

Making Sense of a Celebrity Suicide: Qualitative Analysis of High-Engagement Tweets Following the Suicide of Anthony Bourdain

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

Following a celebrity suicide, social media explodes with commentary, reflecting national attention on the issue. This research looks at how society and individuals emotionally process and react to celebrity suicide on social media. Qualitative content analysis was used to identify thematic content present in the fifty tweets with the highest engagement each day over the course of one month following Anthony Bourdain's suicide. Several themes were identified and divided into categories. Results showed that the conversation surrounding Bourdain and suicide decreased rapidly after only a few days. The data suggests a small population of users continued the conversation beyond this point, perhaps looking for meaning and encouraging change as a coping mechanism for grieving. For this subgroup, the data suggests the societal effects of Bourdain's suicide became more concerning and relevant over time than the event itself.

I. Introduction

Anthony Bourdain, a world-renowned chef and television star, shocked the world by committing suicide in June 2018. Through his award-winning CNN series, *Parts Unknown*, Bourdain had shared his travel and culinary experiences with millions of viewers eager to explore new cultures. Famous for his large personality and gifted ability as a storyteller, Bourdain had also written several books detailing his adventures (Stelter, 2018). Days earlier, Kate Spade, a successful fashion designer, had also committed suicide by hanging. The shock of two celebrity suicides occurring so close together spurred a national conversation about suicide.

In nearly twenty years, suicide rates have increased by 25% across the United States (Stelter, 2018). According to a recent Vital Signs report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide rates have been rising in nearly every state, and nearly 45,000 Americans over the age of ten died by suicide in 2016. Prevention efforts typically focus on identifying those in need and providing resources. Following Bourdain's death, Rose McGowan wrote a public letter shedding light on Bourdain's struggle with depression. Prior to his death, Bourdain had reached out to a medical professional about his depression but did not follow the doctor's advice. McGowan blamed Bourdain's death on the "a strong man doesn't ask for help generation" (Patten, 2018).

Keywords: social media, suicide, Anthony Bourdain, qualitative content analysis
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Suicide is rarely caused by a single factor (“CDC Newsroom,” 2018). News reports following Bourdain’s death pointed to financial stress and past substance abuse that may have exacerbated his depression (Stelter, 2018). Relationship issues, poor physical health, legal woes, among many other factors, can also contribute to suicide risk. In fact, CDC researchers reported that over half of those “who died by suicide did not have a known diagnosed mental health condition at the time of death” (“CDC Newsroom,” 2018).

In response to Bourdain’s death, many turned to social media to celebrate him, mourn his loss, offer opinions, and share concerns related to suicide. Social media plays a role in spreading information among audiences in the aftermath of celebrity suicides, and references to such seem to dominate platforms for a period of time. But as time passes, conversation surrounding the celebrity and suicide in general can wane quickly in the wake of other global events. The topic appears to lose prominence until the next time a newsworthy celebrity commits suicide, then suddenly, addressing suicide once again becomes a national priority.

When posts go viral at the beginning of this cycle, they have “the ability to reach comparably higher amounts of shares on news stories compared to common sharing practices,” and therefore garner greater engagement and provide insight to how users grieve a celebrity suicide online (Kalsnes & Larsson, 2017, p. 1674). This study will identify and examine high-engagement tweets immediately following Bourdain’s death to determine trends and patterns. This will be accomplished by analyzing the top fifty tweets with the highest engagement pertaining to Bourdain and the topic of suicide immediately following his death each day for one month.

II. Literature Review

Previous research has explored how the diffusion of innovations theory contributes to news sharing in a modern media landscape, and the psychological reasons for sharing information via social media platforms. When a celebrity commits suicide, these intrinsic motivations influence sharing and social media engagement. Parasocial relationships have been shown by researchers to be powerful mechanisms for facilitating discussion and sparking communities based on shared experiences. Scholars have also examined how celebrity suicides also trigger information-seeking patterns among those using social media.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Modern applications of the diffusion of innovations theory involve complex platforms and interactions, making how information moves through society a multi-faceted process. The diffusion of innovations theory helps explain “the way information moves through a society” (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2017, p. 157). Katz identified four key components to the diffusion of innovations theory: “transmitters or those who initiate the diffusion of the innovation; adopters or those who receive the innovation; the innovation or item that is being diffused; and the channel or the means by which diffusion occurs” (Katz, 1963).

