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**Shoveling tweets: An analysis of the microblogging engagement
of traditional news organizations**

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Abstract

This study analyzed the adoption and use of the microblogging platform Twitter by newspapers and television stations in the U.S. in 2009 and 2010. The results of a content analysis show that the use of social bookmarking tools on news organizations' websites and the adoption of Twitter have become important tools in the news distribution. However, the study also reveals that news organizations rarely use Twitter as a community-building tool and that shovelware still dominates the Twitter feeds. The use of the main Twitter channels has not developed beyond the utilization as a promotional tool.

Introduction

The popularity of Twitter has grown rapidly in only the five years of its existence. Started as a project by a San Francisco based podcasting company in 2006, the microblogging platform had 100,000 users one year later and was named “best blogging tool” by the influential South by Southwest festival (Hamilton, 2007). *Time* named “tweet” one of the top buzzwords of 2008 and due to the overall buzz the number of Twitter users quickly increased into the millions (Cloud, 2008).

News events in which Twitter played a significant role in the early news dissemination or in circumventing government restrictions, like the Mumbai terror attacks in 2008, the Green Revolution in Iran in 2009, the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, and the Middle East uprisings in 2011, turned microblogging into an international phenomenon that also demonstrated its political and journalistic impact. The use of Twitter as a campaigning tool in the 2008 U.S. presidential election also stressed its potential for public relations and fundraising (Garrison-Sprenger, 2008; Shirky, 2011; Smith 2010). By early 2011, Twitter had become the ninth most popular website in the world with 200 million users and the seventh most popular in the U.S. Only Facebook is a more popular social network today (Alexa.com, 2011a).

Twitter has not only gained great popularity with its users, but it has also become a valuable tool for journalists to find sources, monitor conversations and build an online following through social bookmarking and tweeting. Farhi (2009) pointed out that “its speed and brevity make it ideal for pushing out scoops and breaking news to Twitter-savvy readers” (p. 28). Nevertheless, many news organizations struggled to use Twitter beyond the means of news dissemination. As Lowery (2009) stated, “we’d used Twitter to push

our stories, viewing it as another channel by which to market our content,” but acknowledged that “its potential is much greater” (p. 33).

After the initial news events that suddenly turned Twitter into a journalistic tool, many news organizations began experimenting with Twitter. CNN had been one of the early adopters with 150 employees tweeting by the fall of 2008 (Garrison-Sprenger, 2008). However, some professionals also became skeptical of the use of Twitter and its effect on the quality standards of journalism, which led to a discussion over stricter guidelines for Twitter usage. Many news organizations implemented such social media guidelines for their employees (Ahmad, 2010; Morton, 2010).

This study attempted to track the adoption rate of social bookmarking tools for Twitter and the use of Twitter accounts by news organizations in the United States from its initial stages in the spring of 2009. The analysis of the use of sharing tools on news organizations’ websites as well as the posts on their Twitter accounts helps to determine whether news organizations are using the microblogging platform to its full potential as a dissemination channel for news content while at the same time actively engaging in the conversation of the social network.

Literature Review

The potential of Twitter as a journalistic tool became known to a broader audience when citizen journalists utilized the microblogging platform for eyewitness reports. The first account of an US Airways jet that landed on the Hudson River in January 2009 came from a Twitter user, who posted an iPhone photo on Twitpic, a website used to share photos on Twitter, all before rescue boats and traditional news

media made it to the scene (Johnston & Marrone, 2009). The first reports of an earthquake in China's Sichuan region in May 2008 came from Twitter users while the ground was still shaking (Gabarain, 2008). Twitter and other social networking sites' ability to spread the news quickly have posed a challenge to traditional news media in their efforts for quick and reliable reporting on disasters and led them to adopt social media platforms themselves (Bloxham, 2008; Schulte, 2009).

