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How has Sports Journalism Been Forced to Adapt to Twitter?

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How has Sports Journalism Been Forced to Adapt to Twitter?

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
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To my parents...for being my rocks throughout my journey in life

And to Dr. Hull for inspiring my research and being by my side during this undertaking

Thesis Summary

This paper seeks to analyze case studies, prior research and tweets to understand the impact Twitter has had on the field of sports journalism. I am looking at this impact through the lenses of breaking news, speed, content, expanded dissemination and gatekeeping. These five aspects are things that Twitter excels at providing, and I want to see what these provide to sports journalism, specifically as it has adapted to a new medium.

Introduction

Since its inception in 2006, Twitter has become one of the most dominant social media platforms in the world (Hull & Lewis, 2014). It is where many people go to get the majority of their news. As such, journalists have increasingly started using Twitter as one of their main platforms for disseminating their work. The world of sports journalism has been particularly impacted by the advent of Twitter, as it is driven by fast-evolving news. Twitter removes the aspect of waiting for news and allows people to find the news that they want. Sports journalists tweet out breaking news the moment that they get it (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010). This is a byproduct of the instant gratification that is part of Twitter's DNA.

One major impact that Twitter has had on sports journalism concerns the format of breaking news released on the social media platform. Since tweets are limited to 280 characters, journalists can only tweet out the most salient elements of a given story which leads to conciseness. Another component has been that Twitter's position as a global platform broadens the reach of content (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010). Previously, local news may have never made it beyond the boundaries of the community in which it exists. Through Twitter, that story or news can be seen and read by anyone in the world. This concept of dissemination has also had an impact on the gatekeeper aspect that has long been a staple of journalism. Twitter allows people to bypass journalism officials and distribute their own content which undermines the gatekeeping function these officials used to serve (Gibbs & Haynes, 2013).

The question I am asking in this thesis is, "How has sports journalism been forced to adapt to Twitter?" This question will be answered through the lenses of breaking news, speed, content, expanded dissemination and gatekeeping. These five aspects are things that Twitter

excels at providing and I want to see what these provide to sports journalism specifically as it has adapted to a new medium.

I examined secondary research, specifically the database for the Human Kinetics Journals. This database's mission is to increase people's knowledge by compiling and delivering sport information. This database searches the different journals under that umbrella which includes the International Journal of Sport Communication, from which I have pulled several of my sources. This database allowed me to efficiently search multiple journals for keywords such as "Twitter" and "sport journalism" that related to my thesis and allowed me to find applicable information.

I specifically found case studies that show journalism on Twitter in action, some of which are in my references. The majority of my sources are case studies, as it is most useful to see sports journalism on Twitter in examples and in action. For example, the Schultz case study is one of the studies from the International Journal of Sport Communication where surveys were sent to 705 journalists with the goal of finding what, if any, changes Twitter is causing for journalists.

I also followed ten sports journalists' Twitter accounts in order to compare them and see how they operate. With my study, I monitored these accounts for a week as they all operate as individuals under their corporation. I picked five of the most-followed ESPN journalists: Adam Schefter (7.8 million followers), Adrian Wojnarowski (4 million followers), Michael Wilbon (4.9 million followers), Stephen A. Smith (4.9 million followers) and Chris Mortensen (2.3 million followers). I also monitored five different "local" journalists from different places across the country. I selected journalists Rick Bonnell from North Carolina, Troy

Hirsch from California, Sam Gannon from Texas, Dawn Mitchell from Minnesota and Harold Kuntz from Missouri. I chose these states because I wanted to make sure the regional areas do not overlap.

The questions I asked about these journalists' tweets are as follows:

- What is the ratio of work to private life on his/her timeline?
- Does that ratio change with local versus national reporters?
- How does he/she tweet? Is it mostly links to stories or does he/she tweet out actual news?
- Are there pictures involved?
- How often does he/she tweet?

In addition, Dr. Hull and I compiled a list of questions to ask three sports journalists. This was helpful because these journalists have experience in the field and offer a new perspective or understanding of this topic. I found journalists with multiple years of experience in the business and who were around during the transition to Twitter. This will allow for an observation of that transition and how it has affected the people involved with it, as well as how the profession has been forced to adapt. I interviewed David Cloninger from The Post and Courier, Mike Gillespie from ABC Columbia and Matt Connolly from The State.

The questions I asked these journalists are as follows:

- Does your station/paper require you to use Twitter?
- How often are you expected to tweet sports news even when you are not technically "on the clock"?
- What is your overall opinion of Twitter?

- How often do you check Twitter while working?
- What is the best part about using Twitter for work?
- What is the worst part about using Twitter for work?
- What impact has Twitter had on your daily routine?
- Has Twitter changed how you do your job?
- Do you consider using Twitter at work to be a burden?
- Have you received any social media training - either in college, station provided or on your own?
- Does your station/paper have a social media policy for employees?
- How often do you tweet work versus personal?

Breaking News

One of the most unique aspects of Twitter is its speed in breaking news stories (Sheffer, 2010). This ability makes it ideal for use as a journalistic tool. People want their news the moment it comes out, and Twitter has reduced the sports news cycle to mere seconds. In the past, a sports journalist would see breaking news and include it in their newscast for that night or write an article that would appear in the paper the next day. For example, if a prominent NFL player was cut from his team, fans of that team might not have heard about the news for several hours or days depending on how closely they were watching the news. If that happened today, fans would get immediate notifications on their phones or see the news while scrolling through their Twitter feeds.

