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Using Twitter for Promotion and Branding: A Content Analysis of Local Television Twitter Sites

Clark F. Greer and Douglas A. Ferguson

A content analysis examined the Twitter sites of 488 local television stations in the United States, based on a strategic and tactical model of media promotion. One finding of the study was that news stories were the most frequently occurring items on the sites. However, stations that offered news items also seldom promoted their regular newscasts. Overall, stations did not appear to use Twitter to direct viewers to the station's on-air programming.

The primary goal of local television stations is to attract and maintain audiences, which translates into ratings and ultimately into advertising dollars. In recent years, however, both viewership and revenue became challenging for broadcasters. One report indicated that advertising revenue at local television stations continued to decline in 2009 ("State of the news," 2010a). Additionally, from 2008 to 2009, stations affiliated with the four major networks experienced a decline in viewership for local television news ("State of the news," 2010b).

Possible contributors to the erosion of local television audiences are an increasingly competitive media environment (Eastman, Ferguson, & Klein, 2006), and the growing use of the Internet and mobile devices (The Nielsen Company, 2008). Although research findings are mixed about whether the Internet substitutes for television viewing (see e.g., Dimmick, Chen, & Li, 2004; Ferguson & Perse, 2000; Lin, 2004), the industry still must deal with the growing popularity of accessing television programs through portable media, the Internet and other non-traditional methods (Arbitron Inc./Edison Research, 2010).

Although identity and image are an essential component of local television marketing, the increased presence of cable and satellite precipitated more branding in television (Bellamy & Traudt, 2000). Television station promotion is so important that broadcasters are willing to forgo advertising space to allow time for promotional

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content, as well as constantly reminding viewers where they are tuned (Eastman et al., 2006). In addition to those tactics, stations also promote themselves by purchasing space or time on other media (Eastman et al., 2006; Ferguson & Adams, 2006). In recent years, radio and television moved from the concept of branding to “cross-media promotion,” which involves promoting a particular medium on other types of media (Eastman et al., 2006, p. 16). For example, this might include promoting a television station by running ads on radio.

Media organizations increasingly recognize Internet-based delivery as an important part of the information mix, particularly as a support mechanism (Chan-Olmsted & Ha, 2003), and as a tool to enhance the differentiation of media (Chan-Olmsted, 2000). More recently, broadcasters found that social network systems provided an added connection to their audiences. One of the fastest growing social networks is Twitter, a micro-blogging platform that enables subscribers to post brief comments about their activities (Twitter, 2009). Even though people still prefer television for breaking news (Webster, 2010), Twitter proved to be an important source for conveying immediate information (Gilbertson, 2009). For example, Twitter users provided news about the crash landing of US Airways flight 1549 on the Hudson River before the “mainstream media” disseminated the story (Beaumont, 2009, para. 2). Twitter’s relevance could also extend beyond news and information. Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University conducted a textual analysis of Twitter postings and found that the social network might be a means of assessing public opinion (O’Connor, Balasubramanyan, Routledge, & Smith, 2010).

Market studies show that media use and promote their Twitter accounts (Webster, 2010). As of fall 2009, more than 580 television stations and networks had a Twitter presence. Following the broadcast promotion model developed by Eastman and colleagues (2006), the content of local television station Twitter sites was analyzed in relation to strategic goals, strategic targets, and tactical approaches. The emergence of new media platforms offers television stations opportunities to service their viewers with information, while also enhancing their loyalty to the station. The present study focuses on the extent to which stations take advantage of a new media technology to promote and brand the station, as well as to interact and connect with viewers. This study is pertinent for broadcasters who seek new ways to attract and maintain audiences. It is equally relevant for media scholars who desire to understand the challenges faced by traditional media organizations when attempting to strategically implement emerging technologies.

Review of Literature

Twitter

Twitter is a Web-based social network system first made available for public use in August 2006. Referred to as a “status update service,” Twitter enables people to post *tweets*, which are brief statements about what they are doing, and to read the postings of others (Fox, Zickuhr, & Smith, 2009, para. 1). Unlike other social network

systems, such as MySpace and Facebook, Twitter limits postings to 140 characters per comment (Twitter, 2009). Communications range from personal mini-diaries of daily activities to business applications (Miller, 2009).

