

@PROATHLETES PRACTICING CELEBRITY ON #TWITTER: A TWEET-POINT
SHOT

By

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To my family

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
LIST OF TABLES.....	8
ABSTRACT	9
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE	11
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	14
Theoretical Framework	14
Twitter	15
Celebrity As A Practice On Twitter.....	16
Linguistic Tools	19
Tweet.....	20
@ Replies.....	20
Hashtags (#'s)	21
Retweet or Modified Retweet (RT)	21
Links.....	21
Channels.....	21
One-to-One	22
One-to-Many	22
Many-to-Many	22
Branding	23
3 METHODOLOGY	26
4 RESULTS	32
Data Set 1.....	32
Weekdays and Weekends.....	32
Categories.....	33
Channels	35
Linguistic Tools.....	37
@ Replies	37
Hashtags.....	37
Retweets	38
Links	38
Data Set 2.....	38
Number of Followers	39
Number Following	41
Number of Tweets	41

	Total Number of Linguistic Tools	42
	NBA Players and WNBA Players – Pearson Correlation Tests	44
5	CONCLUSIONS	47
	Summary	47
	Time and Frequency	47
	Categories	47
	Channels	49
	Linguistics Tools	50
	Number of Followers	51
	Overall Conclusions and Implications	52
	Limitations	53
	Recommendations for Future Research	53
	LIST OF REFERENCES	55
	BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	58

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>page</u>
4-1 Weekday (V4) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square.....	33
4-2 Categories (V7) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square	34
4-3 Channels (V8) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square	36
4-4 At Reply (V10) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square	37
4-5 Hashtag (V11) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square	37
4-6 Retweet (V12) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square	38
4-7 Links (V13) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square	38
4-8 Means (Standard Deviation) and T-Test Results.....	39
4-9 Number of Followers (V3) vs. Gender (V2) – T-Test	40
4-10 Condensed Number of Followers Variable (nufollow1).....	40
4-11 Number of Followers (nufollow1) vs. Gender (V2) – T-Test	40
4-12 Number Following (V4) vs. Gender (V2) – T-Test	41
4-13 Number of Tweets (V5) vs. Gender (V2) – T-Test.....	41
4-14 Number of Actual Tweets (V5) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square.....	42
4-15 Total Number of Linguistic Tools (V8) vs. Gender (V2) – T-Test.....	43
4-16 NBA Player Descriptive Statistics	43
4-17 WNBA Players Descriptive Statistics.....	44
4-18 All Variables for NBA Players - Pearson Correlation Test	45
4-19 All Variables for WNBA Players – Pearson Correlation Test	46

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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Celebrity as a practice on Twitter is a new theory defined as the appearance and performance of 'backstage' access by celebrity practitioners, referred to as professional athletes in this study, through affiliation, intimacy, authenticity and sincerity, and fan maintenance (Markwick & boyd, 2011). Previous studies have examined professional athletes' use of Twitter to build their brands (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012; Fischer, Smith & Yongjian, 2012; Yan, 2011), however none have examined their use of celebrity as a practice on Twitter. This study served to extend previous research by using a content analysis to examine how professional athletes can practice celebrity to build their brands through both user-generated content and linguistic tools used on Twitter. Descriptive statistics including Chi Square tests, t-tests, and Pearson Correlation tests were used to satisfy the objectives of this study.

A key finding from this study was both NBA players and WNBA players practice celebrity on Twitter through user-generated content and linguistics tools. However, the specific type of user-generated content shared and the specific linguistic tools used to share that content varied. This study found that NBA players are followed 122 times

more than WNBA players suggesting popularity differentials between male and female professional athletes exist both offline and online. Interestingly for both NBA players and WNBA players, no correlation was found between number of followers versus the number following, total number of tweets, tweeting frequency, and total number of linguistics tools used.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Twitter has become one of the most popular social networking sites (SNSs) of the 21st century and Web 2.0 era. Celebrity practitioners are using the micro-blogging site to practice celebrity by building their personal-brand through constructing and maintaining fan bases, known on Twitter as followers. Professional athletes have always held a celebrity status with fans, however the majority of female athletes have traditionally not experienced the same highly visible fame as their male counterparts. The NBA currently has 30 teams compared to 12 teams in the WNBA. In 2012, the Chicago Bulls in the NBA had the highest attendance with an average of 21,876 fans each game (ESPN, 2013). In comparison, the Los Angeles Sparks in the WNBA averaged only 10,567 fans each game (Sports Business Daily, 2012). Celebrity as a practice on Twitter is a new theory that has little research in general, and even less research is available as it pertains to professional athletes. Introduced by Marwick and boyd (2011), it is defined as the appearance and performance of 'backstage' access by celebrity practitioners through affiliation, intimacy, authenticity and sincerity, and fan maintenance on Twitter.

Professional athletes' use of Twitter has become a popular topic in the mainstream media. Twitter has allowed professional athletes to tweet their way into fans' lives (McManus, 2012). A recent article interviewed Paul Bissonnete, a National Hockey League (NHL) player who rarely sees playing time, has used the micro-blogging site to practice celebrity and build a brand that includes multiple endorsement deals (Riva, 2012). His Twitter account @BizNasty2point0 is the top followed NHL player largely due to his comical, clever, and personable persona on the social networking site.

However, not all coverage of the Twitter trend has been positive and well received by the press, fans, or the team organizations of professional athletes (Paraham, 2011; Roberts, 2011; Skolnick, 2011).

Professional athletes' tweeting about controversial issues has led the National Basketball Association (NBA), Major League Baseball (MLB), National Football League (NFL), Major League Soccer (MLS), National Hockey League (NHL), and English Premier League (EPL) to impose policies that limit the use of social media for players, league employees, and even the media (Paraham, 2011). While there are downsides to players using social media, the benefits are becoming more salient. MLB's outfielder Logan Morrison has more than 70,000 followers, which equated to roughly a week's worth of crowds at the Florida Marlin's Sun Life Stadium in 2011 (Skolnick, 2011). On a daily basis, Morrison's ability to reach the amount of fans his team reaches in a week is changing the way fans connect to the game.

As the infusion of social media networks and professional athletes continues to increase there is an imperative need to understand how they can use these resources to build their brand through practicing celebrity on Twitter. Unlike traditional celebrity status in the offline world, NBA players and WNBA players have the same opportunity to increase their marketability on and off the court in the online world. Although some research has been conducted on the history, practices, linguistics, and users and communities of Twitter (Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, & Seymour, 2011; Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyeev, 2011; boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010; Chen, 2010; Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010; Marwick & boyd, 2010; Honeycutt & Herring, 2009; boyd & Ellison, 2007), studies up to this point have not examined how male and female

professional athletes use the micro-blogging site similarly or differently to practice celebrity. More specifically, no studies have examined professional athletes using the theory of celebrity as a practice on Twitter other than focusing solely on building brands (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012; Fischer, Smith, & Yongjian, 2012; Yan, 2011).

Therefore, this study served to extend previous research by using a content analysis to examine how professional athletes can practice celebrity to build their brands through both the user-generated content and linguistic tools used on Twitter. Finally, this study aimed to bridge the gap between research on celebrity as a practice on Twitter and research on professional athletes' using social media to build their brands.

Through the content analysis of 10 NBA player and 10 WNBA player Twitter accounts, this study examined whether NBA players and WNBA players differ on:

1. their use of Twitter to practice celebrity
2. their use of Twitter for personal purposes
3. their use of Twitter for personal purposes or to practice celebrity based on number of followers
4. their use of Twitter tools such as hashtags (#s), @ replies, retweets (RTs), and links

Also, this study aimed to expand previous research to determine new celebrity practices on Twitter that NBA players and WNBA players should use to effectively build their brands.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Social networking sites (SNSs), often referred to as social media networks or social media, have advanced the Web to the Web 2.0 era, which includes a myriad of sites for social interaction and user-generated content.

