

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

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Abstract

A content analysis study examined the Twitter sites of 488 local television stations in the U.S., based on a strategic and tactical model of media promotion. One finding of the study was that news stories were the most frequently occurring items on the sites. However, stations that offered news items seldom also promoted their regular newscasts. Overall, stations did not appear to be using their Twitter sites as a tool to promote newscasts or non-news programming.

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The primary goal of local television stations is to attract and maintain audiences, which translates into ratings and ultimately advertising dollars. In recent years, however, keeping viewers has become a challenge for broadcasters. One example is viewership of local television news. As Ferguson (1997) noted, “Local evening news is television’s front page” (p. 182). It is largely the means by which stations have an opportunity to connect with their community (Kurpius, 2000) and through which the community often comes to know itself. Despite that sentiment, recent statistics serve as a negative omen for stations, since news and public affairs comprise most, if not all, of a station’s programs that originate locally. According to Nielsen Media Research, the number of people who watch local television news has either declined or remained about the same (Pew Project, 2009). For example, from 1998 to 2008, the number of people who said they watched local evening newscasts had fallen from 64% to 52%.

An increasingly competitive media environment (Eastman, Ferguson, & Klein, 2006) is one possible contributor to the erosion of ratings and fragmentation of audiences. Coupled with changes in the consumption of traditional media is the growing use of the Internet and mobile devices (The Nielsen Company, 2009). Although research findings are mixed about whether the Internet substitutes for television viewing (see e.g., Dimmick, Chen & Li, 2004; Ferguson & Perse, 2000; Lin, 2004), the industry still must deal with the growing popularity of accessing television programs online (The Nielsen Company, 2008).

Although identity and image have long been an essential component of local television marketing, the increased presence of cable and satellite has precipitated more branding in television (Bellamy & Traudt, 2000). In fact, television station promotions are so important that

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

Media organizations have increasingly recognized Internet-based delivery to be an important part of the information mix, particularly as a support mechanism (Chan-Olmsted & Ha, 2003) and as a tool to enhance the differentiation of media from its competitors (Chan-Olmsted, 2000). More recently, social networking has become an added dimension for television stations as a means of making a somewhat interpersonal connection with their audiences. By capitalizing on the popularity of social networks, stations are able to go beyond push communications and facilitate two-way communication and audience expression.

Currently, one of the fastest growing social network systems is Twitter, a micro-blogging platform that enables subscribers to post very brief comments about what they are doing (Twitter, 2009). According to the Web site tvontwitter.com, more than 580 television stations and networks in the U.S. were using Twitter (at the time this paper was written). Despite its growing usage, however, little research has focused on this communication tool. Using a content analysis method, this study examined the ways that local television stations in the U.S. use Twitter. Following the promotional model developed by Eastman, Ferguson and Klein (2006), we analyzed the content of television Twitter sites in relation to strategic goals, strategic targets, and tactical approaches.

Review of Literature

Twitter and Social Networks

Twitter is a Web-based social network system that was first made available for public use in August 2006. Referred to as a “status update system,” Twitter enables people to post *tweets*, which are brief statements about what they are doing and to read the postings of others (Fox, Zickuhr, & Smith, 2009, para. 1). Compared with other social network systems, such as MySpace and Facebook, Twitter limits postings to 140 characters per comment (Twitter, 2009). Subscribers to the system have found Twitter to be useful for everything from a personal mini-diary of daily activities to business applications (Miller, 2009). Despite the content limitations, benefits of Twitter include simplicity (Grossman, 2009), more frequent postings (Java, Finin, Song, & Tseng, 2007), and linking to more detailed information other sites (Johnson, 2009). Twitter users also have the ability to “tweet” on mobile devices (Farhi, 2009). According to one recent report, 40% of Twitter subscribers used the service “sometimes” via mobile devices (MediaPost, 2009).