As of February 2010, an estimated 17 million people in the United States used Twitter (Webster, 2010). A report by eMarketer (2010) noted that, while usage of the social network system was still high, the number of unique visits had “plateaued” in early 2010. Despite the number of system users, one market research firm (eMarketer, 2009) found that “75% of all Twitter activity comes from just 5% of users” (para. 3) and that “94% of Twitter users have fewer than 100 followers” (para. 4). Other research showed that few Twitter users actually post (Heil & Piskorski, 2009).

According to Edison Research (Webster, 2010), Twitter is primarily used as a one-way information tool. Other research showed that people use Twitter for sharing information (Java, Song, Finin, & Tseng, 2007). Twitter’s benefits include simplicity (Grossman, 2009), more frequent postings (Java et al., 2007), and linking to more detailed information on other sites (Johnson, 2009). Twitter users also have the ability to “tweet” on mobile devices (Farhi, 2009). One report estimated that 40% of Twitter subscribers used the service “sometimes” via mobile devices (MediaPost, 2009).

One factor that distinguishes Twitter from other popular social network systems is the age of its users. Traditionally, younger populations tend to drive the growth of an innovation (Miller, 2009). A similar pattern was observed in the use of online social networks, although an increasing number of adults use the systems (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Research by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Lenhart et al., 2010) found that 73% of 12- to 17-year-olds use social networks, compared to 40% of people age 30 and older. However, when it comes to Twitter, the same report noted that 19% of adults 18 and older use the system, compared to only 8% of 12 to 17-year-olds. The fact that Twitter attracts adults might be due to the system being information-based rather than a conversation with acquaintances, which is characteristic of social networks used by young people (Miller, 2009). Studies also found that women use Twitter more than men (Fox et al., 2009; Heil & Piskorski, 2009), but that men had more followers on the system (Heil & Piskorski, 2009).

Individuals are not the only ones using social networks. Media organizations are using Twitter to connect with their audiences. While the television industry as a whole is still trying to determine how best to use this social network system, actors from various network programs attract a following (Collins, 2009). Cable and networks use Twitter to make connections with programs’ audiences (Steinberg, 2009). On the local side, stations find the system useful for disseminating news updates and for obtaining tips about potential news topics from their audiences (Farhi, 2009; Petner, 2009).

Social Networks

Historically, research regarding social networks and network theory revolved around traditional interpersonal communication. One characteristic of social net-

works is their dynamic nature (Davern, 1997; Rogers & Kincaid, 1981) where individuals actively "create and share information" (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981, p. 43). In contrast to models of linear communication, the network model relies on a feedback loop among actors who both transmit and receive information. As a result, network members and the network as a whole may influence each other (Gould, 1993). The concept of a dynamic network also carries with it the idea that networks change over time (Davern, 1997). The structure is flexible in that ties are made and broken through social changes.

Extending the concept to online communication, social network systems enable users to provide information about themselves, while connecting to others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). What the Internet facilitates, that goes beyond the limitation of traditional face-to-face social networks, are connections not previously possible between individuals (Haythornthwaite, 2005).

Scholars examined how and why people use social networks. Given the younger demographic that characterizes the principle users of online social networks, research often focused on college student motivations for using these systems. For example, studies about Facebook found that maintaining contact with friends is one of the primary reasons for using the system (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Sheldon, 2008). Similar findings were noted by Urista, Dong, and Day (2009) in research about MySpace and Facebook usage. Among other findings, they noted that users viewed the social networks as a convenient and efficient way to reinforce relationships and to share information quickly with many individuals.

Broadcast Promotion Model

Promotion, branding, and identity are important to local television stations. However, the perceived importance of those activities do not necessarily coincide with practical application. For example, research by Chan-Olmsted and Kim (2001) revealed that, although managers perceived branding to be important, they viewed it more as a promotional or tactical function than a managerial strategy.

Eastman and colleagues proposed a model of promotion that focused on "audience strategies and tactics" arranged in three concentric steps or segments (2006, p. 23). At the outside periphery were "strategic goals" that include acquiring audiences, "recycling" them "from one time period to another" or retaining them (p. 23). On the other hand, media companies might also seek a "brand positioning" goal that centered on increasing "revenue in another property" owned by the entity (p. 23). However, Eastman and colleagues issued the caveat that "the most effective promotion" does not try to accomplish both increased ratings and enhanced "cross-media revenue" simultaneously (p. 23). The second segment of the model focused on targeting a specific group ("strategic targets"). Here, the company attempts to define audiences according to demographics, psychographics, and the types of media services (e.g., cable and satellite) to which audience members subscribe. The third segment of the model centered on "tactical approaches," or methods that

companies use to reach their “target audience” (p. 25). Such tactics might include both internal and external means, such as advertising and on-air promotion.