Everett Rogers (1995), a pioneer in diffusion research, studied the stages in which innovations become adopted by society. For media practitioners, Rogers’ theory can be applied to studying how information from news, advertising, and campaigns are spread among audiences. Melvin Defleur was among the first researchers to use a hierarchical model to explain the news cycle: the news as the innovation, the mainstream media as the primary transmitter, the audience as the adopters, and the channel as traditional forms of media like print or broadcast (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2017).

While a top-down, hierarchical model of diffusion may once have been the scholarly norm, a proximal model may better describe the modern media landscape. These researchers argue that the proximal model “corresponds more closely to the structure facilitated by social media, whereby actors engage with others with whom they identify or are spatially or culturally relevant” (Rane & Salem, 2012, p. 99). For example, news organizations and users often post about events as they happen on Twitter. Twitter users are heavily involved in the speed and depth of sharing information by re-tweeting articles and comments that travel and connect through digital networks relevant to individual users.

As an example, Highfield (2015) found that tweets related to the immediate aftermath of a breaking news story experience high rates of re-tweets. However, as a story develops and new information is released,

there is a “decline in attention for the initial tweets,” Highfield observes, and once the “initial information has been spread sufficiently and the breaking news is now common knowledge,” the number of re-tweets diminishes significantly often within hours (p. 2725). In this situation, the channel has changed to a complex, interactive social media platform connecting and engaging users from all over the world. The mainstream media may or may not act as the initial transmitter or even the primary transmitter. Thus, it has been “suggested that determining how news is presented is no longer the role of journalists alone” (p. 2716).

Scholars have also discovered that the influence of media frames from traditional news sources does not necessarily parallel the topics and conversation present on social media. In the case of a Flemish celebrity suicide, the media pursued frames related to remorse, the celebrity as a lesbian icon, and as a victim of abuse. The audience revealed several counter-frames when interacting with peers on social media that did not exist in more traditional news coverage. Rather than directly mimic media frames, the audience “instead mediated in different ways by personal experiences, peers, and parasocial relationships...” (Bulck & Claessens, 2013, p. 78).

User Intentions and Relatedness

The diffusion of innovations theory also helps explain user intentions when sharing news in a social media context. One study found that users decide to share articles when they perceive news as relevant to their interests or believe the online community will benefit from awareness of the news. Users feel like they are helping others by sharing content, and they feel “a sense of altruism and social affiliation” by contributing to the growing awareness of others (“Relatedness Need Satisfaction,” 2012, p. 2).

Additional scholars have observed that stories that stir strong emotions among audience members, such as sensational news and celebrity news, also lay the foundation for the viral phenomenon (Ma, Lee, & Goh, 2014). Related research has found that sharing content significantly contributes to the spread of information, as users are more likely to engage in a less-demanding form of social media activity rather than taking the time to post a comment (Hujanen & Pietikainen, 2004).

In general, users are motivated to participate on social media platforms to satisfy relatedness, a feeling of closeness with friends, peers, and/or community. In the event of a celebrity suicide, these intrinsic motivations influence individuals’ engagement on social media with each other and with content.

Parasocial Relationships and Celebrity Suicides

Parasocial relationships influence social media engagement and often spark communities based on shared experiences. These relationships impact audience response and interaction with content and other users in the aftermath of a celebrity suicide. Hoffner and Cohen (2017) describe parasocial relationships as a one-sided relationship between an audience member and public figure based on the media consumption of the audience member. Though the public figure has no awareness of the relationship’s existence, individual audience members can develop a genuine, intimate-feeling relationship with celebrities based on their private and public life as presented to the world through the media (Holmes, 2005).

