Why Twitter Displaces Broadcast Sports Media: A Model

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The rising popularity of Twitter and the concurrent decline in audience size for local television sportscasts has fueled concern that the new medium is displacing traditional broadcasters. A model is offered that identifies the salient latent constructs that make Twitter a more attractive medium for connected fans in ways that transcend Twitter's obvious advantage in timeliness. Issues relating to Twitter's brevity, the public–private blending of athletes, parasocial interaction between users and who they follow, community building, homophily, and self-presentation are all addressed. The model offers propositions that can be tested by future research and provides guidance to broadcasters willing to adapt to what Twitter offers. Understanding why Twitter engages sports fans in a manner unlike that of previous technologies offers application for sports broadcasters trying to maintain audience share, as well as guidance for researchers seeking to explain the allure of the 140-character medium.

Keywords: broadcasting, journalism, parasocial interaction, interactivity

"I Don't Need To Watch Local Sports."

In November 2011, award-winning sports journalist Joe Dubin decided to leave the television news business. After 8 years at Nashville's WRKN-TV, Dubin determined local sports on television was passé, saying

> Now with Twitter and Facebook, nobody's waiting around until 6:30 [p.m.] to watch sports. The landscape has changed. I get Titans information and any other information I want on my phone in five minutes. I don't need to watch local sports. (Knox, 2011)

Dubin's statement illustrates the struggle that broadcasters face in adapting to the immediacy that the Internet affords (Sagan & Leighton, 2010), in much the same way that broadcasters themselves offered timeliness as a competitive advantage over newspapers starting in the 1960s. Although newspapers were once able to compete

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with television for timely news based on much greater capacity to generate news (Shelton, 1978), the broadcasters could disseminate information much faster than newspapers could even when the latter had two editions a day. News consumers judged television news to be significantly more immediate than newspapers (Lee, 1978). Broadcasters' verbal cues about the timeliness such as "this just in" and "moments ago" resulted in more positive audience evaluations of newscasts (Tiedge & Ksobiech, 1982). In part because of this timeliness, some viewers began to see television news as more credible than newspapers (Lee, 1978). Today, the Internet is often faster than broadcasters in breaking news, and Twitter allows fans to get their information quickly and conveniently, which means that fans do not have to wait until the evening news to get their sports update (Rudd, 2012).

But Dubin's concern with Twitter and Facebook as channels of communication that trump the immediacy that traditional broadcasters once enjoyed overlooks an even more important benefit that social media offer: the potential for interaction with athletes and teams. The interactivity of Twitter allows the public to communicate directly with the person delivering the message (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). This interactivity has become an important news value for the viewer (Miller, 1995; Singer et al., 2011; Smith & Rainie, 2010). Fans are turning to Twitter for interactivity (Sanderson, 2011) because traditional, one-to-many, news media cannot offer two-way interactions. And in the process of delivering interactivity, Twitter has become a primary way for some people to get news either directly from the broadcasters or from the newsmakers themselves (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012).

The interaction that Twitter fosters is especially important in sports journalism, which promotes audience identification with participants and organizations in a way that many other topics do not. Beyond politics and celebrity worship, there are very few subjects that create the passion that sports does among its followers (Vallerand et al., 2008), and this passion leads people from all walks of life to connect based almost solely on their common interests in the same team or player. People play sports to increase their social integration and socialization (Sage, 1979). In addition, socialization was a key component of the enjoyment level of those who watch sports on television. Fans' emotions were heightened if they were watching the game with friends as opposed to watching alone (Gantz, 1981). This speaks to the social aspect of sports and how the interaction that occurs as a result is able to create conversations and bonds among viewers that can bridge social, religious, and political differences among fans of the same team. Therefore, the world of sports fosters social connections, a feature that is ideally suited for social media such as Twitter.