Television and the Web

Television station managers recognize the importance of online communication. The central concern is the extent to which stations are willing to allocate financial and personnel resources to new media. Chan-Olmsted and Ha (2003) found that nearly 60% of the stations they studied had a full-time staff devoted to the Internet, but the budget for Internet operations was small. More recently, research showed that local television stations were increasingly doing more with existing news staff, such as producing news content for both the station’s on-air broadcasts and for the Web (Smith, Tanner & Duhé, 2007; “State of the news,” 2010c).

Research produced mixed results when considering whether market size coincides with content on television station Websites. In a study of local, commercial television station managers about branding, Chan-Olmsted and Kim (2001) found that managers tended to use the Internet more when they had a lower position in news ratings. They also noted that the Internet was more important for small market stations.

More than a decade ago, Kiernan and Levy (1999) found no relationship between market rank and Website features in general. However, Chan-Olmsted and Park examined local television sites and found that market size was associated with program promotions on the front page, and with outside links, “chat room structure,” advertising, and “online shopping” overall (2000, p. 334). Regarding market rank, they found that Websites of the top stations in a market “were most likely to offer local information, news and weather, ads, programming information, and links to affiliated network sites” (p. 335).

Another consideration is the use of online media by public television stations. Research shows that public television’s brand is viewed positively by audiences (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2002). However, there is a dearth of studies about the Web and public television. Therefore, the following questions include both market status and station type (public/commercial) in relation to Twitter use:

- RQ₁: What is the relationship between station status and the content of local TV station Twitter sites?
- RQ₂: What is the relationship between the number of TV households, number of Twitter postings, and the number of Twitter followers for a station?
- RQ₃: What are differences in the number of followers and the number of average daily tweets based on the status of the station?

Prior research regarding television station use of the Web in general and for promotion, specifically, revealed common activities that are pertinent to the present

study: interactivity; promotional activities and identity; and news content. As Masclat and Klein argued, "taking advantage of users' time-spent-online" is essential when using the Web for promotion (2006, p. 226).

Interactivity

The Web affords an opportunity for interactive communication between media and their audiences. Rafaeli defined interactivity as "a given series of communication exchanges" (1988, p. 111), but also posited three levels of interactivity based on the extent of the exchange. In low interactivity, individuals might simply send messages to each other. The second level, reactive, occurs when one person responds to the other's communication. Finally, at the interactive level, individuals connect content to earlier messages. An important consideration for content producers is the enhanced experience that interactive features offer media audiences, such as that found in Chung and Nah's (2009) study of community newspaper sites.

Despite the Web's capabilities for interactivity and the possibility of a more positive audience experience, prior research show that television stations might not take advantage of this feature. For example, Chan-Olmsted and Park (2000) found that television station Websites offered essentially one-way communication that focused on information. Few stations offered interactivity. However, Ferguson (2000) found that, compared with prior research, local television stations featured more interactivity. Similarly, Bucy (2004) found that the amount of interactivity increased on the "Net news sites" of top 40 market television stations between 1998 and 2000 (p. 110).

The feedback loop discussed earlier is pertinent especially when considering that the structure and operation of social networks is built on information sharing (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981). Coupled with research findings regarding social networks and the increasing presence of interactivity on television station Websites, the following research question is posed:

RQ4: What is the relationship between the amount of interactivity via stations' Twitter sites, number of followers and average daily tweets?

Promotion Activities and Identity

Stations embraced various techniques to enhance their position within a market and to distinguish news programming from that of their competition. This often took the form of teasers (Ferguson & Adams, 2006), slogans that promoted newscasts and news talent in stations' on-air promotion, as well as advertisements on billboards, in print, and on radio (Pringle, Starr, & McCavitt, 1995). In addition, some stations found that using a specialized URL (e.g., NBCChicago.com) rather than the station's call letters as a branding strategy helped to increase the number of visitors to their Websites (Malone, 2009).

In addition to traditional marketing and branding strategies, television stations also use the Web for promotional efforts. However, stations might not use the Web to drive visitors to on-air news broadcasts. A study by Gregson (2008) revealed that stations in the top 100 markets more actively promoted the station itself rather than the newscast. Less than 5% of the stations studied offered highlights of stories for that evening's newscast, and few stations listed their newscast ratings status.

