

Paradigm Shift or Passing Fad? Twitter and Sports Journalism

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This was an extension of research by the same authors (2010) that investigated sports reporters' perception of their use of Twitter as part of their professional journalistic duties. Using content-analysis methodology ($N = 1,008$), the authors investigated how sports reporters actually used Twitter. Analysis showed a discrepancy between journalist responses and measured content. Although journalists said they were using Twitter for breaking news and promotion, the dominant result of the content analysis was commentary and opinion. There were also differences related to print and smaller media outlets. The implications of such differences are discussed, including a possible paradigmatic shift in journalists' approaches.

Keywords: new-media technologies, social media, sports reporting, content analysis

Thanks in great part to the advancement of communication technology, the modern news-media environment continues to change and redefine itself. Social-network Web sites and nontraditional news venues are on the rise and compete with once-established traditional news outlets, forcing journalists to market their own work (Ryan, 2009). This new competition allows citizens the opportunity to participate and engage in conversations, thus challenging and altering the way traditional journalists report the news (Hume, 1996). Increasingly, citizen journalists have taken an active role in gathering and disseminating information to the public (Lemann, 2006), with the result that news-media outlets can no longer consider the audience passive participants in the communication process. In fact, Papper (2008) reported that 60% of Americans want more interaction with television news. According to Bucy (2003), "Gatekeeping roles are eroding, storytelling techniques are transforming, and new media entrepreneurs are challenging industry players and practices" (p. xi).

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Previous research (Chan-Olmsted, 2004; The Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008; Teeling, 2006) indicates that these changes have already begun to take place and are pushing traditional journalists to maintain an open dialogue with citizens. This emerging dialogue can take many forms, including blogging (Sheffer & Schultz, 2009) and, even more recently, social-networking sites. Among these sites available online, Twitter has emerged as a dominant venue. Although once considered only a tool to post messages to relatives and friends, Twitter has become another social-networking tool used by news-media outlets (Johnson, 2009; Lavrusik, 2009; McIntyre, 2009; Schultz & Sheffer, 2010). In the case of the 2009 uprising and elections in Iran, information unfolded "live through citizen journalism. The world was watching . . . and it did so on Twitter, not CNN or any other news network" (Solis, 2009, ¶2). In the 2009 shooting at Fort Hood, TX, news-media outlets used Twitter to their benefit. Through a new Twitter feature, news agencies created a news lists that linked users to multiple sites. For example, *The New York Times* list included updates from the U.S. Army and news outlets throughout Texas, as well as several journalists on the ground (Ostrow, 2009, ¶1). According to Ostrow (2009), "News organizations that compete vigorously for breaking news turn to real-time curation to help tell the story" (¶4).

Breaking news is not the only use for Twitter. Its value as a means of interacting with audiences and promoting and linking work on other media platforms has made it the latest tool in newsrooms across the country. WFTV news director Bob Jordan noted that Twitter "is now the primary way a lot of people communicate, share and obtain information. Not to be in that space would be just the dumbest thing anyone could do" (Petner, 2009, ¶6). Recent research (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010) suggested that although significant change to news routines has not yet occurred, certain groups of journalists were using Twitter differently, and other groups were more reluctant to embrace the new technology. That particular study was based on a survey of sports journalists' attitudes and practices. That research sought to extend those findings by going beyond attitudes and analyzing sports journalists' Twitter content. Exactly how are sports journalists using Twitter? Are they actually interacting with fans, using it for breaking news, or simply promoting their work on other media platforms? What does their use of Twitter suggest in terms of the future of the technology?

Literature Review

Journalism and Twitter

Journalists' use of Twitter is based in part on McManus's economic theory of news selection. McManus (1988) argued that the financial well-being of the news corporation determined news content and delivery and described news as a commodity in which "the event being covered is inversely proportional to the cost of coverage and is proportional to expected audience appeal" (p. 4). Twitter can be viewed as a content-delivery system that makes news operations more competitive in a crowded media field. By connecting directly with users or by pointing them to other content, Twitter has the promise to more efficiently distribute content, increase audience, and grow revenue.