Social media has transformed communication and removed geographical barriers of individuals throughout the world. While the concept of the phenomenon itself is not new, the purposes and practices of how to use social media are continually evolving. Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. SNSs allow individuals to construct an online representation of self and publicly display connections with people they know or network with people they have never met. The public or semi-public display of connections helps users navigate through the networked social world and build a network of users with similar interests or gather information about their interests.

Previous research has offered many ideas about the first occurrences of social media, most noting the early 1990s as the time when social networking sites were officially created (Edosomwan et al., 2011; boyd & Ellison, 2007). Some examples include Six Degrees, BlackPlanet, Asian Avenue, MoveOn, ThirdVoice, and Napster. These early niche social networking sites included sites that allowed users to advocate for public policy, blog, share reviews of products, post comments on webpages, and

utilize peer-to-peer file sharing. The popularity of social networking sites grew exponentially in the 2000s with a surge of sites launching. Most took the form of visual profile-centric sites that allowed users to have a profile picture, personal descriptors (such as age, location, interests, and an “about me” section), multimedia content (such as photo, videos, or music), and a public or semi-public display of connections (such as fans, contacts, friends, or followers) (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Some examples of popular social networking sites launched in the 2000’s include LinkedIn, MySpace, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, and Twitter.

Twitter

In 2006, Twitter, a micro-blogging site, was launched and created by a San Francisco-based company called Obvious. The 10-person start-up company introduced Twitter during the same time Facebook was becoming available to everyone. Users can send messages limited to 140-characters, known as “tweets” to share information with individuals, groups, and the public at large. Tweets can be posted via Twitter.com, text messages, or several third party application clients (e.g., TweetCaster or TweetBot) that can be accessed on the Internet or downloaded to a users’ mobile phone or computer. Twitter users can maintain a brief profile that consists of a profile picture, name, webpage location, and short biography.

Unlike Facebook and several other social networking sites, the relationship of following or connecting with users does not require reciprocation. This means a user can follow another user, and the user does not have to follow them back, which on Twitter is denoted on an account as number of “followers” and number of “following” accounts. Also, users can choose to make their profiles public or private, and can choose to accept all followers or require approval before a user can follow their account.

Kwak et al. (2010) found that Twitter overall shows a low level of reciprocity; 77.9% of user pairs with any link between them are connected one-way, and only 22.1% have a reciprocal relationship between them. They also found that 67.6% of users are not followed by any of their followings, suggesting that Twitter is rather a source of information than solely a social networking site. In contrast, Chen (2010) found that the more months a person is active on Twitter and the more hours per week the person spends on Twitter, the more the person gratifies a need for an information sense of camaraderie, called “connection,” with other users.

The top users on Twitter are typically celebrities and most of them do not follow their followers back. While the number of followers can easily estimate top users and popularity, it is not a comprehensive measure. A user’s influence or a tweet’s influence is increased when their tweet is retweeted or their following includes influential people (Kwak et al., 2010). An example of this is Justin Bieber’s Twitter following which he calls “Beliebers.” As expected, the top pop star in the world has one of the largest Twitter followings reaching over 40 million users. Unexpectedly, his business teams of managers, directors, stage crew, hair stylists, high school friends, and dancers who typically are behind the scenes, all have significant followings, which can arguably be attributed to his tweets being directed to those users. Even fans that Justin directly tweets or retweets have hundreds or thousands of other “Beliebers” asking to be followed by the lucky fans he noticed on Twitter.

Celebrity As A Practice On Twitter

Celebrity as a practice on Twitter was introduced by Marwick and boyd (2011) and defined as the appearance and performance of ‘backstage’ access by celebrity practitioners, referred to as professional athletes in this study. The authors

conceptualized the practice of celebrity to involve continuous maintenance of fan bases, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, the construction of a consumable persona, and the equally important, mutual recognition of power differentials between the professional athletes and their fans. In this study, celebrity as a practice was operationalized as:

- AFFILIATION. Publicly performing a connection with fans using language, words, cultural symbols, and conventions.
- INTIMACY. Posting personal pictures and videos, addressing rumors, and sharing personal information.
- AUTHENTICITY AND SINCERITY. Taking risks and not playing it safe, being real and honest through discourse and connection.
- FAN MAINTENANCE. Constant interaction with fans to preserve power differentials.

Prior to this research, Senft (2008) introduced the concept of 'micro-celebrity' as the use of social media to develop and maintain an audience using a set of practices. Micro-celebrity is, "a mindset and set of practices in which audience is viewed as a fan base; popularity is maintained through ongoing fan management; and self-presentation is carefully constructed to be consumed by others" (as cited in Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 140). The practice of micro-celebrity was initially aimed at explaining the phenomenon of non-celebrity, or 'ordinary' social media users building large online followings such as comedian Jenna Marbles, or child singers and regulars on The Ellen Show, Sophia Grace and Rosie Hit. Now, both ordinary and celebrity users on Twitter are adopting the above-mentioned practices and Marwick and boyd (2011) argue that, "celebrity has become a set of circulated strategies and practices that place fame on a continuum, rather than as a bright line that separates individuals" (p. 140).

In other research, Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell (2010) examined Twitter use among professional athletes by applying the uses and gratifications theory to offer suggestions on ways players could adjust their tweets to address their followers' needs. The authors categorized tweets into six categories; interactivity, diversion, information sharing, content, promotion, and fanship, which will be defined in the methods section of this study. In this study, the categories were operationalized as:

- INTERACTIVITY. Direct communication with fellow athletes and fans.
- DIVERSION. Non-sports-related information about the athlete's personal life.
- INFORMATION SHARING. Insight into athlete's teammates, team, or sport.
- CONTENT. Links to pictures, videos, and other websites.
- FANSHIP. Discussion of sports other than their own teams and teammates.
- PROMOTIONAL. Publicity regarding sponsorships, upcoming games, and related promotions.

Hambrick et al. (2010) found that athletes with the most followers had the more interactivity tweets, suggesting and confirming Marwick and boyd's (2011) findings that conversing directly with fans is essential to practicing celebrity on Twitter. In contrast, Page (2012) found that 63% of celebrity practitioners tweets were non-addressed updates compared to 32% addressed conversational tweets.

Professional athletes' practicing celebrity on Twitter by sharing personal information, publicly acknowledging fans, and using language and cultural references to create affiliations with followers is providing an uncensored look at the personas behind fans' favorite players. The power to communicate with fans is in the hands of the professional athletes themselves and followers have direct access -- or at least have the

perception of direct access -- to professional athletes without having the traditional filters of managers, public relations teams, and the mainstream media. This unprecedented access to professional athletes has shortened the distance between fans and the game, while also creating a platform where fans get to know professional athletes, and professional athletes get to know fans, which could prove particularly useful to lesser-known athletes such as WNBA players, who are looking to increase their awareness and popularity on and off the court (Hambrick et al., 2010).

Twitter has knocked down the wall between professional athletes and the public by creating a platform where fans can show support, express dissatisfaction, participate in dialogue about games and events, network with other fans, and discuss information tweeted by their favorite athletes, teams, and sports. It is important to note that celebrity practitioners, fans, media, and intermediaries such as gossip columnists co-exist on Twitter, making self-representation and the practice of celebrity a negotiation of these multiple audiences to successfully maintain face and manage impressions (Marwick & boyd, 2011). This co-existence of identities on Twitter makes a crucial argument for the importance of a better understanding of the practice of celebrity to help professional athletes' navigate through the social media platform.

Linguistic Tools

Twitter's environment allows users to search users and topics to see what they are saying about topics using the practice of tools mentioned above. Originally, Twitter was launched as a way for users to update other users about the simple question, "What are you doing?" and has since evolved to serve a number of uses. Honeycutt and Herring (2009) found that despite a noisy environment and interface that is not especially conducive to conversational use, both short exchanges and longer

exchanges with multiple participants are surprisingly coherent. Linguistic strategies implementing the practice of tools on Twitter are important for professional athletes to use due to the large number of tweets and speed at which they are posted. As Zappavigna (2011) found, Twitter is witnessing a cultural shift of electronic discourse from online conversation to 'searchable talk'. This is important to note because Hargittai and Litt (2011) found that interest in entertainment and celebrity news is an extremely strong predictor of Twitter adoption for young adults between the ages of 18-24, even when controlling for user background characteristics and digital media experiences. These findings suggest that what the 'searchable talk' users are looking for on the micro-blogging site is entertainment and celebrity news.