Given the factors associated with various forms of television promotion and identity discussed above, the following question is posed:

RQ5: What is the relationship between number of followers to station Twitter sites and various promotional activities of the station on Twitter?

News Content

Ferguson noted that "local evening news is television's front page" (1997, p. 182). It is largely the means by which stations connect with their community (Kurpius, 2000) and through which the community often comes to know itself. Since local news constitutes a dominant portion of locally produced programming, stations place a great deal of importance on their news efforts. Thus, newscasts are an important component in a station's branding activities (Buchman, 2000).

News also is a prominent feature on station Websites. Kiernan and Levy (1999) revealed that 68% of television station sites featured local news, and Chan-Olmsted and Park (2000) found that news was one of the top features on the front pages of local television station sites they examined. A study by RTNDA and Ball State University revealed that local news appeared on a high percentage of local television Websites (Papper, 2007). Specifically, news ranked second only to weather as the audience's most desired item.

Prior research consistently show that news tends to be a central element on the Websites of local television stations. Coupled with research discussed earlier dealing with news promotional activities on Websites, an answer is sought to the following research question:

RQ6: How prevalent are specific Twitter strategies like breaking news tweets and the promotion of newscasts?

Method

Data for the study were obtained through a content analysis of the Twitter sites of local television stations in the United States, listed on tvontwitter.com. Pages were archived on September 25, 2009, by using the program Webpage Thumbnailer, which captures digital pictures of Web pages from a batch list. Due to the potentially large number of postings on sites, only the first page of each account was analyzed.

However, this analysis was deemed adequate to provide information appropriate for testing the content categories.

Tvontwitter.com listed approximately 589 TV stations, but some sites did not archive due to technical problems. Only Twitter sites operated by English-language local stations were analyzed. Accounts that were operated by multiple media (e.g., a television station and a newspaper) were not included. Also excluded from analysis were sites operated by state or national networks, sites that had fewer than five comments, and sites that appeared to be inactive after June 1, 2009. That cut-off date was established to include stations that posted infrequently, yet were somewhat active in their Twitter accounts within an acceptable time frame for analysis. One site was excluded from consideration because it appeared that it was comprised of content posted by an individual, even though the Twitter site name appeared to be television call letters. After excluding sites based on the criteria noted above, 488 Twitter sites were analyzed.¹

Information used for analysis included the city and state of the station, station call letters, and network affiliation (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, CW, MyNetwork, independent, PBS). Market rank and number of television households were based on Nielsen data reflecting estimates for 2009–2010 (The Nielsen Company, 2009). The number of tweets and followers were obtained from the Twitter screen shots of each station. Average daily tweets were obtained via Tweetstats (www.tweetstats.com).

Following the promotion model devised by Eastman and colleagues (2006), categories were developed that corresponded with the three promotional activities. Strategic goals were defined as those associated with the station's branding activities and position of the station. In addition to market rank, number of TV households and number of tweets, coding for strategic goals included the presence or absence of general station promotions. Coders indicated whether or not (0 = no; 1 = yes) there were tweets that generally promoted the station, but that were not specifically focused on programs or news. The second segment of the model, which focuses on targeting a specific group ("strategic targets"), was defined as information relating to users' interests. In addition to noting the number of followers, coders indicated (0 = no; 1 = yes) whether or not the following items were present: News stories; breaking news; promotion of contests or contest winners; advertisements or promotions for organizations or events outside the station; and posts requesting follower interaction. The third segment of the model—tactical approaches—centered on methods companies used to reach their "target audience" (p. 25). Items under this category focused on the station promoting on-air and online programming. This segment required coders to indicate whether the following items were present (0 = no; 1 = yes): promotes an on-air newscast; promotes programs other than news; promotes Web content; and congruence (posts including station's call letters, station slogan or channel ID).