It is no secret that mainstream news-media viewership and readership have steadily declined. Recent polls show that American newspapers have lost slightly more than 40% of their market value, creating "a palpable sense of doom" among newspapers (Alterman, 2008, ¶4). An overall downturn in the national economy negatively affected media economics, causing many outlets to shut down and others to engage in massive layoffs (Flamm, 2008; Hirschorn, 2009). Much of the problem can be traced to the growth of new-media content and distribution systems that have empowered media consumers and weakened the traditional gatekeeping and agenda-setting functions of the media. News consumers have begun to show more interest in creating their own news and interacting with media outlets than remaining passive news consumers (Papper, 2008). Increasingly, citizen journalists are taking an active role in using social networks to bypass the traditional media and disseminate their own content to the public (Lemann, 2006).

More and more, the traditional media are exploring these technologies as a means of remaining economically competitive. According to Tom Rosenstiel, the director for the Project in Excellence in Journalism, "I don't know whether it's five years or 10 years or 15 years, but at some point, [the] old media will be fully online" (Ibbitson, 2008, ¶11). Part of that process has included the growth of news blogging, which has become a staple in newsrooms across the country (Sheffer & Schultz, 2009). Now, many news outlets are turning to Twitter.

More than just a simple delivery system, Twitter is a communication system that can also link to online content. In its most basic form it is digital communication that allows one party to communicate instantly with any number of other people but limits individual messages to 140 characters or less. Those wishing to post more than 140 characters, however, can link to the exceeding amount on an Internet site. Users publish these "tweets" from a computer or mobile device that circulates them to anyone interested in following their communication. Through the Web site, Twitter users can follow the message stream of any number of fellow tweeters in addition to posting messages themselves (Johnson, 2009). Twitter's popularity has exceeded expectations. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Twitter had 32 million users in June 2009, an increase of about 2 million from the previous year, with predictions that the numbers will increase some 50–100% per month (as cited in McIntyre, 2009).

The unique characteristics of Twitter, most obviously its speed in breaking news stories, make it ideally suitable for use as a journalistic tool. Peggy Phillips, news director at KSHB television in Kansas City, notes, "We brand ourselves the breaking news station, so if we have breaking news or a difficult weather situation, we use Twitter to push page views" (Petner, 2009, ¶11). Recent research (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010) suggested that sports journalists use Twitter most often for breaking news. "If Carmelo Anthony sneezes, people want to know," said Ben Hochman, who covers the Nuggets NBA team for the *Denver Post*. "A lot of people care" ("Ahead of the Curve," 2010).

Once journalists push a story out to the public via Twitter, it can disseminate far beyond the traditional reach of the media outlet. "The power of Twitter is when people start spreading your stories for you," said Jonathan Kealing, online editor of the Lawrence, KS, *Journal-World*. A prime example of this is Kealing's use of Twitter after the University of Kansas won the NCAA national basketball championship in 2008. Kealing's staff put together a multimedia package that highlighted

the win and recapped the season. The package got 50,000 plays, primarily because "we used Twitter to promote the hell out of (it)," said Kealing (Ryan, 2009, ¶16).

In addition, some reporters view Twitter as a way to better interact with the public. Recently, ABC News' *Nightline* incorporated the social network into a new half-hour program (*Nightline*) in which anchors use Twitter to communicate with viewers (Tarleton, 2009). In regard to mediated sports and Twitter, fan identification is crucial. Similar to star athletes, sports reporters tend to have loyal followers or fans. Reporters are using Twitter to develop a stronger line of communication with the audience and strengthen fan allegiance simply by responding to their tweets.

Finally, a potential use of Twitter would be as a promotional tool. Although its limited nature does not permit for detailed, in-depth content, Twitter can point users to such content on related media sites. The idea is to create a story brand across multiple platforms and present an integrated fusion of converged media. Ellyn Angelotti, interactive editor at the Poynter Institute, said, "Twitter is based on personal brands. [When] a station can tap into the individual brands within the organization, it can strengthen the collective organization's brand" (Petner, 2009, p. 2).