It was estimated that, by the end of 2008, 11% of adults who use the Internet also used some form of “microblogging” program, such as Twitter (Lenhart & Fox, 2009). As of March 2009, one report indicated that there were about nine million Twitter users (“comScore Media Metrix,” 2009). One factor that distinguishes Twitter from other popular social network systems is the age of the users. Contrary to the traditional new technology diffusion model in which a younger population drives the growth of the innovation (Miller, 2009), recent studies have shown that the highest percentage of Twitter subscribers fall between the ages of 25 and 34 (“Do you know,” 2009; Lenhart & Fox, 2009); although one study indicated that 37% of Twitter users were ages 18-24 (Fox, Zickuhr, & Smith, 2009). A comScore report noted that just 11% of

Twitter users were ages 12-17 (Miller, 2009). The fact that Twitter attracts an older demographic might be due to the system being information based rather than a conversation with acquaintances, which is characteristic of social network used by young people (Miller, 2009).

Recent reports have found that women use Twitter more than men (Fox, Zickuhr, & Smith, 2009; Heil & Piskorski, 2009), but that men tend to have more followers on the system (Heil & Piskorski, 2009). On the individual level, research has shown that people use Twitter for obtaining information and connecting with friends (Java, Fanin, Song, & Tseng, 2007).

Despite the numbers of people who use the system, one market research firm found that “75% of all Twitter activity comes from just 5% of users” (para. 3) and that “94% of Twitter users have fewer than 100 followers” (para. 4) (“Do you know,” 2009). Other research has shown that, in comparison with the numbers of individuals who use Twitter, few of them actually post (Heil & Piskorski, 2009). One study found that about 40% of tweets had “pointless babble” (Pear Analytics cited in “What people are,” 2009).

Individuals are not the only ones participating in social media systems. Media organizations are using Twitter as a two-way device between themselves and their audiences. While the television industry as a whole is still trying to determine how best to use this social network system, actors from various network programs are attracting a following (Collins, 2009). Cable and networks are also getting involved in Twitter by making connections to audiences of programs (Steinberg, 2009). On the local side, stations not only are able to provide updates regarding news stories, but they also find the system useful for obtaining tips about potential news topics from their audiences (Farhi, 2009; Petner, 2009).

Social Networking

Historically, research regarding social networks and network theory has revolved around traditional interpersonal communication. One characteristic of social networks is that they are dynamic in nature (Davern, 1997; Rogers & Kincaid, 1981) in that individuals actively “create and share information” (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981, p. 43). In contrast to models of linear communication, the network model relies heavily on a feedback loop among actors who transmit as well as receive information. As a result, network members and the network as a whole may influence each other (Gould, 1993). The concept of a dynamic network also carries with it the idea that networks change over time (Davern, 1997). The structure is flexible in that ties are connected and broken through social changes. Extending the concept to online communication, social network services enable users to provide information about themselves, while connecting to others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). What the Internet facilitates, that goes beyond the limitation of traditional face-to-face social networks, are connections not previously possible between individuals (Haythornethwaite, 2005).

Over the years, scholars have examined how and why people use various types of electronic media in a variety of contexts. Given the younger demographic that characterizes the principle users of online social networks, research has largely focused on college students. Some of that research has considered motivations for using online social networks. Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) found that Facebook was an important tool for maintaining “bridging social capital.” There also was an increase in bridging social capital for individuals with low self esteem and life satisfaction. Furthermore, they noted that more use of the social network program was associated with “bonding social capital.”

Sheldon (2008) examined student uses of Facebook and found that motives for using the social network program revolved around relationship maintenance, passing time, virtual community, entertainment, coolness, and companionship (p. 45). Sheldon also found that gender and age predicted the use of the program for relationships. Females tended to use Facebook more than males as a way to pass time. Males were more likely to use the program to “develop new relationships” (p. 47), while females used the program to maintain relationships. Few students were found to use Facebook to escape or because of loneliness.