Twitter functions as a free online service that combines social networking, blogging and texting on the same platform. In 140 characters or less, users post short messages, called "tweets," to their audience, which is comprised of their "followers." Each post is published on the user's profile page which includes a thumbnail picture of the user's choice and a short personal description. Users chose who they want to interact with and who they want to follow. Crawford (2009) noted that "Unlike radio, which is a one-to many medium, Twitter is many-to-many" (p. 528).

At the end of 2008, 11% of American adult Internet users used a service like Twitter or another service that allowed them to send and receive status updates. Twitter was found to be most commonly used among young adults between the ages of 18 and 34. However, compared to other social networking sites, Twitter did not have the youngest following. The average age of a Twitter user was 31, while MySpace and Facebook had average user ages of 27 and 26 (Lenhart and Fox, 2009). In early 2011, 11% of Internet users worldwide were visiting Twitter on a daily basis. Only one other social network, Facebook, received more visits (Alexa.com, 2011b).

News organizations have been turning to social networking tools in an effort to build their online audiences. *The New York Times* describes its social media marketing as

one of the several essential strategies for disseminating news online and as a “brand enhancer” (Emmett, 2009, p. 42). Many media companies have used Facebook to drive traffic to their website through both advertisements and Facebook pages that encourage users to join their fan community. Other news organizations like CNN have taken the use of Facebook further by participating in a project called Facebook Connect. Users register on the CNN website, giving CNN access to their Facebook profiles, posted materials and circle of online friends. Users can import their profiles, privacy settings and friends into the CNN forum and in return are able export their favorite stories, videos and blogs from the CNN website onto their Facebook profile. This exposure resulted in a large increase of web traffic from CNN’s Facebook community (Emmett, 2009).

Social networking sites are also being used by journalists as an investigative reporting tool. Many journalists have cited using social networking websites like MySpace and Facebook to track and contact sources. A reporter from the *Boston Globe* used MySpace to study the appeal gang life has on young people. A reporter for the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* used information from the MySpace to write a profile story and obtain pictures. Student journalists working for Virginia Tech University’s campus newspaper were the first to post the names of victims of the previous day’s school shooting after searching social networking sites for information (Spencer, 2007)

Research on social media and traditional news media is still evolving at this point. Arceneaux and Weiss (2010) concluded from their research on press coverage of Twitter that traditional news media have encouraged and promoted the use of Twitter. Waters, Tindall and Morton (2010) found that reporters increasingly used social media platforms to find expert sources. Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser and Howes (2009), however, found that

business journalists make very little use of social media for story ideas or to find sources. There still seems to be hesitancy in some areas of journalism to use and adopt social media tools. In addition, Ahmad (2010) raised the question whether journalism is “reduced to a tool for Twitter” (p. 154).

As Gordon (2009) pointed out, “with commenting opportunities available on almost any kind of content Web site ... it’s hard to find a news organization that’s not trying to tap into ‘social media’” (p.7). Morton (2010) stressed that journalists should refrain from debating their opinions with their audience and rather engage in discussions about their journalistic mission. *The Washington Post*, probably most prominently in 2009, issued social media guidelines that restricted reporters from stating their political opinions in tweets. Many professionals, on the other hand, believe that restrictions on social media content will impose restrictions on using social media tools to their fullest potential. Gleason (2009) wrote that “being up-front about their opinions will make journalists more believable, not less” (p.7).

Twitter has taken on an increasingly prominent role in journalism. However, as Lowery (2009) pointed out, “one of our worst mistakes, and one many news organizations are still making, was to automate” (p. 33). The time restraints within editors’ workflows led many news organizations to treat their Twitter accounts like an automated RSS feed with little audience interaction. Nevertheless, it takes a new approach to Twitter in order to make it work. “We started thinking about our Twitter feed as a separate product, another platform not just to push our journalism, but to do it well” (Lowery, 2009, p. 33). Farhi (2009) also stressed that Twitter could be used as a “community organizing tool for the newsroom itself” (p. 29). Social bookmarking tools

allow audiences to share and engage with news content that is then posted in the most popular social networks like Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. That's where the conversation begins. Hermida (2010) described this new journalistic environment as "ambient journalism." However, journalists must move beyond automated feeds to engage in or monitor this conversation.