Researchers have examined the growing use of Twitter among journalists, athletes, and fans. Broadcast journalists are using the social network mainly for commentary and opinion (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010), while sports print journalists are using Twitter to break news and promote their work on other platforms (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010). Athletes are using Twitter to discuss their personal lives (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010; Sanderson, 2011), provide a behind-the-scenes glimpse of their lives as athletes (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Sanderson, 2011), and converse directly with fans (Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010). Direct conversations on Twitter offer parasocial interaction between athletes and fans (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Sanderson, 2011).

No study, however, has addressed the real concern underlying Dubin's rant: that there is something about Twitter that makes it a qualitatively different medium that threatens to bypass broadcasters. The purpose of this study is to offer a model that seeks to explain why Twitter is not just a more immediate source of sports news and how it affects the way sports consumers interact with news about players and teams. By offering a model to explain these differences, this study also offers advice to broadcasters seeking to retain relevancy.

This study is rooted in social-impact theory, a concept first developed by Bibb Latané. In his seminal piece titled *The Psychology of Social Impact,* Latané (1981) described how the beliefs, attributes, and behaviors of individuals are influenced by those of others around them. Social-impact theory has been applied to social situations such as consumer attitudes regarding social-media recommendations (Mir & Zaheer, 2012), language (Nettle, 1999), conformity (Latané & L'Herrou, 1996), and the influence of the majority (Latané & Wolf, 1981). Latané developed algorithms showing that social impact is affected by strength, immediacy, and the number of sources. Social-impact theory can explain the appeal of Twitter to sports fans because tweets can come from the athletes or teams themselves (strength), be delivered to the user instantly (immediacy), and come from a wide variety of users (number of sources). If users of social-media sites share similar views, the information discussed seems more credible, validating Latané's theory (Mir & Zaheer, 2012). Social-impact theory explains why Twitter engages sports fans more effectively than traditional media do because it provides a useful framework for understanding how people are affected by their social environment (Nowak, Szamrej, & Latané, 1990).

Types of Fans

Gantz and Wenner (1995) divided people who watch sports into two categories: fans and nonfans. Fans were defined as those who "know about the techniques, guidelines, and rules associated with the sports they follow; many are walking compendiums of the current status of particular players and teams" (Gantz & Wenner, 1995, p. 59), while nonfans viewed sports without much interest. Some researchers proposed that sports fanship was a continuous concept rather than a dichotomous one (Gantz, Wilson, Lee, & Fingerhut, 2008), yet most studies have divided fanship into two categories (Giulianotti, 2002; Smith, 1988; Wann, Hunter, Ryan, & Wright, 2001). This study suggests that a third type of fan has been created by the rise of the Internet, which fosters interaction and personal connections. The Internet is not just another news medium, for it encourages readers to discuss news among each other through comments and promotes people to interact through social media like Facebook and Twitter. In turn, the Internet enables fans not just to consume news or even to participate in the conversation but also to potentially bypass traditional media and interact directly with athletes and teams. Therefore, in addition to the two traditional categories of fan and nonfan is a third type: the connected fan.

Connected fans are defined as those who use the Internet at least once daily to follow their favorite players and teams. Connected fans not only rely on traditional media for sports information but will also use sports Web sites (Butler & Sagas, 2008), mobile phone applications (Boyle, 2004), or social-networking services—in

particular, Twitter (Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Clavio & Kian, 2010; Frederick et al., 2012; Hambrick et al., 2010; Sanderson, 2011). By contrast, fans rely on traditional media to receive sports information. Connected fans are not necessarily more passionate fans, as both types could be loyal to their teams and players, but connected fan use social media both as an information source and as a vehicle to interact. For this study, being a connected fan is an antecedent condition for the model, as only connected fans would receive a sports tweet.