Sports and Twitter

The real-time, interactive nature of Twitter makes it ideal to study the relationship between sports journalists, athletes, and fans. All the advantages that Twitter brings to media and journalism are even more pronounced for sports, which already has a large, built-in audience hungry for the opportunity to talk directly with sports journalists, athletes, and coaches. Thus, Twitter has the potential to "change the athlete/fan interaction forever" (Gregory, 2009, ¶24). According to Nielsen Media (as cited in Gregory, 2009) the primary users of Twitter are 35–49 years old, which coincides with the demographics of heavy sports consumers (Gantz & Wenner, 1991; Perse, 1992).

Twitter has become popular with athletes to the point that "the sports world is obsessed with the microblogging tool" (Gregory, 2009, ¶93). The Web site *twitter-athletes.com* compiles a list of what athletes are tweeting and how many followers they have. As of October 2010, there were 2,865 athletes actively involved with Twitter. NBA star Shaquille O'Neal was the most popular athlete among fans, with 3.13 million followers. Others in the top 10 included cyclist Lance Armstrong (2.63 million), skateboarder Tony Hawk (2.18 million), and tennis player Serena Williams (1.73 million; "Top 10 Twitter Athletes," 2010). "We're hitting [Twitter] hard," said Chris Bosh of the NBA's Toronto Raptors. "You can put up what you're doing. Or if you have a question, you'd be surprised how much people know. You can be, like, 'I need directions to this spot.' People will tell you" (Feschuk, 2009).

Much of the attraction is a result of the fact that athletes can avoid the mainstream media and present their message unfiltered. "Your message definitely gets twisted and folded the way the media wants it," said DeAngelo Hall of the Washington Redskins. "If you have something posted on your Twitter site, that's exactly what you have to say. It hasn't been doctored up by a writer or any of the media" (Robinson, 2009, ¶15). Former NFL running back and now sports journalist Reggie Rivers noted, "The relationship between the players and the media is well established, but it's changing. Now, players have their own blogs and tweets" ("Ahead of the Curve," 2010).

But even as Twitter becomes more popular, it also becomes potentially more disruptive. The NBA was embarrassed in March 2009 when Milwaukee Bucks player Charlie Villanueva tweeted during halftime of a game, but even though Villanueva's team reprimanded him for the incident, the league itself had no policy against the activity ("Skiles to Villanueva," 2009). However, the NFL has taken a much stronger, proactive stance, in part because the league is "routinely beset by athletes' off-the-field antics. Twitter has already grown into a social media tool over which the league has little to no control" (Maese, 2009, ¶5). The league has a rule barring the use of mobile devices from the bench area during play, to which Bengals' receiver Chad Johnson tweeted, "Damn NFL and these rules, I am going by my own set of rules, I ain't hurting nobody or getting in trouble, I am putting my foot down!" (Maese, 2009, ¶12). In addition, several NFL teams have created rules restricting how journalists can use Twitter. For example, when Denver Broncos running back Elvis Dumervil was injured in an August 2010 practice, reporters could not tweet that information from the practice field but instead had to return to the press area. Although fans watching the practice had no such restrictions, media members violating the policy risked jeopardizing access to players and coaches ("Ahead of the Curve," 2010).

The media have also begun to regulate themselves in regard to Twitter. In August 2009, ESPN created an in-house guide to tweeting as part of its "Guidelines for Social Networking." The policy suggests that ESPN employees should not tweet what they would not say on air or write online. It also discourages discussing internal policies and disparaging colleagues or competitors (Hiestand, 2009). Other media outlets such as National Public Radio, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* have also implemented social-networking guidelines that restrict employees' professional and personal use of social-media technologies. At these media outlets, reporters are instructed to treat social networks as an extension of the traditional news platform.

Such self-regulation has become almost a necessity as more media outlets get involved with Twitter. Scibetti (2009) noted, "With [more] alternate websites and social media outlets . . . companies need to be willing to go outside their own web-space and seek out their fans in other places" (¶4). The outlets and journalists that have adopted Twitter now view it as more than just another reporting tool—it has become a transformative technology. "Twitter has completely changed our beats," said Lindsey Jones, who covers the NFL Broncos for the *Denver Post*. "I can't remember what the job was like before it. The whole mentality has changed. Who cares when you get it on the website? Twitter is what matters" ("Ahead of the Curve," 2010). Jones has some 11,000 followers of her Twitter account, and on a typical day she starts tweeting at 8 a.m. and doesn't end until after 9 p.m. "You wake up at 7 a.m. and put your face into the computer until 10 p.m.," said former ESPN college football blogger Graham Watson. "It's a grueling, demanding job."