Mike Gillespie, the sports director at ABC Columbia, said Twitter has made everything instantaneous.

“In order to survive, you’ve got to get information out as quickly as you can,” Gillespie said.

A quick scroll through Gillespie’s tweets demonstrates this philosophy. He tweets throughout the day about both collegiate and professional sports and his tweets are almost always posted right after the news is announced. Gillespie said he checks Twitter every 5-10 minutes while working. He must do this because news breaks quickly and as a sports director, he has to be on top of everything that is going on in the world of sports. When he finds breaking news, he tweets it out himself then writes the web story about the news and puts it into his newscast for that night.

This is a pattern echoed by many sports journalists as it pertains to breaking news. Adrian Wojnarowski is one of ESPN's most prominent breaking news reporters. Wojnarowski is known for often being the first reporter to break NBA stories, with his tweets being colloquially referred to as "Woj bombs" on Twitter. Wojnarowski tweets out the news that he is breaking and then posts a link to his story on ESPN's website shortly after. This allows him to tweet out the most salient piece of information immediately so that people know what's going on. When the story is tweeted later, anyone who is interested in reading more in-depth information about the news can do so. However, it is ideally not required reading in order to understand the story. One recent example from Wojnarowski involves the Houston Rockets signing two players, DeMarre Carroll and Jeff Green. At 6:47 p.m. on February 17, Wojnarowski tweeted, "Houston plans to use its two open roster spots on forwards DeMarre Carroll and Jeff Green." His next tweet came at 7:28 p.m. and said, "ESPN story on Rockets plans to sign DeMarre Carroll and Jeff Green" with a link to the story. The initial tweet generated more replies, retweets and likes which isn't surprising. As Twitter has a character limit per tweet, it can be utilized extremely well as a headline service (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010). Many of Wojnarowski's followers will never read the story on the website because they just want to know the news and then move on to the next thing or the next tweet.

"An Exploratory Study of How Twitter is Affecting Sports Journalism," a 2010 study by Brad Schultz and Mary Lou Sheffer, aimed to "assess what, if any, changes Twitter is causing in journalism news work" (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010). The survey, which consisted of three questions, was answered by 705 sports journalists. This sample size was broken up into 372 print journalists, 188 television journalists and 145 radio journalists. The results indicated that

most sports journalists were using Twitter for breaking news. The survey also discovered differences in how print journalists and broadcast journalists use Twitter. Print journalists were more likely to use Twitter for breaking news than their broadcast counterparts. This isn't surprising, as "the broadcast media already have a delivery platform for such news" (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010). This platform includes daily newscasts that air on broadcast networks. Print journalists have historically had to wait to publicize news until the next paper or magazine issue came out. Therefore, Twitter is particularly useful for these individuals because it removes the constraint that has typically affected them.

David Cloninger, a sports journalist at The Post and Courier, said that Twitter has had an immeasurable impact on his day-to-day routine. Cloninger, who considers himself to always be "on the clock," never knows when something is going to be released or tweeted out that he will have to report. He described a scene from February 13, when he was sitting in Colonial Life Arena in Columbia, S.C., waiting for the South Carolina women's basketball team to tip off against the Auburn Tigers. Cloninger said he knew the Gamecocks men's basketball team would be receiving a NCAA Notice of Allegations soon, but he had been told it wouldn't be for another week. However, 20 minutes before the game started, he saw a text from a "really great reporter" saying that the notice has just been delivered. At this point, Cloninger had to scramble to confirm the report because that's a story that he would want to write for the paper.

"If I hadn't seen that tweet, I would have been further behind," Cloninger said. "I'd have been out there doing the basketball game and we'd have looked pretty silly."

Cloninger said if he's working 16 hours a day, he's typically looking at Twitter for at least 13 of those hours. The majority of that time is spent making sure he's up to date on what's happening and hasn't missed any breaking news. Twitter is something he constantly has an eye on, particularly during whichever athletic season it currently is for the Gamecocks.

"Paradigm Shift or Passing Fad? Twitter and Sports Journalism," a 2010 study by Mary Lou Sheffer and Brad Schultz, is an extension of their earlier study, "An Exploratory Study of How Twitter is Affecting Sports Journalism." One finding from this study was that print and smaller media outlets were using Twitter more frequently and using it more for breaking news and updating stories than other outlets (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010). This is because Twitter is an inexpensive way of breaking news as it doesn't require having a news broadcast or many resources at all. As such, it can be a more economically viable path for smaller news companies to still make a name for themselves.

Speed

As a whole, social media moves faster than any other medium. Sports reporting lends itself perfectly to Twitter, as it is about fast-evolving news (Deprez, Merchant & Hoebeke, 2013). Twitter is an ideal medium for such updates, particularly when compared to the mainstream media (Farhi, 2009). This is what makes it so unique, but also dangerous at times. Consumers cannot always tell the difference between false information posing as news and real news stories. A U.S. newspaper journalist said, “The Internet works with false information being presented as real. I guess what that boils down to is, who is to be held accountable?” (Singer, 1997). Often, there is a rush to be the first to report versus having the correct report. This issue can become amplified because of Twitter. A journalist can hit send on a tweet in a matter of seconds and then it is out there for the world to see, for better or worse.