Twitter and the World of Sports

Twitter is a social medium that allows users to send 140 character messages, or tweets, from a computer or mobile device (Palser, 2009). These tweets can be read by other Twitter users who have chosen to follow the sender or by anyone on the Internet if the account has not been locked by the original poster (Johnson, 2009). These followers can then read the message, respond to it, or "retweet" the message to their own followers, enabling the original tweet to reach an even larger audience. Twitter is searchable (Mansfield, 2010). More important, Twitter offers shorthand to enable like-minded people to find each other or form conversations around a common topic: the use of the number sign (#) to create hashtags (Johnson, 2009). These hashtags, such as #HeatRepeat or #FreeTebow, are brief identifiers that mark a tweet as part of a topic or discussion (Bruns & Burgess, 2012). Someone interested in a particular topic can search Twitter for keywords that others have tweeted or find a hashtag that relates to the user's interests.

Created in 2006, Twitter has grown fast. Six years later, the site had at least 630 million registered users ("Countdown to 500 Million," 2012), with 250 million active users (defined as members who log into their account at least once a month; Bennett, 2012). Part of the reason for this explosive growth is that Twitter, with messages limited to 140 characters, is easily accessed and used through mobile devices (Hutchins & Rowe, 2009).

For athletes, Twitter has become one of the most popular social-media tools (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010). Many athletes have embraced Twitter as a way to create positive exposure, engage fans, and increase their visibility (Pegoraro, 2010). In 2009, a *Sports Illustrated* writer commented, "The entire sports world is obsessed with the social media tool" (Gregory, 2009, ¶ 3). Not all players tweet frequently, but those who do send tweets about a variety of topics; while almost 50% involve fan interactions, 26% are about their personal lives, and 7% involved pop culture (Pegoraro, 2010). As the players have flocked to Twitter, teams and leagues have had to respond accordingly. Many teams have embraced the Twitter craze, perhaps none more so than the Philadelphia Wings of the National Lacrosse League, which put players' Twitter handles on the backs of jerseys (Olenski, 2012). While some sports leagues teach rookies acceptable ways to use social media (McManus, 2012), they also take steps to keep tweeting from interfering with the actual games. The National Football League banned players and coaches from using Twitter 90 minutes before a game, during a game, and until postgame interviews are completed (Reisinger, 2009). In sports-car racing, Brad Keselowski tweeted from the race track during a red-flag caution in the Daytona 500 (Locker, 2012). Keselowski gained more than 100,000 followers after tweeting during the race (Sandomir, 2012) but was fined $25,000 by the sport's governing board after repeating the act later in the

season (Associated Press, 2012). Although the driver's tweets were nothing more than pictures from the track, the episode speaks to the fact that traditional media outlets are now competing with the athletes they cover when it comes to providing information to fans.

For this study, Twitter sources under consideration were limited to those that most closely emulated what a local television sportscast would provide as well as the interactions that a connected fan would value. Thus, tweets from athletes and teams were evaluated because they would mirror what a local TV sports report provides. In addition, tweets from other fans were assessed, because those interactions would be valued by connected fans. As a result, the study considered tweets from teams such as the Miami Heat professional basketball team and athletes such as the Heat's LeBron James, along with tweets from Heat fans. Excluded from this study were tweets from sports leagues such as the National Basketball Association, journalists or bloggers who cover the Heat, or agents for players, to cite a few examples. Similarly, the study looked at tweets from professional football players such as quarterback Aaron Rodgers and his team, the Green Bay Packers, along with a hashtag identifier used by fans, #PackerBacker—while ignoring tweets from the National Football League, *Sports Illustrated* football writer Peter King, and journalists who cover the team, such as Tyler Dunne of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

Local TV Sportscast Substitution

The proliferation of smartphones and tablets has created a new era for news, as people now have more methods to receive information than they did in the past (Mitchell & Rosenstiel, 2012). Media use has grown in the last decade, with some estimating that more hours are spent with media than are spent in school, work, or sleeping (Newell, 2007). Because the range of options has grown, people today must be more selective in deciding how to access news (Ruggiero, 2000). When people start using new technology, they compare it to old methods (Jeong & Li, 2003), and if they find that the new medium is better, they are likely to spend less time with older technology (Kayany & Yelsma, 2000).