Previous Study

In their study of journalists' use of Twitter, Schultz and Sheffer (2010) surveyed sports journalists across four U.S. media platforms (newspapers, television and radio stations, and ESPN). The journalists indicated that they used Twitter most often for breaking news, followed closely by promoting work on traditional media

outlets, and then connecting with audiences. Sports journalists indicated that they seldom used Twitter to express their own personal opinion. In addition, the researchers discovered differences in perception across different media platforms. Newspaper sports journalists said they used Twitter more for breaking news and to promote other work than broadcast sports reporters, whereas broadcast journalists indicated that they used Twitter more to connect with audiences and give personal opinion.

Research Questions and Rationale

Based on the literature, and the results of the original study, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1: What is the dominant use of Twitter by sports journalists?

The literature revealed several different types of uses, including breaking news, promotion and branding, and connecting with fans. More important, when Schultz and Sheffer (2010) posed a similar question, sports journalists said they used Twitter most often for breaking news, followed by promotion. The current research question sought to further investigate this claim.

RQ2: Are there different uses for Twitter for different groups of sports journalists?

Would journalists at large media outlets use Twitter any differently than those at smaller outlets? As Schultz and Sheffer (2010) suggested, there could be differences in Twitter use based on type of media, such as print versus broadcast.

Methodology

As an extension of Schultz and Sheffer's (2010) study, the current research design was based on a conceptual analysis of media-sponsored Twitter accounts written by U.S. sports journalists. The original research depended on survey responses by sports journalists at local newspaper, television, and radio media outlets, along with sports reporters at ESPN. Similar to a content analysis by Danielson and Adams (1961), a sophisticated multistage sampling procedure was applied. A probability sample was created using industry and other Internet sources (OnTheRadio.Net, 2009; "SHG Resources," 2009; USNPL, 2009) and was based on the population of sports journalists tweeting at local U.S. newspapers and television and radio stations. The sports journalists at these media outlets were identified, and that list was cross-referenced to see whether each journalist had a Twitter account (using Twitter.com). In the second sampling stage sports journalists were divided by type of media outlet, and we incorporated a stratified sampling procedure. Media outlets with journalists who tweet were divided into three separate categories based on size of media outlet: small, <100,000 circulation, television-radio DMA 141–210; medium, 100,001–250,000 circulation, DMA 71–140; and large, >250,001 circulation, DMA 1–70. Similar to Reinard (2008), who ranked individual categories and then randomly selected cases in each category to guarantee a balanced representation of the content being analyzed, an *n*th-series list was created using every third reporter in each category (third-stage systematic sampling).

We randomly selected a period of coding. The time period for the content analysis covered a 3-week span from October 11 to 31, 2009. Newspapers were coded the first week, radio reporters the second week, followed by television and ESPN reporters the final week. We attempted to code and analyze the last four consecutive tweets of each reporter. When a reporter tweeted fewer than four consecutive tweets, we analyzed what was available. In regard to local sports journalists, the *n*th-series list resulted in 99 newspaper reporters (304 tweets), 76 radio reporters (242 tweets), 106 television reporters (398 tweets), and 16 reporters from ESPN (64 tweets). The total number of sports reporters was 297, with 1,008 individual tweets analyzed. Two independent coders with prior content-analysis experience conducted the coding. They were trained based on a standardized coding sheet and coded the data independently of each other. They conducted a pretest with the content protocol before the second week of December 2009. After addressing disagreements or inconsistencies in the pretest, the primary investigators adjusted the code sheet to reflect these changes. Holsti's coefficient reliability ranged from .88 to 1.00 on the individual variables. The following seven units of analysis were coded either yes (1) or no (0): update scores, summarize live events, post breaking news, personal opinions, promote traditional outlets, promote other news-media outlets, reference to first person, and post questions.