Urista, Dong and Day (2009) examined young adult use of MySpace and Facebook and found that people used the two systems for five reasons: Efficiency of sharing information quickly and to many individuals; convenience of communication, especially across distances and simultaneously to many friends; curiosity in obtaining information about new people and tracking existing friends; increased popularity of the user and enhancement of personal image; and relationship formation and reinforcement.

Television Promotion and the Web

A crucial component of branding is how stations distinguish themselves from their competition is local programs (Ferguson & Adams, 2000). A study by Chan-Olmsted and Kim (2001) found that managers perceived branding to be important, but they viewed it more as a promotional or tactical function than a managerial strategy. One especially important element in a station’s branding activities involves newscasts (Buchman, 2000). Because local news constitutes a dominant portion of locally produced programming, stations place a great deal of importance on their news efforts. Stations also have embraced various techniques to enhance their position within a market and to distinguish their news programming from that of their competition. Typically, this takes the form of teasers (Ferguson & Adams, 2000), slogans that

promote newscasts and news talent in stations' on-air promotion, and advertisements on billboards, in print, and on radio (Pringle, Starr, & McCavitt, 1995).

Eastman, Ferguson and Klein (2006) proposed a model of promotion that focuses on "audience strategies and tactics" arranged in three concentric steps (p. 23). At the outside periphery are "strategic goals" that include acquiring audiences, "recycling" them "from one time period to another," or retaining them (p. 23). On the other hand, media companies might also seek a "brand positioning" goal that centers on increasing "revenue in another property" owned by the entity (p. 23). However, Eastman, Ferguson and Klein issued the caveat that "the most effective promotion" does not try to accomplish both increased ratings and enhanced "cross-media revenue" simultaneously (p. 23). The second segment of the model focuses on targeting a specific group ("strategic targets"). Here, the company attempts to define audiences according to demographics, psychographics, and the types of media services (e.g., cable and satellite) to which the audience members subscribe. The third segment of the model centers on "tactical approaches," which are the methods that companies use to reach their "target audience" (p. 25). Such tactics might include both internal and external means, such as advertising and on-air promotion.

The incorporation of the Internet has become an important element in the business practices of local television stations, but not necessarily to the full extent of online capabilities. In a study of local, commercial television station managers regarding branding, Chan-Olmsted and Kim (2001) found that managers tended to use the Internet more when they had a lower position in news ratings. They also noted that the Internet was more important for small market stations.

How stations present themselves online is key to the fulfillment of the station's Web presence. For example, some stations are finding that using a specialized URL (e.g.,

NBCChicago.com) rather than the station's call letters as a branding strategy have helped to increase the number of visitors to their Web sites (Malone, 2009).

Masiclat and Klein (2006) argued that "taking advantage of users' time-spent-online" is essential when using the Web for promotion (p. 226). A decade ago, Kiernan and Levy (1999) analyzed the content of television station Web sites and concluded that, at the time, stations were not taking advantage of the Web's capability to provide for interactivity with audiences and, thus, to enhance "audience loyalty" (p. 278). They found that 68% of stations featured local news. However, they found no relationship between market rank and site features. Ferguson (2000) found that, compared with prior research, local television stations were using more visuals online, had more interactive features, and content was presented more simply. However, promotional content tended to be generic rather than specific.

That managers of television stations recognize the importance of online communication is not debatable. The issue, however, is the extent to which stations provide resources for new media. For example, Chan-Olmstead and Ha (2003) found that nearly 60% of stations had a full-time staff devoted to the Internet. They also noted that, while more than 90% of stations allocated some of their budget to Internet operations, the dollar amount was small. Managers perceived that having an online presence was a means of enhancing their operation, obtaining audience information, "managing channel relations," and for advertising revenue. The most important purposes of the station's Web sites were enhancing station-audience relationships and obtaining information about their audiences. For the most part, however, stations used the Internet as a support tool rather than as a way to implement "additional business opportunities" (p. 606).