One recent notable incident with this involved the death of retired basketball player, Kobe Bryant. Bryant was in a fatal helicopter crash on January 26, 2020. When someone of that magnitude dies, Twitter usually explodes with activity. Journalists use the platform to give users the most recent updates, while fans post tweets in mourning or memorial. One unique factor of Bryant’s death was that not much was known about the crash immediately after it happened. As authorities had not yet made an official announcement, reporters were scrambling to find information and try to get it out before their competitors. This led to some false reports circulating around Twitter. Matt Gutman, ABC News’ chief national correspondent, tweeted that all four of Bryant’s daughters were on board with him when the helicopter crashed (Cachero, 2020). There was also a report that Rick Fox, one of Bryant’s former teammates, was on the plane (Feldman, 2020). Both of these reports were eventually proven to be wrong, but

not before they had been passed around on the internet. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office rebuked TMZ, which was the first outlet to report Bryant's death (Tracy, 2020). At the time of that report, Bryant's family had not yet been contacted, meaning they likely first heard the news through TMZ.

For reporters who always wants to be first, there is always the chance of posting a false report and risking loss of credibility. It's crucial for journalists to remain cautious when they share breaking news that they didn't report firsthand. The credibility of the news is, at minimum, as important as the speed with which news is spread (Deprez, Merchant & Hoebeke, 2013). Drew Davison, Texas Christian University's beat reporter for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram in Fort Worth, Texas, said it's "important for reporters to ensure speed is complemented with accuracy. With so many folks trying to spread 'fake news' or trick a reporter down a rabbit hole, it's on reporters to do the due diligence to ensure erroneous reports aren't circulated." Davison also raised the issue of reporters retweeting other stories because by doing so, that source becomes legitimized. He said Oklahoma State football coach Mike Gundy scolded a reporter on a conference call this past season for asking a question from a satirical website about T. Boone Pickens passing away. The reporter didn't do his homework and check the facts behind the story and it ended up being an embarrassing moment for him.

Mark Cohen, associate athletics director for communication at TCU, shared an example of speed going wrong. In 2018, Cohen said, an outlet reported that TCU backed out of a home-and-home series in football against Ohio State. In actuality, it was a mutual decision to have the teams only play one game at a neutral site. Cohen said that the outlet just wanted to be first and didn't gather all of the facts before tweeting.

Mike Gillespie offered a counterpoint to the speed of news and tweeting it as it changes. He thinks many people don't understand that news develops, and they take things as the word of God and run with it. However, news changes over time and it is up to the reporters to continue to tweet and update consumers. Gillespie also said that, "Sometimes as journalists, we jump the gun on things and it's hard not to blame journalists. In order to survive, you've got to get information out as quickly as you can."

Mike Wise, who at the time was a Washington Post sports columnist, purposefully tweeted a false report about Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger. Wise did so as part of a "misguided attempt to comment on the lowered standards of accuracy for information shared on social media" (Alexander, 2010). Roethlisberger had been suspended for six games by the NFL, but Wise tweeted that he would only get five games. Wise was suspended for a month by the paper for doing so.

"A Phenomenological Investigation Into How Twitter Has Changed the Nature of Sport Media Relations," a 2013 study by Chris Gibbs and Richard Haynes, presents the argument that Twitter could be considered the most influential social-media platform in sport today (Gibbs & Haynes, 2013). In interviews with 18 sports journalists or sport team media relations, interviewees asked about the media landscape, Twitter in general and the transformation of sports communication. As it pertains to the media landscape, "the speed of Twitter as a news-distribution platform was one of the experiences mentioned most by informants, several of whom frequently highlighted Twitter in comparison with other forms of media" (Gibbs & Haynes, 2013). One negative that the interviewees mentioned was the increased time demand that comes from this speed. One of them, a sport public relations and digital expert, said, "It's

changed the rhythm of sports, where it was already bad enough. It now truly is 24/7 365” (Gibbs & Haynes, 2013).

One byproduct of Twitter and its speed has been that it has made broadcast sports media less relevant. Very few people will wait until the nightly news to get their local sports fix. Fans can get their information when they want it and where they want it. “The Internet’s ubiquity and easy accessibility offer an immediacy of information that no other news medium can match” (Sagan & Leighton, 2010). Broadcasters are struggling to adapt, in the same way that newspapers struggled in the 1960’s when broadcast came along (Hull & Lewis, 2014).

In the past, sport media consumers would have to wait until the next episode of SportsCenter or the nightly news to see a coach’s press conference or hear what a player had to say after a game. Now, reporters can use Twitter to disseminate that information. Dawn Mitchell, the sports reporter for Fox 9 in Minneapolis, tweeted out multiple videos of the Minnesota Wild’s coaches and players speaking during the week that I monitored her tweets. She was tweeting them out as she was recording them. This allows fans to immediately watch and listen, as well as allow them to hear more than just sound bites. They can watch the whole thing. Sam Gannon, the sports reporter for Fox 4 in Dallas, did similar things. Gannon would tweet out videos of her interviewing Dallas Mavericks or Dallas Stars players.

Gillespie said when he’s at a press conference, he has to work the camera and make sure it’s focused on who’s speaking, try to take in all the information in his brain, record the audio and also try to tweet out information all at the same time. He jokingly suggested that there are days that he wishes he was an octopus and had eight tentacles. According to Gillespie, trying to keep up with the speed of everything is the most difficult part of his job. He

understands that people want information immediately without waiting and it's his job to provide it.