For the purposes of the study, a Twitter feed was defined as a social-media Web site produced by a traditional news-media outlet on which journalists post comments and may or may not encourage audience participation. A professional journalist associated with the local media outlet had to maintain the Twitter account on a semiregular basis. The frequency of the journalists' contributions was deemed an important variable in regard to the news-media outlet's commitment to tweeting. Therefore, the frequencies of posts were coded in the following categories: post the same day, post within the week, post within the last 2 weeks, post within the month, and post more than a month ago.

Results

The plurality of tweeters were television sports journalists ($n = 398$, 39%), followed by newspaper ($n = 304$, 29%) and radio sports reporters ($n = 242$, 24%). Sports journalists from ESPN ($n = 64$, 6%) could not be assigned to just one medium. More male reporters ($n = 933$, 92%) than female reporters ($n = 75$, 8%) tweeted. In total, 526 (52%) tweets came from large-market or -circulation media outlets, 333 (33%) from medium-size outlets, and 149 (15%) from small media outlets (see Table 1).

In regard to RQ1, the data indicated that sports reporters used Twitter to post personal opinions (58% yes) but did not use it to promote their traditional media outlet (70% no), promote other media outlets (92% no), post breaking news (96% no), summarize live events (87% no), update information (82% no), or ask their audience questions (88% no).

Regarding RQ2, data indicated that sports journalists used Twitter differently depending on type of media outlet. Print sports journalists used Twitter significantly more than other media outlets for breaking news, $\chi^2(1, N = 1,008) = 57.8, p < .001$; to promote other news-media outlets, $\chi^2(1, N = 1,008) = 10.3, p < .001$; and to post the same day, $\chi^2(1, N = 1,008) = 25.1, p < .001$, but used Twitter less to promote their own traditional media outlet, $\chi^2(1, N = 1,008) = 9.11, p < .003$, and update information, $\chi^2(1, N = 1,008) = 16.9, p < .001$ (see Table 2).

Table 1 Demographic Breakdown of Respondents (N = 1,008)

	Gender		Outlet Size			Frequency of Posts		
	Male	Female	Small	Medium	Large	Same day	Weekly	>1 week
Newspaper	267	37	91	79	133	134	98	49
Television	368	30	49	158	191	139	151	108
Radio	238	4	10	97	135	115	78	49
ESPN	60	4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	35	19	10

Note. Figures are based on number of respondents in each category. Size of media outlet was defined as small (<100,000 circulation for newspapers and DMA 141–210 for television and radio stations), medium (100,000–250,000 circulation and 71–140 DMA), or large (>250,000 circulation and 1–70 DMA).

Table 2 Reporters' Use of Twitter Based on Type of Media Outlet (N = 1,008)

Variable	Percentage of Affirmative Responses		
	Print	Nonprint	χ^2
Posted same day	48	35	25.1***
Updated information	10	21	16.9***
Posted breaking news	25	4	57.8***
Promoted traditional outlet	23	33	9.1**

Note. Type of media outlet was defined as print for newspaper and nonprint for all other outlets including television, radio, and Internet. For all analyses $df = 1$.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Further analysis revealed significant differences between circulation or market size and certain key variables. Compared with reporters at larger media outlets, small-market and -circulation reporters posted significantly more questions to their followers, $\chi^2(2, N = 1,008) = 6.11, p < .04$, and personal opinions, $\chi^2(2, N = 1,008) = 5.56, p < .06$, and were significantly less likely to promote other media outlets via Twitter, $\chi^2(2, N = 1,008) = 8.21, p < .01$. In addition, reporters at small news outlets used Twitter significantly less to promote their traditional media outlet than other reporters, $\chi^2(2, N = 1,007) = 11.3, p < .003$. Reporters at large and small news outlets referred to themselves in the first person more than reporters at medium-size news outlets, albeit at a slightly less significant level, $\chi^2(2, N = 1,008) = 4.80, p < .09$. There were no significant differences in regard to updating scores, $\chi^2(2, N = 1,008) = 2.53, p < .28$; breaking news, $\chi^2(2, N = 1,008) = 4.25, p < .120$; and summarizing live events, $\chi^2(2, N = 1,008) = 4.05, p < .13$.