A number of recent studies have focused on the linguistics tools of Twitter (Page, 2012; Zappavigna, 2011; boyd et al., 2010; Honeycutt & Herring, 2009). Hashtags, retweets, modified retweets, @ replies, and links to photos, videos, websites, etc. are all tools that assist professional athletes in practicing celebrity on Twitter. A brief description of tools are listed below:

Tweet

On Twitter, a tweet consists of 140-characters and can be a statement by a user, a retweet of another user, or a reply to tweet from another user.

@ Replies

The practice of @ replies allows users to direct tweets at designated users. Addressing tweets to users helps facilitate user-to-user exchanges and aids users in tracking conversations. Similar to email, there can be one recipient or several, as long as the characters are within the 140-character limit.

Hashtags (#'s)

Hashtags are denoted using the “#” symbol and are used to mark the topic of a tweet, which could include an event, place, person, or expression. Using hashtags gives the ability for users to search and follow conversations on a particular topic. The success of a hashtag is determined by other users adopting a keyword (i.e. #NBAFinals) and continuing to use it to tag tweets. If a hashtag is used with enough frequency, it will be listed in the ‘trending topics’ sidebar of the Twitter website or in various locations on third party application clients.

Retweet or Modified Retweet (RT)

Retweets, or modified retweets, are considered the feature that has made Twitter a new medium of information dissemination (Kwak et al., 2010). Retweeting, denoted as “RT,” is the practice of a user reposting a tweet from another user and sharing that information with their followers. The practice is similar to a user forwarding an email message to another user. Modified retweets serve the same function as retweets, but allow users to add or remove information.

Links

Users include URL hyperlinks in tweets, known as links, to incorporate outside content such as videos, new stories, blogs, websites, etc. Several URL shortener applications exist to generate abbreviated URL's that redirect users to pictures, videos, and websites. Twitter has created its own in-application URL shortener and other sites (e.g., <http://bit.ly> or <http://goo.gl>) are also popular due to their click tracking capabilities.

Channels

Other researchers believe Twitter is ideally placed to provide a highly interactive one-to-many information channel, especially by influential individuals, using a

combination of practices; @ replies, retweets, hyperlinks, and hashtags (Burton & Soboleva, 2011). This study argues that Twitter provides interactivity for one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to many communication levels. Examples include:

One-to-One

User1: "@user2 What are you doing for the #UF football game tonight?"

One-to-Many

User1: "I'm bored. What is going on in #Gainesville tonight?"

Many-to-Many

User1: "Is anyone else watching #OKCMiami game tonight? This show is crazy!"

User2: "@user1 I am! I can't believe @KingJames has 35 points in the first half!
#OKCMiami"

User3: "He is a beast! "@user2: @user 1 I am! I can't believe @KingJames has 35
points in the first half! #OKCMiami"

The use of linguistic tools is crucial to professional athletes effectively reaching audiences through the above-mentioned channels. Tools help followers maintain easy access to professional athletes' tweets, and keep them in the loop with their daily lives on and off the court. Specifically, hashtags and @ replies are useful tools for making coherent exchanges and helping audiences relate one tweet to another (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009). Hashtags for national events, such as sporting events, were the most frequently occurring hashtags used by celebrity practitioners and were all occasions in which they were performing (Page, 2012). This finding is similar to Hambrick et al. (2010) examination of professional athletes' Twitter use that found only 5% of tweets discussed sports other than their own teams and teammates. These results suggest two things; (1) hashtags are used by professional athletes to strategically build their brand through performances, products, and campaigns, and (2) there are practices of celebrity

that could be used more often and more effectively to reach out to fans in different ways.

Retweeting is an equally important linguistic tool used to practice celebrity on Twitter. While there are different reasons for how, why, and what users retweet, this practice contributes to conversations composed of a public interplay of voices that give rise to an emotional sense of shared conversational context (boyd et al., 2010). The practice of retweeting allows users to share information without directly being involved in a conversation. It also serves to invite their followers into a particular thread and be aware of a conversation or topic being discussed.

Understanding this tool for practicing celebrity on Twitter is valuable because the content users retweet is inextricably tied to the goals they have related to self-image and self-promotion, supporting conversation and building community (boyd et al., 2010). Also, the power of influence a professional athlete has is indicated by the amount their followers retweet their content (Gruzd et al., 2011). Page (2012) found the practice of modifying retweets is used as a technique of affiliation, most frequently by celebrity practitioners, to encourage engagement with their followers by expressing positive endorsements of the original tweet authors and sentiment they articulate.

Branding

Twitter is a brand-building tool that provides professional athletes the opportunity to build their personal brand and develop sponsorship opportunities. It is imperative to understand the strategies of practicing celebrity on Twitter to capitalize on having a successful social media presence that may result in social or economic gain. While NBA players often have successful personal brands due to the high-visibility and popularity of their on-court careers, WNBA players are looking for off-court opportunities to develop

their personal brands with a wider audience. Many professional athletes who are renowned within their sport lack visibility beyond them, which we posit is especially true for WNBA players. Regardless of the visibility differentials between NBA players and WNBA players in the mainstream media and general public, both groups want to build or continue to build their brand equity (the value of the brand) offline and online. Parmentier and Fischer (2012) proposed two brand-building goals for professional athletes; (1) a need to build their professional image of the brand they represent in relationship to their sport, and (2) a need to build their mainstream media persona by providing cues to their personality as an individual outside of their sport. When athletes garner attention outside the mainstream media of their sport they reach a wide audience of people other than sports fans, and sponsorship opportunities can exist beyond the court and beyond playing careers.

High-visibility, number of followers, and the public display of connections are crucial components of building a brand on Twitter and attracting potential sponsors. A professional athletes' audience and their discourse on Twitter are valuable commodities with the linguistic marketplace, which is used to build social and economic capital of those already in powerful positions in the offline world (Page, 2012). Smith, Fischer, and Yongjian (2012) found that, "Twitter hosts most brand-central content because of its technical design and greater cultural focus on sharing news, information, and opinions" (p. 109). Sponsors look to capitalize on professional athletes' network of followers, and their ability to disseminate their message on their own terms to fans. However, it is not just the size of their following that matters but rather the content they are providing (Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012).

Professional athletes are still learning what works and what doesn't work on Twitter to harness its power to positively build their brands. A tweet is not just a tweet, and a hashtag is not just a hashtag. A tweet invites a follower or searcher to share the values a professional athlete presents, and strategic hashtagging makes the values shared louder and more bondable (Zappavigna, 2011). Recognizing the power of Twitter and the tools used also makes salient the responsibility professional athletes' have to use the medium effectively to build their personal brands.

While Twitter provides fans with unprecedented access to professional athletes, its appeal and uniqueness is in its ability for interactions to be immediate and intimate. Professional athletes need to have consistent conversations with their followers or risk them turning away when they feel they no longer have a sense of engagement and oneness resulting in a loss of brand loyalty and credibility, which in this study is the professional athletes themselves (Yan, 2011; Edosomwan et al., 2011). In three case studies of professional athletes, Shaquille O'Neal (NBA), Paul Bissonnette (NHL), and Chad Ochocinco (NFL) all of whom have successful social media presences, Pedgoraro and Jinnah (2012) found their tweets consistent with the practices of celebrity through performed intimacy, authenticity and access, the construction of a consumable persona, and fan maintenance. Using these strategies coupled with brand-building practices on Twitter is paramount for professional athletes' to capitalize on the marketing, advertising, and sponsorship potential it provides.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Professional athletes were selected from www.sportsin140.com, a website devoted to identifying verified athlete Twitter accounts. The sample included 10 NBA and 10 WNBA players from the sport categories listed on the website. The complete list for both sports categories included 154 NBA and 89 WNBA professional athlete verified accounts. A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure equal representation in both sport-product categories that were selected. Retired athletes were removed from the sample and replaced with another professional athlete selected from the stratified random sample. Professional athletes that did not have verified accounts, had locked accounts, or did not tweet during the randomly selected dates were also removed from the sample and replaced with another professional athlete selected from the stratified random sample.