Cohen said there can be downsides to reporters having to manage all these devices. He said when a TCU coach says something at a press conference, everyone immediately gets their phones or laptops out to tweet the comment immediately. Cohen said that this can lead to reporters asking the same questions because they weren't paying attention while they were tweeting.

Putting it in the simplest form possible, Twitter is not just a passive source of information but can instead be actively used as a platform for disseminating news and updates (Deprez, Mechant & Hoebeke, 2013). When they're on Twitter, news consumers do not have to wait for content to come to them. Instead, they seek out the content and enjoy the speed at which it comes. Twitter also allows unique news consumers to find what matters to them. Davison said he ran into a Texas Rangers executive one night who was scrolling through Twitter just like any normal person would. The only difference is that he is involved in decision making for a MLB team. Twitter is now the way people keep up in today's 24/7 sports environment and journalists have had to adjust how they operate or risk becoming obsolete.

Content

As with any social media platform, Twitter would be nothing without the content that is published on it. Twitter has so much content that is extremely varied. Sports journalists can use their accounts for many purposes. The easiest and most obvious is breaking news. But, it can also be used for sharing stories journalists have written online, interacting with followers or sharing parts of their personal lives.

The best way to demonstrate these multifaceted uses is through a case study. When I followed the ten journalists' accounts for a week, I noticed that many of them had slightly different content strategies.

Rick Bonnell definitely tweeted more than any of the others. Bonnell is the sports reporter for The Charlotte Observer and mostly covers the Charlotte Hornets and occasionally the Carolina Panthers, the two professional teams in the city. He live-tweets every Hornets game, which is where the majority of his tweets came from. This type of journalism works well because of its instantaneity and inclusion of the audience (Wells, 2011). He tweets out major plays, occasional score updates, fouls and also posts updates at the end of each quarter. If a Hornets fan just read Bonnell's feed instead of watching the game, that fan could likely talk about the game almost as well as someone who actually watched it. One benefit this has for Bonnell is that it increases his page views. If fans are keeping up with the game via his tweets, they have to go to his page and refresh whenever they want an update. Along with this, he is constantly replying to people who leave comments below his tweets, particularly during games. Interaction is one of the key features of Twitter and many journalists use it every day. It enables a dialogue between journalists, their peers and their news audience (Deprez, Mechant &

Hoebeke, 2013). In terms of his peers, Bonnell will often interact with other journalists while he's live-tweeting games, whether that's other journalists who cover the Hornets or reporters covering the opposing team. He also tweets out recent his Hornets articles before, during and after the game. He often tweets them out with different captions in the tweet to include more keywords that may catch his audience's attention. For example, he recently wrote an article about Malik Monk, a Hornets player who had been performing well. If someone didn't know much about Monk, that person may be interested in reading the article and learning more about the players on their favorite team. Monk played collegiately at the University of Kentucky, which Bonnell made sure to point out in one of his tweets linking to the article by putting @KentuckyMBB. That way, if anyone looks up Kentucky's men's basketball team on Twitter, Bonnell's story will show up somewhere. Bonnell also does a "mailbag" column for the paper, where he answers questions fans may have about the Hornets. He takes submissions on Twitter and then chooses the ones he wants to answer. This allows anyone to ask a question, not just people who read The Charlotte Observer.

Twitter allows local sports journalists to tweet outside of their local beats. Even though Dawn Mitchell works in Minneapolis and tweets about Minnesota sports, her biography on her profile says she is a "MA girl in MN" and notes that she attended Boston College. Interspersed among her Minnesota tweets are tweets about Boston sports teams like the Bruins, Celtics and Red Sox. Even though that's not part of her job, it allows her to inject some of her own personality onto her page. She also used to work in Boston so if anyone followed her during that time, it allows those fans to still follow Mitchell's work while also seeing things about the teams that matter most to them. Much like Bonnell, Mitchell live-tweets during games,

particularly Minnesota Wild games. As hockey doesn't include as frequent of scoring as basketball, she doesn't have to tweet as much as Bonnell. However, she still makes sure her followers are kept in the loop with the ebbs and flows of each game.

One big content choice that journalists can choose to make on Twitter is whether to tweet things about their personal lives. Sports journalists use their accounts not just for professional goals, but also for personal reasons, "implicating a blurring between professional and personal communication" (Deprez, Mechant and Hoebeke, 2013). If a journalist shares parts of their personal life on Twitter, their audience may feel more of a connection to them as a person, which could result in them being more likely to read the journalist's work. However, if a journalist does choose to keep their account strictly professional, it doesn't detract from their opportunities for success. They may just not feel comfortable sharing their personal information all over the internet. David Cloninger is one of the journalists who isn't interested in sharing his life or personal opinions on his account.

"I report the news; I don't want to be the news. I'm not interested in being a news personality," Cloninger said.

Cloninger also has a policy where he doesn't respond to any comments on his tweets, even if it's just a simple question. He said he doesn't want any part of it and he'd rather just keep his head down and report.

Matt Connolly, a sports reporter at The State, is on the other end of the spectrum. He said he tweets mostly professional but does post some personal tweets too. He estimated his ratio was 80% work, 20% personal. He tweets about funny or silly things that his daughter is doing. For example, he tweeted a video of her hitting a ball off of a tee. His profile picture is a

picture of him and his daughter. He also said he loves to watch television, so he often asks for new show recommendations.

Mike Gillespie said he thinks he should tweet more personal things. However, he loves sports and as he frequently tweets about sports for his job, it can be hard to tell a difference between his work and personal tweets. He also said that since he spends so much time working, he doesn't differentiate much between his work and personal life.