For some, television sports broadcasts are being displaced by online media as a primary source of information (Kian, Burden, & Shaw, 2011), with about 20% of Internet users replacing their former primary news source with Web sites (Jeong & Li, 2003). Local television newscasts audiences were 10% smaller in 2012 than they were in 2007 (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2012), even though the population is growing (Schlesinger, 2012). The old model of waiting until the evening news show to hear the latest information about a sports team has been disrupted.

Although some researchers believe that Twitter will displace traditional media (Ha & Fang, 2012; Kayany & Yelsma, 2000), such predictions tend to be based on an assumption that the primary cause is the immediacy that online affords—that Twitter is faster than TV. If that explanation was sufficient, however, TV broadcasters could reclaim supremacy merely by offering a faster report through Web sites or mobile applications. Yet even television stations with robust Web sites and a strong online commitment have been unable to unable to thwart Twitter. Therefore, speed alone does not explain why Twitter holds a distinctive advantage

in the marketplace. Instead, a more well-rounded explanation is needed, one that reveals the salient constructs that often are tacit or latent and that make Twitter more efficacious than TV.

A model to advance those constructs is offered in Figure 1. The model postulates that the Twitter messages, or tweets, serve as the independent variable—the causal link in the chain. The degree to which connected fans see those messages as displacing a television sportscast is the dependent variable. Parasocial interaction is the mediator, or the construct necessary for a connected fan to see Twitter as a potential displacement. The other constructs identified are moderators. These are variables that can either strengthen or weaken a potential correlation between the independent and dependent variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon, 2011).

Brevity

One of the core elements of Twitter is the brevity of the messages that allow for conversations similar to those found in text messages and interpersonal communications. Unlike other social media, Twitter limits messages to 140 characters, or about 25 words. Twitter's short messages are like those in pocket diaries popular in the 19th century and which, due to their size, limited how much authors could write (Humphreys, Gill, Krishnamurthy, & Newbury, 2013). As a result of this brevity, a tweet does not require the level of attention required to read an entire a longer news story, e-mail, or Facebook post, as the users of the social network instead focus on the collection of the tweets as a whole to get a picture of the latest news
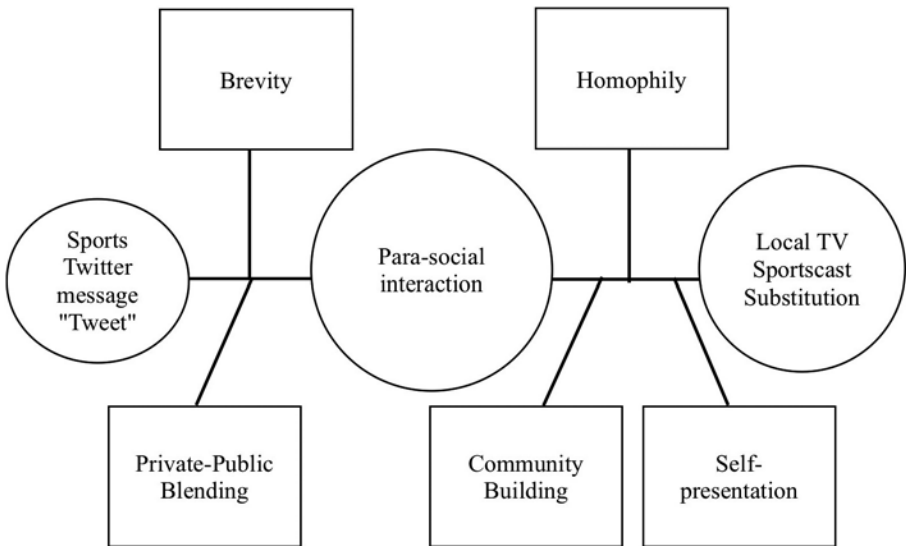

Figure 1 — A model for why Twitter displaces traditional media.

