7-11-2011

Athletes who tweet: Differences in audience perceived credibility between journalists and athlete's twitter accounts

Christine Foster

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses

The Rochester Institute of Technology

Department of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Athletes who Tweet: Differences in Audience Perceived Credibility

between Journalists and Athletes' Twitter Accounts

by

Christine Foster

A Thesis submitted

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

in Communication & Media Technologies

Degree Awarded:
July 11, 2011

The members of the Committee approve the thesis of
Christine Foster presented on July 11, 2011

Bruce A. Austin, Ph. D.
Professor of Communication
Department of Communication
Thesis Adviser

Laurie Dwyer, MBA
Lecturer of Marketing
E. Philip Saunders College of Business
Thesis Adviser

Rudy Pugliese, Ph. D.
Professor of Communication
Director, Communication & Media
Technologies Graduate Degree Program
Department of Communication

Patrick M. Scanlon, Ph. D.
Professor of Communication and Chair
Department of Communication

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Mark Fragale who gave me the opportunity to work as the Associate

Producer at RIT SportsZone Live while completing my Masters Degree.

Table of Contents

ATHLETES WHO TWEET: DIFFERENCES IN AUDIENCE PERCIEVED CREDIBILITY
BETWEEN JOURNALISTS AND ATHLETES' TWITTER ACCOUNTS

Name: Christine Foster
Department: Communication
College: Liberal Arts
Degree: Master of Science in Communication & Media Technologies
Term Degree Awarded: Summer Quarter 2011 (20104)

Abstract

The research reveals the differences in audience perceived credibility between an athlete's tweets

and a sports reporter's story. Because audiences are drawn to Twitter accounts of athletes, the

reporters' sources have become their competition. The study also investigates the difference

between how often audiences choose Twitter over a reporter's story to obtain their sports news.

A survey of n RIT students measured how often participants obtain sports news from sports

reporters' print or online stories and athlete's personal Twitter accounts. The audience's

perceived credibility of the sources was also measured. Findings suggest audiences choose

online articles as their source for sports news although heavy sports fans also use Twitter.

Overall, sports reporters' articles are perceived as more credible.

Keywords: social media, Twitter, context collapsing, perceived credibility, journalism

Athletes who Tweet: Differences in Audience Perceived Credibility
between Journalists **and Athletes' Twit**ter Accounts

With 180 million unique visitors a month, Twitter is currently the fastest growing social

networking site (Lee, 2010). The popularity of Twitter is unlikely to fade in the near future (Lee,

2010; Sanderson & Cheong, 2010). Not only are Twitter and other social media used by the

every day public, celebrities and politicians use them to reach fans and voters as well (Marwick

& Boyd, 2010; Rapping, 2009). Unfortunately for professional journalists, the public can now

obtain news information from the newsmakers. As a result, audiences are breaking away from

journalists' stories and turning to social media. The effects of social media on its users have

created a "bipolar disorder unique to journalists who alternate between…a new age of public

engagement with the news or a dark age of doom and deterioration" (Sivek, 2010, p. 147). The

public attraction to social media threatens traditional journalism because users can now turn to

the source of the news instead of the journalist's story about the source. As social media was

becoming popular with the public, journalists were turning up their noses to the idea (Sivek,

2010). However, the public continues to use social media as a method of obtaining information

from well-known figures because the audiences' perception of credibility has shifted from

traditional journalistic ways. And now, some journalists have joined social media sites; however,

the journalists' adoption time has been too slow thereby allowing the journalists' sources to

become their competition (Sivek, 2010).

A shift in audience perceived credibility has developed because of changes social media

have presented (Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007). The onset of Twitter, and other social media,

has created an arena where audiences no longer base credibility on objective information (Hayes,

Singer & Ceppos, 2007). Instead audiences gravitate towards the celebrity Twitter account

directly because credibility is developed through factors such as transparency, authenticity, and interaction (Hayes, Singer, & Ceepos, 2007; Marwick & Boyd, 2010, Atkinson, 2008; Sivek, 2010).

Among tweeting celebrity figures are professional athletes. Recently, as more and more athletes tweet about their personal and professional lives, the tweets pose a threat to sports journalists, sports broadcast media, and the sports franchises to which athletes belong. The athlete, who used to be the journalist's source of sports news, has morphed into their top competitor (Rowe et al., 2010; Hutchins & Rowe, 2010).

Twitter allows athletes to control content about themselves instead of the reporters. The social networking site is an outlet for the player to reach an audience without the filter of the journalists' mediated interviews (Hutchins & Rowe, 2010). Although athletes are entitled to present themselves over social media any way they want, the information athletes distribute affects the job of the journalist. Research into how often audiences obtain sports news from varying sources and perceived credibility will show how the audience is being affected and may suggest how far the transformation will go.

Research Questions

RQ1: What differences are there between how often audiences say they obtain sports news from an athlete's tweet compared to a sports journalist's story?

RQ2: What differences are there in audience perceived credibility between an athlete's tweet and a reporter's story?

Rationale

Scholarly

This research will help the scholarly field because findings in journalism, public relations, and marketing will be enhanced. The scholarly world will have a better understanding of how social media are affecting journalism and public relations furthering advancing education of students. Proper management of social media can be taught to give marketing students knowledge on how to use the new phenomenon to market products, services, or people.

Social

The research will help the public recognize the changes social media have created in journalism. Through the study, journalists will be able to clearly comprehend their new competitor, not only within sports journalism but throughout all aspects of journalism. Finally, readers and viewers will understand how social media are affecting them with regards to journalism and obtaining news information.

