Lerner, et al., 2015).

Comparison between positive and negative emotions

In the overall landscape of government communications, a variety of emotions play crucial roles in shaping public perceptions, attitudes, and responses to government policies and actions. Positive and negative emotions represent two contrasting yet powerful dimensions in shaping the effectiveness and impact of government messaging. Emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, and hope all contribute to the complexity of public communications and engagement (Dennison, 2023).

Fear, for example, can be a powerful motivator for action, prompting individuals to take preventive measures or support policies aimed at addressing perceived threats to safety or security. Anger can mobilize people to demand accountability and change, particularly in response to perceived injustices or grievances. Sadness can evoke empathy and compassion, prompting individuals and communities to come together in times of tragedy or crisis (Fahkry, 2023). Meanwhile, messages filled with positivity have the potential to uplift and motivate citizens, fostering a sense of unity, empowerment, and collective purpose (Stitzlein, 2020). An example of integrating both positive and negative emotions can be seen in public health initiatives during disease outbreaks. Government communications advisors can work on a

campaign that initially leverage fear to convey the seriousness of the situation and encourage preventive measures like vaccination and hygiene protocols. Simultaneously, they incorporate messages of hope by highlighting progress, recovery stories, and community resilience, motivating citizens to stay resilient and united in overcoming the crisis. This dual approach can help instill urgency while providing reassurance and motivation for collective action (Nabi & Myrick, 2019).

Therefore, a balanced use of positive and negative emotions is vital for crafting messages that resonate with the public. Positive emotions like hope and pride inspire trust and unity, while negative emotions such as concern and urgency highlight pressing issues and prompt action (Nabi & Myrick, 2019). Together, they create a nuanced narrative that acknowledges challenges while inspiring progress (Nabi & Myrick, 2019). As such, there is no doubt that emotions play significant roles in shaping individuals' responses to government messages, influencing perceptions, behaviors, and levels of engagement (Dennison, 2023).

For the purpose of this study, exploring the emotional dynamics in government communications can shed light on how communications advisors at the provincial Government of Alberta navigate the delicate balance between communicate information effectively and resonating with the public's emotional landscape.

The role of emotions in the context of provincial government communications

But first, why would I expect a certain level of emotions usage in provincial government communications? The expectation for emotions in provincial government communications, in contrast to federal communications, is deeply rooted in the nature of provincial governance and the unique relationship between provincial governments and their constituents (Hofmann, et al., 2013). Provinces, being closer in proximity to their citizens and often serving as the primary providers of essential services like healthcare, education, and social welfare, inherently engage with issues that have direct and immediate impacts on people's daily lives (Hofmann, et al., 2013). As such, citizens tend to have a more personal and vested interest in provincial government actions and policies, and they may expect their provincial leaders to not only convey information but also empathize with and address the emotions that accompany these decisions (Jones, 2023). This close proximity to the people often requires a more emotional approach to

communication, as provincial governments strive to connect with citizens on a human level, acknowledging their concerns, fears, and aspirations (Jones, 2023).

Moreover, according to Jones (2023), the cultural and regional diversity within provinces further amplifies the importance of emotions in provincial government communications. Provinces often consist of diverse communities with distinct identities, histories, and priorities. To effectively engage with and represent these varied constituencies, provincial leaders must employ communication strategies that resonate emotionally and culturally (Touch Stone Publishers, n.d.). Whether it's addressing the specific needs of rural communities, Indigenous populations, or urban centers, acknowledging the unique emotional landscapes of different regions becomes essential for fostering understanding and unity within the province (Touch Stone Publishers, n.d.). Furthermore, the perceived accessibility and accountability of provincial governments compared to their federal counterparts contribute to the expectation for emotional resonance in their communications (Agrawal & Gretzinger, 2023). Provincial leaders are often seen as more directly accountable to their constituents, with a greater emphasis on local representation and responsiveness (Michel, et al., 2018). This heightened accountability places added pressure on provincial governments to demonstrate empathy, transparency, and emotional intelligence in their interactions with citizens (Michel, et al., 2018). Whether it's addressing concerns raised by community members, responding to crises, or engaging in public consultations, provincial leaders are expected to navigate these interactions with a keen awareness of the emotional impact of their decisions (Agrawal & Gretzinger, 2023). Additionally, provincial governments frequently engage in localized community outreach initiatives and consultation processes to gather input and feedback from citizens. Effective engagement requires more than just disseminating information, it demands building trust, fostering collaboration, and establishing meaningful connections with diverse stakeholders (Agrawal & Gretzinger, 2023). Emotionally resonant communication plays a crucial role in these efforts, as it enables provincial leaders to forge genuine connections, address underlying concerns, and build consensus around key issues.

Finally, the intense political scrutiny and public pressure faced by provincial administrations further underscore the importance of emotional intelligence in communication (Agrawal & Gretzinger, 2023). Provincial governments often operate in highly charged political environments, where decisions are scrutinized, debated, and sometimes contested by various

interest groups and stakeholders. Therefore, in such contexts, the ability to navigate complex emotional dynamics, manage conflicting perspectives, and communicate effectively becomes indispensable for maintaining public trust and confidence in provincial government institutions (Agrawal & Gretzinger, 2023).

Provincial government communicators. Who are they?

Provincial governments (Institutional Context)

In Canada, provincial governments play a crucial role in the governance and administration of their respective regions, operating within the broader framework of the country's federal system. Each province and territory have its own government, responsible for a range of issues including "education, property, civil rights, and the administration of justice, hospitals, municipalities, and other local or private matters within the provinces" (Government of Canada, n.d.). Provinces vary in demographics, economic structures, and regional challenges, requiring governments to tailor policies and services to address specific concerns (Cameron-Blake, et al., 2021).

In the context of this study, Alberta, located in western Canada, is a province known for its rich natural resources, including vast oil sands, natural gas, and expansive farmlands (Government of Alberta, n.d.). Its economy is one of the strongest in Canada, largely driven by energy exports, agriculture, and technology sectors (Government of Alberta, n.d.). According to Government of Alberta (n.d.), the province's demographic distribution is concentrated in major urban centers like Calgary and Edmonton. Calgary is a vibrant business and financial hub, hosting numerous corporate headquarters and fostering a dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem. Edmonton, the provincial capital, is a center for government activities, education, and cultural events.

The provincial government of Alberta, led by the Premier, plays a crucial role in managing various domains including healthcare, education, infrastructure, and natural resource management (Government of Alberta, n.d.). Key areas of focus in government communications include economic development, environmental sustainability, and indigenous rights (Government of Alberta, 2018). The government actively seeks to address environmental concerns associated with its resource-based economy, balancing economic growth with ecological preservation (Government of Alberta, 2018). Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on fostering relationships with Indigenous communities, ensuring their voices and rights are respected in provincial policymaking (Government of Alberta, 2018).

Effective government communication is essential in Alberta, aimed at maintaining transparency, engaging the public, and facilitating informed decision-making among residents (Government of Alberta, 2018). The government's communication strategy employs multiple platforms, such as press releases, social media, public engagement, and official websites, to disseminate information and updates on policies, programs, and services (Government of Alberta, 2018). Through these communications efforts, the government aims to build a more inclusive, informed, and participatory society in Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2018).

Overall, while there are multiple elements shaping provincial operations across Canada, each province must effectively communicate its efforts to the public (Agrawal & Gretzinger, 2023). These communication efforts will help build and maintain trust in provincial governance, demonstrating a commitment to transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to citizen needs, ultimately contributing to the strength and resilience of Canada's democratic institutions (Mansoor, 2021). So, who are the backbone behind government communications?

Government communicators. Who are they?

In Canada, governments at all levels have in-house communication professionals to communicate with the public (Government of Canada, n.d.). Whether it's federal, provincial, or municipal, government departments need to find ways to share important information with the public while staying true to their goals and respecting people's needs (Cemazar, 2023). Communication teams are like the glue that holds everything together, working closely with every part of the government to make sure Canadians get the facts they need (Government of Canada, 2024). People who work on communications team for the government, whether it's provincial or federal, they are often called communications advisors.

According to Government of Canada (2024), communication teams are responsible to draft communications strategies or cabinet communications package, write speeches to convey government messages clearly, handle media inquiries to make sure news stories are accurate and fair, manage digital platforms like websites and social media to keep the public informed and more. From drafting articles to working on advertising campaign, their work is diverse and always changing to keep up with the times (Government of Canada, 2024). They craft messages that highlight government achievements, promote important initiatives, and advocate for key

priorities. These communication teams are the backbone of government transparency, making sure citizens stay in the loop and feel confident in their government's actions (Cemazar, 2023).

Communications advisors working within government agencies have a critical role that sets them apart from partisan politics: they're non-partisan (Government of Canada, 2024). This means they're focused on serving the public, not the political party in power. Their main job is to make sure government information gets out to the public in a fair, accurate, and transparent way. They work to keep the public informed about what the government is doing and why, without trying to sway opinions or promote any particular political agenda (Government of Canada, 2024). Whether it's explaining new policies, responding to crises, or sharing updates on government programs, their goal is to build trust between the government and the people it serves (Government of Canada, n.d.). Navigating this role isn't always easy. Communications advisors need to strike a balance between representing the government's interests and respecting the public's right to unbiased information (Government of Canada, 2024). They must understand the diverse perspectives and concerns of the public and find effective ways to communicate across different platforms, such as social media, press releases, or public statements. During times of crisis or uncertainty, like natural disasters or public health emergencies, they play a crucial role in providing accurate information and reassuring the public. Whether it's boosting the economy, advocating for social justice, or addressing environmental issues, their job is to make sure the public understands and supports the government's actions and goals (Government of Canada, 2024). Therefore, government communicators are crucial mediators between governments and citizens.

Collective identity of communications advisors

Despite operating within diverse contexts and jurisdictions, these communicators share a collective identity shaped by their commitment to transparency, accountability, and public service (Melucci, 1996). This collective identity serves as a unifying force, fostering cohesion, collaboration, and a sense of purpose among advisors across different departments and agencies within provincial governments (Soenen & Moingeon, 2002).

However, this collective identity is not monolithic but rather emerges from the diverse array of personal identities that advisors bring to their roles (Straub, 2002). Factors such as cultural background, personal values, and past experiences can influence their communication styles,

decision-making processes, and priorities (Denyer-Simmons & Small, 2012). For example, a communications advisor with a background in community organizing may prioritize grassroots engagement strategies, while another with a background in journalism may emphasize transparency and media relations. Acknowledging the diversity within their personal identities is essential for understanding the richness and complexity of the collective identity of provincial communications advisors (Leverage to lead, 2019). By recognizing and embracing this diversity, advisors can leverage their unique perspectives and experiences to develop more inclusive, resonant, and effective communication strategies that resonate with diverse audiences across the province (Hall, 2019).

While each advisor may have distinct areas of expertise or specialization, there is a recognition of the value of collective wisdom and shared best practices (Hall, 2019). According to Hall & Gay (1996), individuals construct their identities within the framework of broader social groups. Hall (1996) posited that collective identities are not fixed or inherent but are instead fluid and dynamic, formed through ongoing processes of negotiation and representation. Individuals within a collective negotiate their identities based on shared experiences, cultural norms, and discourses prevalent within their social context (Hall & Gay, 1996). Similarly, government communications advisors operate within the context of governmental institutions, where they engage in constant negotiation and representation of both their own identities and the identities of the institutions they serve.

The collective identity of provincial communications advisors includes a shared sense of purpose, values, and professional mindset that unite them in their roles as government communicators (Snow & Corrigall-Brown, 2015). This collective identity is shaped by common objectives, challenges, and responsibilities inherent in the field of public communications within provincial governments. Central to this collective identity is a commitment to transparency, accountability, and effective engagement with citizens, stakeholders, and the media (Snow & Corrigall-Brown, 2015).

Within this collective identity, provincial communications advisors recognize their role as public servant and guardians of governmental integrity. According to Lin (2004, p.805), this collective identity serves as "action guidelines" and it becomes their "interpretative lens" and "comparison reference." They share a commitment to upholding ethical standards, maintaining the integrity of

information, and ensuring that communications align with the principles and priorities of the provincial government (Lin, 2004). This shared commitment serves as a cornerstone of their collective identity, fostering a sense of cohesion and solidarity among advisors across different departments and agencies (Lin, 2004).

Furthermore, the collective identity of provincial communications advisors is shaped by a recognition of the broader societal impact of their work (Lin, 2004). They understand that effective communication is not just about conveying information but also about building understanding, trust, and engagement among citizens. As such, they embrace their role as facilitators of public dialogue, advocates for transparency, and champions of civic participation within their respective provinces (Lin, 2004).

In conclusion, the roles of provincial communications advisors are shaped by both personal and collective identities, each influencing and enriching the other. While their collective identity as government communicators embodies shared values, objectives, and responsibilities, their personal identities infuse diversity, creativity, and empathy into their professional endeavors (Snow & Corrigall-Brown, 2015). By embracing the intersection of personal and collective identities, provincial communications advisors can enhance the effectiveness, inclusivity, and legitimacy of government communication efforts, ultimately contributing to the vitality of democratic governance.

Communications advisors and their use of emotions

So coming back to the thesis topic, in today's rapidly evolving communication landscape, where the dissemination of information is not merely about conveying facts but also about establishing meaningful connections with the public, communications advisors recognize the significance of emotions as a powerful tool in building rapport and credibility (Lerner, et al., 2015). By weaving elements of empathy, understanding, and authenticity into their messaging, these advisors aim to resonate with the diverse emotions and experiences of the public, thereby forging stronger bonds of trust and engagement (Dennison, 2023).