Palser (2009) stressed that "twitter-fluent newsrooms and journalists will use the tool not only as a hook into their Web sites, but also as a stand-alone channel" (p. 54). Twitter offers for instance newspapers a new way to connect with young and affluent audiences that will not pick up a printed newspaper. Schulte (2009) wrote, "That the social networking scene has pushed into the news business is no surprise, but what is raising eyebrows is how quickly the famously slow-footed industry embraced it" (p. 23). Through the adoption of social media, the user has become an important part of every news story.

However, no research study has yet analyzed the adoption rates of Twitter by traditional news media. It is also unclear whether news organizations are engaging their Twitter communities or use an automated approach to their Twitter news feeds. The dissemination of social bookmarking and sharing tools on news organizations' websites is also an important area to consider when analyzing the Twitter engagement of traditional news media. This research study, therefore, will break new ground and help to better understand how news organizations are engaging the microblogging platform.

Research Questions

Based on the above literature review the following research questions were derived:

RQ1: How have traditional news media adopted social bookmarking for the microblogging platform Twitter?

RQ2: Is there a difference in the adoption of social bookmarking for the microblogging platform Twitter and other social networking sites by traditional news media?

RQ3: Is there a difference among traditional news media in their use of social bookmarking?

RQ4: How have traditional news media adopted the microblogging platform Twitter?

RQ5: Is there a difference among traditional news media in their adoption of the microblogging platform Twitter?

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to analyze the adoption of social bookmarking tools as well as the adoption of the microblogging platform Twitter by traditional news media. To answer the five research questions, a two-study approach was chosen. The first content analysis examined the social bookmarking adoption and the second content analysis the adoption of Twitter. Data for the content analyses was collected during 2009 and 2010 to be able to determine changes and differences in the adoption of social bookmarking and Twitter over time.

Both studies examined content samples from national newspapers and television networks, cable news channels as well as local television stations. The use of the top 100 newspapers by circulation as well as national television channels and local television news stations located in the top 24 markets was determined appropriate for this study because of their widespread circulation and viewership across the country. Content was captured from the websites of the largest 100 newspapers in the U.S. based on their circulation as determined by the Audit Bureau of Circulations.¹

However, *The Rocky Mountain News* discontinued operations and was not included in the coding. The newspaper sample was, therefore, reduced to 99 for both years.

In addition, the websites of the five national television news organizations as well as 95 local news television stations in the top 24 television markets in the U.S. based on the ranking by Nielsen Media Research were accessed to collect content. Each local news

¹ The sample of newspapers included the following: USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, The Daily News, The New York Post, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Houston Chronicle, Arizona Republic, Newsday, San Francisco Chronicle, Dallas Morning News, The Boston Globe, The Star Ledger, Philadelphia Inquirer, The Plain Dealer, The Atlanta Journal Constitution, Star-Tribune, St. Petersburg Times, The Chicago Sun Times, Detroit Free Press, The Oregonian, The San Diego Union Tribune, The Sacramento Bee, The Indianapolis Star, St. Louis Post Dispatch, The Kansas City Star, The Orange County Register, The Miami Herald, San Jose Mercury News, The Baltimore Sun, The Orlando Sentinel, San Antonio Express News, The Rocky Mountain News, The Denver Post, The Seattle Times, Tampa Tribune, South Florida Sun, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, The Courier Journal, Pittsburgh Post Gazette, The Cincinnati Enquirer, The Charlotte Observer, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, The Oklahoman, The Columbus Dispatch, St. Paul Pioneer Press, The Detroit News, Contra Costa Times, The Boston Herald, Arkansas Democrat Gazette, New Orleans Times-Picayune, Omaha World – Herald, The Buffalo News, The News and Observer, Richmond Times-Dispatch, The Virginian Pilot, Las Vegas Review-Journal, Austin American-Statesman, The Hartford Courant, The Palm Beach Post, The Press Enterprise, The Record, Investor's Business Daily, The Tennessean, Tribune Review, The Fresno Bee, The Commercial Appeal, Democrat & Chronicle, The Florida Times-Union, Daily Herald, Asbury Park Press, The Birmingham News, The Honolulu Advertiser, The Providence Journal, The Des Moines Register, The Los Angeles Daily News, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, The Grand Rapids Press, The Salt Lake Tribune, The Akron Beacon Journal, The Blade, The Knoxville News-Sentinel, Dayton Daily News, Sarasota Herald-Tribune, La Opinion, Arizona Daily Star, Tulsa World, The News Tribune, The News Journal, Post-Standard, Lexington Herald-Leader, Morning Call, Journal News, Philadelphia Daily News, Albuquerque Journal, The State, The Post and Courier, The Daytona Beach News Journal.