Prior to coding the final screen shots, the subjective categories (*yes/no*) in the coding form were tested by grabbing screen shots of TV station Twitter postings on a different day than the screens used for final analysis. Following the first test for agreement, coders discussed areas of disagreement and adjustments were made to

the coding instructions. Additional samples of screens were grabbed and tested until the coders reached an agreement level of at least .70. Agreement was calculated using Cohen's kappa, which takes chance agreement into consideration (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997). One item, promoting/advertising external organizations, was excluded from analysis after it failed to reach an acceptable agreement level after several tests. Ongoing disagreements in coding this item might have been due to its highly subjective nature—coders found it difficult to determine what constituted an ad or external promotional announcement as compared with other content such as news stories or station self-promotion. Another related factor in low agreement for this item might have been the brevity of words in the posts, which offered little context for judging these types of posts. Excluding that category, coder agreements for the remaining nine items ranged from .70 to 1.0, with an average agreement of .865.

Additional coding was done in response to an anonymous manuscript reviewer. Screens were coded for the presence (0 = no; 1 = yes) of retweets and direct messages. Retweets were defined as messages that began with the traditional "RT @username" tweet, as well as less obvious retweets that included "via @username" at the end. Of the 488 stations, 31.8% (155 stations) used retweets at least once. Direct messages were defined as messages that began with "@username" in response to a previous message, as well as messages that listed a series of "@username" identities used to acknowledge specific users. Of the 488 stations, 20.5% (100 stations) used retweets at least once. An interactivity score was computed as the total of retweets plus direct messages plus the "posts requesting follower interaction" mentioned above. This interactivity score ranged from 0 to 3 ($M = 0.76$; $SD = 0.84$). Of the 488 stations, 47.3% (231 stations) showed no instances of interactivity.

Just over a quarter of the stations in this analysis were affiliated with the top three broadcast networks: CBS (25.4%), NBC (23.8%), and ABC (23.4%). Sixty-four stations (13.1%) were affiliated with the FOX network, followed by PBS (6.8%), CW (5.3%), independent stations (1.2%), and MyNetwork (1.0%). Large market stations comprised 44.5% of the sample, followed by medium markets (30.7%), and small markets (24.8%). The estimated number of TV homes ranged from 27,630 to 7,493,530 ($M = 948,301.97$; $SD = 1,158,427.8$).

Of the nine dichotomous variables, news appeared most frequently on the sites (89.5%), followed by congruence (53.5%). The remaining seven items rarely observed were, Web promo (32.6%), news promo (25.8%), invitation to interact with the station (23.4%), promotional announcements for programs other than news (22.1%), breaking news (18.4%), contest promotions (5.9%), and general station promotion (1.6%).

To examine relationships between nominal variables, a chi square test was employed. In addition to listing the chi square value and probability for significant relationships, measures of association also are reported. This includes a phi coefficient for 2×2 contingency tables and Cramer's V for tables larger than 2×2 (Field, 2005). There were a number of significant relationships between variables, but associations tended to be small.

The total number of tweets ranged from 12 to 24,445 with a mean of 3334.63 ($SD = 3637.31$). Six stations appeared to cease using Twitter or stop posting tweets sometime between September 25, 2009 (the date on which data were gathered) and November 30, 2009 (the date on which the number of average daily tweets was obtained). For purposes of analysis, those instances were coded as missing. Excluding those six sites, the average number of daily tweets ranged from 1 to 100.2 ($M = 12.47$; $SD = 11.15$). Meanwhile, the number of followers ranged from 40 to 18,154 ($M = 1748.50$; $SD = 1774.98$). None of the stations' Twitter sites featured all nine items from the promotion model. The most was 19 stations that each offered 6 items. The highest number of features offered was three, which appeared on 25.6% of the sites. Nearly a quarter of the sites (23.6%) had only one item.

Results

RQ₁ asked about the relationship between station status and the content of local TV station Twitter sites. Station status was operationalized as the two components of market size and the type of station (public or commercial). A chi-square analysis between the three categories of market sizes (small, medium, large) and each of the nine dichotomous variables showed significant relationships for two of the items. Compared to the other market sizes, a higher percentage of large market stations offered invitations to interact ($\chi^2 = 9.823$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$, *Cramer's V* = .142). For Web promotion announcements, a higher percentage of medium market stations offered that feature compared to the other market sizes ($\chi^2 = 7.549$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$, *Cramer's V* = .124).

When comparing public versus commercial stations regarding the presence of the dichotomous variables, several items achieved statistical significance (see Table 1). Based on the phi coefficient, two items that reached significance showed inverse relationships. A majority of commercial stations offered news compared with public stations; however, the relationship failed to achieve statistical significance. None of the public stations offered breaking news tweets or newscast promos, most likely due to the stations not providing a regular local newscast. However, a higher percentage of public stations offered program promotions, Web promotions, and congruence. Commercial stations focused tweets on information, while public stations were concerned with station identification and driving followers to on-air programming or the station's Website.