The 20 most recent tweets from a random weekday (Monday – Friday) and the 20 most recent tweets from a random weekend day (Saturday – Sunday) were selected and analyzed from each professional athlete’s Twitter account. All tweets for both NBA players and WNBA players were collected from www.allmytweets.net, a website that displays the 3,200 most recent tweets for a Twitter account on one page. The 20 tweets were selected because they represent the entire first page of tweets on a Twitter user’s home page viewed on Twitter’s website. The weekday and weekend day selected were during the regular season of each respective sport to account for differences in weekday and weekend Twitter usage; the NBA regular season is from November through April and the WNBA regular season is from May through September. Finally, the weekday and weekend day selected were in different weeks to circumvent the

possible analysis duplication of the same tweets. For example, a player may only tweet 10 times a day and therefore the 20 tweets analyzed could have been tweeted over two days, resulting in an overlap of the other randomly selected day. Initially the study aimed to analyze a total of 800 tweets, however one of the NBA players selected only tweeted 17 times from the second randomly selected date till the present. Therefore a total of 797 tweets were analyzed in the content analysis and two data sets were examined. In the first data set the unit of analysis was the tweets and in the second data set the unit of analysis was the professional athletes.

Content analysis was then employed to categorize and analyze the tweets in the two data sets. To ensure intercoder reliability, each of the 797 tweets were independently coded into one of six categories based on the practices of celebrity on Twitter and from an analysis of professional athletes' tweets (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Hambrick et al., 2010). As previously mentioned, several practices are synonymous in both celebrity as a practice on Twitter and brand-building practices such as, professional athletes' being personable, authentic, immediate, consistent, conversational, sincere, genuine, and regularly maintaining their followers (Page, 2012; Pedgoraro & Jinnah, 2012; Parmentier, 2012; Edosomwan et al., 2011; Yan, 2011; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Hambrick et al., 2010). The categories derived from the previous two studies and used in the current study were interactivity, affiliation, professional image sharing, diversion, promotional, and fanship. The categories were operationalized as:

- **INTERACTIVITY.** Interactivity is a professional athletes' direct communication with fans. The category is derived from the practice of celebrity and micro-celebrity that requires constant interactions with fans to preserve fan maintenance and power differentials (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Senft, 2008). The current study

modified the category to reflect the communication with fans through the one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many communication channels. Tweets in the interactivity category may include @ replies, retweets, modified retweets, and direct message mentions to their fans. For example,

ProAthlete1: Thank you for the support! “@fan1 ProAthlete1 was an all-star tonight! #Laker #MVP”

- AFFILIATION. Publicly displaying connections with other public figures in the sports, entertainment, or political industries. The category is derived from value of the public display of connections to affirm bonds with others who are in powerful positions in the mainstream media (Page, 2012; Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). This category incorporates the intimacy and authenticity constructs of the practice of celebrity by creating a sense of insidership through allowing fans to observe personal relationships between celebrities (Markwick & boyd, 2011). For example,

ProAthlete2: Just had dinner with the beautiful @taylorswift. Can't wait for her concert tomorrow night!

- PROFESSIONAL IMAGE SHARING. Insight into an athlete's team, teammates, sport, or profession. Tweets can include information about practices, games, events, travel, and other team-related content. The category is derived from brand-building practice of affiliating with the high-status playing opportunities of professional athletes to contribute to a strong professional image (Parmentier, 2012). For example,

ProAthlete3: Great team win tonight against the @Pacers. About to board this flight and pass out! See you soon #Boston #CantWaitToBeHome

- DIVERSION. Non-sports-related information provided by professional athletes such as, stories, quotes, pictures, videos, websites, etc. that provides 'backstage' access into the professional athletes' persona. The category derives from the practice of providing publicly visible persona cues to gain media exposure that reaches a wider audience beyond the sport (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). Tweets can include content that provides a candid and uncensored look into the professional athletes' personal life. This category incorporates all of the celebrity as a practice constructs through providing intimate, authentic, and sincere content about the professional athletes' persona off the court (Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2011). For example,

ProAthlete4: Happy 60th Birthday mom! So glad I got to spend the day with you. Look at the size of that cake... <http://pic.twitter.com/Ehle36FD>

- PROMOTIONAL. Publicly promoting, advertising, and marketing sponsorships, games, events, charitable causes, etc. The category is derived from the brand-build practices on Twitter to capitalize on social and economic gain. Professional

athletes may tweet at other Twitter accounts participating in the event or promotion, or use hashtags to persuade followers to interact, join, watch, or purchase the commodity being shared (Page, 2012; Zappavigna, 2011). For example,

ProAthlete5: Come out to @FinishLine in Orlando tonight and support my charity #KicksforKids. I'll be there and will match every donated shoe purchase for future ballers! #GiveBack

- FANSHIP. Discussion of athletes and teams outside of own sport, and other celebrity figures. Hambrick et al. (2010) found that athletes did not spend much time communicating about other sports, either positively or negatively. The current study modified this category to include other celebrity figures based on value in potential networking opportunities by networking with other powerful public figures. Tweets in this category differ from the affiliation category in that professional athletes' are expressing admiration for other celebrity figures and showing fanship, rather than a personal relationship. For example,

ProAthlete6: @AaronRodgers12 is the best QB in the league. Seriously, I'm becoming a cheesehead! #GoPack

Variables in the first data set also included day of the week, channels of communication, and the specific use of each type of linguistic tools (e.g., @ replies, hashtags, retweets, and links).

The categories for the second data set consisted of gender, number of followers, number following, total number of tweets, number of days to accumulate 20 tweets for both of the randomly selected days, and total number of linguistic tools (i.e. @ replies, hashtags, retweets, and links). As mentioned above, it is not just the size of a professional athlete's following that matters to sponsors but rather the content they are providing (Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012). We contended it is the size of the following, the content provided, and the use of linguistics tools to share content that will most effectively capitalize on the marketing and brand-building opportunities that Twitter provides.

Intercoder reliability was assessed using both percentage agreement and Cohen's kappa in both data sets, and a co-coder was used. Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2002) suggest selecting a minimum acceptable level of reliability for the index being used. For this study, we suggested a Cohen's kappa value of a minimum of .80, which is considered very good agreement (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). The second coder coded 80 (10%) of the tweets. The two coders agreed on all categories.

This study examined whether NBA players and WNBA players differ on:

1. their use of Twitter to practice celebrity
2. their use of Twitter for personal purposes
3. their use of Twitter for personal purposes or to practice celebrity based on number of followers
4. their use of Twitter tools such as hashtags (#s), @ replies, retweets (RTs), and links

Also, this study aimed to expand previous research to determine new celebrity practices on Twitter that NBA players and WNBA players should use to effectively build their brands.

The first data set from the content analysis was analyzed using Chi Square tests to determine if NBA players and WNBA players differ in their use of Twitter to practice celebrity. The two nominal variables that will be compared are male athletes and female athletes. If the results were significant, the findings suggested that NBA players and WNBA players use Twitter differently in the practice of celebrity. In the second data set, t-tests were used to compare averages of NBA players' and WNBA players' number of followers, number following, tweeting frequency, and use linguistic tools on Twitter. If the use of linguistic tools, number of followers, number following, and/or frequency differed between NBA players and WNBA players, the results suggested an opportunity

for the athletes with the lowest averages to use these tools more effectively on Twitter to build their brand. Finally, a series of Pearson Correlation Tests were run on all variables for NBA players and WNBA players separately to examine relationships between the variables. These tests determined if any of the variables have a correlation to number of followers within each group.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

In the first data set, the unit of analysis was the tweets ($n = 797$) and in the second data set, the unit of analysis was the athletes ($n = 20$; 10 NBA players and 10 WNBA players). A total of 797 tweets were analyzed due to one of the NBA athletes only tweeting 17 times from the second randomly selected date till the date the statistics were calculated. Of the 797 tweets, 397 were tweets from NBA players and 400 tweets were from WNBA players.