The degree to which a Web presence enhances the branding efforts of television has been the focus of at least two studies. Ha and Chan-Olmstead (2004) surveyed adult Internet users regarding their use of cable Web sites. They found that there was a relationship between viewer loyalty and the existence of enhanced features on cable sites. In particular, viewers had more loyalty to the shows as well as to the network. However, they noted that cable viewers, in general, did not visit TV station Web sites. In conclusion, Ha and Chan-Olmsted observed that there was some success in network brand extension via the Web.

Chan-Olmsted and Park (2000) analyzed the content of local television station Web sites. The top features of the sites were news and program content, with essentially one-way communication that focused on information. Market size was associated with program promotion, outside links, advertising, and “online shopping” (p. 334). Also, stations in larger markets were more likely to have links to their network and to provide “top story and weather,” as well as “personnel information, program schedule, and general program content information” (p. 334). Few stations offered interactivity.

A study by RTNDA and Ball State University revealed that local television Web sites were nearly ubiquitous no matter the size of the market (Papper, 2007). Local news appeared on a high percentage of sites, which was the audience’s second most desired item (weather was first) on television sites. When including all television stations, the most commonly occurring feature was text (97%), while podcasts were the least featured item (15.9%). The limiting factor regarding types of features offered were stations that had ten or fewer news employees.

Using a content analysis, Gregson (2008) examined the extent to which the top four network television stations in the top 100 markets promoted their local newscasts. Findings of the study revealed that the Web sites more actively promoted the station itself rather than the

newscast. Fox stations were more active in promoting their on-air newscast times. However, less than 5% of all stations studies offered highlights of stories for that evening's newscast and few stations listed their newscast ratings status. As with earlier studies, few of the station sites examined offered interactive features.

Given the review of literature, there are several issues that are important to examine in the present study of local television station Twitter sites.

RQ1: What is the relationship between station status and the content of local TV station Twitter sites?

RQ2: What is the relationship between the number of TV households, number of Twitter postings, and the number of Twitter followers for a station?

RQ3: What is the relationship between the number of followers to station Twitter sites and the promotional activities of the station on Twitter?

RQ4: What is the relationship between a station's network affiliation and the Twitter content of local TV stations?

RQ5: What is the relationship between the occurrence of promotional features?

RQ6: What are differences in the number of followers and the number of average daily tweets based on the status of the station?

Method

Data for this study were obtained through a content analysis of the Twitter sites of local television stations in the U.S. Twitter sites were those listed on tvontwitter.com. Pages were archived on September 25, 2009, through the use of the program Webpage Thumbnailer, which captures digital pictures of Web pages from a batch list. Due to the potentially large number of

postings on sites, only the first page of each account was analyzed. However, this analysis was deemed adequate to provide information appropriate for testing the content categories.

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

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

Following the promotion model devised by Eastman, Ferguson, and Klein (2006), a series of categories were developed that corresponded with the three promotional activities. Strategic goals were defined as goals that were associated with the station's branding activities and position of the station. In addition to market rank, number of TV households and number of tweets, coding for strategic goals included the presence or absence of general station promotions.

Coders indicated whether or not (0=no; 1=yes) there were tweets that generally promoted the station, but that were not specifically focused on programs or news.

The second segment of the model, which focuses on targeting a specific group ("strategic targets"), was defined as information relating to users' interests. In addition to noting the number of followers, coders indicated (0=no; 1=yes) whether or not the following items were present: News stories, breaking news, promotion of contests or contest winners, advertisements or promotions for organizations or events outside the station, and posts requesting follower interaction.

The third segment of the model -- tactical approaches -- centers on methods that companies use to reach their "target audience" (p. 25). Items under this category focused on the station promoting on-air and online programming. This segment required coders to indicate whether the following items were present (0=no; 1=yes): Promotes an on-air newscast, promotes programs other than news, promotes Web content, and congruence (posts including station's call letters, station slogan or channel ID).