Review of Related Literature

Challenges to Journalism

Stone and Wetherington (1979) investigated whether reading print journalism could be categorized as a psychological habit, "a stereotyped form of response: the doing of the same thing always in the same way under the same conditions" (Stone & Wetherington, 1979, p. 554). They sought to find out when this habit forms and how we can use this information to predict the public's disinterest in print journalism (Stone & Wetherington, 1979). The authors found that print journalism reading is habitual and forms around the age of 18. Parents' print journalism reading habits heavily impact the future habit of the young adult. However, habits can evolve or

change. For decades the print industry has been facing declines in readership due to evolving and changing habits (Stone & Wetherington, 1979). Even before the threat of digital media, Stone and Wetherington (1979) show that print media is susceptible to threats and was already coping with a loss of readership.

When Stone and Wetherington conducted their study in 1979 there had been a drop in newspaper circulation that they predicted would only get worse (Stone & Wetherington, 1979). "If newspaper dependence can't be reinstituted, then a home without a newspaper tradition today will probably result in parents without a newspaper habit tomorrow" (Stone & Wetherington, 1979). Stone and Wetherington (1979) neglected to identify exactly what was threatening print news readership such as the growing popularity of the television. However, Newhagen and Nass (1984) studied audience reaction to television news taking readership away from print journalism during the late 1980s. After collecting names and addresses through random digit dialing, 985 people were sent a survey with two sets of 16 questions. The first 16 items measured respondents' judgments of print journalism and credibility while the second set concerned broadcast TV news and credibility. They found that people "base their perception of credibility or confidence in a newspaper on its performance as an institution, while they base their perception of credibility on the standards and trustworthiness of television news on the performance of an aggregate of on-camera personalities" (Newhagen & Nass, 1984, p. 284). Overall, people turned to the new medium, television, and print news readership decreased (Newhagen & Nass, 1984). Newhagen and Nass conclude that television was not completely taking the place of newspaper, but "how information from them is perceived, may lead to different information processing strategies" (Newhagen & Nass, 1984, p. 284). These findings

suggest that social media today are similar to broadcast television in the 1980s: social media gives the public a new method to judge credibility.

In the 1990s newspapers again were threatened, this time by online news (Stessen, 2010). At the turn of the century, the internet transitioned into the Web 2.0 phase which moved away from the collection of websites into a "computing platform serving web applications to end users" (Stessen, 2010, p. 3). Stessen (2010) surveyed four different editors of *News24,* an African news organization, to see how they apply social media to help distribute news. Findings revealed that after using social media, news distribution and interactivity increased while an online community was established. Stessen (2010) credits the spread of news and the effectiveness of social media to the design of Web 2.0. Social media emerged during the Web 2.0 phase because the ideals of the two complement each other. Web 2.0 was designed to produce audience interactivity and allowed the audience to produce user-generated content with ease (Stessen, 2010). Social media is about relationship building through listening to each other and responding. Instead of the user being the consumer of news, they are, in some cases, the producer of the news (Stessen, 2010). Naturally, Web 2.0 produced social media's framework. User-generated content by the audience leaves less room for the journalist to get their story out (Stessen, 2010). Today, we continue to face this issue (Sivek, 2010; Stessen, 2010; Skolar, 2009).

Skolar (2009) argues that the Internet didn't take the readership away from the newspapers; rather journalists became out of touch with their readership. Furthermore, the Internet, and especially social media, gives the audience a chance to focus on what they want and share their ideas. Skolar specifically addressed Twitter, describing it as "half diary and half

stream of consciousness, and it is all about relationships and trust because it's easy to follow

people, see if there is a connection, and drop those you don't like" (Skolar, 2009, p. 39). Most

importantly, Skolar notes that the most successful Twitter accounts, in terms of followers and

feedback, are the ones who are listening and responding back to their audience. Journalists are

too concerned with their readership to fully listen and use social media as successfully as others

(Skolar, 2009).

Origins of Twitter

Twitter was introduced in August 2006 by Obvious, a company based in San Francisco as

a free social networking site originally designed for mobile phone users to share text updates

with friends (Farhi, 2009; Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Currently, the microblogging site can be

accessed through the web, smartphones, desk top computers, and text messaging (Markwick &

Boyd, 2010).

The site did not become popular until 2008-09 after receiving media attention. By May

2009, Twitter had 18.2 million users and a growth rate of 1448 % in a year (Sivek, 2010). Media

figures, including journalists and broadcast personalities, have also incorporated the use of

Twitter into their jobs as a means of getting news stories to audiences in a quick and effective

manner (Farhi, 2009; Sivek, 2010). However, the most followed Twitter accounts are those of

celebrities or well-known individuals ranging from President Barack Obama, to singer Justin

Beiber, to professional football player Chad Ochocino. (Marwick & Boyd, 2010; Sanderson &

Cheong, 2010).

Members create a user name under which they post messages, or "tweets" up to 140-

characters. Twitter seeks to find out, "What are you doing?" Furthermore, users connect with

others by "following" each other. This allows them to read each others' tweets and respond. The

140-character limit makes the site stand out from its top competitors, such as Facebook and

MySpace because Twitter is textual and less visual (Marwick & Boyd, 2010).

Other features include the "retweet," or reposting another's tweet. Retweeting extends the

audience while allowing the original message to be altered (Marwick & Boyd, 2010; Sanderson

& Cheong, 2010). "Hashtags" create another way to navigate Twitter. By placing a # sign in

front of words they become searchable throughout the site and direct users to similar hashtagged

tweets (Marwick & Boyd, 2010; Sanderson & Cheong, 2010). Users can also target individuals

by placing @username in front of messages. Although the message is directed at one user, other

followers can read it as well (Marwick & Boyd, 2010; Sanderson & Cheong, 2010).

Understanding how Twitter works and how quickly it's growing contextualizes the

present research because it gives an understanding of the interaction level the audience is

engaged in. The difference between a tweet and a journalist's story is vast. How they are

produced and the speeds at which the two are made public are completely different procedures.