(Hermida, 2010). In addition, researchers have determined that authors' opinions are easier to understand in shortened forms such as in Twitter as opposed to longer writings in news stories or blogs (Bermingham & Smeaton, 2010). Just as television sound bites have grown shorter to appeal to viewers with short attention spans (Schaefer & Martinez, 2009), so has Twitter's 140-character limit attracted people who believe that their busy lives have privileged brevity.

The brevity of the messages also adds convenience. Because messages are brief, Twitter can be used in its full form as an application on mobile devices such as smartphones, unlike Web sites or video services that are not optimized for mobile platforms. This ability to appear on mobile platforms without a loss in quality has been cited as one of the reasons for Twitter's popularity (Brock, 2012). Because users only need a cellphone to connect, the service can be used even in countries that are not technologically advanced (Murthy, 2011). Therefore, the following proposition is offered:

> **P1**: The brevity and mobile-platform convenience of Twitter is more appealing to connected fans than is a sports report on television.

Private–Public Blending

With the exception of the periodic feature stories that may focus on an athlete's private life, most of the work done by traditional media is focused on athletes' public roles. Stories often discuss only an athlete's play during a game, leaving much of the athlete's life a mystery to the fans. However, the ethos of social media in general and Twitter in particular encourages a blending of the personal and the professional, giving fans a more private look into athletes' lives. Some fans want a more complete approach than broadcasters traditionally supply and want to know more than an athlete's on-the-field life. One of the main reasons fans use Twitter is to get information on what athletes are doing that they cannot get elsewhere. Therefore, fans believe that Twitter provides more in-depth coverage of athletes than traditional media do (Frederick et al., 2012).

Some athletes have recognized that fostering a personal relationship with fans can boost their market value. Traditionally, athletes have had to rely on journalists as go-betweens to personalize them, often by conducting a press conference or having a one-on-one interview with a reporter. Thanks to Twitter, the intermediary can be avoided as athletes can give the fans a glimpse into their personal lives by sending out a tweet. Journalists have long functioned as gatekeepers with the power to decide what information should and should not be passed along to the masses (Lewin, 1947). Gatekeeping theory was affirmed by David Manning White when he realized that a wire editor at a local newspaper controlled what stories reached his readers and what stories were left out of the newspaper (White, 1950). For athletes, gatekeepers often kept stories about their personal lives away from fans. Now athletes can send pictures and videos they have taken themselves directly to their fans, something the public has shown an interest in (Frederick et al., 2012).

> **P2**: Connected fans use Twitter to learn about an athlete's professional, as well as private, life and value the blending of the two.

Parasocial Interaction

The fan–athlete relationship used to be largely one-sided: The fan would watch the player in the games and see the highlights in the sports broadcast but rarely interact with the athlete. Broadcast media produced sports content to generally passive audiences that could not be active in their relationships with the athletes (Wenner, 1989). Generally, the only personal interaction fans had with their favorite athlete was through a cursory autograph signing (Pegoraro, 2010).

Fans had little choice but to form figurative connections by watching athletes on television. These relationships are known as a parasocial interaction, which describe is a relationship that is one-sided, or a pseudo-friendship (Robinson & Trail, 2005).

Parasocial relationships are a "seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215). The fan believes he or she is in a friendship with an athlete while the athlete does not have a personal relationship with the fan (Frederick et al., 2012; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Sanderson, 2011). Due to the emergence of Twitter, these parasocial interactions are evolving to the point that users can interact more substantially with their favorite athletes (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009), meaning that the parasocial relationship could turn into a social relationship between fans and athletes (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). With athletes spending almost 50% of their time on Twitter interacting with fans (Pegoraro, 2010), the likelihood of a conversation, albeit online, has grown exponentially since the development of Twitter. In other words, Twitter offers fans the very real possibility that their connections with an athlete could be more than parasocial—they could actually get an athlete to respond personally.