One way communications advisors utilize emotions is by humanizing government messaging to make it more relatable and accessible to citizens. By infusing empathy, warmth, and compassion into their communications, advisors can help establish a sense of connection and understanding between government officials and the public. For example, when addressing sensitive issues such

as public health crises or economic hardships, communications advisors may use emotions to convey a sense of solidarity and support for affected individuals, thereby fostering trust and empathy. For instance, when crafting speeches or public statements on behalf of government officials, communications advisors leverage emotional language and narratives that resonate with the values, concerns, and aspirations of citizens, instilling a sense of empathy and relatability (Dennison, 2023). Similarly, in media relations, communication advisors strive to humanize government actions and policies by conveying stories that evoke emotions such as compassion, hope, or resilience, thereby fostering a deeper connection between government institutions and the public (Dennison, 2023).

Additionally, emotions can be strategically employed to evoke specific responses or actions from the public (Dennison, 2023). Communications advisors may leverage emotions such as urgency, hope, or concern to motivate citizens to engage with government initiatives, participate in civic activities, or comply with public health guidelines (Bennett & Entman, 2001). For instance, during emergency situations like natural disasters or pandemics, advisors may use emotions like fear or concern to prompt citizens to take necessary precautions or follow evacuation orders.

Communications advisors can use emotions to shape the public narrative and influence public opinion on government policies and decisions (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010). By framing issues in a way that resonates emotionally with the target audience, advisors can garner support, build consensus, or mitigate opposition to government actions. For example, when introducing controversial policies or reforms, advisors may emphasize the positive emotional outcomes or benefits to garner public support and minimize resistance. Moreover, in the digital realm, where social media platforms serve as critical channels for engaging with citizens, communications advisors employ strategies that leverage emotions to elicit meaningful interactions and responses (Sellas, 2023). Whether it's sharing personal stories, highlighting the impact of government initiatives on individuals and communities, or responding to public concerns with empathy and transparency, communications advisors understand the importance of emotional resonance in building trust and credibility in government communications (Sellas, 2023).

By acknowledging and addressing the emotional elements, these advisors not only enhance the effectiveness of government communication strategies but also contribute to the cultivation of a more inclusive, responsive, and trusted government-citizen relationship. Through their adept use

of emotions, communications advisors ultimately fostering greater transparency, accountability, and public engagement in governance processes (Dennison, 2023). However, it's crucial for communications advisors to exercise caution and ethical responsibility when using emotions in government communications (Guttman, 2017). While emotions can be powerful tools for engagement and persuasion, they must be employed ethically and responsibly to ensure transparency, authenticity, and integrity in government messaging (Guttman, 2017). Effective communication requires a balanced approach that acknowledges and respects the emotions of citizens while serving the broader public interest and democratic principles.

Trust, emotions and information

At the provincial government level, the importance of using emotions in building trust cannot be overstated (Dann, 2022). Public trust is essential to any government operations. "Investing in trust is akin to investing in infrastructure" (Proof Agency, 2024, p.08). When citizens trust their government, they are more likely to participate actively in civic life, adhere to laws and regulations, and support government initiatives (Fung, 2015). Trust fosters cooperation between citizens and government institutions, facilitating effective governance and policy implementation (Cuthill & Fien, 2005). Moreover, trust in government strengthens social cohesion, promotes stability, and enhances the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Without public trust, governments may face challenges in addressing societal problems, implementing reforms, and maintaining order, ultimately undermining the fabric of democracy and hindering progress (Dann, 2022). Building and maintaining public trust is essential for the well-being and prosperity of any society (Dann, 2022).

While factual information is essential, emotions play a significant role in connecting with citizens on a deeper level and fostering meaningful relationships between government institutions and the public (Dann, 2022). According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2023), by incorporating emotions such as empathy, compassion, and authenticity into communication strategies, provincial governments can humanize their interactions with citizens, making them more relatable and resonant. Emotions help to convey sincerity and understanding, which are crucial for building trust and credibility in government actions and decisions. When citizens feel that their concerns and experiences are acknowledged and validated by provincial authorities, they are more likely to trust in the government's

intentions and support its initiatives (Dann, 2022). Moreover, emotions can inspire a sense of unity, solidarity, and shared purpose among citizens, reinforcing their confidence in provincial government institutions as agents of positive change and progress (Dann, 2022). Therefore, leveraging emotions in provincial government communications is essential for fostering trust, strengthening community bonds, and promoting effective governance that truly serves the needs and interests of all citizens.

When it comes to the provincial government of Alberta, a survey was conducted in 2022 among 1500 Canadians by Abacus Data (Monopoli, 2022), and they found out that 52% of Canadians agreed with the statement that official government accounts can't be trusted. In the results from that survey, Alberta residents showed even greater mistrust (59%) in their provincial government compared to other provinces in the country. One significant contributing factor to the increasing distrust in governmental institutions during the 2023 – 2024 period can be attributed to their actions and responses during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their subsequent recovery plans and handling of the ensuing economic recession. Throughout the pandemic, governments worldwide faced unprecedented challenges in managing the pandemic, including implementing public health measures, providing healthcare services, and addressing economic repercussions (Brownson, et al., 2020). The effectiveness and timeliness of government responses varied widely, leading to differing perceptions of competence and reliability. Difficult policy decisions balancing public health priorities with economic and social considerations involved trade-offs that not everyone agreed with, leading to dissatisfaction and decreased trust in governmental decision-making processes (Garritzmann, et al., 2023).

However, the effectiveness and transparency of government measures varied widely, leading to divergent perceptions among citizens. Instances of delayed responses, inconsistent messaging, and perceived mismanagement of resources eroded public confidence in governmental leadership and decision-making processes (Hyland-Wood, et al., 2021). Moreover, the creation and execution of recovery plans following the peak of the pandemic were subject to scrutiny, particularly regarding the allocation of financial resources, support for vulnerable populations, and efforts to revitalize affected sectors of the economy (Johannes, et al., 2021). The government's ability to address unemployment, business closures, and economic instability during the subsequent recession further influenced public perceptions of competence and

responsiveness. Inadequate support measures, perceived favoritism, and disparities in relief distribution exacerbated existing inequalities and fueled skepticism toward governmental institutions (Bormann, et al., 2021). Thus, the government's communications during and after the pandemic have played a pivotal role in shaping public trust and confidence, underscoring the imperative for transparent, equitable, and accountable governance in times of crisis.

In conclusion, while factual information remains crucial for transparency and accountability, emotions act as the bridge that connects citizens with government institutions on a more profound level (Dennison, 2023). The low trust levels observed in Alberta highlight a disconnect between the provincial government and its citizens, possibly stemming from perceptions of incompetence, lack of transparency, or insufficient support during times of crisis (Agrawal & Gretzinger, 2023). Emotions such as empathy and authenticity can humanize government interactions, reassuring citizens of their concerns' validity and fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024). Effective communication strategies that integrate emotions alongside factual information can rebuild trust, strengthen community bonds, and ultimately enhance the effectiveness of governance at the provincial level (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024). Through this lens, understanding and harnessing the power of emotions in government communications become imperative for fostering a more resilient and trusting relationship between provincial governments and the public they serve.

Research methods

In this study, I opted for the qualitative research method, aligning with Robson & McCartan's (2011) assertion that qualitative research emphasizes "a focus on meanings" and embraces flexibility in research design, allowing it to evolve organically throughout the process. This approach views the social world as a construct shaped by individuals, offering a nuanced understanding of complex phenomena (Robson & McCartan, 2011).

Conducting interviews with nine communications advisors from the provincial government of Alberta served as the primary methodological choice. These advisors, with their invaluable expertise and insider knowledge, provide a unique lens into the inner workings of government communication strategies. They are directly involved in shaping these strategies and are well-positioned to offer firsthand insights into the practical considerations, challenges, and strategies involved in achieving these objectives within the provincial government context (Thomas, 1998).

These interviews facilitates rich, qualitative data collection, enabling a comprehensive exploration of government communication strategies and the role of emotions within them.

Through their perspectives, this study seeks to shed light on the internal processes, priorities, and constraints influencing the use of emotions in provincial government communication. By engaging directly with practitioners in the field, I aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice, informing evidence-based recommendations for enhancing communication effectiveness and public engagement.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study involved conducting in-depth interviews with nine communications advisors currently working within the provincial government of Alberta. Participants were selected based on their roles and responsibilities in shaping and executing communication strategies. Eight of the interviewees have the job tittle as "communications advisors" and the last one was a communications director. Participants were contacted via Microsoft Teams to request their participation in the study. As I mentioned earlier, I was also an employee with the provincial government of Alberta, so I had access to the Government of Alberta's Microsoft Teams and that facilitated this process. Upon obtaining informed consent, interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times. Interviews were conducted all via the Microsoft Teams platform. Each interview was expected to last approximately 30 – 40 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Detailed field notes were also taken during the interviews.

Semi-structured interview guides were developed, including open-ended questions designed to explore participants' perspectives on the use of emotions in government communication strategies, as well as related topics such as communication priorities, challenges, and strategies. The reason I chose semi-structured interview was because, as described by Robson & McCartan (2011), it would offer a flexible approach wherein the interviewer has a predetermined guide but can modify the wording and order of questions based on the flow of the conversation. Additionally, unplanned questions can be asked to follow up on the interviewee's responses, allowing for a deeper exploration of the topics discussed (Robson & McCartan, 2011). In semi-structured interviews, the content of the interview guide consists of a set of items, typically questions, with alternative subsequent items depending on the responses obtained. Given that the

communications advisors interviewed for this study come from different ministries, cover various topics, and possess diverse areas of expertise, employing a semi-structured approach allows for flexibility and adaptability during the interviews. This flexibility enables me as the researcher to delve into specific areas of interest or expertise of each interviewee, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the use of emotions by government communications advisors within the provincial government of Alberta.

Probes and prompts are also utilized during the interview process to encourage the interviewee to expand on their responses or explore specific areas further (Robson & McCartan, 2011). Probes are particularly useful for eliciting more detailed or personal perspectives from the interviewee, while prompts suggest a range of possible answers that the interviewer expects (Robson & McCartan, 2011). Furthermore, the nature of the topic being explored – emotions in government communications - requires a careful and detailed approach to questioning, as interviewees may be cautious or guarded in their responses due to the sensitive nature of their work. The use of probes and prompts, along with techniques such as periods of silence and repeating the interviewee's statements, can help create a comfortable environment for interviewees to express their thoughts openly and candidly (Robson & McCartan, 2011). These techniques are especially valuable in eliciting genuine insights and perspectives from the communications advisors regarding their roles, challenges, and experiences within the government context (Robson & McCartan, 2011). Additionally, through employing open-ended questioning and probing techniques, I can delve deeply into the complexities of these strategies, eliciting detailed accounts and real-life examples. As emphasized by Robson & McCartan (2011), open-ended questions offer flexibility, allowing researchers to push the boundaries of respondents' knowledge. In this research, the diverse range of experiences among the nine interviewees adds depth to the exploration, spanning from newcomers with one year of government experience to seasoned advisors with over a decade of service. Open-ended questions also help foster cooperation and rapport, facilitating a deeper understanding of respondents' perspectives and beliefs (Robson & McCartan, 2011).

To form the semi-structured interview guide, Seidman's three-stage interview model was employed to explore the perspectives and experiences of the communications advisors (Granot, et al., 2012). Each interview followed Seidman's three-stage model, starting with an opening

interview to establish rapport, followed by a focusing interview to delve deeper into specific themes, and concluding with a closing interview to summarize and reflect on the insights gained (Granot, et al., 2012).

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. The data analysis process involved thematic coding and categorization of themes and patterns emerging from the interview transcripts. Themes related to communication priorities, challenges, strategies, and the integration of emotions into government communication strategies were identified and analyzed in relation to the research questions.

Research ethics were considered throughout the interview process. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and informed consent was obtained before the commencement of interviews. Any identifiable information was anonymized in reporting and dissemination of findings to ensure participant confidentiality and privacy. It is noteworthy to mention one background context of the study. I, as a researcher, was employed by the government organization where the interviewees were working; however, there was no conflict of interest. I worked within the organization, engaged in ongoing observation processes, and carefully considered whom to approach for interviews, the specific topics to discuss, and the overall research approach.

Even though this study was conducted in my daily workplace, ethnographic analysis was not considered and pursued due to several factors. First and foremost, security concerns within government institutions are paramount. Ethnographic analysis often involves prolonged immersion in the research environment, which could potentially raise security risks or concerns regarding the confidentiality of sensitive information (Kirner & Mills, 2019). Moreover, the complex approval process required for conducting research within a government institution adds another layer of difficulty. Ethnographic research typically entails extensive engagement with participants and observation of their daily activities over an extended period (Kirner & Mills, 2019). This would necessitate obtaining approvals from various bureaucratic channels within the government hierarchy, including securing permissions from relevant authorities and navigating through bureaucratic red tape. It often results in lengthy approval processes, which could cause delay in ethnographic research activities. Considering these factors, the decision was made to focus on semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. While

ethnographic analysis offers valuable insights into organizational culture and practices, the logistical and security challenges associated with conducting ethnographic research within a government institution outweighed its potential benefits in this particular context. By prioritizing semi-structured interviews, the study could still capture rich qualitative data to learn more about the use of emotions in the provincial government communications.