Yet, the two both release news. Twitter shares some common ground with other mass

communication media (*From TV to Twitter*, 2010). Similar to the telephone, Twitter allows for

real-time communication and like instant messaging or e-mail, Twitter allows information to be

shared in small burst (*From TV to Twitter*, 2010). Twitter combines features from many other

mediums maintaining both one-to-many and many-to-many communications (*From TV to

Twitter*, 2010). The accessibility of Twitter and the large audience on Twitter is a contributing

factor to why the journalists' sources are now their competition. Many scholars have already

dissected Twitter to find why the audience has turned to it as a credible news source (Marwick & Boyd, 2010; Sivek, 2010; Morgan, 2010; Atkinson, 2008).

Audience Preference

Since Twitter can be accessed through a variety of platforms, it provides an outlet for ambient news (*From TV to Twitter*, 2010). Ambient news is the term used to describe how news is disseminated in ubiquitous ways starting with the onset of broadcast news being shown in many public venues with televisions (*From TV to Twitter*, 2010). Today, Twitter only enhances the idea of ambient news (*From TV to Twitter*, 2010). "The most palpable feature of mass media is to reach the many, and this affects the relationship between the media and the audience…to suggest that members of the audience are just empty receptacles to be filled with news is an oversimplification" (*From TV to Twitter*, 2010, p. 7). Audiences have been kept away from the journalist's process, however Twitter has given the audience a chance to directly interact with the source of news.

Audiences frequently choose Twitter over traditional journalism for these benefits. Twitter makes news a social experience and audiences have gravitated towards this idea (*From TV to Twitter*, 2010). The audience can hear news directly from the source or from people involved with a particular news event and respond through Twitter or other social mediums. This gives the audience the feeling that they are not only the receiver but also a part of the news through their participation. The audience's equal chance for participation directly with the news source has created a concept known as context collapsing (*From TV to Twitter,* 2010; Marwick & Boyd, 2010).

Context Collapsing and Polysemy

The growth of social media sites has created a phenomenon where multiple audiences are flattened into one, or context collapsing (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Context collapsing brings all Twitter users to the same level, users have equal access to each others' expressed thoughts. Well-known figures use this idea to reach out to fans in a casual and a seemingly natural way. Before social media, celebrity figures existed on an inaccessible pedestal due to the gatekeeping of publicists and journalists that prevented content collapsing. Context collapsing gives celebrities new relationships with their fan base and the audience is taking to this positively (Rapping, 2009; Hutchins & Mikosza, 2010; Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Ultimately, context collapsing alters the gatekeeping hierarchy that journalists are accustomed to, and readers appreciate this change (Hutchins & Rowe, 2010).

Marwick and Boyd (2010) found that well-known figures use polysemy or coded information that makes them appeal to many audiences over social media. Polysemy is not a new concept to figures who get interviewed often by journalists. Celebrities are prepped before interviews to give specific answers that appeal to a wide audience. Within polysemy, the common rule of thumb is to apply the "lowest-common-denominator" technique (Marwick & Boyd, 2010, p. 12). Celebrities can apply these comments to their tweets. The comments they make are relatable to a wide range of people. Marwick and Boyd (2010) conclude that the combination of context collapsing and polysemy are a combination of broadcast media and face-to-face communication. Broadcast television marked the beginning of context collapsing, "making it difficult for people to engage in the complex negotiations needed to vary identity presentation, manage impressions, and save face" (Marwick & Boyd, 2010, p. 10). However,

social media contains interpersonal communication aspects because like most common Twitter

users, celebrities often use it to correspond with close friends and family. Overall, "Twitter users

maintain impressions by balancing personal/public information, avoiding certain topics, and

maintaining authenticity" (Marwick & Boyd, 2010, p.11).

Credibility

Hayes, Singer, and Ceppos (2007) discuss different qualities that make up the audience's

perception of credibility in a journalist and how that perception is changing in the new digital

world. Journalists today who have taken notice of the shift in where audiences get their news

information have complained that there is a lack of value in "verification of information,

objectivity, and disclosure of…personal biases" (Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007, p.265). This

suggests that traditional journalists feel those attributes are the cornerstone of credibility.

However, in a survey conducted in 2006 "asking opinions of various local and national media,

not a single outlet was seen as credible enough for even 30% of the respondents to say they

believed 'all of most' of what it reported" (Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007, p. 270). These

results show that despite what journalists feel credibility should be based on, the public must not

agree.

Specifically, journalists can be identified by their professional efforts to seek the truth

and their training and education (Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007). Athletes' Twitter accounts

obviously do not fall under this umbrella. Therefore, their perceived credibility must be based

on other characteristics. The Internet and Web 2.0 have created an environment that fosters

credibility (Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007). "The unbound and interconnected nature of the

medium gives journalists an unprecedented opportunity to build credibility through a form of

information transparency that has never before been feasible" (Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007, pp.271). Common factors of audience perceived credibility in today's digital world are transparency, authenticity, and interactivity (Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007; Sivek, 2010; Marwick & Boyd, 2010; Morgan, 2010; Atkinson, 2008).

Transparency vs. Objectivity

Sivek (2010) studied why readers trust what they hear directly from the celebrity over the reports of the objective journalist. Transparency, or "the ability to see through the published draft-often gives us more reason to believe a report than the claim of objectivity" (Sivek, 2010, p.157). The readers are already familiar with a well-known figure, and the apparent transparency of social media further enhances that relationship. Direct interactions via social media allow the audience to feel they are talking to a close friend, even if what they say is biased. Readers truly experience the ideas and values of the celebrity through their tweets (Sivek, 2010).