television station affiliated with ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC was included in the study. However, the Detroit CBS affiliate WWJ-TV only ran syndicated programming in 2009 and 2010 and had no news department. Therefore, it was not included in the study's sample. For the purpose of simplification, the national television news organizations and local television stations will be subsequently addressed together as television stations.²

In order to study the adoption of social bookmarking, the websites of the 199 traditional news media were accessed. The coding was done once for each of the websites for March 25 or March 26, 2009 and for August 1 or August 2, 2010. This 16-month period was deemed appropriate to track changes in the adoption rate. The unit of analysis for this first study was the top news story on each of the news organizations' homepages. The top news story was determined by its position on the website and the headline size. Each top news story was opened so that the full article could be viewed and social bookmarking tools could be easily located. Each top news story was then coded for the following: media category (newspaper or television), name of news outlet as well as month and date of access for the coding. In addition, it was determined whether the use of e-mail as the most common sharing tool was available, whether social bookmarking tools were available and how many, as well as the availability of sharing tools for the

² The sample of television networks, cable news channels and television stations included the following: CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, CBS News, ABC News; New York: WCBS, WNBC, WNYW, WABC; Los Angeles: KTTV, KABC, KCAL, KNBC; Chicago: WFLD; WLS – TV, WBBM, WMAQ; San Francisco: KTFU, KGO- TV, KPIX, KNTV, Philadelphia: WTXF, WPVI, KYW – TV, WCAU; Dallas/Fort Worth: KDFW, WFAA, KTVT, KXAS; Washington, D.C.: WTTG, WJLA, WUSA, WRC; Boston: WFXT, WCVB, WBZ-TV, WHDH; Miami: WSVN, WPLG, WFOR, WTVJ; Detroit: WJBK, WXYZ, WDIV; Houston: KRIV, KTRK, KHOU, KPRC; Phoenix: KSAZ, KNXV, KPHO, KPNX; Seattle: KCPQ, KOMO, KIRO, KING; Minneapolis: KMSP, KSTP, WCCO, KARE; Cleveland: WJW, WEWS, WOIO, WKYC, Sacramento: KTXL, KXTV, KOVR, KCRA; San Diego: KSWB, KGTV, KFMB, KSND; Denver: KDVR, KMGH, KCNC, KUSA; Tampa: WTVT, WFTS, WTSP, WFLA; St. Louis: KTVI, KDNL, KMOV, KSDK; Atlanta: WAGA, WSB – TV, WGCL, WXIA; Baltimore: WBFF, WMAR, WJZ, WBAL; Orlando: WOFL, WFTV, WKMG, WESH; Indianapolis: WXIN, WRTV, WISH, WTHR.

predominant social media platforms Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. This allowed for a comparison of the adoption rates among different social media platforms.