RQ₂ examined the relationship between the number of TV homes, number of Twitter postings (average daily tweets), and the number of Twitter followers for a station. A moderate positive correlation was observed between TV homes and followers ($n = 488$, $r = .460$, $p < .01$) and a weak, but positive correlation between the number of followers and the number of average daily tweets ($n = 482$, $r = .249$, $p < .01$). There was no significant relationship between TV homes and average daily tweets.

Table 1
Percentage of Features Appearing on Television Station Twitter Sites by Type of Station

	Commercial (<i>n</i> = 455)	Public (<i>n</i> = 33)	χ^2	Phi Coefficient
General promo	1.8%	0%	.590	-.035
News	94.9%	15.2%	209.329	-.655
Breaking news	19.8%	0%	8.004**	-.128
Contest promo	5.9%	6.1%	.001	.001
Interaction invite	23.3%	24.2%	.015	.006
News promo	27.7%	0%	12.319***	-.159
Program promo	17.6%	84.8%	80.785***	.407
Web promo	31.2%	51.5%	5.776*	.109
Congruence	51.6%	78.8%	9.109**	.137

Notes: *df* = 1; **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

RQ₃ considered whether there were differences in the number of followers and the number of average daily tweets based on the status of the station. There were no significant differences between the types of stations when it came to the number of followers. However, there were statistically significant differences between the two types of stations when it came to the number of tweets (*t* = 13.911, *df* = 158.085, *p* < .001). On average, the Twitter sites of commercial stations saw more than four times as many average daily tweets as public station sites.

RQ₄ examined the relationship between the amount of interactivity via stations' Twitter sites, number of followers and average daily tweets. Because the stations that engaged in interactivity were split into two approximate halves (47/53%), a *t*-test comparison was made to study differences. The number of followers was higher (*M* = 1923.29; *SD* = 2068.45) for stations using interactive tweets than for the other group (*M* = 1554.03; *SD* = 1355.25) with no interactive tweets (*t* = 2.35, *df* = 446, *p* < .05). However, the average number of tweets was lower (*M* = 14.94; *SD* = 12.25) for stations using interactive tweets than for the noninteractive stations (*M* = 10.24; *SD* = 9.54) which amounted to an approximate five-tweet difference on average (*t* = -4.72, *df* = 430, *p* < .001).

RQ₅ assessed the relationship between the number of followers to station Twitter sites and the promotional activities of the station on Twitter. With the number of followers as the dependent variable, a stepwise regression with number of TV homes and average daily tweets explained 25.7% (adjusted *R*²) of the variance (*F*(2,479) = 84.212, *p* < .001). Because news on the sites was the predominant feature, adding that item to the model accounted for 29.9% (adjusted *R*²) of the variance (*F*(3,478) = 69.341, *p* < .001). Therefore, although a market's TV population and number of

tweets posted by the stations are significant when it comes to attracting a following, the presence of news on the sites may further enhance those connections.

RQ₆ asked about the prevalence of specific Twitter strategies like breaking news tweets and the promotion of newscasts on television station Twitter sites. More than three quarters (79.4%) of the stations that featured news stories did not feature breaking news items ($\chi^2 = 12.879$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .162$). Also, 71.6% of stations that had news stories did not use their tweets to promote their on-air newscasts ($\chi^2 = 14.259$; $df = 1$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .171$). About two-thirds (63.3%) of the sites that featured breaking news did not promote the station's on-air newscasts ($\chi^2 = 6.779$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$, $\phi = .118$). This suggests that stations are more interested in giving away their news content than sending followers to their newscasts.

Discussion

This study examined how local television stations in the United States use Twitter, a social network system that enables users to post brief comments about their activities (Twitter, 2009). Specifically, this study focused on the number of followers of local TV Twitter sites, market size and features offered on the sites as they relate to strategic goals, strategic targets, and tactical approaches (Eastman et al., 2006).

Commercial and public stations used Twitter differently. Commercial stations were more likely than public stations to have breaking news and tweets promoting newscasts. None of the public stations had either of those two features, most likely because they do not typically offer regular on-air newscasts. On the other hand, public stations were more prone to offer tweets that contained announcements that promoted programming other than local newscasts. In addition, they were more likely to promote their Websites, as well as to include items in their tweets associated with identification or station slogans (i.e., congruence). The findings regarding differences in emphasis between commercial and public stations suggest that news is central to commercial stations, while branding and programs are central to public stations.