For example, on October 26, 2012, college track athlete Laura Calderone posted a photo of herself on Twitter dressed up for Halloween as Olympic track athlete Lolo Jones (Calderone, 2012a). Five hours later, Jones responded to Calderone's Tweet and commented on the picture (Jones, 2012), setting off a barrage of excited tweets from the stunned student (Calderone, 2012b; Calderone 2012c; Calderone 2012d) and her friends (Black, 2012; Samper, 2012). What could have simply been a teenager posting a picture for her friends to see became an actual interaction with the student's favorite athlete. This type of interaction would not have been possible without Twitter, and it is a good example of how athletes are using the social network to appear more accessible. Calderone wrapped up the night by writing, "So what aspirations should I have for the rest of my life now that I've been tweeted by Lolo Jones?" (Calderone, 2012e). This exchange between an athlete and a fan, and the many others like it occurring on Twitter every day, can create the sense of a normal conversation between equals (Johnson, 2009). While not all athlete–fan interactions on Twitter are positive (Browning & Sanderson, 2012), the social network does give fans like Calderone a chance to get closer to athletes than ever before.

These exchanges by athletes are not all about sports. In addition to their interactions with fans, 28% of athlete tweets are about topics other than sports, with an additional 5% promoting themselves or a product they endorse (Hambrick et al., 2010). By showing their nonathletic side and tweeting about more personal activities, athletes can foster connections between themselves and their followers (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Based on the principles of social-impact theory, the

connected fans on Twitter will be influenced greatly by those around them because the parasocial interaction gives fans a more personal connection to the athletes they follow.

> **P3**: Unless they value parasocial interaction, connected fans are unlikely to see Twitter as a potential replacement for a television sports report.

Community Building

While using traditional forms of media is a usually singular activity, Twitter has created a community among users. Now users not only get the news but also interact with it and spread the information to other Twitter users, as well. Identification with an athlete or team fosters a sense of community among fans, a process that Twitter amplifies. For connected sports fans, the sense of community may not be the team or player for which they root, but Twitter itself. With hundreds of millions of active users (Bennett, 2012), Twitter encourages participants to form bonds with each other.

A sense of community is composed of four elements: membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Those four elements remain valid even after the Internet removed geography as the limiting factor for the concept of community (Boyd, 2002). The dynamics within and between these four elements in the Twitter community are identified when a person signs up for Twitter (membership) to get the latest information (fulfillment of needs), to interact with other users through starting discussion or retweets (influence), and to form a connection with other users (shared emotional connection). Social-impact theory demonstrates that these created communities can also lead to users' behaviors being influenced by those in this newly formed group.

Another method of community building on Twitter is through the use of hashtags, or the number sign. Through Twitter's search options, users can find tweets that have been labeled with the same hashtag (Bruns & Burgess, 2012). Hashtags transform interactions from dialogic conversations into ones with multiple connections, as dozens can join in the discourse. During the Super Bowl, a Twitter user could use "#superbowl" to indicate that the tweet was about the game (Hernandez, 2011). These specialized hashtags for a specific event create new communities for users with similar interests. The hashtag "#superbowl" allows a user to demonstrate that he or she is watching the game and wants to contribute to the conversation. Because the Super Bowl is normally the most-watched television broadcast of the year (Levinson, 2012), demonstrating that someone is watching and commenting on the game may give Twitter users the feeling of fitting in with the majority. These hashtags also are used as communicative shorthand. Users can write messages with hashtags such as "#RollTide" or "#sportsmanship" that others can be part of. This can start interactions among users who have the same beliefs as the original poster. The two uses of hashtags are able to foster a sense of community that can lead to increased interaction among users.

Community has been defined as a local relationship (Wellman & Leighton, 1979), but the Internet has removed that restriction to enable virtual communities worldwide. An online community requires interactivity, more than two people communicating, virtual space where people can interact, and a sustained membership (Jones, 1997). Twitter, therefore, meets those criteria to foster a virtual community

(Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011). Twitter can give connected sports fans a chance to interact with other users and feel as if they are part of a community. Users who privilege this sense of community may deemphasize broadcast media in favor of Twitter.

P4: Connected fans prefer a sense of community and find that Twitter creates a virtual community they value.