Prior to coding the final screen shots, the subjective categories (yes/no) in the coding form were tested by grabbing screen shots of TV station Twitter postings on a different day than the screens used for final analysis. Following the first test for agreement, coders discussed areas of disagreement and adjustments were made to the coding instructions. Another sample of screens was then grabbed and tested until the coders reached at an agreement level of at least .70.

Agreement was calculated using Cohen's kappa, which takes chance agreement into consideration (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997). One item, promoting/advertising external organizations, was excluded from analysis after it failed to reach an acceptable agreement level after several tests. One reason for ongoing disagreements in coding this item might have been

due to its highly subjective nature – coders found it difficult to determine what constituted an ad or external promotional announcement as compared with other content such as news stories or station self-promotion. Another related factor in low agreement for this item might have been the brevity of words in the posts, which offered little context for judging these types of posts. Excluding that category, coder agreements for the remaining nine items ranged from .70 to 1.0, with an average agreement of .865.

Just over a quarter of the stations in this analysis were affiliated with the top three broadcast networks: CBS (25.5%), NBC (23.8%), and ABC (23.4%). Sixty-four stations (13.1%) were affiliated with the FOX network, followed by PBS (6.8%), CW (5.3%), independent stations (1.2%), and MyNetwork (1.0%). Large market stations comprised 44.5% of the sample, followed by medium markets (30.7%), and small markets (24.8%). The estimated number of TV homes ranged from 27,630 to 7,493,530 ($M=948,301.97$; $SD=1158427.8$).

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

The total number of tweets ranged from 12 to 24,445 with a mean of 3334.63 ($SD=3637.310$). Six stations appeared to have ceased using Twitter or had not posted any tweets sometime between September 25, 2009 (the date data were gathered) and November 30, 2009, when the number of average daily tweets was obtained. For purposes of analysis, those instances were coded as missing. Excluding those six sites, the average number of daily tweets ranged from 1 to 100.2 ($M=12.471$; $SD=11.1469$). Meanwhile, the number of followers ranged from 40

to 18154 ($M=1748.50$; $SD=1774.982$). None of the station's Twitter sites featured all nine items from the promotion model. The most was 19 stations that each offered six items. The highest number of features offered was three, which appeared on 25.6% of the sites. Nearly a quarter of the sites (23.6%) had only one item.

Results

The first research question asked about the relationship between station status and the content of local TV station Twitter sites. Station status was defined as the two components of market size and the type of station as being either public or commercial. A chi-square analysis between the three categories of market sizes (small, medium, large) and each of the nine dichotomous variables showed significant relationships for the two of the items. Of the sites that invited follower interaction, large market stations were most likely to have that feature, while small market stations were least likely to offer it ($\chi^2=9.823$, $df=2$, $p<.01$). In addition, of the sites that offered Web promotional announcements, large market stations also were more likely to have this feature ($\chi^2=7.549$, $df=2$, $p<.05$)

When comparing public versus commercial stations regarding the presence of the dichotomous variables, several items achieved statistical significance. Of the sites that featured breaking news tweets, commercial stations were more likely to offer that item ($\chi^2=8.004$, $df=1$, $p<.01$). Similarly, commercial stations were also more likely to offer newscast promotions ($\chi^2=12.319$, $df=1$, $p<.001$). It should be noted that none of the public stations offered breaking news tweets or newscast promos, most likely due to the stations not providing a regular local newscast. However, public stations offered more program promotions ($\chi^2=80.758$, $df=1$, $p<.001$), Web promotions ($\chi^2=5.776$, $df=1$, $p<.05$), and congruence ($\chi^2=9.109$, $df=1$, $p<.01$). Of

the 33 public station sites, 84.8% featured a program promo, 51.2% featured a Web promo, and 78.8% featured congruence.

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

The third research question assessed the relationship between the number of followers to station Twitter sites and the promotional activities of the station on Twitter. With the number of followers as the dependent variable, a stepwise regression with number of TV homes and average daily tweets explained 25.7% (adjusted R^2) of the variance ($F(2,479)=84.212$, $p<.001$). Because news on the sites was the predominant feature, adding that item to the model accounted for 29.9% (adjusted R^2) of the variance ($F(3,478)=69.341$, $p<.001$). Although a market's TV population and number of tweets posted by the stations are significant when it comes to attracting a following, the presence of news on the sites may further enhance those connections.