The second study analyzed the adoption of Twitter itself by traditional news media. Using the same sample of news organizations as the first study, the main Twitter feed of each news organization was searched for in Google to determine whether the newspapers and television stations had adopted Twitter. The searches showed that 90.5% (n=180) of traditional news media had a Twitter account in 2009 and 99.5% (n=198) had one in 2010. In 2009, the available Twitter accounts were evenly split between newspapers (n=90) and television stations (n=90). In 2010, 99.5% (n=198) of the traditional news media had a Twitter account. Only one local television station did not.

Subsequently, 180 Twitter accounts were analyzed in 2009 and 198 accounts in 2010. The content was retrieved by accessing each available account once for April 4 or April 5, 2009 and for August 1 or August 2, 2010. The unit of analysis for this second study was the content of each Twitter post. Each post was coded for the following: media category (newspaper or television station), name of news outlet as well as month and date of access for the coding. In addition, it was determined whether the content of the post was news related, whether the post had a hyperlink and if so whether it linked to the news organization's own website. Each Twitter account was also coded for the number of posts each news outlet posted on the day assessed. In total, 1568 posts were analyzed in 2009 and 1112 in 2010.

The coding manuals for the two studies were pre-tested and revised before the actual coding began. Two trained coders analyzed the website content and Twitter posts. Overall, intercoder reliability was assessed at .87 for *Scott's Pi* (1955).

Findings

In order to determine the adoption rates of social bookmarking tools and the microblogging platform Twitter, two content analyses were conducted, which examined content in 2009 and 2010. Overall, the websites of 199 traditional news media were analyzed for social bookmarking tools as well as 2680 posts on the news organizations' Twitter accounts. In the following, the five research questions will be answered separately.

The first research question asked how traditional news media adopted social bookmarking for Twitter. The findings show that this adoption rate has increased greatly from 2009 to 2010. Only 36.7% (n=73) of news organizations had a sharing function for Twitter within the top stories on their websites in 2009. However, by 2010 the adoption rate had increased to 91.5% (n=182).

The second research question asked whether differences existed in the adoption of bookmarking by traditional news media for Twitter and other social networking sites. It was found that the most common sharing tool on the websites of traditional news media was the e-mail function that lets users send articles to other users. In 2009 and 2010, all 199 news organizations had this function available on their websites. Almost all news organizations also made social bookmarking tools available to their users. In 2009, 96.5% (n=192) of traditional news media allowed the sharing of articles via social bookmarking tools. The number slightly increased to 98.5% (n=196) in 2010. However, at the same time the number of available social bookmarking tools increased sharply. While the news organizations only made 16.4 tools available on average in 2009, they made 110.3 tools available in 2010.

Differences were also found in the adoption rates of social bookmarking for Twitter and other major social networking sites. While Facebook already had a higher adoption rate than Twitter for its bookmarking tool with 83.9% (n=167) in 2009, it even increased it to 97.5% (n=194) in 2010. MySpace, on the other, had a similar low adoption rate as Twitter with 38.2% (n=76) in 2009. Nevertheless, MySpace's subsequent increase was much more modest than the one of Twitter. In 2010, the bookmarking tool for MySpace was available on the websites of only 59.8% (n=119) of the news organizations.

The third research question asked whether differences existed among traditional news media in their use of social bookmarking. The analysis found that both newspapers and television stations had high adoption rates for social bookmarking tools. The adoption by newspapers increased slightly from 96% (n=95) in 2009 to 97% (n=96) in 2010). The adoption by television stations increased from 97% (n=97) in 2009 to 100% (n=100) in 2010. While in 2009 newspapers had offered on average 17.9 bookmarking tools and television stations only 14.9 tools, this trend reversed in 2010 when newspapers offered 88.3 tools and television stations 132 tools.