Homophily

Homophily is the principle that individuals are more likely to interact with people who are similar to themselves or who have common interests (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). While the idea of like-minded people interacting with each other goes back to Aristotle (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), it was Lazarsfeld and Merton who created the most widely recognized version of this theory. They determined that factors such as age, sex, and personal beliefs contributed to how people determined with whom to spend time. Such factors are just as applicable with Twitter. People were more likely to interact with fellow Twitter users who shared their opinions, and replies between like-minded individuals strengthened group identity (Yardi & Boyd, 2010). By interacting only with people who were in their interest group, people were more likely to have their opinions reinforced, reducing the opportunity to learn opposite viewpoints (McPherson et al., 2001). Through social-impact theory, those with like viewpoints cannot only reinforce opinions but also influence the beliefs of others in the group. If a person is a fan of a sports team, he or she can follow other team fans on Twitter. Even if living thousands of miles away from a team's home city, a fan can follow the players, the team, local sports writers, and other fans and thus interact with people with similar interests.

Following athletes can also create a sense of homophily because followers may identify with an athlete. When the athlete tells a personal anecdote on Twitter, and the user shares the same opinion, the two will have attitude homophily (Frederick et al., 2012). Twitter builds a sense of homophily that the sports broadcasts cannot, because it gives people a chance to surround themselves with other Twitter users who share their opinions.

P5: Homophily between a connected fan and his or her favored athlete or team is directly correlated with the degree to which the fan sees Twitter as a potential displacement for local broadcast sports shows.

Self-Presentation

Twitter allows users to create online identities, a concept known as self-presentation. Just as actors create a stage impression in a theater that may differ from their private persona, individuals craft public presentations reflecting how they wish to be seen (Goffman, 1959). Self-presentation theory applies to Twitter (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Jacobsen, 2010; Miller, 1995). Twitter allows users to form public identities to look more desirable to other people. Because Twitter nourishes self-presentation, it is particular useful for athletes, whose public personas can affect their market value and endorsement contracts (Brazeal, 2008).

In addition to self-presentation, affinity seeking helps explain Twitter's displacement power. Affinity seeking is based on the idea that people want to be liked (Bell & Daly, 1984). Twitter users send messages and engage in actions that can be repeated by others (also known as role-modeling tactics) to increase their popularity (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). Popularity on Twitter can be determined by the number of followers a person has or by the number of retweets a specific tweet receives.

> **P6**: As the sports figures and teams that a connected fan follows use Twitter for self-presentation and affinity-seeking purposes, the fan is more likely to see Twitter as a potential displacement for television sportscasts.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze why Twitter engages connected sports fans more effectively than television sportscasts do. A model was offered that explains how Twitter can displace the local sports broadcast. Parasocial interaction was posited as the mediator through which Twitter messages can be seen as a displacement medium. Several constructs were offered as moderators to explain how the link between Twitter and displacement occurs.

The model suggests a number of paths for future research that can test the propositions offered. The validity of the model can be tested to determine whether tweets influence a sports audience in the manner postulated. The propositions in the model could compare tweets from athletes, teams, and fans to determine if the psychological processes involved in evaluating them differ based on the source. Conversely, the model could be tested by comparing responses according to the category of fan to test the argument that Twitter is more effective with a particular type of fan. The results could affirm or challenge theoretical presumptions about social-impact theory.

The model was offered to help explain the distinctive potential of Twitter to displace traditional local sports television broadcasts beyond the disruptive power of the Internet. However, more research is needed to determine why audiences for local news are declining. For example, the appointment-viewing model on which television is based but that fits less well in a more fluid society may have more to do with shrinking audiences than alternatives sources such as Twitter. Research is needed to determine whether Twitter is a displacement channel or a parallel one that can coexist with the traditional local sports broadcast in a dual-screen environment.

Finally, research is needed into how connected sports fans choose and use their information sources. Twitter is both a source of information and a connective tissue. Research into which of those two is prized more by connected fans could help broadcasters better understand their competitive environments. A fuller understanding of fan behavior sometimes requires more than surveys and measurements; ethnographic uses-and-gratifications studies can also be beneficial.