Scholars also have found that social media platforms are well structured to facilitate parasocial interaction, and that Twitter can play a role in enriching parasocial relationships (Humphreys et al., 2013). Researchers have also studied how parasocial relationships influence a feeling of belonging to a community in which engaged audiences share experiences of attachment to a celebrity (Greenwood & Long, 2009). For example, after Robin Williams’ death in 2014, fans responded by sharing content related to mental health issues, grief, Williams’ career, and positive remembrance. Audience members who have parasocial relationships with a celebrity can feel intense grief in response to a celebrity death. (Radford & Block, 2012).

Studies have also found that the role of celebrity attachment in response to extensive media coverage on celebrity health issues has the potential to shape attitudes, beliefs, and interactions (Noar, et al., 2014). Celebrities who share health issues publically have positively impacted “public awareness, knowledge gain, and willingness to discuss these health issues” (Carpentier & Parrott, 2016, p. 1335). Parasocial contact has been shown to have the great benefit in reducing stigma (Bulck & Claessens, 2013). Hoffner and Cohen (2017) also discovered that individuals with stronger parasocial relationships with Williams “reported low social distance from people with depression, greater willingness to seek treatment for depression, and more frequent outreach to other people with depression or suicidal thoughts following his death” (p. 1573).

Information Seeking in the Aftermath of Celebrity Suicides

The death of a celebrity can “trigger information-seeking behaviors as a means of coping with the loss” (Schaefer & Moos, 1998). In fact, Google reported over 10 million searches for information related to Robin Williams the day he died, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness experienced a 20% call increase the following day (Carpentier & Parrott, 2016).

Carpentier and Parrott’s study examined the information-seeking patterns and commentary of undergraduate students shortly after Williams’ suicide. In terms of information seeking, respondents primarily checked Twitter and Facebook to find details related to his suicide, depression, career, and celebrity responses to his death. In terms of respondent commentary, dominant themes included the challenges of diagnosis, susceptibility to suicide, seriousness of suicide, need for prevention efforts, causes of suicide, and judgment and lack of understanding (Carpentier & Parrott, 2016).

Previous research explores how parasocial relationships and information dissemination influence information seeking and dialogue surrounding celebrity suicides on social media. But, previous research has not investigated the nature of popular content on social media immediately following a celebrity suicide. This study intends to fill the research gap by identifying the thematic components of high-engagement tweets in the weeks immediately following a celebrity suicide to analyze potential trends, topics, timeframes, attitudes, and conversation surrounding suicide following the breaking news.

Research Questions

This study will answer the following questions, for tweets containing a reference to Bourdain and “#suicide”:

RQ1: What themes are present in the top fifty highest engagement tweets each day for one month following Anthony Bourdain’s death?

RQ2: What thematic trends are present in the top fifty highest engagement tweets each day for one month following Anthony Bourdain’s death, and when did the trends occur and for how long?

RQ3: Overall, what three themes occurred most frequently out of the top fifty highest engagement tweets each day for one month following Anthony Bourdain’s suicide?

This research is important because themes present in popular social media content following a celebrity suicide may provide valuable insight for understanding how society and individuals relate to and emotionally process the event. Additionally, an understanding of these processes may help healthcare professionals address copycat suicides and jumpstart new prevention efforts to fight the suicide epidemic in the future.

This study differs from previous research and provides a unique perspective on the subject matter. Past studies explored social media relatedness and common trends, such as the life span of tweets, but not in the context of a celebrity suicide. Other studies looked at parasocial relationships and information-seeking through a celebrity suicide lens, but did not analyze or address the timing, trends, or thematic components of popular social media content immediately following a celebrity suicide. Therefore, the research builds on previous studies and bridges the gap between social media conversation and celebrity suicide research.

III. Methods

The research uses qualitative content analysis to identify the thematic components of high-engagement tweets following Bourdain’s suicide. The materials were reviewed several times to ensure accuracy and a systematic approach.