Celebrities have an advantage over their competitor, the journalist, because they were quick to adopt social media and already have an authentic voice (Sivek, 2010). Journalists, especially those unfamiliar with digital media, are accustomed to constructing pieces based on objectivity. Journalists have not been quick to transition from objectivity to transparency. Instead, they are stuck on building relationships that rely on objectivity. Relationships in the media are now based on the ability to see connections in the claims (Sivek, 2010). Based on audience judgment, honest and open tweets get the readership that journalists are seeking in the age of the dying press. However, Sivek (2010) predicts there may be changes once future journalists who are immersed in social media step up to the plate in upcoming years (Sivek, 2010).

Authenticity

Marwick and Boyd (2010) discuss Twitter as an outlet where celebrities have an opportunity to use their own voice, or establish authenticity. Writing tweets is a unique way to express themselves, or ego-centric communication. Overall, this process helps to maintain their image and keeps them in the spotlight (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Having a chance to push out information and have an authentic voice allows celebrities to firmly establish their image (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Moreover, when celebrity Twitter users personally disclose information about themselves, audiences perceive them as authentic and credible based on their words from the heart (Marwick & Boyd, 2010; Hayes, Singer & Ceppos, 2007). In other words, authenticity permits celebrities to stand out in the context collapsed social media world.

Morgan (2010) specifically examined athletes and their use of Twitter. The image created through social media ultimately turns the athlete into a commodity. Social media allows players to promote themselves at a rapid pace (Morgan, 2010). Morgan (2010) discusses how sports news is instantaneously absorbed without question or critique because of its entertainment level. Twitter fits well into the sports industry because the short 140-character tweets and speed of information mimics the fast-paced sports calendar (Morgan, 2010). Different sports are not focused on all year round, but each has short seasons within the year where they attract more attention. Twitter keeps up with sports seasons giving more time and opportunities for players to promote themselves repeatedly. Fans quickly absorb tweets and move on to the next hot topic without thought (Morgan, 2010).

Interactivity

Interactivity is key to the phenomenon of Twitter, however the term is used loosely so often that its meaning varies (Atkinson, 2008; Ornebring, 2008). In the strictest sense, interactivity has to include audience manipulation and complete control of media, while another interpretation is simply any audience engagement (Atkinson, 2008). Atkinson (2008) discusses three ways that interactivity is broken down on the Internet: "user-to-system, user-to-user, and user-to-document" (Atkinson, 2008, p. 231). User-to-system is the interaction on sites such as Google where a user interacts with the system. User-to-document refers to sites such as Wikipedia.org where users directly manipulate the content ultimately producing media. Lastly, user-to-user "refers to interactions between two or more people through new media systems, such as conversations using e-mail or Instant Messenger" (Atkinson, 2008, pp.231).

Since Twitter was designed to update friends quickly, branching from the instant messaging idea, it would be categorized as a user-to-user interactivity site (Atkinson, 2008; Farhi, 2009; Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Twitter allows users to interact personally with one another or publically display the interaction. Users can also manipulate tweets from others giving users complete control of the content. Moreover, users can choose who they want to read and block others they want nothing to do with. The establishment of a site like Twitter has taken user-to-user interactivity to a new level where control is in the hands of the user. Twitter as a new social media phenomenon provides the perfect arena to further investigate audience and athlete interaction and how this affects obtaining sports news information.

Method

Research questions were tested through an online survey distributed by e-mail to RIT undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in RIT College of Liberal Arts and Saunders College of Business programs during spring quarter 2011 (Appendix C). The research questions focus on the audience, therefore surveys were used in order to find out information directly from the audience. The survey was delivered with an introduction informing the potential participants about the survey (Appendix B). Participants read about the study and then choose to participate by clicking on a link. The survey was distributed to a convenience sample of 1840 students (undergrad and graduate). The e-mail invitation was sent to all recipients on the list twice, a reminder message was sent a week after the first email was distributed. An RIT log in requirement on Clipboard prevented students from taking the survey more than once and also stopped non-RIT individuals from participating.

The survey was separated into three distinct sections. Part I inquired about the frequency of the use of different media including print news, online articles, and Twitter. Frequency was measured by asking about each medium specifically and giving close-ended ordered choices depending on the type of medium. For instance, newspapers are delivered once a day, so the question asks how many times a week the sports section of the paper was read ("daily", "4-6 days per week", "3-1 days per week", "never"). Twitter frequency was calculated using an open-ended question because usage varies heavily since it is available and updated constantly. These questions were designed to give an understanding of how people obtain sports news and address the "how often" variable.

Credibility was measured based on believability, fairness, accuracy, and depth of information and was modeled after other studies of perceived credibility (Newhagen & Nass, 1984; Johnson & Kaye, 2000, 2010). Twenty-two belief statements were posed (11 for newspaper articles and online journals and 11 for Twitter) using Newhagen & Nass' (1984) instrument for measuring credibility between newspapers and broadcast news. Some statements were altered to accommodate differences between broadcast news and Twitter. Respondents used a five-point Likert scale to judge the statements (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). The belief statements addressed the credibility variable. Part III asked general demographic questions including age, sex, favorite sports, and technology ownership. Ample space provided for any additional comments and suggestions.

Results

Out of the 1840 distributed surveys, 274 responses were received, a 14.9% response rate. Slightly more than half of the respondents were female (55.8%). Ages ranged from 18 to 60 years old with a median and mean age of 22 and mode of 21 years. Most respondents were undergraduates in the Liberal Arts College (46%) and Saunders College of Business (27%). Since graduate students are less abundant than undergrads, only 14% of all Liberal Arts graduate students and 2% of Business graduate students responded. Five percent of respondents did not state their major. The most popular professional sport league among participants was the NFL at 59.9% with both the NHL (45.6%) and the MLB (41.6%) close behind in popularity. Respondents were technically savvy: 89.1% reported owning laptops, 54% smart phones, and 33.6% owning a desktop. Out of the 274 responses, 58.4% reported that they do not use Twitter while 21.2% use Twitter but do not follow sports-related accounts. However, of those who

follow sports related accounts on Twitter, 18.6% follow professional athletes. The highest

percentage compared to reporters (10.1%), bloggers (9%), teams (17.5%), personnel (8.1%), or

broadcast stations (14%) (see Appendix F).