During the week that I followed them, none of the five ESPN reporters had any personal tweets. ESPN's social media policy requests that if employees tweet about a political or social issue, the subject matter should warrant an audience's interest, the journalist should have a conversation with producers and editors about the commentary and the presentation of the information should be respectful and thoughtful (ESPN). It also iterates in the policy that ESPN's main focus is sports and while they know that employees have interests beyond sports, it is essential that these interests do not overtake the company's.

Even though none of these employees tweeted anything about their personal lives, it doesn't mean their Twitter feeds were boring. The NBA All-Star Game was during the week that I monitored the Twitter accounts. Michael Wilbon and Stephen A. Smith were the two coaches during the celebrity game. In the days leading up to the game, Wilbon and Smith tweeted back and forth about who was going to be the better coach or whose team was going to win. On the morning of the game, Smith tweeted an animated GIF of a basketball player with his head imposed on him crossing over another basketball player with Wilbon's head imposed on him. In response, Wilbon tweeted an animated GIF of a player with his head imposed on him dunking on another player with Smith's head imposed on him. It was a playful back-and-forth that was

meant to increase interest in the game. Smith's tweet got more than 79,000 likes while Wilbon's got more than 16,000 likes. Both of these counts are higher than either man usually gets on a tweet, so they definitely made the rounds on Twitter.

Drew Davison had a unique take on Twitter content. He said that sometimes a big deal on Twitter is not that big of a deal to the general readership base. In other words, Twitter can be a place where the vocal minority seems like a majority. He brought up a baseball example. Advanced stats have changed the way the game is played and how executives build teams. But, he thinks the casual fan still "goes to the ballpark hoping to see a home run or two, eat some hotdogs and hope their team wins." Reporters will tweet out stats like WAR (wins above replacement), BABIP (batting average on balls in play) or slugging percentage. You can frequently see tweets where these numbers are used to show why Player A is better than Player B, or why Player C has been on a hot streak recently. However, many baseball fans that aren't on Twitter, or even some of those that are, may not know or care about what any of those numbers mean. As only 22% of U.S. adults are on Twitter, it is not universally adopted by any means (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Brevity is important on Twitter. Each tweet can only be 280 characters, which means journalists have to be clear and concise to get their point across. As a result, a tweet doesn't require the level of attention that a news story or Facebook post would (Hull & Lewis, 2014). This brevity allows convenience for readers because they can find out everything they need to know by just scrolling through a few tweets about a given subject.

Another component of content on Twitter is that it allows journalists to engage with readers about potential story ideas, or just stories in general. Scott Adkins, a reporter with

WEHT in Evansville, IN, said, "Twitter gives you an opportunity to engage the audience on a more frequent basis. I know it's not a fad, because people wouldn't be sending me story ideas" (Petner, 2009). When interviewed, one television reporter said, "I have been surprised how sources have sought me out on Twitter. They'd seen I was working on a story [on Twitter] and contacted me to contribute info. It's happened multiple times" (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010).

Twitter allows journalists to tweet out whatever they want which is usually a positive. However, there are times when this ability can get them into hot water or even fired. Mike Bacsik, a former MLB pitcher, was a radio producer in Dallas in 2010 watching Game 5 of an NBA playoff series between the Dallas Mavericks and San Antonio Spurs. Bacsik, a Mavericks fan, was frustrated after a Mavericks player was ejected and he tweeted, "Congrats to all the dirty mexicans in San Antonio" (Wilonsky, 2010). Even though Bacsik apologized shortly after, he was fired by the radio station. One moment of bad judgement on his part caused him to lose his job and it will follow him for the rest of his career. In another example, Curt Schilling, a former MLB pitcher, was working as a baseball analyst at ESPN. Schilling is as well-known for his right-leaning tweets and comments, as he is for his pitching career. He had been reprimanded and suspended by ESPN in the past for his posts on social media. In 2015, Schilling tweeted an image of Hitler that said, "It's said only 5-10% of Muslims are extremists. In 1940, only 7% of Germans were Nazis. How'd that go?" (Carson, 2015). Schilling was suspended by ESPN as a result but was eventually reinstated. Schilling was later fired in 2016 for sharing another offensive image on Facebook.

These two examples serve as warnings to journalists to always think before they tweet. Davison pointed this out and said that's why he is admittedly boring on Twitter. He said he's not

interested in how many likes or comments he gets on a tweet nor does he care if a tweet goes viral. Davison said he's seen too many people get their careers ruined over something they tweeted out. He always reminds himself that Twitter has never written him a check and it's something that he emphasizes to new reporters getting into the business.