There was a significant relationship (albeit moderate) between the number of TV homes and followers of the stations' Twitter sites. Larger market stations naturally have the capacity for more potential followers. However, there was no significant relationship between the number of TV homes and the number of average daily tweets. This suggests that, despite the number of followers in relation to market size, larger market stations are not necessarily producing more Twitter content on average. Conversely, it also indicates that smaller market stations are likely not producing less content, even though those stations might have fewer staff dedicated to online work.

The differences between stations using and not using interactive features suggest that interactivity gains more followers, but limits the average output of Twitter sites. It appears easier to post one-way messages, even if doing so ignores strategic goals

or promoting viewing. Some stations appear to give their content to their followers in a manner to replace rather than enhance viewing levels. Nevertheless, stations supplying news rather than promoting their on-air programs are making a choice.

The results of the regression particularly are important. Specifically, the addition of the news story variable to the model illustrates that information might be a key element in predicting following of a station's Twitter site. This finding also has ramifications for public television stations and stations that do not feature regular local on-air newscasts. It might be advantageous for stations to include news stories in their tweets in order to better connect with potential followers.

The chi square analyses between the variables of news, newscast promotion, and breaking news are also noteworthy. Although many of the stations provided news stories on their Twitter sites, few of those sites promoted the station's on-air newscasts. Furthermore, sites that featured breaking news items tended not to promote the station's on-air newscast also. These findings suggest that stations use Twitter primarily as an information source, rather than as a news "teaser" to drive followers to watch the televised newscasts.

The findings in this study diverged somewhat from the promotion model proposed by Eastman and colleagues (2006). Regarding the "strategic goals" aspect of the model, there were a few sites that featured general station promotional announcements. Most promotions were specific to newscasts or programs. Whether or not stations retain followers to their Twitter sites is beyond the scope of this study, but definitely worthy of consideration for future research. The second portion of the model, "strategic targets," was defined in this study as features in Twitter sites that relate to followers' interests. As noted earlier, news stories were the top feature on the sites (primarily commercial stations). However, there was not much occurrence of other items in this category such as breaking news, contest promos, or invitations for user interaction. The last segment of the model, "tactical approaches," also yielded few instances of items in this category. Congruence, items associated with station identity, was the most occurring feature in this category. As stated earlier, stations rarely actively directed followers to broadcast programming.

As it relates to Web-based communication, Twitter is a new online tool; however, not much has changed regarding content. As with prior research of TV and the Web (e.g., Chan-Olmsted & Park, 2000; Kiernan & Levy, 1999), this study found little facilitation or promotion of interactivity between Twitter followers and the station. However, this study found that news was the top feature on Twitter sites, a finding that is consistent with prior TV Web studies (Chan-Olmsted & Park, 2000; Kiernan & Levy, 1999; Papper, 2007). Gregson (2008) found that TV Websites promoted the station rather than the newscast. However, in the present study, neither of those features appeared with regularity on the Twitter postings.

A few limitations should be noted regarding this research. First, this study represents only a single snapshot in time of TV station Twitter pages. Additional research that examines Twitter postings longitudinally is warranted. A second limitation is the dynamic nature of information associated with the Web. As noted in the method section of this paper, several TV stations either had not used their Twitter sites for a

period of months or completely ceased using Twitter. Another limitation is that only Twitter sites listed on tvontwitter.com were included in this analysis. It is possible that there are other TV stations using Twitter that were not listed in this resource.

Future research should examine followers of Twitter to determine what they most like about their favorite sites, their motivations for following local TV on Twitter, and how they generally use television Twitter sites. A related point of research would be to examine the success of branding (Ha & Chan-Olmsted, 2004) via Twitter from the standpoint of followers.

This study documented how television stations explore the use of Twitter for promotion and branding. Applying newer strategies to older media is often complicated as audiences find different ways to receive information. Social media were adopted by stations that sought to stay relevant in a changing media environment. Examining the use of new media technologies by traditional media provides important information for broadcasters who seek new ways to attract and maintain audiences.

Note

¹Significance testing was not necessary because sampling was not used. The *p*-values in the results section are included for additional information to the reader.

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