Respondents were separated into three fan groups; light (LF), moderate (MF), or heavy

sports fans (HF) based on a combination of their answers pertaining to how many teams they

consider themselves a fan of and how often they follow a sporting event per month (LF=27.4%,

MF=28.5%, and HF=44.2%) (See Appendix D). Kruskal-Wallis tests compared differences

across fan groups and how often they obtain their sports news from different mediums across fan

groups. Significant results were found (H=29.519, p<.05) indicating that LF obtain their sports

news from the print news more often than HF or MF. However, HF check twitter more times per

week for sports news than MF or LF (H=24.814, p<.05). Cross tabulations were used to see

overall where the groups would obtain sports scores or sports game information. All of the three

groups frequented online articles the most (see Appendix G).

A *t* test compared differences in the mean perceived credibility between the sports

reporter and the athletes Twitter account (see Appendix E). A significant difference was found

and the sports reporter's credibility was greater than that of the athlete's account. Credibility was

further tested among the calculated fan groups (LF, MF, and HF) using a one-way ANOVA. No

significant difference was found for either the sports reporters (F = .837, df=2, p> .05) or the

athlete's Twitter account (F= .327, df=2, p> .05). As a result, regardless if someone followed

athletes on Twitter or was a heavy or light sports fan- all find a sports reporter more credible.

Kruskal-Wallis tests compared differences in perceived credibility between the reporter

and athlete based on how many sports teams a respondent said they followed. A significant result

(H= 6.02, p < .05) was found for the credibility of the athlete's Twitter account respondents who said they were fans of four or more professional sporting leagues who had a higher perceived credibility (155.44) than those who are a fan of one to three sports (137.88) or a fan of no sports (127.52). The same test compared credibility of a sports reporter and self-reported fan-hood. No significant difference was found (H=5.097, p=.078).

Further tests compared sports reporter credibility and the number of games the respondent reported that they watched within the past month. A significant result was found (H= 19.9, p<.05). Those who watched 10+ games per month (150.86) and 7-9 games per month (180.74) had a higher perceived credibility of the sports reporter than those who did not watch sports in the past month (117.62) or watched one to three games (119.56). The same test was conducted to compare credibility of the athlete's Twitter account with games watched in the past month, however, no significant difference was found (H= .476, p>.05).

Discussion

More than half (58.6%) of participants do not use Twitter and all fan groups had a tendency to get their sports news from an online sports reporter's article. This shows that there is a difference in how often audiences obtain sports news from a sports reporter versus an athlete's Tweet because of the lack in Twitter use overall. Based on these findings, it is not true that audiences are choosing Twitter over the reporter (*From TV to Twitter*, 2010). However, the respondents that use Twitter and are a HF do, in fact, check Twitter for sports news more often than the LF or MF. These findings are important because they show that despite the dedication of the sports fan, people go to online articles for sports news most frequently. Also, the HF may go to Twitter to obtain news more frequently than others just to satisfy their love of sports.

The perceived credibility of the sports reporter was judged as higher than that of the athlete. There was no significance found between the fan groups and perceived credibility levels; there were other significant differences that apply to RQ2. Participants who follow or watch seven or more games per month regard the sports reporter's stories with being more credible. This may indicate that those who watch games and have knowledge on more than just scores judge the reporter's articles as a more credible source. These results run parallel to the results that Newhagen and Nass (1984) reported with their testing of the difference in credibility between TV news and print news. As previously discussed, the TV news was not completely taking the place of the newspapers, the journalist still was perceived as more credible (Newhagen & Nass, 1984). The present results show similar characteristics as the sports reporters' articles still are perceived as a more credible source than the athlete's Twitter account.

Moreover, the participants who reported being a fan of four or more professional sports teams regard the athlete's Twitter account as a more credible source than those who follow three or less teams. The participants who follow multiple teams may be more familiar with the abundance of athletes on Twitter indicating that they see them as a more credible source than those who may be less familiar with them. They also may be more interested in hearing from the athlete authentically. This may be due to a new digital relationship that forms based on transparency and authenticity, but objectivity proved to play a more important role in the perceived credibility of the sports reporter.

Hayes, Singer, and Ceppos (2007) suggested that the cornerstones of credibility should lie in verification of information and objectivity. The present results support this view as the reporter tested higher for perceived credibility consistently against the athlete's Twitter account.

Currently, the sports reporters' stories still are perceived as being the more credible work and their articles create more of a draw to obtain sports news than does Twitter.

Conclusion

Certain limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The small convenience sample produces results that may not be generalized to a larger population. Also, the survey relies on self-report leaving room for errors of deception or lapses in memory. Moreover, the study focused on sports news. Different genres within news may produce distinctive reactions to reporters' articles and Twitter.

In order to further look into the stated problem of the athlete becoming the competitor for the journalist, further research can be conducted. Credibility could be investigated by looking at perceptions across media. With digital and online media continuously growing faster than ever before, there may be many different factors that affect credibility (Metzger & Flanagin, 2010). For instance, more research could examine possible impacts on credibility and age.

Another possibility would be searching for other factors beyond credibility that are to blame for the source becoming the competitor, such as digital relationships or differences in accessibility. There may be other contributing agents causing the source to become the reporter's competitor. Future studies should also look at other genres within news to see how digital or social media is threatening reporters such as economics, arts, business, or technology.

References

Atkinson, J. D. (2008). Towards a model of interactivity in alternative media: A multilevel analysis of

audiences and producers in a new social movement network. *Mass Communication & Society*,

11(3), 227-247.