To retrieve and filter data from Twitter, the researcher used the media analytics tool Meltwater to create a dashboard containing data related to Bourdain’s suicide. First, a custom date range was selected starting with the day Bourdain committed suicide (June 8, 2018) and ending exactly one month later (July 8, 2018). Based on informal social media observations from past celebrity suicides, high rates of tweets and engagement pertaining to Bourdain’s suicide were not expected to last longer than one month. If significant data had existed beyond the specified end date, the date range would have been adjusted accordingly. But,

after June 23, the number of engagements never increased from single digits. After specifying the date range, the data was again filtered to isolate tweets with the presence of “#suicide” and “Bourdain” and/or “#Bourdain” (without regard to capitalization).

Because “suicide” is such a broad search term, only tweets with “#suicide” were included in the data set. “Suicide” as a search term would infiltrate the data with links, usernames, news articles, etc. that would not be relevant to the data set. Because it is a name, “Bourdain” as a search term is far more limited than “suicide,” so the same restrictions did not apply.

This study’s methodology draws from Highfield’s study, which did not represent complete data sets. However, practical filter limitations still maintained a valid sample and adequate sample size (Highfield, 2015). This current research is exploratory in nature and only a first step in capturing large-scale analysis pertaining to online expressions of mourning a celebrity suicide.

Once the Bourdain dashboard was exported as an Excel spreadsheet, the tweets were organized by date. Next, for each individual date, tweets were organized by ascending order by highest level of engagement. Duplicate and unrelated tweets were removed from the data set.

There was a sharp decline in tweet engagement containing “#suicide” and “Bourdain” and/or “#Bourdain.” While there were more than 3,000 tweets that met the criteria on June 8, there were fewer than 50 such tweets each day after June 12. Once the data was filtered, the researcher conducted qualitative content analysis on a total of 438 tweets—the top fifty tweets with the highest engagement each day after and including the day Bourdain committed suicide. For each day containing less than fifty tweets total, the number of tweets available was included in the analysis regardless of the engagement.

Qualitative content analysis included sorting, reading, and familiarizing with the material to identify themes. Altheide says themes are “the most powerful features of public information” when conducting qualitative content analysis. Therefore, themes in this study are essential to understanding change over time and “the relevance of communication media” (Altheide, 1996, p. 31).

Additionally, any tweets containing unfamiliar references to Bourdain and other related events were researched individually to enhance comprehension of a tweet’s context. Then, themes were identified based on analysis of the tweets. If a topic or reference appeared in more than one tweet, it qualified as a theme. Next, similar themes were grouped into overarching categories. For example, several tweets encouraged those in need to use the suicide hotline. This theme was then placed in a category with other themes related to consoling individuals in need. If applicable, each tweet could embody more than one theme and therefore count in more than one category. Themes occurring roughly six or more times in one day were considered highly prevalent, themes occurring four or five times considered prevalent, themes occurring three times somewhat prevalent, themes occurring once or twice not very prevalent, and no themes occurring not prevalent at all.

IV. Findings

The study identified five categories of tweets about Anthony Bourdain’s suicide (Table 1). In terms of prominent themes and trends, some were present only during certain time periods, some occurred consistently during the time period, and others fell somewhere in between.

Table 1: Categories of tweets and themes within them

CATEGORY	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
References to Bourdain	Announcements and proclamations of Bourdain's death	Expressions of sadness and shock	Bourdain as an inspiration/ compliments of his work	Tributes	N/A
Helping Individuals in Need	Encouragement to seek resources if needed	Encouragement to use Suicide Hotline	Reports citing a rapid increase in calls to the Suicide Hotline	Encouragement to look for warning signs/ reaching out to loved ones	Coping through religion
Suicide as an Epidemic	Interviews with mental health experts to make sense of epidemic and celebrity suicide	Suicide in the context of a public health crisis	Increasing rate of suicide	Call for prevention strategies	Concern for the contagion effect
Discussing Suicide as a Society	Expression of upset with user commentary	Encouragement to continue talking about suicide as a society	Call to end stigma and danger of stigma	Suicide can affect any person, even the rich/famous	User sharing of personal experiences
References to Other Individuals/ Groups	Kate Spade	Clintons	Pedophile ring	Journalists covering Bourdain's suicide	Mention of past celebrity suicides

Note: Themes included in the table are not an exhaustive list. Cells marked "N/A" indicate there are fewer than five themes in the category.