No.	Tittle	Length	Date
Interviewee 1 (Pilot)	Communications advisor	35 mins	March 22
Interviewee 2	Communications advisor	38 mins	March 27
Interviewee 3	Communications advisor	46 mins	March 28
Interviewee 4	Communications advisor	34 mins	April 03
Interviewee 5	Communications advisor	44 mins	April 04
Interviewee 6	Communications advisor	40 mins	April 05
Interviewee 7	Communications advisor	37 mins	April 05
Interviewee 8	Director of Communications	48 mins	April 10
Interviewee 9	Communications advisor	31 mins	April 12

Table 1: Interview information and interviewees' detail

Analysis

As a researcher, I initially hypothesized that emotions would play a crucial role in provincial government communications with all the reasons that mentioned in the literature review above. Through the nine interviews conducted with communications advisors within the government of Alberta, several key insights emerged regarding the role of emotions in government communications.

Through the process of conducting this research, it became apparent that emotions are not considered important when crafting communication products. While there is an awareness of the role of emotions in the communication process, the end product tends to reflect a more neutral and factual tone. I initially thought that tapping into emotions would play an important role in shaping perceptions of government credibility and trustworthiness (Lu & Hong, 2022) but indeed, all interviewees (9 out of 9) stated that emotions are not vital in provincial government communications.

> *There's a really fine line when we're bringing up emotion. We are aware of the emotion that comes with the post, but we don't put the emotion in it. Emotion is involved and how we post and how we curate the messages, but it's not going to be something that you see in the end product. (Interview 6)*

As Interviewee 6 stated, while emotions may not be visible in the final product of our communications efforts, they undeniably shape how messages are crafted, curated, and conveyed to the target audience. Emotions influence on message tone and style in government communications. Communications advisors must carefully consider the emotional resonance of their messaging, selecting language and imagery that evoke the desired response from the audience. Whether aiming to inspire trust, convey empathy, or encourage action, the emotional tone of government communications plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards government initiatives (Dennison, 2023).

Moreover, Interviewee 4 said that when communications advisors deal with a sensitive subject and there's an emotional story behind it, they would be "sensitive to story, but the communications products are not necessarily emotional." While these communications professionals acknowledge the presence of emotion in certain context, the emphasis still appears to be on maintaining professionalism and objectivity in the communication process, even when dealing with sensitive subjects or stories that carry emotional weight.

> *We do a lot of media monitoring, and we always have a good idea of where people are at. We try to meet them where they're at emotionally. But I don't think that it's our job to also be emotional. (Interviewee 1)*

By closely monitoring media coverage and public sentiment, communications professionals gain valuable insights into the emotional state and concerns of the audience. Interviewee 1 also emphasizes the importance of understanding and acknowledging the emotional context in which communication takes place, suggesting a commitment to meeting the audience "where they're at emotionally." This approach reflects a proactive stance towards audience engagement, aiming to tailor communication strategies to resonate with the prevailing emotional climate. However, Interviewee 1 also draws a distinction between recognizing and responding to audience emotions and embodying emotionality in the communication process. While sensitivity to audience emotions is valued, Interviewee 1 suggests that it is not the role of government communicators to

express or convey emotions themselves. Instead, the focus appears to be on maintaining professionalism, objectivity, and credibility in the delivery of information and messages. This perspective underscores the strategic approach to emotion in government communications, balancing empathy with the responsibilities of conveying accurate and impartial information.

Literature review also suggests that emotions have strong impacts on navigating crises and managing public perceptions during challenging times and crises (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024). Emotions are expected to mitigate panic and boost confidence among citizens (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024) but in this context of provincial government of Alberta, communications advisors have different thoughts about the best way to response during an emergency and their top priorities. Interviewee 4 emphasized the critical importance of delivering information concisely and in an easily accessible manner, particularly in emergency situations such as wildfires. The interviewee underscored that during crises, individuals prioritize obtaining essential information, such as accessing resources and emergency assistance, over emotional content. For instance, during a wildfire, affected individuals seek immediate and clear guidance on where they can evacuate to and how to access necessary resources. Therefore, ensuring that emergency information is readily available and easy to find takes precedence over other considerations. Interview 8 also shared the same thought and stated that:

> *First and foremost, just making the material accessible, giving people a reason to care about it or explaining things in ways that make sense to people so that they can understand it. We're trying to think about where people are and think about providing them with correct answers. (Interviewee 8)*

The inclination towards a neutral and factual tone in government communication, in the given answers, is possibly reflective of broader trends in Canada and can indeed be influenced by the country's media system, which is often characterized as a liberal model that prioritizes information (Hallin & Mancini, 2024, p.11). According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), in liberal model of media and politics, there is typically an emphasis on providing objective and informative content to the public. Liberal media systems are often associated with democratic values such as freedom of speech, transparency, and access to information. As a result, there may be a cultural inclination towards communication that emphasizes transparency, accountability, and the provision of factual information, aligning with the principles of liberal media systems.

Especially, in liberal democracies like Canada, it's safe to say that there is a strong emphasis on government accountability and transparency. Clear, factual communication from government agencies helps fulfill these democratic principles by keeping the public informed and engaged in governance processes (OECD, 2021). Moreover, in addition to reflecting on the presence of emotion in the government system, it's important to consider the distinction between partisan and non-partisan employees within the provincial government of Alberta. While politicians often engage in public displays of emotion as part of their partisan roles, non-partisan employees, such as communications advisors, are expected to maintain a clear line of neutrality and objectivity in their duties (Government of Alberta, 2018).

> *We often see is our politicians who are out in front giving big demonstrations of emotion, and that's their job. But I don't. (Interviewee 7)*

This distinction is crucial in upholding the integrity and impartiality of government communications, ensuring that information is conveyed accurately and transparently, free from partisan bias or influence. The public often mistakenly associates the partisan displays of emotion by political figures with the entirety of government operations, overlooking the subtle emotions in government communications handled by non-partisan employees within the provincial government of Alberta (Agrawal & Gretzinger, 2023). By emphasizing the role as a non-partisan employee, Interviewee 7 underscores the importance of maintaining professionalism and adherence to ethical standards in government communications, regardless of the emotional dynamics at play in the broader political landscape.

However, it's worth noting that **while emotions might not be overtly expressed in government communications, that doesn't mean they are completely absent.** Effective communication often involves understanding the emotions and concerns of the audience and addressing them appropriately, even if it's done in a more subdued or implicit manner (Dennison, 2023).

Emotion as a strategic tool.

> *"Emotions are not good or bad, nor are they facts. Emotions are transitory data that provide individuals with information or emotional messages about themselves, others or a situation. These emotional messages are received and communicated."*
>
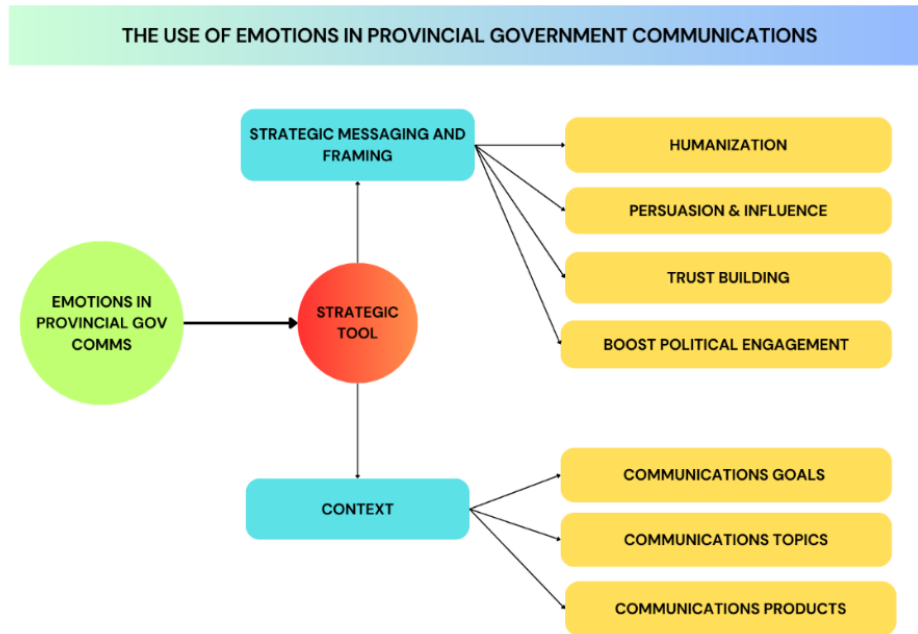> *(Government of Canada, 2024, p. 03)*

Figure 1: The use of emotions in provincial government communications

In the figure I've presented above, the utilization of emotions within provincial government communication is highlighted as a strategic tool aimed at crafting strategic messaging and framing. This practice extends across diverse contexts within provincial government communications, including various communication goals, topics, and various communication products.

Strategic messaging and framing

> *It's all about using emotion as a strategic tool to communicate what you need to communicate and make sure it's used at the right time (Interviewee 7).*

Emotions are strategic tools wielded with precision to achieve specific goals. At the core of governmental communication lies the imperative to inform, engage, and persuade citizens while upholding democratic values and promoting public welfare (Bennett & Entman, 2001). Emotions serve as potent instruments in achieving these objectives, allowing provincial governments to connect with citizens on a deeper level and elicit desired responses (Bennett & Entman, 2001). .

Interviewee 5 provided an example that sometimes communications advisors might fit in an additional post on social media that wasn't included in the initial communications strategies, but

because so many people are early waiting for, they would go ahead and "match the public on their emotional level with "we are excited to announce" kind of post so that they know that the government heard them." In such cases, choosing to align with the public's emotional tone make the public feel acknowledged by the government. It illustrates how the use of emotions by communications advisors can shape public perceptions and foster positive relationships in government communications.

In the context of the Government of Alberta, the actions of communications advisors is also reflective of the Cultivation Theory by George Gerbner (1960s). Cultivation theory posits that prolonged exposure to media content, particularly television, shapes individuals' perceptions of reality over time (Perera, 2023). It suggests that the media's portrayal of social issues and values influences viewers' beliefs and attitudes (Perera, 2023). If the government wants to shape public perceptions and attitudes towards specific policy agendas, communications advisors can utilize emotions to support but in a way that is also "measured and controlled because they want those emotions to be reliable, steady and dependable" (Interviewee 7). This requires advisors to carefully align emotional messaging with predetermined themes or values associated with the policy agenda. Whether evoking urgency, excitement, or anger, emotions must remain consistent to effectively influence public understanding and underscore the importance of the issue at hand.

Suppose the Government of Alberta wants to address public anger towards the federal government's policies on natural resource management. Communications advisors can strategically use emotions like frustration and determination in a measured and controlled manner to rally public support. For example, a social media campaign features heartfelt testimonials from local residents, highlighting the impact of federal policies on Alberta's economy. By consistently utilizing these emotions with high frequency across various communication channels, advisors can reinforce their messaging and influence public opinion over time. Through the emotional messaging with Alberta's stance on natural resource management, advisors evoke solidarity and empowerment among the public, shaping positive perceptions and attitudes towards the government's agenda.

Moreover, in order to focus on these emotional triggers properly, provincial government communications advisors need to understand the topic to elicit specific emotional responses. As interviewee 6 mentioned, there's a certain place for emotion in the products depending on the

topic. For example, for communications advisors at Ministry of Health, topics related to chronic illnesses like cancer or health struggles may evoke strong emotional responses from the public, as these issues directly impact individuals' well-being and quality of life. Interviewee 6 stated that when these emotions happen "more organically", communications advisors can "play into those emotions", leverage these emotional triggers to create empathetic and relatable messaging that resonates with audiences on a personal level.

For topics that are drier or harder to include emotions, Interviewee 7 mentioned that evoking strong emotions can be achieved through various cues, including the tone of speech, body language, and visual elements in communication products.

> *If your Premier is out there talking about dry financial information, you would want to use emotions make it approachable in a different way, right? And so that would be through things like maybe premiers looking directly at the camera, she's speaking with a stronger voice, she's pausing, and she's smiling a little bit. Those cues of emotion are absolutely used within a speech. (Interviewee 7)*

Interview 2 also stated that the provincial government has "a lot of little things like little tricks and tools that they can use to convey emotion" (Interviewee 2). Main tools are tone, grammar and word choices, especially when communications advisors have to write key messages and things that are very short but they can be so impactful and convey a lot of emotions. For example, one of the key messages that Interviewee 2 wrote for the food security program was "all Albertans deserve access to food." This concise yet powerful statement elicits a strong emotional response, as it touches on fundamental rights and underscores the government's obligation to take action. By carefully selecting words and crafting messages with the appropriate tone, communications advisors can evoke empathy, urgency, and a sense of responsibility among the public, ultimately driving support for important policy initiatives.

Moreover, communications advisors can incorporate emotional storytelling techniques, such as real-life case studies and personal narratives, to evoke empathy, empathy, and inspire action. Interviewee 2 also provided an example about the role of emotions in digital storytelling projects, particularly in addressing social issues such as homelessness. The interviewee referenced a specific example where a colleague created a series of six videos focused on aiding homeless individuals. These videos featured real case studies and community leaders actively

involved in assisting the homeless population that had significant impacts on Albertans. After the release of the series, the government did get a good amount of donations for homeless shelters across the province and people took immediate actions to support people in need. In this case, according to Fahkry (2023), emotions can serve as powerful motivators for action, prompting viewers to empathize with the experiences of others and feel compelled to contribute to positive change. By incorporating emotional elements into digital storytelling content, communicators can create more impactful and resonant messages. This is also an excellent example to reflect to what have been mentioned in the literature review: "Government communications that tap into negative emotions can foster empathy and solidarity among citizens (Zaki, 2020). Messages that highlight the struggles of marginalized communities or the hardships faced by vulnerable populations can evoke empathy and prompt individuals to support policies aimed at addressing social inequalities (Zaki, 2020)."