Farhi, P. (2009). Twitter Explosion. *American Journalism Review.* 31(3), 26-31. Retrieved from

Communication & Mass Media Complete.

From TV to Twitter: How ambient news became ambient journalism. (2010). *M/C Journal.* 13(2), 7.

Hayes, A.S., Singer, J.B., &Ceppos, J. (2007) Shifting roles, enduring values: The credible journalist

in a digital age. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics,* 22(4). 262-279.

Hutchins, B. & Mikosza, J. (2010). The web 2.0 Olympics: Athlete blogging, social networking and

policy contradictions at the 2008 Beijing games. *Convergence: The International Journal of*

Research into New Media & Technologies, 16(3), 279-297.

Hutchins, B. & Rowe, D. (2010). Reconfiguring media sport for the online world: An inquiry into "sports

news and digital media." *International Journal of Communication,* 4, 696-718.

Johnson, T.J. & Kaye, B. (2002) Webelievability: A path model examining how convenience and reliance

predict online credibility. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly. 79(3)* 619-642.

----(2010). Choosing is believing? How web gratifications and reliance affect internet credibility among

politically interested users. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly.* 18. 1-21.

Lee, E. (2010). Chat, stats, secrets about twitter. *Advertising Age.* 81(16),8. Retrieved from

Communications & Mass Media Complete.

Marwick, A. & Boyd, D. (2010). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse,

and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, 1-20.

Metzger, M. & Flanagin, A. (2010). Credibility and Digital Media @ UCSB. Retrieved from

http://www.credibility.ucsb.edu/index.php

Morgan, W. J. (2010). Bullshitters, markets, and the privatization of public discourse about sports.

American Behavioral Scientist. 53(11). 1574-1589.

Newhagen, J. & Nass, C. (1984). Differential criteria for evaluating credibility of newspapers

and TV news. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly.* 277-284.

Ornebring, H. (2008). The consumer as producer- of what? User-generated tabloid content in "The Sun"

(UK) and "Aftonbladet" (Sweden). *Journalism Studies.* 9(5). 771-785.

Rapping, E. (2009). Celebrities the media and the law. *St Louis Journalism Review.* 38(310), 20-21.

Rowe, D., Ruddock, A., & Hutchins, B. (2010). Cultures of complaint: Online fan message boards and

networked digital media sport communities. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research

into New Media & Technologies,* 16, 298-315.

Sanderson, J. & Cheong, P.H. (2010). Tweeting prayers and communication grief over Michael Jackson

online. *Bulletin of Science Technology & Society.* 30(5), 328-340.

Sivek, S.C. (2010). Social media under social control: Regulating social media and the future of

socialization. *Electronic News.* 4(3), 146-164.

Skoler, M. (2009). Why the news media became irrelevant- and how social media can help. *Nieman

Reports,* 63(3), 38-40.

Stessen, W. (2010). Your news in 140 characters: exploring the role of social media in journalism. *Global

Media Journal: African Edition*, 4(1), 1-16.

Stone, G. C., & Wetherington Jr., R. V. (1979). Confirming the Newspaper Reading Habit. *Journalism

Quarterly*, 56(3), 554-566. Retrieved from EBSCO*host.*

Appendix A – Sources Outlined

Sources:
*note: all searches were conducted between the years of 1940-present

Communication and Mass Media Complete
Keywords: "audience" "social media"
- Atkinson, J. D. (2008). Towards a Model of Interactivity in Alternative Media: A Multilevel Analysis of Audiences and Producers in a New Social Movement Network.
- Marwick, A. & Boyd, D. (2010). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience.

Keywords: "Twitter" "audience"
- Farhi, P. (2009). Twitter Explosion. *American Journalism Review*
- Lee, E. (2010). Chat, stats, secrets about twitter. *Advertising Age*

Keywords: "audience" "social media" "journalism"
- Sivek, S.C. (2010). Social media under social control: Regulating social media and the future of socialization.
- Stassen, W. (2010). Your news in 140 characters: exploring the role of social media in journalism.
    - Consulted references to find: Skoler, M. (2009). Why the news media became irrelevant- and how social media can help.

EBSCO
Keywords: "sports" "social media"
- Morgan, W. J. (2010). Bullshitters, markets, and the privatization of public discourse about sports.
- Hutchins, B. & Rowe, D. (2010). Reconfiguring media sport for the online world: An inquiry into "sports news and digital media."
    - Consulted references to find: Hutchins, B. & Mikosza, J. (2010). The web 2.0 Olympics: Athlete blogging, social networking and policy contradictions at the 2008 Beijing games.

    - Rowe, D., Ruddock, A., & Hutchins, B. (2010). Cultures of complaint: Online fan message boards and networked digital media sport communities.

Keywords: "celebrity" "social media"
- Sanderson, J. & Cheong, P.H. (2010). Tweeting prayers and communication grief over Michael Jackson online.
- Rapping, E. (2009). Celebrities the media and the law.

Keywords: "sports" "journalism" "readers"
- Stone, G. C., & Wetherington Jr., R. V. (1979). Confirming the Newspaper Reading Habit

Appendix B – Letter to Participants

Contents of e-mail sent to potential survey participants:

Dear NAME,

You are one of a small number of college students whose thoughts I would like on how you obtain your sports news. Today's technologically advanced society is changing the way news is read and your time can help document this phenomenon.

It takes fewer than 10 minutes to complete this survey. You may be assured of complete confidentiality. Your name will never appear in the survey results, and I, as the project director, will be the only person with access to survey responses.

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions posed in the survey. Participation in the survey is completely voluntary, and you can stop participating at any point. Should you experience any discomfort as a result of taking this survey, contact the counseling center at 585-475-2261, second floor of the August Center (Bldg. 23A).

Should you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them, so please email me (cxf3800@rit.edu).