There were also significant differences between circulation or market size and type of media outlet. At small media outlets, print journalists used Twitter significantly more than broadcast reporters, $\chi^2(2, N = 1,008) = 76.6, p < .001$, and

there were significantly more female print sports reporters tweeting than at other media outlets, $\chi^2(2, N = 924) = 23.9, p < .001$.

Discussion

As an extension of previous survey research, we sought to determine exactly how sports reporters were using Twitter as part of their professional journalistic practices. Survey methodology (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010) suggested that such journalists were more likely to use Twitter for breaking news and to promote their work on other platforms. Younger and broadcast journalists were more likely to see Twitter as having stand-alone value and use it in forward-thinking ways. Older and print journalists were more likely to use Twitter for traditional purposes such as promoting printed work on other platforms. When we focus on content analysis rather than survey methodology, however, the results of this particular study were different in several key areas. Most notably, journalists used Twitter primarily for opinion and commentary and much less for breaking news, promotion, and connecting with audiences. Some of the actual Twitter entries included the following: "Cowboys are embarrassing. Seriously, play some football" (print journalist/small circulation), "3 bad turnovers & a ton of ugly passes. He'll still get an invite, but McCoy has failed to impress like I thought he would" (radio journalist/large market), and "It literally took me 3-and-a-half hours to mount a clock to the wall. Living room wall is riddled with holes like we just got drive-by'd" (TV journalist/large market). In all, results indicated that more than half (58%) of analyzed posts had some form of opinion or commentary. That compares with just 33% of sports journalists who admitted to posting opinion or commentary in the survey (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010). In a similar manner, research that focused on how professional journalists were using blogs also showed a difference between reporter attitudes and actual content (Sheffer & Schultz, 2009). That is, whereas the reporters said they were doing one thing in their blogs, content analysis revealed that they were doing things quite differently.

Previous research on blogging (Sheffer & Schultz, 2009) showed that some journalists felt pressured by management to implement the technology, were unfamiliar with its use, and were thus resistant toward its implementation, and these same attitudes might explain the results of the current study. Although not representative of the whole, the following quotes help illustrate the possibility that this resistance remains. One radio journalist said of Twitter, "Why do you think you are so important? This whole Twitter thing is stupid!" A print journalist noted, "If the only thing you have to 'tweet' about is the number of followers you have . . . then do us all a favor and keep that 'tweet' in the nest." A newspaper journalist in a small market admitted, "By the way, I know nothing about Twitter. If people respond to these . . . I have no idea where that would be." Unfamiliarity with the technology may have caused confusion between journalists' attitudes and actions.

This type of opinion and commentary in the analysis may be a sign of how technologies like Twitter are starting to reshape news-media communication. Given that it is primarily a social-networking tool, Twitter embodies the concepts of personal conversation and dialogue (even if the conversation involves millions of people).

Conversation often includes rumor, gossip, innuendo, and other techniques that are typically discouraged by the professional journalistic community. The advent of radio and television did not necessarily threaten journalistic standards because they were seen simply as new ways of distributing traditional information. But in the case of Twitter, McLuhan (1964) may be correct in saying that the medium is the message: a new way of communicating rather than just a new distribution system. According to Johnson (2009),

[With Twitter] we're actually having a genuine, public conversation with a group that extends far beyond our nuclear family and our next-door neighbors. . . . It [adds] a second layer of discussion and [brings] a wider audience into what would [be a] private exchange." (§10, 12)

Thus, "Twitter and social media represent a new, powerful platform to broadcast news, crowd source leads and stories, and expand the media's role and earned relevance in the new age of media" (Solis, 2009, ¶36). Right now, Twitter seems to focus more on opinion and commentary than social interaction, but that may change as the technology matures.