In this same case of homeless issue, Interviewee 2 discussed the impact of negative emotions in addressing the issue of homelessness. The interviewee suggested that negative emotions can have a greater impact on eliciting reactions from the public. For instance, if the government were to publicly acknowledge the severity of homelessness by stating "homelessness is terrible, this is awful," it could potentially evoke stronger reactions from the public. However, Interviewee 2 noted that such negative messaging is rare, as governments typically aim to maintain a positive image. Nonetheless, the interviewee emphasized the importance of balancing reaffirmation and factual information in communication strategies:

> *I think if it were to go completely factual, it would give the media free reign to interpret that however they want. From a communications perspective, it's really important to spin messaging, especially during crises like homelessness, to be as touching as you can make it because otherwise, you're just asking for trouble. (Interviewee 2)*

Interviewee 2 highlights the importance of recognizing that audiences may interpret messaging differently based on their perspectives, experiences, and biases. Communications advisors must consider how their messages will be received and interpreted by diverse audience segments, particularly during times of crisis when emotions may be heightened (Sellnow & Ulmer, 1998). According to Vreese & Elenbaas (2009), the mention of "spin" suggests the strategic manipulation or framing of messages to influence audience perceptions in a favorable direction.

While the term "spin" may have negative connotations in some contexts, here it underscores the need for communications professionals to carefully craft messages during challenging time, as Interviewee 5 explained:

> *We want to inspire hope, but we can't sugarcoat the tough stuff. So, we use emotions to guide our messaging. We aim to uplift while still keeping it real. It's all about finding that sweet spot where people feel informed and empowered, even in uncertain times. (Interviewee 5)*

Therefore, the use of emotions has to be thoroughly considered and controlled. Moreover, during the chat, Interviewee 6 highlighted that Alberta is a very diverse province and its citizens come from various backgrounds, cultures, and languages, therefore communication strategies should resonate with the widest possible audience. As a result, communications advisors often focus strongly on essential key messages that are relevant provincewide. While this approach may appear neutral and "sometimes very stripped", "it is strategic in nature", aiming to ensure that nobody feels excluded or marginalized by the information provided. This underscores the commitment to reaching and engaging with all members of the community, irrespective of their cultural or linguistic backgrounds. In essence, the use of emotions in government communications is not solely about evoking certain feelings but also about fostering connection and understanding among diverse audiences. By carefully considering the diverse perspectives and experiences within the population, communications advisors can craft messages that resonate deeply and effectively convey vital information to all members of the community.

Context for the use of emotions in government communications

Emotions based on communications goals and topics

Communication goals serve as the compass guiding government messaging, directing efforts towards specific outcomes such as building trust, fostering public engagement, or driving behavioral change (Denyer-Simmons & Small, 2012). Emotions can be strategically employed to support these goals, with different emotions evoking distinct responses from audiences.

In the interview with one interviewee who is the director of communications, she mentioned the "Alberta is calling" campaign and this is an exemplary case of the strategic use of emotions based on the communications goals. This campaign is one of the biggest provincial campaigns,

aiming to attract individuals from across the country and around the world to move to Alberta for employment opportunities, quality of life, and economic prosperity (Menezes, 2022). Emotions played a pivotal role in the "Alberta is calling" campaign, "as the government sought to evoke feelings of excitement, opportunity, and optimism among its target audience" (Interviewee 8). According to Interviewee 8, through a series of visually compelling advertisements, social media campaigns, and promotional materials, the government strategically portrayed Alberta as a vibrant and welcoming destination where individuals could pursue their dreams and build a better future for themselves and their families.

Key elements of the campaign included captivating imagery showcasing Alberta's natural beauty, dynamic urban centers, and diverse communities, along with compelling narratives highlighting success stories of individuals who had relocated to Alberta and thrived professionally and personally. By tapping into emotions such as hope, aspiration, and the desire for a fresh start, the campaign effectively resonated with its target audience and inspired them to consider Alberta as their next home. According to statistic from CBC Canada (2023), this campaign was a huge success with 17,000 people from other provinces within Canada in only three months. Fletcher (2023) from CBC News wrote the tittle of his article as "*Alberta isn't calling anymore because you're already here*".

> *It's not just a one-size-fits-all approach. The topics we're dealing with really dictate how we go about it. Different issues, they pull on different heartstrings. As government communicators, we've got to be really in tune with what's going on culturally, socially, and politically. It's like we're walking this fine line between tapping into those emotions and respecting the context we're in. (Interviewee 1)*

Therefore, the choice of emotional approach is heavily influenced by the topics being communicated. Different topics evoke different emotional responses from audiences, and government communicators must tailor their strategies accordingly. Government communicators must navigate these contextual nuances with sensitivity and awareness to ensure the relevance and resonance of emotional messaging.

Emotions in different communications products

Moreover, communications advisors can tailor communications products based on its nature to draw specific emotional responses from the intended audience (Peil, 2014). Communication

products are essential tools used by provincial governments to disseminate information, engage with citizens, and shape public perceptions. These products include press releases, social media posts, telephone townhall engagement sessions, or correspondence response, i.e., each serving distinct purposes in the communication landscape (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010).

According to Interviewee 4, print materials, such as brochures, pamphlets, and posters, are "designed to elicit immediate emotional responses" from viewers, capturing attention and conveying key information in a memorable and impactful manner. She provided an example of a public health campaign aimed at raising awareness about the dangers of smoking. Communications advisors may utilize stark imagery and emotive language to evoke fear and concern, driving home the potential consequences of tobacco use and motivating behavior change. Meanwhile, Interviewee 6 mentioned that digital platforms, including websites, social media posts, and multimedia presentations, "provide great opportunities for engaging audiences through interactive elements". This can go back to the example of the video series about homelessness and it's safe to say that emotions are integrated into digital communication products through video, animation, and interactive features, allowing for more intensive emotional expression and audience engagement. Furthermore, as aforementioned, with face-to-face interactions, such as public speeches, and community events, emotions are communicated through tone of voice, body language, and personal anecdotes, creating authentic connections and fostering trust and rapport with listeners. Notably, public engagement sessions and correspondence messages are inherently very interactive and tailored to address the concerns, needs, and sentiments of the public. Interviewee 8 stated that:

> *Correspondence work and engagement sessions are like emotion magnets... I mean, just look at the names of these communication products. When we're in those settings, we're not just exchanging information, we're diving into the heart of what matters to people in a more private setting.*

One reason why public engagement sessions and correspondence messages tend to contain more emotions is their direct and personal nature (Government of Canda, 2023). As Interviewee 8 put it - correspondence messages, including letters, emails, and social media interactions, provide a direct line of communication between government representatives and individual citizens. In these messages, government officials often address constituents' inquiries, concerns, and

feedback, which may encompass a wide range of emotional responses, including frustration, anxiety, gratitude, or hope. As such, these messages require an empathetic approach to effectively address the emotional needs of constituents while providing accurate and helpful information. When it comes to public engagement sessions, "unlike the other one-way communication channels, they allow for real-time interaction and dialogue between government officials and members of the public" (Interviewee 8). During these sessions, citizens have the opportunity to voice their opinions, share personal experiences, and express emotions related to various issues affecting their lives and communities. In conclusion, navigating the use of emotions in provincial government communications across different products demands a thorough understanding from communications advisors.

> *I would say if there's a place where you can let the emotions come in. Speaking notes are usually the best opportunity to feel a little bit more creative and have a more personal touch, while I sometimes see a news release is just more like information and where I'm trying to be more factual. (Interviewee 9)*

Connecting with citizens, fostering empathy, and building trust require a deep awareness of how emotions can be effectively wielded in various contexts. However, it's crucial to strike a balance between emotional appeal and factual accuracy, ensuring that the true purpose of each communication product is not overshadowed (Dennison, 2023). As communication landscapes evolve and societal expectations shift, government communicators must remain agile to expertly choose the most suitable communication channels and deploying emotions appropriately, ultimately support provincial governments to foster meaningful connections with citizens while advancing their governance objectives.

Elements that restrict the use of emotions

Embracing emotion as a strategic communication tool allows governments to create meaningful connections with the public, ultimately enhancing the impact and relevance of their communication efforts. But as mentioned in the previous part, emotion is not a crucial part in the context of provincial government communications in Alberta, Canada. The strategic use of

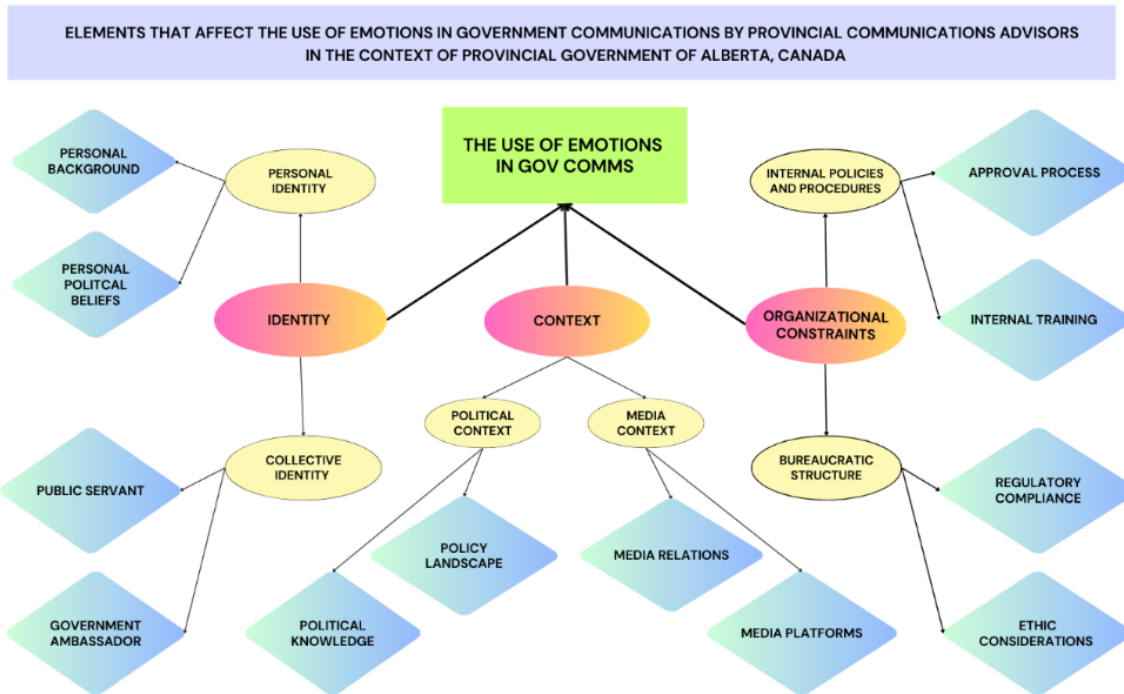emotions is often constrained by various elements mentioned in the figure below.

Figure 2: Elements that affect the use of emotions in provincial government communications

As presented, the incorporation of emotions in government communications is influenced by three primary factors. Firstly, the broader context of government communications, including political and media context, sets the stage for emotional expression. Secondly, organizational constraints pose challenges to the integration of emotions, with internal policies, procedures, and bureaucratic structures. Lastly, the identity of communications advisors plays a pivotal role in determining the extent to which emotional elements are incorporated, involving both personal and collective identity considerations. A deeper analysis of these factors is essential for gaining insight into the use of emotions within the provincial government of Alberta.

Context

Political context

The political context of provincial government communications is shaped by the broader political landscape, including party ideologies, public opinion, and electoral considerations (Bennett & Entman, 2001). Political pressures may dictate the tone and content of government

messages, limiting the freedom to evoke emotions that diverge from established party narratives (Bennett & Entman, 2001).

> *When we send products up for review, Minister's Office one way or another often will put a political spin on it. Even though they still need to follow the government standards with language and structure but somehow the products turn out so different compared to our initial draft. (Interviewee 2)*

Moreover, public servants, despite having expertise in communication strategies, have limited autonomy in deciding how to address public sentiment emotionally (Agrawal & Gretzinger, 2023). While they may recommend approaches to make people feel heard and understood, the final decision rests with political leaders. Interviewee 6 mentioned that as non-partisan communications advisors, it is difficult because "what they do or how they respond to that information is not in their hands." They can send forward the reports that show recommendations of effective communications strategies. But at the end of the day, it is up to the ministers of that department, where those political heads that were voted in to make the final call on if they will address it or not. "And that's when communications advisors would go to their personal socials or their announcements and to see how they respond to the criticism," said Interviewee 6. As a result, communications advisors must often wait to observe how political leaders respond, typically through personal social media platforms or official announcements. This insight guides communications advisors in preparing to manage the aftermath and uphold the reputation of government institutions. They also have to understand that transparency and credibility are paramount, and any hint of partisanship could undermine the effectiveness of their efforts (Hofmann, et al., 2013). Thus, they approach each communication goal with a keen awareness of the political landscape, striving to strike a balance that serves both their governmental responsibilities and the public interest.

Media context

Similarly, the media context exerts a profound influence on the communication strategies adopted by provincial governments, presenting both opportunities and challenges in effectively incorporating emotions into government messaging (Deane, 2015). Media outlets serve as intermediaries between governments and the public, shaping public discourse, perceptions, and agendas through their editorial decisions and content dissemination practices (Deane, 2015).