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Chrissy Foster
Project Director

Appendix C - Survey

RIT Department of Communication
Online Survey

Part I. First, we'd like to learn how you follow sports and how you obtain your sports news. For each question, please choose one answer by clicking the circle next to your selection.

1. Do you consider yourself a sports fan?
- I am not a sports fan.
- I am a fan of one to three different sports.
- I am a fan of four or more sports.

2. In the past month, how many professional sporting events have you watched on TV, in person, or online (including checking score updates)?
- 0
- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-9
- 10+

3. How many times in the past week did you read the sports section in the print newspaper? (NOT online)
- Daily
- 4-6 Days per week
- 1-3 Days per week
- Never

4. How many times in the past week did you read the sports news online? (democratandschronicle.com/sports, nytimes.com/sports, amerks.com, espn.com's top stories)
- Daily
- 4-6 Days per week
- 1-3 Days per week
- Never

5. Thinking of the past five days, how many times did you check Twitter to see a professional athlete's tweets?

6. Which of the following sports-related individuals or organizations do you follow on Twitter? (Please choose all that apply.)
- Professional Athletes
- Sports Bloggers
- Sports Reporters
- Sports Teams

o Sports Team's Personnel (ie: Public Relations, Media Relations, Community Relations Representatives)
o Sports Broadcast Stations (ie: ESPN, VERSUS, NBCSPORTS, etc.)
o I do not follow any sports-related Twitter accounts.
o I do not use Twitter.
o Other: _____

7. If you missed last night's game, where is the first place you go to check the game's score?
o Online article (team's website, news website)
o Print article (newspaper)
o Twitter
o Other (please specify)_____

8. If you missed last night's game and you want to find out what happened, which is your first choice?
o Online article (team's website, news website)
o Print article (newspaper)
o Twitter
o Other (please specify)_____

Part II. Next are a series of statements concerning sports news as presented by print media sports reporters and professional athletes on Twitter. For each, please choose one answer by clicking in the circle next to your selection

9. The following statements pertain to a print media sports reporter. There are no right or wrong answers; it is your opinion that is important.

Sports news reporters' articles are factual.
o Strongly Agree
o Agree
o Neutral
o Disagree
o Strongly Disagree

Sports news reporters' articles can be trusted.
o Strongly Agree
o Agree
o Neutral
o Disagree
o Strongly Disagree

Sports news reporters' articles are accurate.
o Strongly Agree
o Agree

- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Sports news reporters' articles tell the whole story.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Sports news reporters' articles use well trained reporters.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Sports news reporters' articles separate facts from opinions.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Sports news reporters' articles are concerned about the public interest.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Sports news reporters' articles are unbiased.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Sports news reporters' articles watch out after your interests.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree

       o Strongly Disagree

Sports news reporters' articles sensationalize information.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Sports news reporters' articles respects people's privacy.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Sports news reporters' articles do not care what people think.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

10. The following statements pertain to sports news as presented on Twitter by any professional athlete. There are no right or wrong answers; it is your opinion that is important

Professional athlete's tweets are factual.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Professional athlete's tweets can be trusted.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Professional athlete's tweets are accurate.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral

- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Professional athlete's tweets tell the whole story.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Professional athlete's tweets separate facts from opinions.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Professional athlete's tweets are concerned about the public interest.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Professional athlete's tweets are unbiased.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Professional athlete's tweets watch out after your interests.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Professional athlete's tweets sensationalize information.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree

  o Strongly Disagree

Professional athlete's tweets respect people's privacy.
  o Strongly Agree
  o Agree
  o Neutral
  o Disagree
  o Strongly Disagree

Professional athlete's tweets do not care what people think.
  o Strongly Agree
  o Agree
  o Neutral
  o Disagree
  o Strongly Disagree

Part III. Finally, the last set of questions concerns selected personal characteristics. Your responses will be used only for statistical purposes. Please choose one answer for each question by clicking in the circle next to your selection or typing in the space provided.

11. What is your sex?
o MALE
o FEMALE

12. What is your present age? _____

13. What is your present major?_____

14. Please check the following professional sports that you follow or watch. If you do not follow or watch one of the sports listed, please leave the space blank. If your favorite sport is not listed, please name it in the space provided. (You may check all that apply.)
o American Football (NFL)
o Baseball (MLB)
o Ice Hockey (NHL)
o Basketball (NBA)
o Soccer
o Lacrosse (NLL/MLL)
o NASCAR/ Auto Racing
o Golf
o Tennis
o Other:

15. Please check all the technologies you currently own. You may check all that apply.
  o Smart Phones (Blackberry, Android, IPhone)

- o   IPod Touch
- o   IPad/ Smart Pads
- o   Laptop
- o   Mini Laptop
- o   Cell phone (NOT a smart phone)
- o   E-Readers (Kindle, Nook, etc.)
- o   Desktop Computer
- o   Other:

Please add any additional comments or suggestions.

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix D- Sports Fan Groups Division

Table D1

Sports Fan Level

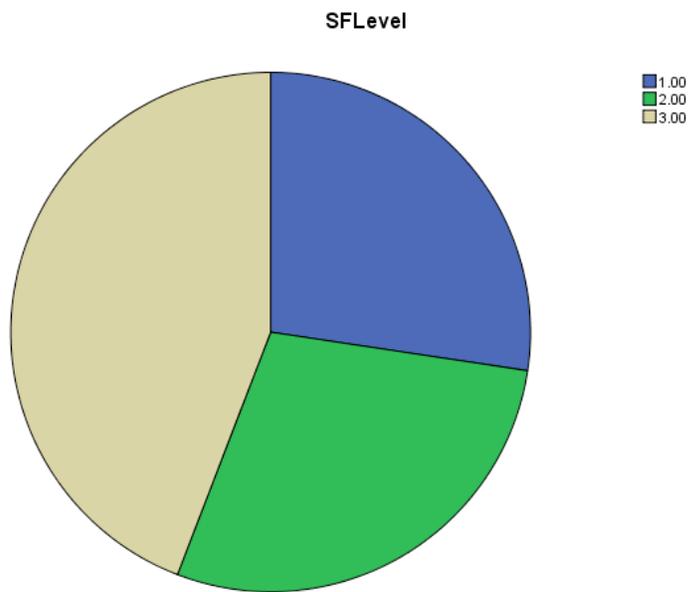|	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low fan (1.00)	75	27.4	27.4	27.4
Moderate fan (2.00)	78	28.5	28.5	55.8
Heavy fan (3.00)	121	44.2	44.2	100.0
Total	274	100.0	100.0	