Research question four dealt with the relationship between a station's network affiliation and the Twitter content of local TV stations. A chi-square analysis showed no significant relationships between the eight networks and the nine dichotomous variables (often due to violation of the minimum cell frequency). This is likely attributable to the small number of affirmative responses to the presence of items on some of the Twitter sites. Even reducing the number of networks to the big four broadcast organizations (ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC) resulted in no significant relationships between the networks and the dichotomous variables. Also, a one-

way ANOVA was run between the networks and average daily tweets, but there were no statistically significant differences.

The fifth research question sought to examine the relationship between the occurrence of each of the nine promotional features. Chi-square analyses were run between pairs of variables. There were no statistically significant relationships between the general promotions item and the other eight variables.

There were several areas of significance when the presence of news stories was compared with the seven other variables. More than three quarters (79.4%) of the stations that featured news stories did not feature breaking news items ($\chi^2=12.879$, $df=1$, $p<.001$). Also, 71.6% of stations that had news stories did not use their tweets to promote their on-air newscasts ($\chi^2=14.259$; $df=1$, $p<.001$). Of the stations that featured news, 86.5% did not promote other programming; however, 96.1% of station sites that did not have news stories featured program promos ($\chi^2=180.711$, $df=1$, $p<.001$). In addition, 69.1% of stations that featured news did not promote the station's Web site ($\chi^2=5.434$, $df=1$, $p<.05$). Finally, 82.4% of the stations that did not have news stories did provide items associated with congruence ($\chi^2=19.079$, $df=1$, $p<.001$).

Two variables were significant when compared with the presence of breaking news. About two-thirds (63.3%) of sites that featured breaking news did not promote the station's on-air newscasts ($\chi^2=6.779$, $df=1$, $p<.01$). Also, 88.9% of sites featuring breaking news did not provide promotional announcements for other programming ($\chi^2=7.776$, $df=1$, $p<.01$).

Chi-square analyses between contest promotions and the other five variables showed three significant relationships. Of the sites that had contest promotions, 41.4% also had invitations to interact with the station ($\chi^2=5.591$, $df=1$, $p<.05$). Also, most of the sites (79.7%) did not have

both contest promotions and program promos ($\chi^2=15.668$, $df=1$, $p<.001$). About half of the sites that featured congruence did not have contest promotions ($\chi^2=10.621$, $df=1$, $p<.01$).

Regarding invitations to interact with the station, there was a significant relationship between that variable and program promotions. Fully 68.4% of sites that featured the interaction item did not feature a program promo ($\chi^2=7.705$, $df=1$, $p<.01$). Also, 72.2% of the station sites did not offer a combination of interaction invitations and Web site promotion ($\chi^2=16.614$, $df=1$, $p<.001$). Of the stations that featured the interaction item, 64.0% also featured items associated with congruence ($\chi^2=6.657$, $df=1$, $p=.01$).

Two significant relationships were observed between tweets that promoted the on-air newscasts and the remaining variables. More than half (57.1%) of sites that had a news promo did not also feature posts that promoted the station's Web site ($\chi^2=8.164$, $df=1$, $p<.01$). However, 80.2% of sites that had newscast promos also featured congruence ($\chi^2=48.581$, $df=1$, $p<.001$).

Significance was also shown when comparing the existence of program promos and Web site promotions. More than a half (56.5%) of the sites that featured program promos did not also feature Web promos ($\chi^2=7.552$, $df=1$, $p<.01$). However, 74.1% of sites that had a program promo also featured congruence ($\chi^2=23.636$, $df=1$, $p<.001$).