To convey emotion, for journalism, it's definitely easier in some ways because you just get assigned stories, or you find stories that are just really human-focused and very impactful. And government has to deal with the emotional responses from those articles. (Interviewee 5)

Media outlets often prioritize sensationalism or conflict-driven narratives, as these tend to attract greater audience attention and engagement (Deane, 2015). This preference for sensationalism can overshadow factual information or soft emotional appeals crafted by provincial governments, making it challenging for government messages to break through the noise of sensationalized news coverage (Denyer-Simmons & Small, 2012). Interviewee 4 mentioned one critical point that the 24/7 news cycle and the rapid dissemination of information on social media platforms required communications advisors to "adapt as it goes" since the official government messages often take longer time to be published.

Moreover, the Gatekeeping Theory by Kurt Lewin (1943) further elucidates the role of media gatekeepers in determining which messages reach the public and how they are presented (DeIuliis, 2015). Media gatekeepers, such as editors and producers, control the flow of information by selecting, interpreting, and framing news stories (DeIuliis, 2015). Understanding this dynamic of gatekeeping provides provincial governments with insights into how to navigate media landscapes and increase the likelihood of their messages being conveyed effectively.

I feel like in government, it's almost like we just sort of take for granted that media will pay attention to what we do. But because of that mindset, we tend to make sure that we frame the language and the story before they have a chance to spin a bad story and make it worse. We need to make sure we distribute factual information in an accessible manner to avoid any backfires. That's why factual information is more important than emotional element sometimes. (Interviewee 1)

By understanding the preferences and tendencies of media outlets, governments can tailor their communication strategies to align with journalistic norms and expectations. Collaborative partnerships with media organizations can also facilitate the dissemination of emotionally resonant stories and messages (Denyer-Simmons & Small, 2012).

Organizational constraints

Bureaucratic structure

The bureaucratic nature of the government introduces complexities and constraints that can hinder the integration of emotions into communication strategies (Hartanto, et al., 2021). As aforementioned, two main bureaucratic constraints examined in this study are regulatory compliance and ethical considerations.

Regulatory compliance

One key area of regulatory compliance that impacts the use of emotions in government communications is privacy laws. Legal constraints can complicate the use of emotions in government communications, particularly in sensitive or controversial contexts (Guttman, 2017). Governments are often bound by strict regulations regarding the handling of personal data and protected health information (Guttman, 2017). Interviewee 7 stated that when communicating with the public, government agencies must ensure that they do not inadvertently disclose sensitive information or violate individuals' privacy rights. This can restrict the types of emotional appeals that can be used, particularly if they involve personal stories or anecdotes. Moreover, Interviewee 5 mentioned that communication professionals must navigate legal considerations such as defamation, privacy, and discrimination laws, which may restrict the types of emotional appeals that can be employed (Guttman, 2017). Communications should strive to be fair and impartial, avoiding favoritism or bias towards any particular group or viewpoint (Bennett & Entman, 2001). Any emotions expressed in communications should be "culturally appropriate and sensitive to diverse audiences' backgrounds and perspectives" (Interviewee 5). Interviewee 5 also emphasized on the alignment with government policies and priorities, reflecting the official stance of the provincial government. The potential for litigation or reputational damage may discourage communication professionals from taking risks with emotional messaging, leading to a preference for safer, more restrained communication approaches.

> *We often find ourselves playing it safe and sticking to more neutral territory, just to avoid any legal headaches down the road. (Interviewee 9)*

Risk aversion is another factor that may limit the expression of emotions in official communication channels. Government agencies often operate within highly scrutinized

environments, where any misstep or misinterpretation of emotional messaging could have significant consequences (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, n.d.). The stakes are high, and the margin for error is slim (Guttman, 2017). As a result, communication professionals may err on the side of caution, opting for communication strategies that minimize the potential for controversy, backlash, or misinterpretation.

> *I personally can't risk stirring up controversy or facing backlash. I tend to stick to communication strategies that keep things neutral and uncontroversial. It might not be the most exciting approach, but hey, it's better than dealing with a PR nightmare! (Interviewee 3)*

Ethics consideration

Ethical considerations also play a significant role in shaping the use of emotions in government communications (Government of Alberta, 2018). Communication professionals are bound by ethical principles such as honesty, integrity, and transparency, which may conflict with use of emotions for strategic purposes (Guttman, 2017).

> *We have to follow our policies and also the guidance from the Office of the Ethics Commissioner of Alberta. We are Alberta public servant who have to take oath and are expected to follow the government ethics standard. (Interviewee 5)*

First and foremost, all interviewees always emphasize on transparency when leveraging emotions in government communications. "Personally, I believe that citizens should have a right to know how and why emotions are being used to influence their perceptions and behaviors" (Interviewee 8). Government agencies must be transparent about their motives and intentions when employing emotional appeals, ensuring that citizens are not manipulated or misled.

Respect for autonomy is another essential ethical consideration in the use of emotions in government communications (Institute on Governance, 2023). Citizens should have the freedom to make informed decisions based on accurate information, free from undue emotional manipulation or coercion.

Furthermore, the protection of vulnerable populations is of utmost importance when employing emotional appeals in government communications (Dann, 2022). One interviewee from the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction brought up an issue highlighting that vulnerable

individual, such as children, the elderly, and those with mental health issues, may be particularly susceptible to emotional manipulation. Therefore, the government or communications advisors in particular should strive to protect the emotional well-being of these individuals and ensure that their communications are respectful and inclusive.

In addition, according to Interviewee 6, whose focus is on social media, when considering online posts that evoke strong emotions, the government must "prioritize the safety and privacy of individuals engaging with the organization on social media platforms." This commitment reflects an ethical responsibility that is particularly crucial for government agencies (Bormann, et al., 2021). Unlike other entities, the government holds a unique ethical obligation to prioritize the well-being and safety of its users, ensuring that interactions on social media occur within a secure and trustworthy environment (Zaki, 2020).

Internal policies and procedures

Furthermore, internal policies and procedures govern the conduct of communication professionals within provincial governments (Government of Alberta, 2018). These policies may outline guidelines for message content, tone, and delivery, imposing restrictions on the use of emotions in government communications.

These guidelines often prioritize factual accuracy, objectivity, and professionalism, emphasizing the importance of conveying information in a clear, concise, and authoritative manner (Government of Alberta, 2018). As a result, communication professionals may feel constrained in their ability to incorporate emotional appeals into government messages, particularly if such appeals are perceived as deviating from established communication norms. Interview 7 mentioned that in government communications, it is required to "follow established templates and samples" to ensure consistency and professionalism across various communication products. These templates often encompass standardized formats, language conventions, and stylistic elements that reflect the official voice and branding of the government entity. By following these templates, communicators can streamline the creation process and maintain coherence in messaging (Agrawal & Gretzinger, 2023). However, while templates provide a structured framework, "they are adapted to fit the specific context at hand" (Interviewee 7). Therefore, while templates and samples provide a starting point, the customization of communications

remains essential to ensure relevance and effectiveness in conveying information to the intended recipients.

Moreover, the need to navigate through multiple layers of approval also often leads to a cautious approach, where communication products are tailored to meet procedural requirements and adhere to established protocols, rather than taking risks by incorporating emotional elements. Many noted that even though they might craft a well-researched, timely and polished communication piece, they often see significant changes or delays in its publication due to the extensive layers of approval it must pass through. This process involves input and revisions from multiple stakeholders, resulting in a final product that may differ significantly from the original draft. Despite their best efforts, advisors must navigate through approvals and revisions, ultimately resulting in communication products that may not fully reflect their original vision.

> *There's definitely not a lot of satisfaction with the end product. But there is a lot of satisfaction with drafts. When I'm done drafting, I'm proud of the work that I did, and I'll send it up for approval. But once it goes up to the top, I feel like there's no satisfaction because it's always completely different and they only care about facts. (Interviewee 2)*

Meanwhile, interviewee 4 highlighted that within provincial government setting, "there's so much room for misinformation if there isn't strong communication." Despite acknowledging the frustrations that may arise from the approval process, communications advisors understand the importance in ensuring that the information disseminated is accurate and factual. As communicators within the government, they "receive raw information" and are tasked with transforming it into communications that effectively reach the public. This perspective shows the significant responsibility placed on communicators to distill complex information into accessible formats, safeguarding the integrity of government messaging and fostering public trust. This emphasis on playing it safe and adhering to established procedures underscores the challenge of balancing the imperative for engaging communication with the realities of operating within a highly institutionalized system (Hartanto, et al., 2021).

Communications advisors' identity

Personal identity

The personal identity of communications advisors plays a significant role in shaping communication strategies within provincial governments. Individual beliefs and values serve as foundational principles that guide communication advisors in their decision-making process (Ozyilmaz & Koc, 2022). These beliefs may include a wide range of ideological, political, and ethical perspectives, shaping advisors' perceptions of what constitutes effective communication and how emotions should be utilized in government messaging (Ozyilmaz & Koc, 2022). For example, an advisor who prioritizes transparency and citizen empowerment may advocate for emotionally resonant communication strategies that prioritize honesty, authenticity, and public engagement.

Personal background

Each advisor brings their unique set of knowledge, experiences, and communication styles to their role, which profoundly influences how they navigate the tension between emotional appeal and organizational constraints in government communications (Ozyilmaz & Koc, 2022) .

> *It's important to keep that personal touch, knowing the fact that yes, it's gonna go up and it's going to get edited and maybe you won't end up in the final product, but it might also end up making someone think, right? (Interviewee 5)*

Interviewee 5 acknowledges that their input may not always make it into the final version, but they believe that it can still have value in sparking ideas or prompting thought among decision-makers. Personal experiences play a significant role in shaping communication advisors' approach to emotional messaging. *"You have to feel it and understand it before you can communicate it" (Interviewee 6).* Advisors draw upon their lived experiences, professional background, and their own emotional intelligence to inform their understanding of how emotions impact communication outcomes (Ozyilmaz & Koc, 2022). Interviewee 6 also mentioned that personal touch would matter because if an advisor were to have a lack of compassion or understanding of a critical situation, then the public wouldn't have felt a sense of support and reassurance through government messaging, it could cause panic, which could be a huge issue with the government because of their jobs as communicators. Another example from an interviewee working at Ministry of Health was that an advisor who has personally experienced

the challenges of accessing healthcare services may advocate for communication strategies that evoke empathy and compassion towards healthcare issues. This highlights the indispensable role of emotional intelligence and personal touch in guiding advisors' communication strategies and ensuring their resonance with diverse audience emotions and needs.

Communication styles also vary among advisors, influencing how they navigate the tension between emotional appeal and organizational constraints. Some advisors may favor a more assertive or persuasive communication style, emphasizing the importance of emotive storytelling and persuasive appeals to mobilize public support. Interviewee 8 provided an example about his assertive communication style when it came to advocate for a new environmental policy. He would emphasize emotive storytelling, describing the devastating impact of pollution on local ecosystems and wildlife. By employing persuasive appeals, his goal was to urge the public to support the policy by highlighting the urgent need for action to mitigate environmental degradation.

Meanwhile, others may adopt a more diplomatic or conciliatory approach, seeking to balance emotional resonance with the need for consensus-building and compromise within government institutions. For example, if a communications advisor is tasked with addressing community concerns about proposed budget cuts to social welfare programs. If the advisor were to choose diplomatic approach, they would carefully craft a statement that acknowledges the emotional resonance of these programs while also emphasizing the need for fiscal responsibility. There is a need to strike a balance between emotional empathy and pragmatic considerations, aiming to build consensus and foster constructive dialogue among stakeholders.

> *I've come to see that it's not just about the words we choose, but how we deliver them. We use what we've picked up along the way to craft the perfect cocktail of emotion and strategy to keep the conversation flowing, right? (Interviewee 9)*

Political beliefs

Personal political beliefs, though diverse among communications advisors, are typically set aside in favor of maintaining a non-partisan stance when working for governmental institutions. Nine out of nine interviewees stated that when it comes to political affiliation, that's where they have to make a big separation because when they work for the Alberta Public Service, they work for

the government of the day, and no matter who they are, they are there to represent that work in their job.

> *You're allowed to be emotional about your job and has your own political beliefs. There's gonna be things that and decisions that the government makes that impacts us and that's ok because you're a person. But in our job, we have to separate ourselves, remain steady and consistent, despite what is sort of going on (Interviewee 7).*

However, these beliefs can still subtly influence the use of emotions in provincial government communications in several ways. Their personal political beliefs may subtly influence the framing of messages. This can be reflected through the use of emotive language, or the emphasis placed on certain emotional appeals that align with their underlying beliefs, even if unintentional (Harris & Daniels, 2005). An advisor provided an example that when she involved in implementing a government initiative related to social welfare, she may subtly favor communication approaches that align with her belief in the importance of social safety nets. "I often use emotive storytelling to highlight the impact of the initiative on vulnerable people because I feel like they really need the extra help that maybe the party overlooked sometimes" (Interviewee 3). This can be explained by the selective perception, suggesting that individuals tend to perceive and interpret information in a way that aligns with their existing beliefs, values, and attitudes (Holland, 2024). In the context of communication strategies by advisors, personal political beliefs may influence how they perceive and interpret emotional responses from different audience groups, potentially leading to biases in communication approaches. By being aware of this tendency, advisors can strive to maintain objectivity and inclusivity in their communication strategies, ensuring that diverse perspectives and emotional responses are considered and addressed effectively.

Collective identity

Moreover, the personal identity of communications advisors intersects with broader collective identities, including professional norms, organizational culture, and group dynamics. Advisors may align themselves with professional associations, industry networks, or ideological affiliations that shape their approach to communication. These collective identities influence advisors' perceptions of what constitutes appropriate communication practices within the context of provincial government institutions.

Collective identity, including professional norms, organizational culture, and group dynamics, shapes the collective approach to communication within government agencies (Soenen & Moingeon, 2002).