A series of Chi Square Tests were run in the first data set to examine the differences in tweeting habits between NBA players and WNBA payers. Variables included weekdays, weekends, categories, channels, and use of the linguistic tools: @ replies, hashtags (#), retweets (RT), and links.

A series of t-tests and Pearson Correlation tests were used in the second data set to compare the mean scores of Twitter habits between NBA players and WNBA players, as well as examine correlations between different variables. Variables included number of followers, number following, total number of tweets, number of days to accumulate twenty tweets for each of the four randomly selected dates, and the total number of linguistic tools used.

Data Set 1

Weekdays and Weekends

The results were significant for the Chi Square Test examining tweets for both NBA players and WNBA players during the week ($\chi^2 = 21,600$, $p = .001$), but not the weekend. Of the 545 weekday tweets, NBA players tweeted 266 times (49%) on weekdays compared to 279 times (51%) by WNBA players. Of the 252 weekend tweets,

NBA and WNBA players tweet similarly with 131 (52%) NBA and 121 (48%) WNBA player tweets. Overall, out of the 797 analyzed tweets, 545 (68%) were during the week and 252 (32%) were on the weekends.

NBA players tweeted nearly twice as many times on Tuesdays compared to WNBA players. In contrast, WNBA players tweeted nearly twice as many times on Wednesdays compared to NBA players. Both NBA players and WNBA players tweeted consistently on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays.

Table 4-1: Weekday (V4) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square

		Gender (V2)		Total
		0 = Male	1 = Female	
Weekday Tweets (V4)	0 = Not Present	131	121	252
	1 = Monday	62	76	138
	2 = Tuesday	44	23	67
	3 = Wednesday	49	88	137
	4 = Thursday	45	41	86
	5 = Friday	66	51	117
Total		397	400	797

Chi Square = 21.600, p = .001

Categories

The results were significant for the Chi Square Test examining the different categories (e.g., Interactivity, Affiliation, Professional Image Sharing, Diversion, Promotional, and Fanship) used by NBA players and WNBA players ($\chi^2 = 50.712$, $p < .001$). All six categories had significant differences between NBA and WNBA players.

The categories were operationalized as:

- INTERACTIVITY. Professional athletes' direct communication with fans.
- AFFILIATION. Publicly displaying connections with other public figures in the sports, entertainment, or political industries.

- PROFESSIONAL IMAGE SHARING. Insight into an athlete’s team, teammates, sport, or profession.
- DIVERSION. Non-sports-related information provided by professional athletes such as, stories, quotes, pictures, videos, websites, etc.
- PROMOTIONAL. Publicly promoting, advertising, and marketing sponsorships, games, events, charitable causes, etc.
- FANSHIP. Discussion of athletes and teams outside of own sport, and other celebrity figures.

Table 4-2: Categories (V7) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square

		Gender (V2)		
		0 = Male	1 = Female	Total
Categories (V7)	0 = Unknown	13	1	14
	1 = Interactivity	112	135	247
	2 = Affiliation	27	1	28
	3 = Professional Image Sharing	78	98	176
	4 = Diversion	113	85	198
	5 = Promotional	42	51	93
	6 = Fanship	12	29	41
Total		397	400	797

Chi Square = 50.712, $p < .001$

NBA players tweeted more frequently in the Affiliation and Diversion categories. Of the 28 tweets that fell in the Affiliation category, 27 (96%) were by NBA players compared to 1 (4%) by WNBA players. Of the 198 tweets that fell in the Diversion category, 113 (57%) were by NBA players compared to 85 (43%) by WNBA players. Thus NBA players displayed their publication connections with other celebrities and tweeted about content other than basketball more than WNBA players.

WNBA players tweeted more frequently in the Interactivity, Professional Image Sharing, Promotional, and Fanship categories. Of the 247 tweets that fell in the Interactivity category, 135 (55%) were by WNBA players compared to 112 (45%) by

NBA players. Of the 176 tweets that fell in the Professional Image Sharing category, 98 (56%) were by WNBA players compared to 78 (44%) by NBA players. Of the 93 tweets that fell in the Promotional category, 51 (55%) were by WNBA players compared to 42 (45%) by NBA players. Of the 41 tweets that fell in the Fanship category, 29 (71%) were by WNBA players compared to 12 (29%) by NBA players. Thus WNBA players discussed their profession and promoted affiliated brands more than NBA players. WNBA players also showed their fanship for other celebrities and interacted with fans more frequently than NBA players.

Overall, the most frequently-used categories of both NBA player and WNBA player tweets were: 1) Interactivity (31%), 2) Diversion (25%), 3) Professional Image Sharing (22%), 4) Promotional (12%), 5) Fanship (5%), and 6) Affiliation (2%). A total of 14 tweets (1%) combined by NBA players and WNBA players were unable to be determined. Specifically for NBA players, the most frequently- to least frequently-used categories were: 1) Interactivity (28%), 2) Diversion (28%), 3) Professional Image Sharing (20%), 4) Promotional (11%), 5) Affiliation (7%), 6) Fanship (3%), and 7) Unknown (3%). Specifically for WNBA Players, the most frequently- to least frequently-used categories were: 1) Interactivity (34%), 2) Professional Image Sharing (25%), 3) Diversion (21%), 4) Promotional (13%), 5) Fanship (7%), 6) Affiliation (0%), and 7) Unknown (0%).

Channels

The results were significant for the Chi Square Test examining the different channels (e.g., one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many) used by NBA and WNBA players ($\chi^2 = 46.960$, $p < .001$). All three channels had significant differences between NBA players and WNBA players.

Table 4-3: Channels (V8) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square

		Gender (V2)		Total
		0 = Male	1 = Female	
Channels (V8)	0 = Unknown	6	0	6
	1 = One-to-One	79	138	217
	2 = One-to-Many	275	192	467
	3 = Many-to-Many	37	70	107
Total		397	400	797

Chi Square = 46.960, $p < .001$

NBA players tweeted most frequently using the one-to-many channel compared to WNBA players tweeted most frequently in the one-to-one and many-to-many channels. Of the 217 tweets that fell into the one-to-one channel, 138 (64%) were by WNBA players compared to 79 (36%) by NBA players. Of the 467 tweets that fell into the one-to-many channel, 275 (59%) were by NBA players compared to 192 (41%) by WNBA players. Of the 107 tweets that fell into the many-to-many channel, 70 (65%) were by WNBA players compared to 37 (35%) by NBA players.

Overall, the most frequently- to least frequently-used channels combined of both NBA players and WNBA player tweets were: 1) one-to-many (60%), 2) one-to-one (27%), many-to-many (13%). A total of 6 tweets (0%) combined by NBA players and WNBA players were unable to be determined. Specifically for NBA players, the most frequently- to least frequently-used channels were: one-to-many (69%), one-to-one (20%), many-to-many (9%), and Unknown (2%). Specifically for WNBA players, the most frequently- to least frequently-used channels were: 1) one-to-many (48%), 2) one-to-one (34%), and many-to-many (18%).

Linguistic Tools

The results were significant for all Chi Square Tests examining the different linguistic tools (e.g., @ reply, hashtag (#), retweet (RT), and links) used by NBA players and WNBA players (@ reply $x^2 = 7.369$, $p = .007$; hashtag $x^2 = 44.657$, $p < .001$; retweet $x^2 = 8.516$, $p = .004$; and links $x^2 = 11.259$, $p = .001$).

@ Replies

Table 4-4: At Reply (V10) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square

		Gender (V2)		Total
		0 = Male	1 = Female	
@ Replies (V10)	0 = Not Present	168	132	300
	1 = Present	229	268	497
Total		397	400	797

Chi Square = 7.369, $p = .007$

Of the 797 tweets analyzed, 497 (62%) contained an @ reply. Of the 400 WNBA player tweets, 268 (67%) contained @ replies compared to 229 (58%) of the 397 NBA player tweets.