Further Dissemination

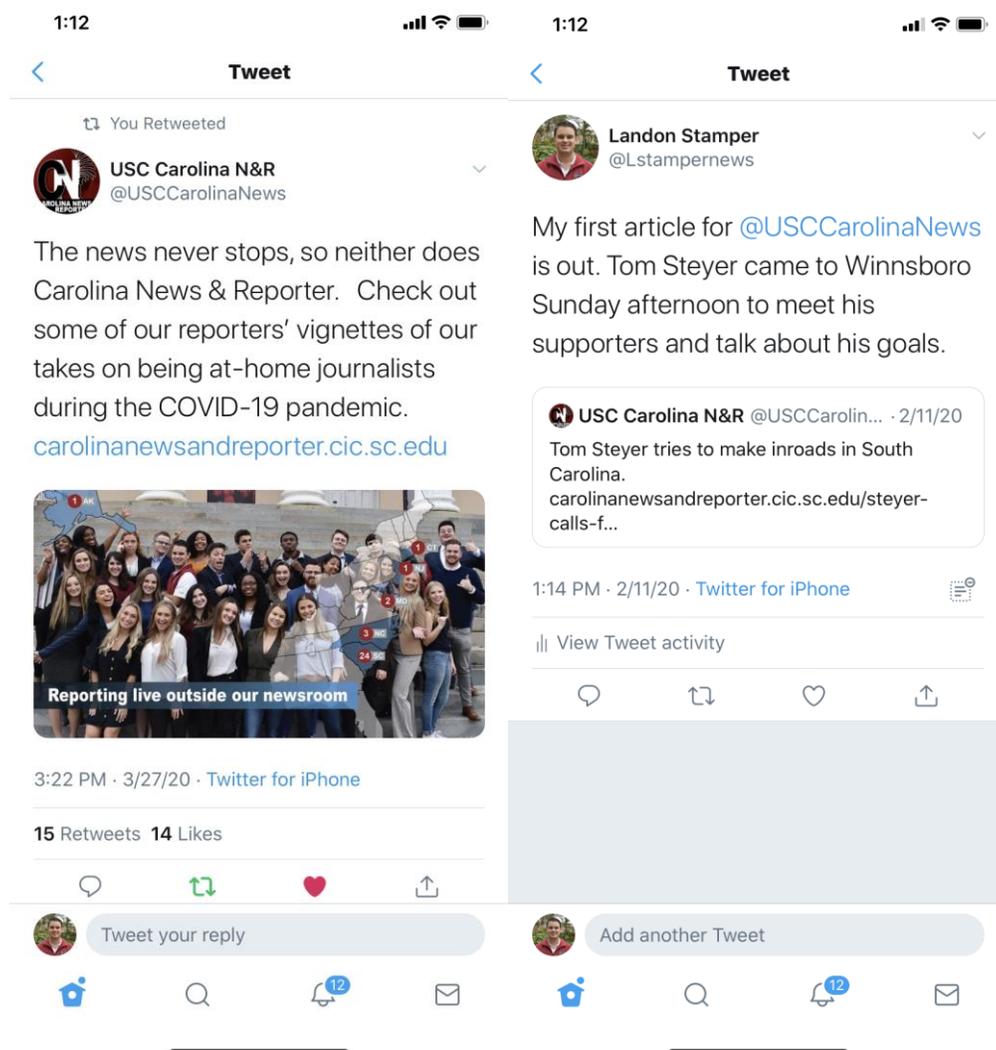
Content that is posted on Twitter can go anywhere in the world. If a journalist in South Carolina posts a story on their Twitter, a journalist in Venezuela could read it. This ability has been one of the hallmarks of online journalism, as it has allowed stories to spread beyond their media outlet's traditional reach (Sheffer & Schulz, 2010).

An example of this happened when the University of Kansas' men's basketball team won the national championship in 2008. Jonathan Kealing, online editor for the Lawrence Journal-World in Kansas, and his staff created a multimedia package recapping the game and the season. The package ended up getting around 50,000 plays. Kealing said that was primarily because "we used Twitter to promote the hell out of (it)" (Ryan, 2009). Kealing also said, "The power of Twitter is when people start spreading your stories for you." Before Twitter, the package would have been seen by those in Kansas, but Twitter enabled anyone to view it.

Twitter features such as retweets, quote tweets and hashtags serve as catalysts for further dissemination. Retweeting shares a tweet from someone else to the retweeter's page, where it shows up like everything else the person tweets. This way, the retweeter is sharing the tweet with all of their followers, increasing the tweet's visibility. Retweets were initially introduced to connect users that had similar interests but have become "something that would ultimately impact the way that people receive news" (Richards, 2011). Retweets are considered to be the feature that has "made Twitter a new medium of information dissemination" (Kwak et al., 2010). If a journalist retweets something, the journalist's followers could also retweet it. That person's followers could then retweet it, which leads to a cycle that disseminates tweets all over the world. This is an example of the concept of strong ties and weak ties. Strong ties are

the close relations you have with family and friends (Cha, 2010). As it relates to Twitter, strong ties can refer to a Twitter user's followers, as people generally follow accounts that share their same beliefs or with which they identify. Weak ties, on the other hand, are distant and indirect relations, meaning "acquaintances and friends of friends" (Cha, 2010). On Twitter, these can be the followers of your followers. These connections are crucial for spreading a message on Twitter because otherwise, the only people that would see a journalist's tweet would be their followers. ESPN's Twitter account frequently retweets, enabling the account to form a "collective intelligence" and distribute news from many sources through one account to its more than 35 million followers (Hambrick & Sanderson, 2013). One of ESPN's journalists, Chris Mortensen, rarely tweeted out his own content during the week that I followed him. Most of his content was retweets. The majority of his retweets were about the XFL, a relaunched football league that had partnered with ESPN to air some of its games. It seemed that Mortensen was trying to help promote the league, as that would obviously make his company look better and get the league more views which is crucial for sustainability.