Category 1: References to Bourdain

Themes directly referencing Bourdain himself had a strong presence shortly after he committed suicide but soon decreased and eventually dropped off. For example, tweets announcing or proclaiming the death of Bourdain was a highly prevalent tweet the day he committed suicide, but it declined over the next few days and was either a not very prevalent, or not prevalent at all, tweet for the duration of the time period. Many of these tweets, such as, "Celebrity chef and storyteller Anthony Bourdain dead by #suicide at 61," had embedded links to news articles and were tweeted by news outlets (@picardonhealth, 2018).

A related theme expressing sadness and shock at Bourdain's death was also a prevalent theme on the first and second day, lessened in prevalence over the next few days, and was rarely seen the second half of the month. Furthermore, references to Bourdain as an inspiration or complimenting his life's work was very prevalent for the first three days after his death, became less prominent the next two days, and was only occasionally present for rest of the time period. Additionally, tributes to Bourdain through music, programming, and ceremonies, was a somewhat prevalent theme the day after Bourdain's suicide and on June 11. The theme largely disappeared after June 12.

Category 2: Helping individuals in need

Category two, themes related to helping individuals in need, followed a similar pattern as the first category. For example, a theme encouraging individuals with suicidal thoughts to acquire resources or reach out to trusted peers was very prevalent the day Bourdain committed suicide, somewhat prevalent the

following two days, and prevalent again on day five before trailing off the remainder of the month. One such tweet said, “If you are feeling lost please reach out. Be it to your family, your friends, or to [a] professional” (@MikeCullen73, 2018). On the other hand, a theme assuring others that they are not alone and that their life matters was not very prevalent the day Bourdain committed suicide, somewhat prevalent the following day, and prevalent the third day. For the remainder of the month, the theme was for the most part not prevalent at all.

Additionally, encouragement to use the suicide hotline was a prevalent theme on the day Bourdain committed suicide, a highly prevalent theme the second day, and a prevalent theme the third and fourth days. On June 12, a new but similar theme appeared: reports citing a rapid increase in calls to the suicide hotline in the aftermath of Bourdain’s suicide. A related theme encouraging friends and family to reach out to loved ones and to look for warning signs of suicide was prevalent for the first two days of the time period, very prevalent the third day, and either somewhat prevalent, or not very prevalent, for the next eight days.

Category 3: Suicide as an epidemic

Themes related addressing suicide as an epidemic tended to start strong and decrease over time. However, the themes occurred at slightly different frequencies and times compared to themes in previously mentioned categories. On the day of Bourdain’s suicide, several media outlets conducted interviews with mental health experts. This theme was only somewhat prevalent on the first day and not prevalent at all for the rest of the time period, with the exception of June 12. Additionally, suicide described or mentioned in the context of a public health crisis was a prevalent theme on the day Bourdain committed suicide, highly prevalent the following day, not very prevalent on day three, very prevalent on the fourth day, and not prevalent at all after June 14. These types of tweets included comments critiquing and calling for changes to the health care system, and medical experts offering facts and opinions about suicide as an epidemic.

One theme also mentioned the increasing rates of suicide, which was prevalent on the second day of the time period, and somewhat prevalent on day four. For instance, one tweet said, “#suicide is a real public health issue and the rise is staggering. We must monitor this closely...” (@seemakh89125928, 2018). Furthermore, Bourdain’s suicide sparked concern of a contagion or “copycat effect.” Lastly, a theme encouraging or calling for prevention strategies first occurred on June 11 and was not very prevalent or not prevalent at all for seven days, but became somewhat prevalent the following two days.

Category 4: Discussing suicide as a society

Category four, themes related to addressing and discussing suicide as a society, varied in frequency and timing. However, most of the themes occurred at the beginning and carried into the middle of the time period at a higher level than many other categories. For example, a theme expressing discomfort with other user comments was prevalent on the day after Bourdain committed suicide, not very prevalent on June 17 and June 29, and not prevalent at all for the rest of the time period. One tweet said, “u r a walking contradiction. Do more research before you speak about #suicide...” (@CarBombBoom13, 2018). Also, a theme related to continuing the conversation of suicide and encouraging others to talk openly about the subject was not prevalent at all on many days, but occurred more in the beginning and middle of the time period.