Public servant

According to the provincial government of British Columbia, Canada, public servants are "responsible to the elected government, not a political party. They develop and deliver public programs or services, inform policymaking, and provide evidence-based advice to leaders" (Government of British Columbia, 2024). They fulfill roles that serve the public interest and contribute to the functioning of society. They encompass a wide range of positions, including elected officials, civil servants, administrative staff, and specialized professionals like communications advisors.

> *Personally, I don't normally include my own emotions because we work as public servants. We're not representing one particular political party. I try to keep things pretty impartial and just stick to the subject matter. (Interviewee 8)*

Firstly, provincial communications advisors typically see themselves as stewards of information, entrusted with the task of effectively disseminating government policies, initiatives, and information to the public. During the chat, Interviewee 3 and 7 mentioned that they are always trying to write from the government's point of view and not theirs. They understand that their role extends beyond message delivery. They are public servants who adhere to transparency, accountability, and public engagement, fostering trust and understanding between government institutions and the communities they serve. Moreover, communications advisors often view themselves as facilitators of democratic participation and civic discourse. As Alberta public servants, communications advisors need to "provide correct and timely information to Albertans and ensure that the government address the struggles that people are going through" (Interviewee 3). Interviewee 8 also stated: "First and foremost, just making the material accessible, giving people a reason to care about it or explaining things in ways that make sense to people so that they can understand it." Or interviewee 9 said "you have to be factually correct, make sure that what you're saying is true but you're not putting words into different people's mouths." This belief is also shared by interviewee 4 that communications advisors are not inserting their own opinions but "reporting the facts basically and just giving the information to people and then they

can take whatever they want from it and form their own opinions." They recognize the importance of empowering citizens to make informed decisions and actively participate in the democratic process.

Moreover, this commitment to public service extends to ensuring that marginalized or underrepresented voices are heard and included in the conversation, promoting inclusivity and equity in government communications. All communications advisors interviewed agreed that Alberta is a very diverse province of multiple languages, backgrounds and cultures, they have to make sure that they reach the most amount of people in their communications products.

> *We really have to take into consideration what we're posting is based on the public interest as a whole and not one particular group, sometimes what that leads to is just the basic key messages that everybody needs to know and that can come across as very neutral. But we have to do that, so nobody feels left out. (Interviewee 6)*

Additionally, provincial communications advisors embrace the principles of professionalism, integrity, and impartiality in their work. Interviewee 1 stated that it's her job to make sure that everything she says from the ministry's point of view is accurate and true. And the rest of interviewees also understand the importance of maintaining non-partisanship and neutrality, ensuring that communication efforts serve the public interest rather than advancing any particular political agenda. They "choose words carefully, striving for clarity, accuracy, and professionalism to convey the government's policies and initiatives effectively", interviewee 5 said. Also, as interviewee 8 mentioned that regardless of personal opinions or feelings about a policy or issue, it's essential to maintain professionalism in their work as a government communicator. Communications advisors might not always be writing about policies that they agree with, or they won't think "this is the best policy ever". But a communications professional "certainly can't let their own feelings on an issue dictate what they write about it" because their jobs are "not to be the people in front of the cameras or the jobs are not to be those people informing Albertans of what they think."

As a public service within one big organization as the provincial government of Alberta, it is imperative to discern the boundaries between various roles and responsibilities. While decision-makers and spokespersons may bring personal viewpoints and biases concerning policies or issues under discussion, the role of a communicator diverges significantly. As a communicator,

the primary objective is not to advocate for personal opinions but to serve as an "information disseminator, ensuring accuracy and effectiveness in message delivery to the audience" (Interviewee 5). This requires an audience-centric approach, wherein the focus shifts towards addressing the needs and interests of the audience rather than personal views or agendas (Kealey, 2019). The top priority remains providing information that is pertinent, timely, and beneficial to the audience, irrespective of one's individual stance on the subject matter. By upholding these principles, communicators serve as public servant with a pivotal role in fostering transparency, trust, and informed decision-making within government communication contexts.

Government ambassador

Within the collective identity as government ambassadors, provincial communications advisors perceive themselves as guardians of the provincial government's image and reputation (Government of British Columbia, 2024). This perception shapes their behavior, both in their professional communications and in their personal interactions, including on social media platforms. Communications advisors are aware that their words and actions reflect not only on themselves but also on the provincial government they represent. They often learn to "manage the way that they speak to other people and especially if people know that they are Government of Alberta employees, it's pretty important to be mindful of that" (Interviewee 8). As a government employee, whether directly involved in communications or not, there is an inherent responsibility to be mindful of one's position and the impact of one's actions on the organization's image. Being aware of the authority and influence associated with the position helps in making informed decisions about how to engage with others (Government of British Columbia, 2024).

Additionally, according to Government of Alberta (n.d.), communications advisors serve as ambassadors of the government's commitment to connecting with citizens in a meaningful and empathetic way. They recognize the importance of "engaging with citizens on a personal level, acknowledging their experiences, and providing assistance or information whenever possible" (Interviewee 7). In their role, communications advisors establish boundaries to maintain professionalism and avoid engaging with abusive language or behavior. However, they actively listen to citizens who share personal stories or concerns, ensuring that each individual feels seen, heard, and acknowledged. An example that Interviewee 6 provided is that the government often

maintain a neutral tone when addressing broader topics, such as changes in immigration policies affecting international students. However, when students reach out to them directly via emails or social media direct inbox with personalized questions or concerns related to their specific circumstances, they prioritize providing tailored responses to address students' needs and offer assistance. This personalized approach allows communications advisors to connect with individuals on a more emotional level, particularly in private dialogues where they can offer support and guidance.

Moreover, communications advisors are mindful of their behavior in personal interactions and on social media platforms, recognizing the potential impact on the government's reputation.

> *I think about like my public presence outside of work. I think about my social media presence and how I might talk in public. I am well aware of my position and I try not to show public political viewpoints too publicly. (Interviewee 1)*

They refrain from engaging in divisive or controversial discussions that may reflect poorly on the government or undermine public trust. Instead, they maintain a respectful and diplomatic demeanor, even in informal settings, to uphold the government's credibility and respectability (Kealey, 2019). Furthermore, communications advisors actively monitor and manage the provincial government's presence on social media platforms, ensuring that content is consistent with the government's messaging and values. They engage with the public in a courteous and responsive manner, addressing inquiries, concerns, and feedback with empathy and professionalism (Kealey, 2019).

Overall, the identity of communication advisors can significantly influence their utilization of emotions in government communications. Factors such as personal background, cultural upbringing, and professional experiences shape advisors' perceptions and attitudes towards emotional expression in communication strategies. Advisors may draw upon their own emotional intelligence and communication style to craft messages that resonate with diverse audiences. Additionally, collective identity within communication teams and organizational cultures can influence the prioritization of emotional elements in messaging (Hall, 2019). For example, teams from the Ministry of Community and Social Services with a strong emphasis on empathy and relationship-building may be more inclined to incorporate emotional appeals into their communications. Conversely, advisors operating within more rigid or bureaucratic structures

such as Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance may face constraints that limit their ability to employ emotions effectively. Overall, the identity of communication advisors plays a crucial role in shaping the emotional tone and content of government communications, highlighting the complex interplay between personal and organizational factors in the use of emotions in government settings.

Conclusions

Through the nine interviews with communications advisors at provincial government of Alberta, the analysis provided valuable insights into the study's overarching research questions. The first question was "*how can emotions be effectively woven into government communication strategies by provincial government communications advisors?*"

As emphasized earlier, emotion is a strategic tool, and communications advisors need to consider multiple factors when incorporating emotions in provincial government communications. Through this study, it's apparent that in government communication, dealing with emotions is like walking a tightrope. Government communicators need to be aware of how their messages might stir up emotions. For communications advisors, it's like their "built-in" sense that helps them judge if what they are saying is hitting the right note (Holland, 2024). Sometimes, communications advisors can intuitively assess the emotional impact of their messaging, just as how they adjust our behavior depending on the situation (Holland, 2024). They have to tread carefully, making sure they're not crossing any lines or causing unnecessary upset. It's all about finding the right balance between connecting with people on an emotional level and keeping things professional and respectful. So, understanding how emotions play into communication helps them shape their messages in a way that feels genuine and appropriate.

While overt displays of emotion may be discouraged, it's important to strategically integrate emotion into communications. This can be achieved through subtle cues such as pauses in speech or variations in voice inflection, allowing emotions to be conveyed effectively without being disruptive. For example, one interviewee's insights highlight the strategic role of emotion in government communication, particularly in the context of speeches delivered by political figures such as the Premier. Additionally, employing narrative storytelling techniques can be an effective strategy for engaging audiences emotionally. By crafting compelling narratives that humanize policy issues and highlight the impact on individuals and communities, provincial

government communications advisors can elicit empathy and understanding among citizens, encouraging them to connect with the message on a deeper level. Furthermore, integrating emotional appeals into visual and multimedia content, such as videos and infographics, can enhance their effectiveness in capturing attention and conveying complex information in a compelling manner.

Overall, emotion is not simply an incidental aspect of communication or an afterthought but rather a deliberate and calculated tool used to enhance the effectiveness of the message being conveyed. Turning to the second research question, RQ2 asked*: To what extent do emotions involve in government communications?*

The extent to which emotion is integrated into government communications may vary depending on the context, audience, communications goals and products. While some public-facing products such as speaking notes may incorporate emotional elements to engage and connect with the public, others may prioritize a more neutral tone to maintain credibility and professionalism. "It's a balance between emotions and facts" (Interviewee 8). While information dissemination often dominates governmental messaging, emotions subtly underpin communication efforts, influencing public perceptions, attitudes, and responses to policies and actions (Dennison, 2023).

The use of emotions in government communications significantly impacts its media presentation, influencing how messages are perceived, interpreted, and amplified by media outlets (Bennett & Entman, 2001). Emotional framing of government messages can influence media coverage by shaping the agenda of news outlets. According to agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), the media play a crucial role in determining which issues are deemed important and worthy of public attention so when government communications incorporate emotional appeals, they may attract greater media coverage, as emotionally resonant stories are often deemed newsworthy and compelling to audiences. Conversely, media outlets may choose to downplay or ignore government messages that lack emotional resonance, thereby influencing the overall media presentation of government communications (Bennett & Entman, 2001).

Moreover, drawing on Erving Goffman's theories, particularly "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" and concepts of impression management (Goffman, 1956), if considering the provincial government as one "self", the strategic use of emotions in government communications becomes evident. Governments consciously engage in impression management

by strategically involve messages to shape public perceptions of officials, institutions, and policies. Once incorporated, emotions serve as a key tool in this endeavor, projecting images of competence, responsiveness, and caring leadership.

Additionally, the strategic use of emotions also reflects as a part of facework concept by Erving Goffman (1967), related to the strategies individuals employ to maintain their own "face" (social identity) and to uphold the "face" of others in social interactions (Goffman, 1967). In government communications, facework entails managing the reputation and image of government institutions and officials while also attending to the emotional needs and concerns of the public. Emotions play a central role in facework, as they are instrumental in signaling sincerity, trustworthiness, and empathy. For instance, government communicators may use emotional appeals to demonstrate empathy towards citizens affected by a crisis or to express solidarity with marginalized communities, thereby enhancing their perceived credibility and trustworthiness.

To summarize, the extent to which emotions are involved in government communications is context-dependent and it can be involved when government communicators wants consciously shape public perceptions to maintain credibility and uphold institutional reputation. By harnessing the power of emotions in communication, communications advisors can help foster stronger relationships with citizens, enhance transparency and accountability, and ultimately, promote greater public trust in governance institutions.

Yet, limitation to emotions were uncovered in answering the final research question, RQ3: *What are constraints of the use of emotions within the provincial government context?*

Despite the significance of emotional elements, provincial government communications advisors face multiple constraints that hinder their effective utilization. One such constraint is the political and media context, which often dictates the tone and content of government messaging. In a polarized media environment, messages that evoke strong emotions may be met with skepticism or backlash from opposing political factions or media outlets (Bennett & Entman, 2001).

Organizational structures within provincial governments, including bureaucratic processes and adherence to international policies and procedures, also pose constraints on the use of emotions in communication strategies. Advisors must navigate through bureaucratic red tape and

procedural requirements, often limiting their ability to craft emotionally resonant messages that deviate from established protocols (Agrawal & Gretzinger, 2023). Furthermore, communications advisors' identities, both personal and collective, can influence their approach to utilizing emotions in government communications. Advisors may be constrained by their own biases, beliefs, and professional affiliations, which can impact the tone and content of communication strategies. Overall, the constraints surrounding the use of emotions within the provincial government context underscore the importance of balance between engaging with constituents and adhering to legal, cultural, and political considerations.

In conclusion, while emotions can be strategically incorporated into government communications to engage, connect, and persuade audiences, the use of emotions still significantly depend on institutionalized communications practices (Grandien & Johansson, 2012). Regardless of the emotional appeal embedded within messaging, the broader framework of institutionalized communications, including organizational structures, policies, and procedures, have a profound influence on how messages are crafted, disseminated, and received. Institutionalized communications serve as the overarching framework within which emotional messaging operates, shaping the boundaries and constraints within which communicators operate (Grandien & Johansson, 2012). Thus, while emotions can enhance the resonance and impact of government communications, their efficacy is inherently intertwined with the institutional context within which they are deployed (Grandien & Johansson, 2012). Understanding and navigating these institutional dynamics are crucial for government communicators seeking to harness the power of emotions effectively in their messaging strategies.