The analysis between the presence of Web promotions and items associated with congruence also showed a significant relationship. More than three-quarters (76.1%) of sites that had a Web promo also had congruence ($\chi^2=48.491$, $df=1$, $p<.001$).

The final research question examined whether there were differences in the number of followers and the number of average daily tweets based on whether the station was commercial or public. There were no significant differences between the types of stations when it came to the number of followers. However, there were statistically significant differences between the

two types of stations when it came to the number of tweets ($t=13.911$, $df=158.085$, $p<.001$). On average, the Twitter sites of commercial stations had more than four times as many average daily tweets as public station sites.

Discussion

This study examined how local television stations in the U.S. are using Twitter, a social network system that enables users to post brief comments about what they are doing. Specifically, this study focused on the number of followers of local TV Twitter sites, market size and features offered on the sites as they relate to strategic goals, strategic targets, and tactical approaches (Eastman, Ferguson, & Klein, 2006).

When comparisons were made according to type of station, commercial stations were more likely than public stations to have such features as breaking news and tweets promoting newscasts. As was noted in the results above, none of the public stations had either of those two features, most likely because public stations do not typically offer regular on-air newscasts. On the other hand, public stations were more prone to offer tweets that contained announcements promoting programming other than local newscasts. In addition, public stations were more likely to promote their Web sites, as well as to include items in their tweets that were associated with identification or station slogans (i.e., congruence). The findings regarding differences in emphasis between commercial and public stations suggests that news is central to commercial stations, while branding and programs are central to public stations.

As might be expected, there was a significant relationship (albeit moderate) between the number of TV homes and followers of the stations' Twitter sites. Larger market stations will naturally have the capacity for more potential followers. However, there was no significant relationship between the number of TV homes and the number of average daily tweets. This

suggests that, despite the number of followers in relation to market size, it does not mean that larger market stations are necessarily producing more Twitter content on average. Conversely, it also indicates that smaller market stations are likely not producing less content, even though those stations might have fewer staff dedicated to online work.

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

Several key results should be noted in relation to the analyses between each of the dichotomous variables. One observation is that, although many of the stations provided news stories on their Twitter sites, few of those sites promoted the station's on-air newscasts. Furthermore, sites that featured breaking news items tended not to also promote the station's on-air newscast. These findings suggest that stations are using Twitter primarily as an information source, rather than as a news "teaser" to drive followers to watch the televised newscasts. In addition, less than a third of the tweets directed followers to the station's Web page, where they might have found videos and other news information. At the same time, it is important to note that sites that featured newscast promos also featured items associated with congruence. This makes sense, given the fact that many television stations use special logos and identifications as part of their branding. In this analysis, it is likely that the newscast promos also included the station ID.

What is the relationship between the findings of this study to the promotion model proposed by Eastman, Ferguson and Klein (2006)? Regarding the “strategic goals” aspect of the model, we found that few sites featured general station promotional announcements. Most promotions were specific to newscasts or programs. Whether or not stations retain followers to their Twitter sites is beyond the scope of this study, but definitely worthy of consideration for future research.

The second portion of the model, “strategic targets,” was defined in this study as features in Twitter sites that relate to followers’ interests. As noted earlier, news stories were the top feature on the sites. However, there was not much occurrence of other items in this category such as breaking news, contest promos, or invitations for user interaction.

The last segment of the model, “tactical approaches,” also yielded few instances of items in this category. Congruence, items associated with station identity, was the most occurring feature in this category. As stated earlier, stations were seldom active in pointing followers to broadcast programming.

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

A few limitations should be noted regarding this research. First, this study only represents a single snapshot in time of TV station Twitter pages. Additional research is warranted that examines Twitter postings longitudinally. A second limitation is the dynamic nature of information associated with the Web. As noted in the method section of this paper, several TV stations either had not used their Twitter sites for a period of months or had completely ceased using Twitter. Another limitation is that only Twitter sites listed on tvontwitter.com were included in this analysis. It is possible that there are other TV stations using Twitter who were not listed in this resource.

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

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