Related themes had low levels of prevalence but were sometimes part of the discussion in high-engagement tweets. One such theme called for including the topic of addiction in the conversation surrounding mental health, while another theme encouraging kindness was present in the beginning and middle of the month. Additionally, a theme calling to end stigma was seen primarily early in the month. One such tweet said, “as mental illness is stigmatized, referred to as being crazy or weak, #suicide rates will not decrease” (@sharon_chmara, 2018).

On a slightly different note, one theme mentioned Bourdain’s fame and fortune as a failed buffer from depression, and other tweets more directly addressed suicide’s ability to affect any person, regardless of social stature. This was highly prevalent on the first day Bourdain committed suicide, somewhat prevalent the following day, and prevalent for the next three days. In addition, user sharing of personal experiences related to suicide was somewhat prevalent on days two through four of the study. For example, one tweet that referenced a video about Bourdain’s suicide said, “This really hit home with me & my experience with depression & feeling suicidal” (@RedGeekMusings, 2018).

Category 5: References to other individuals or groups

Category five varied in terms of frequency, timing, and patterns more than any other. For example, during the specified time period, Kate Spade was not prevalent at all for only two days. Every day through June 21, Spade was a highly prevalent theme (with the exception of June 20 when it was just prevalent), reaching up to 34 mentions in one day. The theme was somewhat prevalent on three days in late June and not very prevalent for the rest of the time period. Spade was one of the three most frequently mentioned themes throughout the entire time period. Another theme in this category addressed journalists and journalistic organizations, usually in context of reporting on Bourdain's suicide appropriately. The only tweet in the sample expressing criticism of coverage was on June 27.

Additional themes in this category included Bourdain's criticism of Hillary Clinton just prior to his death, and conspiracy theories alleging that Bourdain had been working on a pedophile case and was actually murdered. One additional related theme focused on celebrities who committed suicide in recent weeks or even years ago. References to celebrities (other than Kate Spade) occurred at the beginning, middle, and end of the month, but never reached high levels of prevalence.

V. Discussion

Overall, the number of tweets pertaining to Bourdain and suicide drastically decreased after only a few days. Immediate reactions to Bourdain's suicide dominated early periods of the month following his death, but the themes became more reflective and big-picture as time passed. The immediate shock seemed to ignite initial Twitter interest, but Bourdain's death quickly became old news. The data suggests though that his suicide was the spark for a small subgroup to continue more reflective conversation surrounding suicide. This finding supports previous research that the proximal model of the diffusion of innovations theory corresponds well with social media, as conversation and information about Bourdain continued to spread even when news reports waned (Rane & Salem, 2012).

Results of this study align with previous scholarship that found tweets related to the immediate aftermath of a breaking news story experience high rates of re-tweets, but engagement declines as a story develops over time and new information is released (Highfield, 2015). In Bourdain's case, breaking news tweets became less prominent as further details such as his method of suicide were released over time. However, tweets expressing sadness or memories of Bourdain had a less steep dropoff in prominence. Emotional responses to Bourdain's suicide likely took longer for users to process; therefore, the data suggests emotional responses to news may outlive the news itself.

After June 12, the number of re-tweets related to suicide and Bourdain dropped significantly, and the majority of users seemed to move on from the event and engage in other online conversations. Only a small population continued the suicide conversation, and it is likely this subgroup of users had not yet finished emotionally processing the event. As a result, these users continued to re-tweet positive remembrances of Bourdain perhaps as a coping mechanism in addition to engaging in reflective, insightful conversation surrounding suicide. This supports previous scholarship that interaction through content is a proven mechanism for feeling close to others (Novak & Hoffman, 2012). These users likely found solace and healing through a community of like-minded users. Additionally, such users likely looked for meaning and encouraged change in these conversations as a way to create positive outcomes of his death and further aid their healing process.