SFLevel

Figure D1

Appendix E – Sports Reporter Credibility vs. Athlete on Twitter (Overall)

Table E1

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Sports reporter credibility	3.0481	274	.61274	.03702
	Athlete's Twitter credibility	2.4741	274	.85829	.05185

Table E2

Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Sports reporter credibility & Athlete Twitter credibility	274	.241	.000

Table E3

Sports Reporter Credibility vs. Athlete on Twitter

Paired Differences							
			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
.57399	.92649	.05597	.46380	.68418	10.255	273	.000

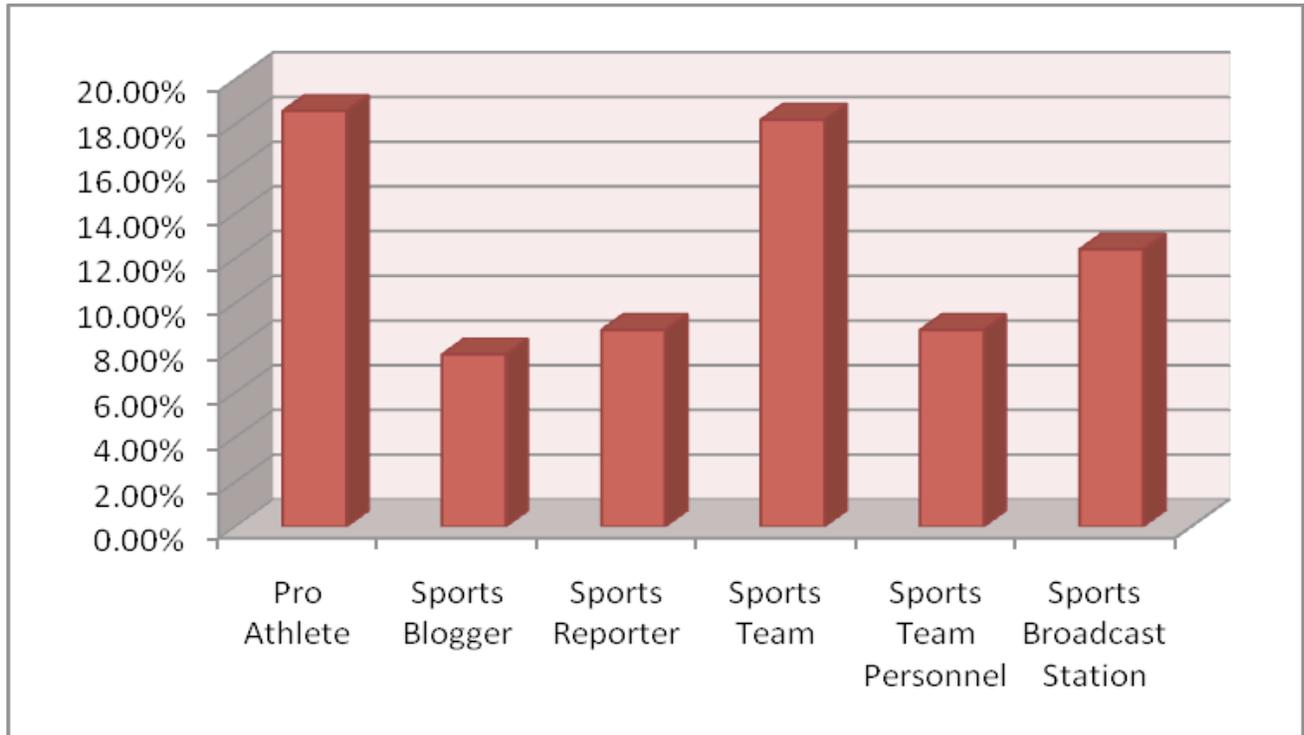Appendix F – Sports Related Followings on Twitter

Figure F1

Appendix G – Cross Tabulations

Table G1

Crosstabulation: If respondents missed last night's game, how would they check the score?

	check scores						
	Online	Print	Twitter	Other	Mobile App	No Answer	Total
Low fan	47	1	2	1	0	24	75
Moderate fan	62	2	2	5	3	4	78
Heavy fan	101	1	5	3	8	3	121
Total	210	4	9	9	11	31	274

Table G2

Crosstabulation: If respondents missed last night's game, how would they find out what happened?

	what happened						
	Online	Print	Twitter	Other	Mobile App	No Answer	TOTAL
Low fan	46	2	2	3	0	22	75
Moderate fan	64	1	0	9	1	3	78
Heavy fan	96	2	5	11	2	5	121
Total	206	5	7	23	3	30	274

Biographical Sketch: CHRISTINE FOSTER

Christine graduated from RIT with a 4.0 g.p.a with a Masters Degree in Communication & Media Technologies in Summer 2011. Prior to RIT, she graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Communications with minors in Writing and Philosophy from Niagara University. Chrissy has worked for both the New York Islanders and Buffalo Sabres, served as the Associate Producer for RIT SZLive, and continues to pursue a career in sports public/media relations.