Many of the local reporters whose tweets I studied also frequently used retweets. Dawn Mitchell retweeted information from the Minnesota Wild, Minnesota Timberwolves and Minnesota Vikings team accounts. She would also occasionally provide her own take by using the quote tweet feature. This is an expanded version of a retweet that allows the user to retweet and then have their own tweet show up above the retweeted information. An example of a normal retweet is seen on the left (as seen by the "you retweeted" line above the tweet), while a quote tweet is seen on the right. The quote tweet looks like a normal tweet from the account, but it also includes the retweeted information.



A quote tweet is most often used when the journalist wants to give additional information to what is in the original tweet or when they want to give an opinion on it. For example, Mitchell quote tweeted a Minnesota Vikings tweet saying, "The #Vikings have added Dom Capers to the 2020 coaching staff as senior defensive assistant" and wrote "THIS." as her tweet, showing that she was excited about the hire. Similarly, she quote tweeted a tweet about Jason Zucker, one of

the Wild's players, being traded and she thanked Zucker for all he had "done on and off the ice here." Quote tweeting is more personal than just retweeting the information and leaving it at that.

Harold Kuntz's Twitter was also filled with retweets and quote tweets during the week of February 10 through February 17. Kuntz, who works in Kansas City, spent a lot of time during that period covering the Kansas City Chiefs, as they had won the Super Bowl on February 2. He retweeted videos of people waiting in line for Super Bowl champions memorabilia and in one instance, waiting to get an autograph from one of the Chiefs' players, Tyrann Mathieu. He also retweeted tweets from some of the Chiefs' players. As the Kansas City Royals were starting spring training around this time, Kuntz also retweeted some baseball content.

One of the other dissemination tools on Twitter is a hashtag. Hashtags are formed by putting the pound sign (#) in front of a word or phrase. This tags the tweet with the words and allows it to be found in Twitter's search function, along with any other tweet using that hashtag. For example, during Super Bowl LIV, #superbowl was used on 2,372,132 tweets (Tweet Binder, 2020). By searching that hashtag, fans could find all of those tweets and look through them. It's one of the best ways to expand a message beyond the outreach of one's own followers (Jackson, 2020). Twitter also includes a tab on its search page where users can see what the top trending hashtags are at the moment. About 20% of these topics are related to sports, which is the second-largest category (Cheong, 2009). Hashtags can be great for sports journalists because they allow fans to find all of the current tweets about a team or player. For example, Kuntz live-tweets Kansas men's basketball games. On all of his live-tweets, he put #kubball. This allows his live-tweets to show up among many other tweets about Kansas

basketball. If a fan didn't follow Kuntz, they might find him by searching that hashtag and potentially end up following him.

During the Penn State football scandal in 2011, where former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky was accused of multiple child sex abuse charges, Twitter played a prominent role in developing the story (Hambrick & Sanderson, 2013). Marion E. Hambrick and Jimmy Sanderson analyzed this situation in their 2013 study, "Gaining Primacy in the Digital Network: Using Social Network Analysis to Examine Sports Journalists' Coverage of the Penn State Football Scandal via Twitter." On November 4, 2011, Bill Rabinowitz, a reporter at the Columbus Dispatch in Columbus, Ohio, tweeted, "Huge news at Penn State. Former longtime football asst coach Sandusky indicted on various sex charges" (Hambrick & Sanderson, 2013). The next day, Rabinowitz tweeted, "Penn State scandal grows. AD Tim Curley charged with perjury." Stewart Mandel, college football reporter for Sports Illustrated, quote tweeted Rabinowitz's second tweet and simply put, "Wow." Pat Forde, of Yahoo! Sports, quote tweeted Mandel and said, "Not good." Dana O'Neil, of ESPN, quote tweeted Forde and wrote, "Speechless." This exchange shows how quickly retweets and quote tweets can spread information across multiple different networks extremely quickly (Hambrick & Sanderson, 2013). The journalists could easily spread the news about Penn State without needing to write much commentary, outside of a few words to show their feelings. The news continued to spread like wildfire and was soon discussed by many sports networks. Twitter allowed the news to be collected and disseminated in a way that wouldn't have been possible without the platform and is an example of the "expanding, and arguably, essential, role of social media in sports reporting" (Hambrick & Sanderson, 2013).

One of the key elements of journalism has always been to spread information to citizens. The internet has changed the way that news is disseminated, and Twitter can be one of many tools in a journalist's toolbox for getting information out quickly and letting it spread (Armstrong & Gao, 2010).

Gatekeeping

As Twitter has gained popularity, news consumers have taken on a more active role in their news consumption and are more likely to seek out information by themselves (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010). This means that gatekeeping roles formerly held by journalists and other officials are being eroded across the media (Bucy, 2005). As a definition, gatekeeping is a process that “determines not only which information will be selected, but also what the content and nature of messages, such as news, will be” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Specifically, Twitter allows users to bypass journalists and sport officials to get sports news (Gibbs & Haynes, 2013).

By using their Twitter accounts, athletes can interact directly with fans, rather than having to go through the normal media (Frederick et al., 2012). This has the ability to reduce the role of journalists, as athletes no longer have to seek them out for interviews to be able to speak out. Instead, the athlete can tweet out their news whenever they want to. When NFL cornerback Malcolm Jenkins signed with the Saints, he announced the signing on his Twitter account (NFL, 2009). Also, if an athlete says something on social media, it removes the possibility that they could be misquoted or have their words taken out of context. Karmichael Hunt, a rugby player from New Zealand, said, “The journalists and reporters give their take on what we had to say and definitely, I think, sometimes things get presented differently to how you were thinking them” (Hutchins, 2010). Hunt said he likes tweeting because it’s “coming straight from the horse’s mouth” (Hutchins, 2010).