Hashtags

Table 4-5: Hashtag (V11) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square

		Gender (V2)		Total
		0 = Male	1 = Female	
Hashtag (V11)	0 = Not Present	298	370	668
	1 = Present	99	30	129
Total		397	399	796

Chi Square = 44.657, $p < .001$

Of the 797 tweets analyzed, only 129 (16%) contained hashtags. Of the 397 NBA player tweets, 99 (25%) contained hashtags compared to only 30 (8%) of the 400 WNBA player tweets. The majority of total tweets (84%) did not contain hashtags.

Retweets

Table 4-6: Retweet (V12) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square

		Gender (V2)		Total
		0 = Male	1 = Female	
Retweets (V12)	0 = Not Present	269	308	577
	1 = Present	128	92	220
Total		397	400	797

Chi Square = 8.516, $p = .004$

Of the 797 tweets analyzed, only 220 (28%) were retweets. Of the 397 NBA player tweets, 128 (32%) were retweets compared to only 92 (23%) of the 400 WNBA player tweets. The majority of total tweets (72%) were not retweets.

Links

Table 4-7: Links (V13) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square

		Gender (V2)		Total
		0 = Male	1 = Females	
Links (V13)	0 = Not Present	271	315	586
	1 = Present	126	85	211
Total		397	400	797

Chi Square = 11.259, $p = .001$

Of the 797 tweets analyzed, only 211 (26%) contained links. Of the 397 NBA player tweets, 126 (32%) contained links compared to only 85 (21%) of the 400 WNBA tweets. The majority of total tweets (74%) did not contain links.

Data Set 2

In the second data set, t-tests were used to compare mean scores between NBA players and WNBA players for different variables (e.g., number of followers, number following, number of tweets, number of days to accumulate 20 tweets for each of the four randomly selected dates, and the total number of linguistic tools used). Of the six variables, only number of followers ($t = 10.301$, $p < .001$) and number of following ($t =$

3.039, $p = .007$) were significant. However, there are important notes on some of the non-significant variables.

Table 4-8: Means (Standard Deviation) and T-Test Results

SPSS Column	Variable	NBA Mean (Std. Deviation)	WNBA Mean (Std. Deviation)	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
nufollow1	Number of Followers	5.4000 (.96609)	1.5000 (.70711)	10.301	.000
V4	Number Following	590.40 (313.930)	262.00 (134.893)	3.039	.007
V5	Number of Tweets	6614.10 (1858.575)	10238.20 (10047.248)	-1.122	.277
V6	Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets - Date 1	15.10 (20.792)	9.80 (9.987)	.727	.477
V7	Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets - Date 2	16.70 (14.538)	10.70 (11.672)	1.018	.322
V8	Total Number of Linguistic Tools	58.50 (23.609)	47.50 (15.204)	1.239	.231

Number of Followers

The initial results of the t-test between gender and number of followers were not significant ($t = 1.803$, $p = .088$). Upon closer examination, the mean scores for NBA players were 749,802.50 and the mean scores for WNBA players were 6,129.60. Actual data showed NBA players had significantly more followers than WNBA players that caused statistical problems when running the t-test. Due to the substantial different actual means, the number of followers were condensed into a variable that ranged between 1 and 7 to lessen the variance (see Table 4-10).

Table 4-9: Number of Followers (V3) vs. Gender (V2) – T-Test

	Gender (V2)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Number of Actual Followers (V3)	0 = Male	10	749802.50	1304439.630	412500.030
	1 = Female	10	6129.60	5294.620	1674.306

t-test = 1.803, p = .088

Table 4-10: Condensed Number of Followers Variable (nufollow1)

Variable Category	Number of Actual Followers
1	1 – 5,000
2	5,001 – 10,000
3	10,001 – 50,000
4	50,001 – 100,000
5	100,001 – 200,000
6	200,001- 500,000
7	x > 500,000

Table 4-11: Number of Followers (nufollow1) vs. Gender (V2) – T-Test

	Gender (V2)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Number of Follower Variable Category (nufollow1)	0 = Male	10	5.4000	.96609	.30551
	1 = Female	10	1.5000	.70711	.22361

t-test = 10.301, p < .001

After condensing the number of followers into a ranged 1-7 variable, results of the t-test between gender and number of followers were significant (t = 10.301, p < .001). The mean score for NBA players was 5.4 compared to 1.5 for WNBA players. This result shows that NBA players are followed 3.6 times more than WNBA players on average. In actual data, NBA players had 122 times more followers than WNBA players on average.

Number Following

The results of the t-test between gender and number following were significant ($t = 3.039$, $p = .007$). On average NBA players (mean = 590.40) followed more accounts than WNBA players (mean = 262.00). The results showed that NBA players follow other Twitters users 2.25 times more than WNBA players on average.

Table 4-12: Number Following (V4) vs. Gender (V2) – T-Test

	Gender (V2)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Number Following (V4)	0 = Male	10	590.40	313.930	99.273
	1 = Female	10	262.00	134.893	42.657

t-test = 3.039, $p = .007$

Number of Tweets

The results of the t-test between gender and number of tweets were not significant ($t = 8.516$, $p = .277$). However, the mean score for WNBA players was 10,328 and the mean score for NBA players was 6,614. Upon closer examination a significant variance was noticed between the most frequent and least frequent tweeters. Out of the top 8 tweeters, 6 were WNBA players and the 3 lowest tweeters were also WNBA players (see Table 4-14). The results showed that WNBA players tended to either tweet a lot or rarely in comparison to NBA players.

Table 4-13: Number of Tweets (V5) vs. Gender (V2) – T-Test

	Gender (V2)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Number of Tweets (V5)	0 = Male	10	6614.10	1858.575	587.733
	1 = Female	10	10238.20	10047.248	3177.219

t-test = 8.516, $p = .277$

Table 4-14: Number of Actual Tweets (V5) vs. Gender (V2) – Chi Square

		Gender (V2)		Total
		0 = Male	1 = Female	
Number of Actual Tweets (V5)	139	0	1	1
	1499	0	1	1
	3614	0	1	1
	3760	1	0	1
	4404	1	0	1
	4691	0	1	1
	5276	1	0	1
	5504	1	0	1
	6884	1	0	1
	7151	1	0	1
	7316	1	0	1
	7672	1	0	1
	7833	0	1	1
	8442	1	0	1
	9317	0	1	1
	9721	0	1	1
	9732	1	0	1
	11095	0	1	1
	21321	0	1	1
	33152	0	1	1
Total	10	10	20	

Total Number of Linguistic Tools

The results of the t-test between gender and number of linguistic tools were not significant ($t = 1.239$, $p = .231$). However, as the results from first data set showed, NBA players and WNBA players had significant differences in all four linguistic tools. The results from the Chi Square Tests in the first data set compared with the results with the t-test in the second data set show that while NBA players and WNBA players use different linguistic tools, the frequency of linguistic tools used in tweets is similar.

Table 4-15: Total Number of Linguistic Tools (V8) vs. Gender (V2) – T-Test

	Gender (V2)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total Number of Linguistic Tools (V8)	0 = Male	10	58.50	23.609	7.466
	1 = Female	10	47.50	15.204	4.808

t-test = 1.239, p = .231

Tables 4-16 and 4-17 provide overall descriptive statistics for both NBA players and WNBA players in the second data set. Minimum, maximum, and mean values are presented for all variables and include standard deviation values.