Many of the results on media regarding their use of Twitter were the same in the survey and the content analysis. However, it was interesting to note that print and smaller media outlets were using Twitter more frequently and using it more for breaking news and updating stories than other outlets. In a media environment in which many print outlets are losing money, laying off employees, and going out of business, Twitter can be viewed as an inexpensive way of breaking news, reaching new audiences, and promoting other media content. Small and print outlets may see Twitter as a way of making themselves more economically viable, especially considering that Twitter users are much more likely to visit Internet news sites than those who do not use Twitter (Diaz, 2009).

Limitations and Future Research

The discrepancies between survey and content analyses in these studies could be related to simple measurement problems, poor research methodology, or a host of other design issues. They could also be a result of endemic factors in the representative samples. Studies (Andrews & Herzog, 1986) do suggest that age, gender, and other such characteristics can greatly influence the level of variance and error in survey responses. Yet another explanation might lie in the self-perception of the respondents. On the whole, journalists tend to think of themselves as professionally responsible, which includes notions such as objectivity, factual representation, and fairness (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2006). Even in the face of new digital forms of communication such as blogging and Twitter, these values remain strong motivators (Carlson, 2007; Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007). Thus, journalists might be reluctant to admit that they were using any tool of their trade in a manner that interjected opinion or commentary.

Furthermore, we acknowledge that analyzing only the four most recent tweets could be viewed as a limitation. There are times when multiple tweets are used in short order to address one topic (which could or could not include opinions). Therefore, future research should analyze more than four tweets or randomly

select tweets in a specified period of time per reporter. Another area of potential future research that seems promising is a case study of an outlet heavily invested with Twitter. The *Denver Post* is one such outlet where qualitative responses from journalists could help bridge the disconnect between survey and content-analysis results. "The way you approach the workday is completely different than just a few years ago," said *Post* sports writer Ben Hochman. "This is the new journalism and changes the way we approach the newspaper. If it's already appeared on Twitter, why read the newspaper?" ("Ahead of the Curve," 2010).

The *Post* has also created a social-media editor to oversee how reporters are using Twitter and blogs and to maintain consistency between the outlet's distribution platforms. In-depth information from this person might be more helpful than simply talking to journalists, even if the journalists are the ones actively using the technology.

Conclusion

The results of this study point to a potential shift in the news-media paradigm. As one of the newest and most popular new-media technologies, Twitter appears to be on the cutting edge of a revolution in creating and distributing news content. Johnson (2009) argues that Twitter will eventually change the way we get news and make individuals more important in the agenda-setting process. Increasingly, stories will come less from traditional media and more from the passed links of people on Twitter. What the traditional media lose in an agenda-setting sense they will gain in the ability to converse directly and immediately with news consumers. "Twitter gives you an opportunity to engage the audience on a more frequent basis," said television reporter Scott Adkins of WEHT in Evansville, IN. "I know it's not a fad, because people wouldn't be sending me story ideas" (Petner, 2009, ¶15).

But there are data to suggest that Twitter has already peaked and is trending downward. From a high of 21.2 million users in July 2009, usage dropped to 19.9 million in December 2009. "Maybe Twitter was a victim of its own success," said Andrew Lipsman, an analyst at comScore, a company that tracks traffic on Internet sites. "It grew so quickly that it isn't meeting its own expectations" (Gross, 2010, ¶5). Another study (Heil & Piskorski, 2009) suggests that Twitter is very top heavy, with the top 10% of Twitter users accounting for 90% of the tweets, which is much different from a typical online network, where 10% of the users account for 30% of production. Thus, "Twitter resembles more of a one-way, one-to-many publishing service more than a two-way, peer-to-peer communication network" (Heil & Piskorski, 2009, ¶8). This one-to-many publishing may be the reason most sports journalists used it as a means to post opinions instead of facts.

However, even if Twitter should turn out to be a fad and disappear as quickly as it came, the implications of this study remain unchanged. Another new technology would take its place, a technology that incorporates the same benefits of real-time dialogue, instant updating, and promotional value. The technology may change but the realities of the new media environment will not, and journalists must adapt. "People are there disseminating information, they're online, they're Facebooking, they're twittering, they're talking, they're texting," says Bob Longo, television news director at WESH in Orlando, FL. "Were best served if we're part of that" (Petner, 2009, ¶34).

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