While athletes being able to interact directly with their fans can have the upside of developing a parasocial relationship (Frederick et al., 2012), there can also be a downside. Mark

Cohen said that TCU stresses to its student-athletes to be careful with how they use Twitter. The university doesn't want student-athletes to break news on their personal platform; any breaking announcements should come from the school's official accounts.

"You wouldn't want a player to announce an injury on Twitter because then it puts the team at a competitive disadvantage," Cohen said. "It could just be an emoji like a broken heart or prayer hands."

Another byproduct of gatekeeping can be seen in which teams get reported on and how prevalent their coverage is. Teams that are successful or that have a lot of fans are usually going to get the most coverage from the national media. Sports networks know if they write or talk about such teams, it will drive views up. For example, the Dallas Cowboys are one of the most well-known sports franchises in the U.S. The team is worth around \$5 billion (Forbes, 2019) and has millions of fans. Despite the team's lack of playoff success since its last Super Bowl win during the 1995-1996 season, it seems that every time I turn on ESPN, there is at least one segment about them. This can likely be attributed to ratings, but regardless, it takes away time where other teams could potentially receive coverage. Twitter has allowed fans to bypass the media's choices and get coverage on all teams, no matter what. Before Twitter, fans of smaller-market teams who lived outside of that market had a minuscule chance of seeing their team covered. For example, let's say a Miami Marlins fan lives in Missouri. The Marlins haven't made the playoffs since 2003 and haven't finished the season with a winning record since 2009 (Baseball Reference). As a result, they are routinely the doormat of their division and are never featured on national sports shows. The Marlins fan in Missouri would never have the ability to hear about the team because the media decided that the team was not worth covering.

However, with Twitter and the decline of gatekeeping, the fan can follow the team on Twitter to keep up with scores, trades and news. The fan could also follow the team's beat reporters for further news and analysis. This example could be demonstrated with a massive number of teams, but regardless, the point stays the same. Twitter has allowed fans of teams who don't live in that market to keep up with their team, no matter where they are.

In 2009, while Twitter was still on its rise, 12 of the NFL's 32 teams banned or limited media tweeting during public practices (Kravitz, 2009). If a player got injured or made a spectacular catch, any of the fans in attendance could tweet about it but none of the media members could. Otherwise they'd risk losing post-practice access to players and coaches (Kravitz, 2009). This policy has since been changed for those 12, but it shows that teams were initially scared of reporters taking reporting into their own hands rather than being required to get it from a player, coach interview or team spokesperson interview.

One great example of gatekeeping impacting a story deals with the Ray Rice incident, which was analyzed in Patrick Ferrucci's 2016 study, "To Tweet and Retweet: NFL Journalists as Gatekeepers in the Ray Rice Scandal on Twitter" (Ferrucci, 2016). Ray Rice was an NFL player for the Baltimore Ravens. On February 15, 2014, Rice and his wife, Janay Palmer, were arrested after being involved in an altercation in an Atlantic City casino elevator. Each of them was charged with simple assault. A few days later, on February 19, TMZ posted a video showing Rice dragging Palmer out of the elevator (CNN, 2014). The charges against Palmer were dropped and Rice was indicted for a charge of third-degree aggravated assault. The NFL announced a two-game suspension for Rice, but after criticism from the media and fans over the length of the suspension, the NFL announced a harsher policy for domestic violence incidents in the future

on August 28 (CNN, 2014). Then, on September 8, TMZ released a second video which showed Rice spitting on and then punching his wife inside the elevator (Ferrucci, 2016). After the release of this video, the Ravens released Rice and he was suspended indefinitely by the NFL. The 2016 study showed this scandal through the eyes of journalistic gatekeeping. Most journalists have some kind of personal brand and sharing opinions is a way to build that brand (Ferrucci, 2016). Other than providing straight news updates on the Rice case as would've likely been the case in the past, Twitter gave these journalists a place to express a personal opinion on the situation and Rice. Pete Prisco, of CBS Sports, tweeted that the video "is as disgusting as disgusting gets" (Ferrucci, 2016). Jason Whitlock, of ESPN, took a direct shot at Rice by tweeting, "This piece of shit needs to be out of the league. Period" (Ferrucci, 2016). Whitlock could never have made that comment on television, but Twitter gives him that platform to speak out. These journalists were able to express their opinions while also providing a link to a story that contained just the facts. That way, people can have access to both.

Conclusion

Through my research, I have found that Twitter has had an immeasurable impact on the field of sports journalism. Through the lenses of breaking news, speed, content, further dissemination and gatekeeping, Twitter has forced sports journalists to evolve and adapt to the current times. Lindsey Jones, writer for the Denver Post, said at a panel, "Twitter has completely changed our beats. I can't remember what the job was like before it. The whole mentality has changed. Who cares what you get on the website? Twitter is what matters," (Ahead of the Curve, 2010). Mike Gillespie emphasized this point by saying that it is critical for all journalists to be on Twitter in this age if they want to stay relevant. Sports journalists use their accounts for both personal and professional reasons, blurring the line between the two (Deprez, Mechant & Hoebeke, 2013). It has also allowed journalists to interact with their followers, which has made the media more accessible to the general public. In addition, Twitter spreads news further and faster than any medium before it, while also allowing fans to take a more active approach in finding the news. Overall, Twitter has become a crucial aspect of working as a journalist in the 21st century.

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