Table 4-16: NBA Player Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Number of Actual Followers (V3)	10	71806	4075502	749802.50	1304439.630
Number of Follower Variable Category (nufollow1)	10	4.00	7.00	5.4000	.96609
Number Following (V4)	10	243	1309	590.40	313.930
Number of Tweets (V5)	10	3760	9732	6614.10	1858.575
Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets – Date 1 (V6)	10	1	73	15.10	20.792
Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets - Date 2 (V7)	10	4	50	16.70	14.538
Total Number of Linguistic Tools (V8)	10	31	103	58.50	23.609

Table 4-17: WNBA Players Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Number of Actual Followers (V3)	10	1700	19639	6129.60	5294.620
Number of Follower Variable Category (nufollow1)	10	1.00	3.00	1.5000	.70711
Number Following (V4)	10	64	510	262.00	134.893
Number of Tweets (V5)	10	139	33152	10238.20	10047.248
Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets – Date 1 (V6)	10	1	35	9.80	9.987
Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets - Date 2 (V7)	10	2	33	10.70	11.672
Total Number of Linguistic Tools (V8)	10	27	80	47.50	15.204

NBA Players and WNBA Players – Pearson Correlation Tests

Finally, a series of Pearson Correlation Tests were run of all variables for NBA players and WNBA players separately to examine relationships between the variables. Only one correlation was statistically significant between the variables of the second data set. The number of days to accumulate 20 tweets on the first randomly selected date and the second randomly selected date were correlated for both NBA players and WNBA players (NBA players $r = .793$, $p = .006$; WNBA players $r = .625$, $p = .053$). The results suggest that tweeting habits for both NBA players and WNBA players are similar across time.

Table 4-18: All Variables for NBA Players - Pearson Correlation Test

		Number of Actual Followers (V3)	Number of Follower Variable Category (nufollow1)	Number Following (V4)	Number of Tweets (V5)	Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets – Date 1 (V6)	Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets - Date 2 (V7)	Total Number of Linguistic Tools (V8)
Number of Actual Followers (V3)	Pearson Correlation	1	.686*	-.115	-.396	-.024	.069	.309
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.028	.752	.257	.948	.850	.385
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Number of Follower Variable Category (nufollow1)	Pearson Correlation	.686*	1	-.555	-.341	.313	.373	.487
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.028		.096	.335	.378	.288	.153
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Number Following (V4)	Pearson Correlation	-.115	-.555	1	.240	-.228	-.261	-.282
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.752	.096		.505	.527	.467	.430
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Number of Tweets (V5)	Pearson Correlation	-.396	-.341	.240	1	-.046	-.124	-.271
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.257	.335	.505		.899	.732	.449
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets – Date 1 (V6)	Pearson Correlation	-.024	.313	-.228	-.046	1	.793**	-.044
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.948	.378	.527	.899		.006	.903
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets - Date 2 (V7)	Pearson Correlation	.069	.373	-.261	-.124	.793**	1	.180
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.850	.288	.467	.732	.006		.618
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Total Number of Linguistic Tools (V8)	Pearson Correlation	.309	.487	-.282	-.271	-.044	.180	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.385	.153	.430	.449	.903	.618	
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10

Table 4-19: All Variables for WNBA Players – Pearson Correlation Test

		Number of Actual Followers (V3)	Number of Follower Variable Category (nufollow1)	Number Following (V4)	Number of Tweets (V5)	Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets – Date 1 (V6)	Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets - Date 2 (V7)	Total Number of Linguistic Tools (V8)
Number of Actual Followers (V3)	Pearson Correlation	1	.914**	.095	-.126	.157	-.122	.132
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.794	.729	.665	.737	.717
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Number of Follower Variable Category (nufollow1)	Pearson Correlation	.914**	1	.218	.056	.031	-.061	.109
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.545	.877	.931	.868	.765
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Number Following (V4)	Pearson Correlation	.095	.218	1	.313	-.390	-.408	.119
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.794	.545		.379	.265	.242	.742
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Number of Tweets (V5)	Pearson Correlation	-.126	.056	.313	1	-.494	.227	-.195
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.729	.877	.379		.146	.528	.590
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets – Date 1 (V6)	Pearson Correlation	.157	.031	-.390	-.494	1	.625	-.241
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.665	.931	.265	.146		.053	.503
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Number of Days to Accumulate 20 Tweets - Date 2 (V7)	Pearson Correlation	-.122	-.061	-.408	.227	.625	1	-.440
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.737	.868	.242	.528	.053		.203
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Total Number of Linguistic Tools (V8)	Pearson Correlation	.132	.109	.119	-.195	-.241	-.440	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.717	.765	.742	.590	.503	.203	
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The results from the study showed NBA players and WNBA players used Twitter similarly in some ways and differently in others. While examining both user-generated content and the use of linguistic tools, almost all variables tested in the first and second data sets had significant differences between the two groups.

Time and Frequency

NBA players and WNBA players had similar tweeting habits on weekdays and weekends. Of all the tweets analyzed, 68% were on weekdays and 32% were on weekends. While the results showed that NBA players tweet more frequently on Tuesdays and Saturdays, and WNBA players tweet more frequently on Wednesdays and Sundays, these results do not suggest any major impact differences. It is more important to note that both groups tweet more frequently during the weekday than the weekend. Finally, this study found similarities in the tweeting frequency of NBA players and WNBA players across time. However, differences were found in the overall total tweets between NBA players and WNBA players. Of the 20 professional athletes analyzed, six out of the top eight tweeters were WNBA players and the three lowest tweeters were also WNBA players. This result suggests that WNBA players either tweet a lot or a little in comparison to NBA players.

Categories

The user-generated content of tweets was the most important variable in the study to examine the similarities and differences of practicing celebrity on Twitter between NBA players and WNBA players. According to Marwick and boyd (2011),

practicing celebrity on Twitter is the appearance and performance of 'backstage' access by celebrity practitioners, referred to as professional athletes in this study. Similarly, Hambrick et al. (2010) found that athletes with the most followers had more interactivity with fans.

The results of this study found WNBA players leading four (e.g., Interactivity, Professional Image Sharing, Promotional, and Fanship) of the six categories, while NBA players led two (e.g., Affiliation and Diversion) categories. WNBA players tended to practice celebrity in tweets by interacting with fans, showing fanship of other celebrities, and through promoting their professional image and affiliated brands more than NBA players. In contrast, NBA players practiced celebrity on Twitter by displaying public connections with other celebrities and by providing backstage access into their personal lives. This may be plausible due to the possibility that NBA players knowing more celebrities compared to WNBA players. For example, Kobe Bryant, of the Los Angeles Lakers is arguably one of the most famous and best players in the NBA. Several celebrities frequently attend his games including season ticket holder Jack Nicholson. Also, Dwayne Wade, of the Miami Heat is in high-profile relationship with celebrity actress Gabrielle Union. Therefore, NBA players may tweet to other celebrities more frequently simply because they know a lot of them.

While it is important to know which of the two groups led each category, it is also important to examine the overall similarities between the user-generated content of NBA players and WNBA players. Of all tweets, the most to least frequently tweeted categories were; 1) Interactivity (31%), 2) Diversion (25%), 3) Professional Image Sharing (22%), 4) Promotional (12%), 5) Fanship (5%), and 6) Affiliation (2%).

Interactivity was the top tweeted category for both NBA players and WNBA players. Both groups had Diversion (NBA second most, WNBA third most) and Professional Image Sharing (NBA third most, WNBA second most) in their top second and third categories, and Promotional ranked fourth for both groups. These results suggest both NBA players and WNBA players use Twitter to practice celebrity by sharing personal information, publicly acknowledging fans, and promoting their professional image and affiliated brands.

Channels

Twitter has also been credited with providing direct access -- or at least the perception of direct access -- to professional athletes without having traditional filters of managers, public relations teams, and the mainstream media. Therefore, this study examined and found differences in the channels (e.g., one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many) used by NBA players and WNBA players to communicate on Twitter. The study found WNBA players leading the one-to-one and many-to-many channels while NBA players led the one-to-many channels. NBA players most frequently tweeting the one-to-many channel suggest the recognition of power differentials between themselves and their followers. This recognition of power differentials allows NBA players to treat their followers as a fan base which Marwick and boyd (2011) found as a crucial component in practicing celebrity on Twitter. It also is plausible they have bigger egos and are more self-centered compared to lesser-known WNBA players. WNBA players also tweeted most frequently using the one-to-many channel, but also tweeted the one-to-one channel almost twice as often as NBA players. These results suggest that WNBA players, similar to NBA players, treat their followers as a fan base while also taking the time to interact with fans on a personal level. Similar to the Hambrick et al.