Limitations and further research opportunities

As I reflect on the potential limitations of my thesis research on the use of emotions in provincial government communications, several considerations come to mind. Firstly, I recognize that the findings derived from my study may be inherently context-bound, primarily applicable to the provincial government of Alberta, Canada. While the insights garnered from interviews with communications advisors offer valuable perspectives, it's essential to acknowledge that these viewpoints may be influenced by individual biases and experiences. Secondly, it's important to acknowledge my position as an employee within the provincial government under study. My pre-existing knowledge of government communications and potential biases may inadvertently

influence the formulation of interview questions and interpretation of findings. Moreover, the subjective nature of emotions presents a challenge in objectively measuring their impact on government communications and public perceptions. The lack of comprehensive data on emotional communication strategies within the provincial government setting further compounds this challenge.

However, considering these limitations, this study provides several avenues for future research. Firstly, comparative analyses could be expanded to include not only different provinces or countries but also various levels of government, such as municipal or federal. By examining how emotional communication strategies vary across different governmental contexts, scholars could uncover further insights into the role of emotions in shaping public perceptions and engagement with government institutions. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of emotional messaging over extended periods can provide valuable insights into the long-term effectiveness and impact of emotional communication strategies. Furthermore, exploring the intersectionality of emotions with other communication factors, such as language choice, visual design, or platform selection, could offer deeper insights into the complex interplay between emotions and communication channels. By delving into these avenues, researchers can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how emotions influence government communications and public trust in governance.

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Appendix 1: Endnotes

According to the provincial Government of Alberta's definition:

- **News release:** News releases provide information about government events and announcements, including the introduction of legislation. For transparency reasons, news releases are always issued provincewide.

- **Statement:** The Premier or a minister will issue a statement to speak to an issue or to mark an event or special day. They are the only product that can be written in the first person.

- **Correspondence message:** A correspondence message from the government typically refers to written communication sent by government officials or agencies to individuals, organizations, or other government entities. These messages can take various forms, including letters, emails, memos, or social media interactions, and serve to convey information, address inquiries or concerns, provide updates on government policies or initiatives, or respond to feedback from constituents.

- **Telephone townhall:** A telephone townhall is a community engagement event conducted over the telephone. In a telephone townhall, government officials, elected representatives, or organizational leaders connect with constituents or members of the public by hosting a large-scale conference call. Participants dial into a designated phone number to join the call and listen to a live discussion or presentation led by the host(s). Telephone townhalls typically allow for interactive participation, enabling participants to ask questions, share feedback, or engage in polls or surveys using their phone keypad or through a designated platform.

- **Engagement session:** A government engagement session refers to a structured meeting or event organized by government agencies or officials to facilitate two-way communication and collaboration with stakeholders, community members, or the public. These sessions are designed to provide opportunities for individuals or groups to actively participate in discussions, share perspectives, provide feedback, and contribute ideas on matters related to government policies, programs, or initiatives.

Office of Ethics Commissioner: The Ethics Commissioner is an independent Officer of the Alberta Legislature and reports to the Legislature through the Speaker of the Legislative

Assembly. Office of Ethics Commissioner can review Alberta legislation and guidelines that relate to conflict-of-interest rules applicable to members of the Executive Council, Members of the Legislative Assembly, and senior public servants in Alberta.

In-house communications: In-house communications refer to the internal communication activities within an organization, managed and conducted by its own staff members or departments. Source:

Microsoft Teams: Microsoft Teams is a collaboration platform developed by Microsoft, designed to facilitate communication, collaboration, and teamwork within organizations. It offers a wide range of features, including instant messaging, audio and video calls, file sharing, document collaboration, and integrated productivity tools. It has an "auto-record" feature that when enabled, this feature allows users to capture audio, video, and screen sharing content during meetings or calls, making it easy to review discussions, reference information, or share recordings with team members who were unable to attend the live session.

Appendix 2: Codebook

This is the initial codebook I've developed from the raw data of all interviews, including all emerging themes.

Main Themes	Analytical Coding	Sub-analytical Coding
Context	Political Context	Political knowledge
		Policy landscape
	Audience Context	Demographics
		Diversity
	Media Context	Traditional platforms (newspapers, TV)
		Digital platforms (social media, online news sites)
		Media relations
	Social and cultural context	Culturally sensitive
		Information Resonance
Identity	Personal identity	Personal background
		Personal political belief
		Personal beliefs
	Collective identity	Public servant
		Information disseminator
		Community Connector
		Government ambassador
		Language
		Lifelong learner
Ethics		
Organizational constraints	Internal constraints	Bureaucratic Structure
		Internal relations
		Internal Policies and Procedures
		Staffing and Training
	External constraints	Regulatory Compliance
		Political Considerations
		Public Perception and Trust
		Media Environment
Emotions in government communications	Strategic tool	Communications products
		Crisis communication
		Trust and emotions
		Humanization
		Personal touch
		Acknowledgement
	Context	Balance information and emotion
		Topics

This is my final codebook after careful consideration to choose themes that best support research questions.

Main Themes	Sub-theme	Analytical Coding	Sub-analytical Coding
Elements impacting the use of emotions	Context	Political Context	Political knowledge
			Policy landscape
		Media Context	Media platforms
			Media relations
	Identity	Personal identity	Personal background
			Personal political belief
		Collective identity	Public servant
			Government ambassador
	Organizational constraints	Internal Policies and Procedures	Approval process
			Internal training
		Bureaucratic Structure	Regulatory Compliance
			Ethics Considerations
The use of emotions in government communications	Strategic tool	Context	Communications goals and topics
			Communications products
		Strategic messaging and framing	Humanization
			Persuasion and influence
			Trust building
			Boost political engagement

Appendix 3: Interview guide

The following semi-structured questions were utilized during interviews with communications advisors at the provincial government of Alberta. The interview guide was designed in accordance with Seidman's three-stage interview model. Initially, opening questions were posed to establish rapport with the interviewees. Subsequently, the focus shifted to an in-depth exploration of specific themes relevant to the research. The concluding questions aimed to summarize and reflect on the insights garnered throughout the interview process (Granot et al., 2012). Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the questions were adaptable, allowing for adjustments based on the interviewee's context and the natural flow of the conversation.

1. Establishing rapport and understand their roles
   a. How do you feel about working in communications for the Government of Alberta?
   b. Can you please talk a bit about your role?
2. Thesis topic: The use of emotions in government communications
   a. What do you think of emotion being used in communication products at Government of Alberta?
   b. In term of emotions, do you think there's like a gap between what the government is trying to communicate and what the public expect?
   c. To what extent do communication advisors strategically involve emotions and keep up with public engagement?
   d. If emotion is crucial in government communications, then how can it be shown in communications products? / If emotion is not crucial, then what are other elements that would be more important in provincial government communications?
3. Summarise and reflect on insights gained
   a. Final thought: What do you think would make a good use of emotions in provincial government communications?
   b. Do you have anything else to add in term of the use of emotions in provincial government communications?

Appendix 4: Interview transcript

This is an example of an interview transcript, where all personal information identifying the interviewee has been redacted to maintain confidentiality. The interviewer is referred to as "A," and the interviewee as "B." The interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams and lasted 32 minutes and 21 seconds. The interviewee provided consent for the recording and agreed to the use of all interview materials for academic purposes by the researcher.

Transcript:

A: So first question, how do you feel about working in communication for the Government of Alberta (GoA)?

B: I feel good. I think it's nice to see, uh, you know, like where taxpayer dollars are going and communicating important messaging for the public to know. Yeah.

A: And then can you please introduce to me a little bit about what you do?

B: Yeah. So you could say I'm a communications advisor currently for [removed the name of the Ministry]. However, I do more work that's aligned with a social analyst, and so I fixate on communication mediums that are done online.

A: Alright, so I could understand that your job involves a lot of work on social media, right?

B: Yes.

A: So what did you think of the social media presence of GoA in general?

B: I think that we are on the platforms that we need to be on to best reach all of our diverse audiences within the province. However, we do use a combination approach because they're still individuals and depending on the demographics, there's folks that like to receive their information still with traditional methods, however, we're utilizing things such as analytics and data, and we're seeing the trend sway more towards people liking to receive information and news on the social platforms as new generations are coming in, it's swaying more towards the online mediums than traditional forms of news.

A: Perfect. So what platforms GOA uses and then do you think there's a difference in content?

B: So for starters, uh, the government of Alberta as a whole or as a presence on profile is on the social platforms of LinkedIn, Twitter or X, Instagram, Facebook. So they're on those we are not currently on TikTok, just given the legal discussions around that platform that are currently ongoing and within our country. Uh for its use for government, but we are on all those platforms and we're utilizing new tools on those every day to be able to communicate such as Instagram stories and posts, reels and different ways to utilize content to get the messages out that we find to be the most important for the public to know.

A: Umm, what was the difference in the content for each platform? Or is that gonna be like one post being used for all?

B: Yeah. So it's not sometimes we streamline the process of having the same posts on all platforms. I think that that was a common and effective approach when social media first made its turn to be a news source or a way of sharing news. However, we're seeing that shift, so that comes from some of the work that I do with analytic reporting. So, what we're seeing as social becomes more of the dominant news sources that retention spans are minimizing. So, when we used to be able to hold people's attention for 30 seconds, we now are holding people before they switch to the next thing in 10 seconds. You're also seeing the type of content switch along with that attention span. So, what that might look like can't be different.

So for instance, on Twitter, the word counts are smaller. It's supposed to be snippets, so we're getting more creative with how we post. So you might see the same message, but worded in more plain language, or differently on Twitter than you would on Instagram and Facebook. So Instagram and Facebook are a little bit more known to have an in-depth take versus Twitter being a snippet. So on Instagram and Facebook you might see the same photo, but the caption or the post text that goes along with that photo will slightly differ in content. We might give a little bit more information on those posts and we would on a tweet or an ex post and given the word count as well as the different audiences that are approached on those.

So you'll see a lot more of the younger demographics to be found on Instagram, so we might appeal with different content and ways of utilizing those words and such as like a real or a carousel so that we hold their retention longer because it's the kind of post that they're used to seeing on those platforms versus just the typical photo. However, on Twitter it's mostly just a photo and a small paragraph, so we might be more prone to Lync where they can learn about

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more information then actually put it in the post. We keep it small and very vague. That way the people that are interested can click to learn more, but they don't see this really long, crowded photo on their feed that they're not used to seeing. So yeah, it does differ per audience and also per platform given the rules around the platform like word count, how much you can fit into a post.

A: Thank you. That's very informative. So getting into the main topic of the thesis, what do you think of emotion being used in communication products at GoA?

B: Yeah. So I think that there's a really fine line when we're bringing up emotions. Sometimes it happens more organically as it is related to the content that we're sharing. For instance, with my job currently representing [removed name of the Ministry], you'll see that the information that we're trying to share with the public often does affect their loved ones. We're dealing with conditions, illnesses. Umm, you know, they're hospital care when people are sick, so that naturally evokes emotion. When we're talking about those sensitive topics, we have to make sure that we word that with care because we know that what we're talking about hits home for a lot of the audiences that are reading it. Whereas if we're talking about, for instance, like a park opening up for the summer, do you type of a motion that naturally or organically evokes from that post will be excitement for all the activities coming up. So sometimes we'll put out information on social media such as we are excited too, and we'll play into that emotion and then. But we'll also say make sure you do this safely, and then that's our way of connecting with them like, yes, we are excited too with emotion, but making them stay long enough to also read the regulations that come with a park opening. Umm, so that's kind of I think the extent that we would play into emotions, how that we can control because we like to be and are you. Well, not that we are nonpartisan as a government, so we have to make sure that we leave our beliefs or our personal feelings towards the subject out of play.

However, there are emotions used just because they happen organically with the content. That being said, there are emotions that happen on social media that we can't control. The non controllable factors are things like comment sections. And the conversations that are evoked from the content that we post, so that can be nonverbal through emojis or on Twitter or X, there's the Twitter threads where you have dialogue that happen underneath the post. When it comes to like racial discriminatory emotions, those we can filter out and block, and we do and we have

filters set up for that and people that monitor the social feeds to ensure it's still a safe space for the community to go to. Uh, but we try to keep the dialogue that is safe for everyone to see open and available, because we find it useful for us as well to kind of learn what's most important or what's upsetting or what people want to know more of. So we like to read those conversations as well, yeah.

A: Do you think there's like a gap between what the government is trying to communicate and what the public expect? For example, emotionally, the government says something very neutral, but then the public tends to be more intense.

B: Yeah, I think that a lot of the time we're seeing that shift today in Media where a lot of what is promoted through the major media channels is based on like triggers or you know, like you have the far left, far right extremist views and it's meant to revoke a reaction because the media's job is to get a story that is has a hold on people, they want it shared, they want it. Umm the most views, whereas the government has to really take into consideration what we're posting is based on the public interest as a whole and not one particular group. So we really cannot go to one side or the other, whether it's real or not, we have to write in a plain language format that everybody can understand and we only can post the facts. So stuff that's scientifically proven, or if, say, like it's law.

So when we communicate new laws that are passed that will affect the public, things like that, we need to write it in a way that's digestible. So it might come across as neutral, but what we're really trying to do is because we are a diverse province of multiple different people from you know, different languages, different backgrounds, cultures, we're trying to make sure that we reach the most amount of people in one post with the smallest amount of words with word count. So what that leads to is something that's very stripped and has just the basic key messages that everybody needs to know and that can come across as very neutral. But it's strategic and why we do that and it's so that nobody feels left out in terms of the information we're giving, yeah.

A: So I knew that we tried to come up as more non-partisan, like kind of neutral. But how do we for example, if you choose the emoji for pose, what could be the standard when you think of choosing an emoji?