In addition to offering guidance for academic researchers, the model presents a road map for broadcasters willing to incorporate the intangibles that Twitter offers. Sports broadcasters recognize that they have to change to regain audience share that's been lost to online vehicles such as Twitter. John Steigerwald, a television sports broadcaster for 20 years, summarized the difficulty in changing by remarking in a 2004 interview, "We're doing the sports today the same way we did it when I

started" (Smizik, 2004, ¶ 20). Broadcasters must make the sports segments more engaging than scores and highlights (Schultz & Sheffer, 2004), and Twitter offers some clues to how traditional sports journalists can adapt.

A starting point is for sports journalists to fully engage with Twitter themselves. Social media are an important news source for a growing number of people (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012). Of Twitter's trending topics, or the leading topics that people are tweeting about at any one particular time, about 20% are related to sports, the second-largest category (Cheong, 2009). Twitter users are more interested in sports than non–Twitter users (Hargittai & Litt, 2011). Sports fans are using Twitter, and journalists should be where the fans are.

Broadcaster David Aldridge said in 2012 that he now breaks all his stories on Twitter (Westney, 2012). Active Twitter users tend to share breaking news, making it likely they will retweet a journalist's message to their followers and thus amplify the broadcaster's voice (Gahran, 2008). Retweeting enables connected sports fans to act as opinion leaders and weaves the television sportscaster into the Twitter users' social network. In turn, this may help connected fans be more willing to embrace those working in traditional media. Similarly, sports broadcasters can take advantage of the public–private blending that Twitter fosters by tweeting appropriate information about their personal lives in addition to sports information. Another way that broadcasters can embrace the power of Twitter is to encourage users to use hashtags to create common interests that may involve the television station. For example, fans can tweet final scores from area high school football games and label them with a hashtag (Buttry, 2011). Television stations can take advantage of the homophily fostered by Twitter by creating individual Twitter accounts for writers assigned to a team. A connected fan may not want to hear about all teams in a given area but may be willing to follow a sports broadcaster assigned to that fan's favorite team. Finally, sports broadcasters can take advantage of parasocial interaction by interacting directly with fans (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010).

Interaction is a key component of Twitter, and interactions create interwoven networks of followers. Twitter connections have tended to be "content-centric and not relationship-centric," meaning that users followed others based on what they were tweeting about and not necessarily if they knew the person (Virk, 2011, p. 20). While not all these people will be considered even acquaintances, Twitter networks create an opportunity for people to interact with others and be linked to people who share interests—or what are known as weak ties. Weak ties are more successful in transmitting new information than strong ties because the people in strong ties are likely to already know the same information (Granovetter, 1973). Through Twitter, if a person retweets a post, it will reach many new followers. These weak ties are then able to interact, giving that first post many new views. Sports broadcasters can use these weak ties to interact with people they would not normally converse with, leading to conversation or even new viewers. By taking advantage of the strength of weak ties through Twitter, sports broadcasters have a chance to reach many more people than they might have been able to before.

Broadcasters willing to engage in the tacit or latent constructs that Twitter offers may find that, rather than being displaced by Twitter, their sportscasts can be a supplement. Users who obtain information from a new source often go back to the older source to fill the gaps the new medium does not provide, so the two can coexist (Jeong & Li, 2003). Although fans may have learned the final score

and heard from players through Twitter, they may wish to turn to a local sports broadcast to see video highlights, for example.

Conclusion

Twitter has emerged as the social-media tool of choice for athletes and their fans, and traditional journalists will need to embrace it, too (Sanderson, 2011; Schultz & Sheffer, 2010). Twitter is not merely a more immediate vehicle than the 10 or 11 p.m. local television sportscast but also a qualitatively distinct medium that engages sports fans in a different manner. Understanding how Twitter engages connected fans is important for both academic researchers and broadcasters who want to remain relevant.

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