(2010) study, this study also found Twitter to be a valuable platform to shorten the distance between fans and the game, and proved particularly useful for lesser-known professional athletes.

Linguistics Tools

Similarities and differences between NBA players and WNBA players were also found in the use of linguistic tools. Linguistic tools have become increasingly important due to a cultural shift of electronic discourse from online conversation to 'searchable talk' (Zappavigna, 2011). Overall, no differences were found in the total amount of linguistic tools used between NBA players and WNBA players, however, significant differences were found in what linguistic tools were used (e.g., @ reply, hashtag, retweet, and links). WNBA players led in @ replies over NBA players, while NBA players led in hashtags, retweets, and links over WNBA players. Interestingly, of all tweets analyzed, 62% contained an @ reply, which is contrary to the Page (2012) study that found 63% of celebrity practitioners tweets did not contain an @ reply. This finding suggests both NBA players and WNBA players practice celebrity on Twitter, in regards to interactivity, more effectively than celebrities in other industries. It is also plausible that NBA players and WNBA players have learned to use linguistic tools more effectively because they are more common now than when the Page (2012) study was conducted.

In contrast, only 28% of tweets were retweets, 26% contained links, and 16% contained hashtags. These findings indicate a missed opportunity by NBA players and WNBA players with a number of recent studies (Page, 2012; Zappavigna, 2011; boyd et al., 2010; Honeycutt & Herring, 2009) suggesting the use of linguistic tools aids professional athletes in practicing celebrity on Twitter.

Number of Followers

The mean score for NBA players (749,802.50) was significantly higher than the mean score for WNBA players (6,129.60). Using raw data, NBA players had 122 times more followers than WNBA players on average, with the top NBA player having 4,075,502 followers compared to the top WNBA player having 19,639 followers. Due to the extreme variance, Pearson Correlations Tests were run separately for NBA players and WNBA players to examine if the different variables within each group positively affected the number of followers.

Interestingly for both NBA players and WNBA players, no correlation was found between the number of followers versus the number of tweets, tweeting frequency, and total number of linguistic tools. This finding suggests that while Twitter has shortened the distance between fans and the game, there are still extreme differences in the amount of reach between NBA players and WNBA players. However, while reach may be different based on the number of followers, total impressions through 'searchable talk' makes WNBA players' content just as easily accessible as NBA players' content.

Finally, it was expected to find NBA players having more followers than WNBA players because of the difference in popularity and coverage in the mainstream media, however the extreme variance of 122 times more was unexpected. Pegoraro and Jihnnah (2012) suggest that sponsors not only look to capitalize on professional athletes' network of followers, but also are interested in the content they tweet. While WNBA players can control content, the results from the current study highlight the existing popularity differential between male and female athletes that puts them at a

disadvantage of being considered for sponsorship opportunities compared to NBA players.

Overall Conclusions and Implications

Both NBA players and WNBA players use Twitter to practice celebrity. The study extends previous research on practicing celebrity on Twitter by providing an in-depth analysis of both user-generated content and the use of linguistic tools. Both NBA players and WNBA players practice celebrity on Twitter through continuous maintenance of fan bases, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, construction of a consumable persona, and recognition of power differentials between themselves and their fans (Marwick and boyd, 2011). Also, both NBA players and WNBA players adjust their tweets to address their followers' needs through interactivity, diversion, sharing information about their profession, promoting affiliated brands, showing fanship for other celebrities, and using links to share pictures, videos, and websites (Hambrick et al., 2010). Unlike previous research, this study is the first to concurrently examine all components of practicing celebrity on Twitter while comparing the differences between male and female athletes. This study concludes that while both NBA players and WNBA players practice celebrity on Twitter, the content in tweets and the use of specific linguistics tools in tweets may vary. This variance did not indicate that one group practiced celebrity more effectively than the other, but rather they practiced celebrity differently at times. Finally, while Twitter provides an equal platform for NBA players and WNBA players to practice celebrity and build their brands, it still favors NBA players over WNBA players similar to the mainstream media. This favoritism may be plausible due to fans more frequently searching out NBA players on Twitter over WNBA players because they are covered considerably more in the mainstream media. Therefore, the

popularity differential between NBA players and WNBA players still exists in the social media world.

Limitations

Twitter only allows the 3,200 most recent tweets to be retrieved for each account. Two of the randomly selected WNBA players had significant followers, however, they could not be used in the study because their tweets during the two randomly selected dates preceded the 3,200 retrievable limit. The study also found limitations in analyzing only 20 tweets on each of the four randomly selected dates. Both groups had players removed from the study due to a lack of tweets, however it may be valuable to examine how inactive users still have considerable followers. Finally, WNBA players were removed for having locked accounts that therefore meant their tweets were inaccessible. These WNBA players also had considerable number of followers compared to number following and could prove valuable in examining if a perceived 'special access' exists with locked accounts.

Recommendations for Future Research

Due to limited time and resources only 10 NBA and 10 WNBA accounts were examined. It would be beneficial in future research to examine more NBA players and WNBA players, and also cross-examine them with other professional athletes and celebrities to determine similarities and differences.

Future research should also examine the demographics of professional athletes' followers. Valuable information could be gained by understanding the differences not only in the tweeting habits of male and female professional athletes, but also the tweeting habits of male and female fans. NBA players and WNBA players could

continue to adjust their tweets to meet their fans needs and in return possibly gain followers and increase engagement.

Engagement should be a priority for future research. While tweeting habits, user-generated content, and use of linguistic tools were examined and compared to the total number of followers; engagement is a significant factor in the effectiveness of tweets that was not examined. Grudz et. al (2011) found the power of influence a professional athlete has is indicated by the amount their followers retweet their content. Examining the number of engaged users, impressions, reach, clicks, and virality of tweets can better assist NBA players and WNBA players in understanding what content has the most engagement with fans.

A mixed methods study would provide a more in-depth analysis by comparing quantitative data with qualitative insights. Interviews with NBA players and WNBA players compared with interviews with selected followers would offer a richer understanding of how practicing celebrity on Twitter correlates to the likeability and brand building efforts of professional athletes. Without qualitative data examining how fans behaviors are changed through the practice of celebrity on Twitter it may be impossible to truly understand its effectiveness.

Finally, the popularity and coverage of NBA players and WNBA players in the mass media should be compared to the popularity and coverage on Twitter. The operationalization of popularity and coverage could prove difficult across the two media, however it would be beneficial to understand how practicing celebrity on Twitter can affect the image of professional athletes in fans' minds compared to the image presented to them in the mass media.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kristina Netzler was raised in the small town of Wautoma, WI. She graduated from Wautoma High School in May of 2003. Following high school graduation, Kristina immediately jumped into her new role as a college student. She received a basketball scholarship and took time to determine which career path to follow. She eventually found the perfect major, Marketing, and graduated in May of 2007 with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Florida. Kristina was the first member of the Netzler family to graduate from college.

During the summer following her junior year, Kristina received an opportunity to work for the NBA and WNBA Minnesota Timberwolves and Lynx franchise. She spent her senior year interning full-time in Minneapolis, Minnesota and commuting weekly to La Crosse, Wisconsin to complete her final year of education. Kristina spent the next six years working for the NBA and WNBA Seattle Sonics and Storm, Fresno State Athletics Department, and the University Athletic Association with focuses in marketing, advertising, and retention. In January 2012, she was accepted into the College of Journalism at the University of Florida to pursue a Master of Advertising. During that same time, Kristina was offered a New Student and Family Programs Graduate Assistantship position in the Dean of Student Office of the Division of Student Affairs. Kristina's plans for the future are simple: pursue a career that positively impacts people's lives by doing things the right way, being a person of integrity, and simply being happy.