As an example, the data suggests themes related to support for those struggling with mental health and/or suicidal thoughts remained fairly constant in the aftermath of Bourdain's suicide. Immediately after Bourdain's death, tweets addressed those in immediate danger (experiencing suicidal thoughts) and encouraged them to seek help.

Generally, tweets encouraging others to look out for family and friends at risk were prevalent at some level throughout the time period. This supports previous research indicating that users share articles if they believe it will benefit the online community (Novak & Hoffman, 2012). However, the data also suggests Twitter users began to cast a wider net in seeking help and resources. Those already experiencing suicidal thoughts were likely seen as high risk following the initial shock after Bourdain's suicide. But as time passed and only a passionate group of users remained in the conversation, tweets more often encouraged others to

look for warning signs rather than directly address those clearly in need. Thus, the small population of users continuing the suicide conversation encouraged others to help people outside their typical social circles, trying to address society's suicide epidemic on a larger scale.

Tweets embracing support networks, or encouraging individuals in need to consult the suicide hotline, also suggest a somewhat consistent concern for at-risk individuals throughout the period studied. The data suggests that the societal effects of Bourdain's suicide became more concerning and relevant to those continuing the conversation over time than the initial event of Bourdain's suicide itself. Though themes such as positive remembrance of Bourdain continued throughout the time period, Bourdain himself, as an individual, found less resonance in the conversation.

Calls to the suicide hotline likely spiked because more people sought help and information after Bourdain's suicide sparked their emotional distress. Carpentier and Parrott (2016) also saw an increase in information seeking after Robin Williams committed suicide. Thus, Bourdain's death became a spark for initiating conversation about trends related to suicide. Conversation online, therefore, evolved into more reflective, insightful conversation about how to address suicide as a society.

Several themes emerged in the evolution of the conversation, some remaining relevant throughout the entire time period. For example, Kate Spade was a constant topic of discussion, but the way her name was evoked in the conversation changed over time. Initially, when news of Bourdain's death first broke, Spade was mentioned in the context of tragedy—one of two high-profile figures that committed suicide within days of one another. Over time, Spade's name began accompanying Bourdain in tweets referencing their deaths as sparks to address suicide in general. Thus, Spade was part of the initial reaction to Bourdain's death, but also seen as a mechanism for addressing suicide from a public health perspective.

Other themes carried relevance only at specific times. For example, tweets complimenting journalists who covered Bourdain's suicide appropriately is an example of an early, dominant theme in the immediate reaction to his death. Once awareness had spread, users were likely satisfied with the information they had acquired and no longer had a need for breaking-news information related to the suicide. As a result, the theme was fleeting.

VI. Conclusion

Because audiences react differently based on the medium, analyzing tweets limits the wide range of potential responses present in other forms of social media (Highfield, 2015). Furthermore, the research provides an in-depth exploration of the most recent high-profile celebrity suicide but does not compare Bourdain's death with other celebrity suicides. Because the study focused on one suicide, the findings may not hold constant in similar situations.

It is clear though that Bourdain's death grew into something bigger than himself. The research revealed a concerned, empathetic group of users interested in continuing the conversation about suicide beyond the shock of his death. A number of themes from these users revealed a search for meaning and encouragement of change. The study reflects one potential avenue of the healing process by exploring online expression of grief following a celebrity suicide. By understanding how these online conversations flow, professionals perhaps can help guide healthy conversations or integrate prevention. An understanding of emotional processing through social media conversation following a celebrity suicide is a vital step in implementing effective preventative measures in the online sphere. Future research might build on this study by comparing the thematic components of high-engagement tweets after several celebrity suicides such as Robin Williams, Kate Spade, Sawyer Sweeten, Simone Battle, and others.

Acknowledgements

Thank you Dr. Daniel Haygood for your support, direction, and enthusiasm for the research. Thank you Dr. Kathleen Stansberry and Steven Barone for your data organization expertise. Thank you Laura Elizabeth Shea for your encouragement and suggestions. Last, but not least, thank you Jim and Diane Barone for your love and support.

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