B: So what if an emoji is for instance, like say we're doing a post and it's National Heart Health Week? We might include an emoji with a heart or something that resonates to the content, but it will never be used as nonverbal communication on something deeper level, like we're not going to post an angry emoji with a caption. Or, if we're not happy with something or you know, like we won't use it as a nonverbal, it's more of like a design or it just relates to the message that it's connected with. That makes sense, yeah.

A: OK, So what do you say about emotions? Is it not really involved in the way that the government posts on social media?

B: I'd say that we write in a way that we feel. We are aware of the emotion that comes with the post, but we don't put the emotion in it. So what we say is that emotion is involved and how we post and how we curate the messages, but it's not going to be something that you see in the end product. But we do like, for instance, we may add more specific and key responses to people that send direct messages, and that's where we can be a little bit more personal and respond in a way that's tailored to their specific questions and story. For instance, we might do a very neutral post on the changes in Immigration for international students, and if a student were to respond in a direct message with personalized questions to their specific scenario, we would respond and have a tailored response to answer their questions and help them out and get them to those specific resources. So that's where we tend to put more emotion into those responses as when we're responding in a private dialogue. But never on the public post, yeah.

A: Alright, so do you think personal touch from communications advisors is important?

B: I think that the personal emotion just comes from being aware of what's within your portfolio. So for instance, I would be an expert in responding to questions in those topics within my ministry, UM, whereas if you talk to someone else that says they might have a portfolio on emergency services. So if there's a flood, a fire, they would be able to emotionally connect and direct those people in their portfolio better. And that's their personalized touch on how they do that or find that to be best with that content. And then my personal touch would be how I communicate health concerns, if that makes sense. Umm, so there is a personal touch with each individual file. I think that is a given and also depending on the situation. For instance, if you're working on emergency services, someone might have more emotion than others because they're dealing with people that have just fled their homes or lost their homes or their businesses because

you know the fire or they can't return home. So they're, you know, seeking refuge in our province and that requires a lot more emotion and tailored responses. Then somebody that might have a file that's, you know, a little bit more lighthearted. So there it is there. It depends on the type of content that you're relaying, and I think that that would matter.

Your personal touch would matter because if you were to have a lack of compassion and those areas where people are fleeing their homes, it would affect how helped they feel because a lot of people just need someone to listen to them and know that they're being taken care of. So if they didn't feel that through our messaging, it could cause panic, which could be a huge issue with the government because of our job as communicators. Uh and through social media is to prevent those feelings of panic or feeling lost in those hard situations. Same thing with health too. You know, like for instance an example I can give is that there's been measles outbreaks, so getting ahead of that message and showing where you go and how to get vaccinated before the Media, you know, puts out messages that might cause panic. So that they already have reassurance from the government. It's been handled so yeah.

A: That's a very good answer. Thanks. So to what extent do communication advisors strategically involve emotions and keep up with public engagement when we still like to keep everything so neutral?

B: Yeah, I think that that's something that we're still battling because social media is something that is growing much more rapidly than we can update laws and protocol within government, for instance, like social media can change overnight, but it's still will take the normal amount of weeks to approve a new way of communicating within government. So it always seems kind of like on occasion we're a little bit behind, you know, with what we can do. Because there is a typical approval process that we go through within government and most of that actually falls under security and also with Social, we have to be super careful with the public while we are an information source, if they're sending us personal details and information about their lives, we want to ensure that they're safe in doing so and reaching out to us. So, umm, while some might think that we are behind, I think it's actually forward thinking of us to take our time and really look into these apps because if we were to rush in to every new app that appears without doing the proper security checks and background on the apps themselves, then we could be putting the public in harm's way, yeah.

A: Yes. So for the question, do you think, uh, provincial governments tend to appear with more emotions than the federal government?

B: I think that the federal government is a much broader paintbrush stroke than so, for instance, the provincial governments can narrow down their audiences more with the urban and rural areas within their particular province. However, if you think about it from the large scale, an entire country that the federal government is trying to cover, it's any problems that affect the entire country. So really their audience is everybody within a whole country. That is a huge stroke, so the only way to appropriately address that large of an audience would be with very high profile plain language. There's not a lot of room to personalize except for on some fun like Social holidays, for instance, which is where Social has allowed for some emotion because they can participate and federal or statutory holidays that everybody in the country can relate to, such as, you know, if there's a day like Family Day, for instance, to be able to post photos of that day and represent the entirety of the country, that is also celebrating that day. That's Social's given them the opportunity to have a personal touch that they wouldn't have necessarily had before Social.

So I think that, yes, the provincial government is more emotional, but not in the sense because of, because they're choosing to be more than the federal government. It's mostly that because of the federal government's large audience and it limits them from being able to be more in a way that is strategic and makes sense, yeah.

A: So do you think using emotion in government communication is gonna help you build trust with the public?

B: Yeah, I do. I think that we can utilize social more. In the future than we have right now, I do think there's room for improvement with Social and government strategy in how we communicate. I don't think a lot of people realize that the people that are running the government public servants are not appointed or attached to a political party. We are nonpartisan and we work with whatever government is voted in, Umm to play and I don't think that that is something that is understood and that we represent the public as a whole, not the government that is in.

But you know, so our job is to communicate anything that's happening to the public, anything that's changed, but we do not have an alliance with the voting in government. It's our alliance with the public and that's our job and that's why we're nonpartisan. So I think the add in the, uh,

more humanized approach to Social the security issues around that is showing our faces because there's situations where security could be at risk if people know who is running, you know like Social accounts or if people were to figure out where, you know, public servant or government workers live. Uh, there's, you know, that is why we haven't been able to really show our faces on the platforms. However, there are methods and ways that we can go about sharing bits of ourselves and showing that humans are behind the screens. And I think that we're gonna start utilizing tools on Social a bit more, such as like collaboration tools within the ministries voiceovers, because we can do things like, you know, voice overs that show like top five, you know, facts within the parks ministry and we can have voices saying the top five facts that they love about the parks ministry. So things like that, where it showcases that there's a human behind the screen without putting them in danger, and I think we're gonna start seeing more of that in the future and that's it's just gonna be a fine balance to make sure everybody is safe and it's still fun for us to do so.

A: So let's say right now we don't put a lot of emotions into things. We try to keep everything neutral. What you are thinking is an important thing that would make government communication effective?

B: I think that yeah, right now it's effective, but because Social is making it so normalized that you have an opinion or a sway, what you're seeing is a lot of people following echo chambers that agree with their line of sight. So when the information is given so plainly and up front. They tend to not resonate or it doesn't sink in as much as if something is, you know, written out in a way that resonates with them. So I think our challenge or what we're gonna be looking at moving forward, uh, to make us even more effective, it's still riding in a nonpartisan way, but finding a way to, uh, resonate on a human level with the audiences. So I think what makes us effective is that we do give out all the information in a plain language that is easy for people of all ages, and we also provide resources and links where they can learn more with every single thing that we post. It's usually attached to a news release or an article or something on the government site that is factual. And so people can learn more about that. For instance, if we're posting about measles, for instance, we give resources for where you could book an appointment, find the vaccine, and so it's a quick way to go and get all the information you need within 5 minutes. So you can get… So that's where it's effective, and it'll be trustworthy. However, the problem is that too many

people think that and you know, if they don't agree politically with what the government is doing and that's where the confusion happens with public servant jobs is that we're still providing the same information no matter what government is in. But we tend to see a decrease in people believing the information we put out. If it's not a government that they agree with, that's it.

The information will never change, no matter who's in office, and we still put out the same information. However, you notice that there's a falloff on people believing it, depending on if the people they agree with are in government or not. But I think that that's something that we could do better and explaining is that the public servants job we put out the same information, same reliable information, no matter who's in office. So we're still a source to go to for anything that's happening in your area.

A: That sounds very good. Alright so for us we are at a younger age of social media, we tend to be more accepting of social media, but then when you send things to approval right, there are people being like the government who are not familiar with social media communications. How do you feel and what do you do to deal with that internal communication process?

B: I think that that is like the policy of how we use social media. Uh needs to be updated because right now we kind of do the traditional forms of media and then social media is still thought of as like an afterthought, like something that you do with traditional media. That it needs to start being looked at as a standalone product, so you have your news release or you know, immediate notice or and then you have your social media posts and they need to be thought of as the same quality of content. Uh, because what used to be was that you, your social post, would just be attached or accompany the news release. But what we're seeing now is that nobody's clicking on the news release. They just are reading what's in the post, so the post itself needs to make sure that it hits the criteria of every single thing that the public needs to know. Because what we're seeing is that most people are not reading the entire news release anymore. They're only reading the Social post, so I think what you'll see is that we're gonna start moving to that more modern format of not expecting people to go to the traditional media sources such as the news or the news release, because it's just not being read. And in the same way that it used to. If that kind of makes sense, I don't know if it answers your question.

A: Yes, it does make sense to me, very much so.

B: OK, so I think that that's where we have to modernize just the way that we use social media. It's no longer gonna be something that accompanies traditional media. It's gonna be a standalone product on its own. And so we're gonna start highlighting more on Social and in different unique ways to make sure that it reaches the public. And we think that it's also a way of gaining that trust and kind of correcting some of the issues that come with the extreme biases we're seeing in the media and with what government is in and which government is out because the more that we humanize what public servant jobs do and the more understanding that's relayed in a format that the public understands, which has been Social. The more that they'll probably read up on the posts that we do, yeah.

A: So if you post something on social, you could see how the public reacts to it right away based the comments and direct inbox. How do you deal with that data where it's like so much emotion involved?

B: So they're currently building this out, but they do have social analysts such as myself that will do reporting on sediment and topic themes. Key messages and the major audience players. So what news sources are sharing our information, quoting our information or utilizing the resources we share in our social posts, in their own posts, and so that we can track how the information is being spread to the public as well as the sediment it covers, not only the sediment of the comment sections in our post, but on posts that are about the same topic on Social. So that way we can see what other people are saying and how it's resonating with the public and if it matches what we're saying, because sometimes you can see for instance, like the government might choose to collaborate with a stakeholder to present a message because we know it'll be perceived better than coming from us. For instance, like if Alberta health were to post the same post as Alberta Health Services and for some reason the same message, the same information is more positive on Alberta Health Services than the government. That tells us that we did a good job with the post. It's just that because it came from us and there's a lack of trust in the government is why it didn't perform well. That way we can know if it was due to the way the message was crafted or if it was because of who it came from. And then at the end of the day, that does not offend us as long as that, they listen to it from somebody. We'd rather collaborate and have other users. Share that information as long as it gets out there. That's like our main initiative is that the public gets the information and resonates with it. We don't necessarily care if it does well on our

platforms as long as they're getting the information. So sometimes we'll get a post that is super negative in sentiment.

While we would love for it to be positive and then receive the information well at the end of the day, we look more at the numbers of how many people engaged with it. How many people read the entire post then carry about if it was viewed positively or negatively? Because our goal at the end of the day is just that they've read it. So yeah, so yeah, and yeah, it depends on the topics too with that one as well. For instance, if our goal from the post is that they go and vote, and everybody's saying they're not gonna vote, that might be something we flag, you know, like nobody's voting or there's a strike or something like that. We might flag, but that doesn't happen very often. Usually people are just negative because it's a triggering topic. More so than the information was poorly put out. That kind of thing.

A: Very informative, thank you. So on top of everything that I just asked, do you have anything else to add?

B: Lol, No I don't think so except for that. Yeah, social is shifting and changing so the government could have completely different answers and a couple weeks for Social, depending on how the apps move. Yeah, we could change our entire strategy. You just never know.

A: Like one last thing that just pops up in my mind. Sometimes you know, a certain program or policy from the government let people down and then you have to be the one to communicate that? How do you deal with that?

B: Yeah. So that's kind of where, like the nonpartisan job of our as public servants is difficult because what they do or how they respond to that information is not in our hands. We can send forward the reports that show recommendations of how we would respond or how to make people feel heard and understood on why they're upset. But at the end of the day, it is up to the ministers of that department, where those political heads that were voted in to make the final call on if they will address it or not. And that's where you would go to their personal socials or their announcements and to see how they respond to the criticism. Uh, so, and that's another thing I wish people would kind of understand is we can recommend a bunch of different options, but whether they accept our recommendations is not in our hands. Uh, also, when people direct messages, for instance, that's where I said that that's where we can add in our bit of emotion and

how we respond to people. But it has to be like for instance, if somebody says like you guys suck, the government sucks like. There's not anything that we can provide to benefit that person. However, if they said something like this page sucks, I can't find anything on blank, blank, blank. If we have information on blank, blank, blank, we can provide a detailed thing on where to go to get resources and respond to that person. And then maybe if we see a theme like, for instance, that person and ten other people asked us about blank, blank, blank, we will realize we'll do a post on this because a lot of people are asking about it and they can't find the information, so we then we'll that's kind of how we alter our strategy. We might fit in a post that we weren't going to post, but because so many people are asking about it, we might post something with more information on it so that they know that we heard them.

And here's the information. So it kind of lessened the amount of direct messages we're getting on that topic. So yeah, so that's like an example of how we, umm, you received the information on what we do with it, if it's something that we can do a post about and clear the error or give more info on then we can do it. And if it's, you know, like they're just upset with a decision that the government made and it's not like public servants can reverse it. You know, if all they're asking for is for an apology or for us to reverse it, we can't do that. We are not the Minister. We are not the political figures that were voted in, so the best thing we can do is say. Uh, you know, if you were to complain with, like, your local MLA or people, people that can actually vouch for the voices of the people, that's the best that we can do.