Table 1: Adoption of Social Bookmarking Tools, 2009

	Facebook	MySpace	Twitter
Newspapers	86.9% (n=86)	41.4% (n=41)	44.4% (n=44)
Television	81.0% (n=81)	35.0% (n=35)	29.0% (n=29)
Total	83.9% (n=167)	38.2% (n=76)	36.7% (n=73)

Table 2: Adoption of Social Bookmarking Tools, 2010

	Facebook	MySpace	Twitter
Newspapers	94.9% (n=94)	52.5% (n=52)	88.9% (n=88)
Television	100% (n=100)	67.0% (n=67)	94.0% (n=94)
Total	97.5% (n=194)	59.8% (n=119)	91.5% (n=182)

A stronger adoption trend for bookmarking tools of major social networking sites was found across the board for television stations. In 2009, newspapers had higher adoption rates for Facebook with 86.9% (n=86), MySpace with 41.4% (n=41) and Twitter with 44.4% (n=44). Fewer television stations had tools available with adoption rates of 81% (n=81) for Facebook, 35% (n=35) for MySpace and 29% (n=29) for Twitter. Nevertheless, this trend reversed as well. Television stations significantly increased their adoption rates by 2010 for Facebook with 100% (n=100), MySpace with 67% (n=67) and Twitter with 94% (n=94). The adoption rates for newspapers increased as well, but were slightly lower for Facebook with 94.9% (n=94), MySpace with 52.5% (n=52) and Twitter with 88.9% (n=88). The adoption rates for Twitter increased significantly for both newspapers and television stations (see Tables 1 and 2).

The fourth research question asked how traditional news media adopted Twitter. The analysis of the Twitter accounts showed that the use of the microblogging platform increased between 2009 and 2010. While 90.5% (n=180) of the news organizations had an account in 2009, the adoption increased to 99.5% (n=198) in 2010. Only one local television station did not have a Twitter account. In 2009, the news organizations on average tweeted 8.7 times a day, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 110 posts. However, despite having an account, 34.4% (n=62) of the news organizations with a

Twitter presence did not post once on the day content was collected for this study. In 2010, news organizations only tweeted 5.6 times, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 96 posts. Of the news organizations with a Twitter presence, 26.3% (n=52) did not post on the day content was collected. In 2010, the Twitter accounts had an average of 13,116 posts for their lifetime, with a minimum of 515 and a maximum of 145,328 posts.

In 2009, of the 1568 Twitter posts 94.3% (n=1478) were news related and 5.7 (n=90) were personal. This finding was confirmed in the following year. Of the 1112 Twitter posts in 2010 96.5% (n=1073) were news related and 3.5% (n=39) were personal. Most of the posts in both years also included hyperlinks that directed users to the website of the news organization. In 2009, 93% (n=1458) of the posts had hyperlinks of which 98.6% (n=1438) linked to the news organizations' websites. Only 1.4% (n=20) of the links directed users to external websites. This finding was again confirmed in the following year. In 2010, 95.5% (n=1062) of the posts had hyperlinks of which 99.3% (n=1055) directed users to the news organizations website, while only 0.7% (n=7) directed users to external websites.

The fifth research question asked whether there is a difference among traditional news media in their adoption of Twitter. It was found that there was hardly any difference in the adoption rates of newspapers and television stations. In 2009, 90.9% (n=90) of newspapers and 90% (n=90) of television stations had adopted Twitter. Those adoption rates increased to 100% (n=99) for newspapers and 99% (n=99) for television stations (see Table 3).

While the adoption trends were very similar, differences were found in the use of the Twitter accounts. In 2009, newspapers accounted for 65.9 percent (n=1033) and

television stations for only 34.1 percent (n= 535) of the Twitter posts. This reversed in 2010, when newspapers accounted for 29.7% (n=330) and television stations for 70.3% (n=782) of the posts. While newspapers had on average posted 11.5 times on the day content was collected in 2009, they only did 3.3 times in 2010. Television stations, on the other hand, increased their average postings from 5.9 times to 7.9 times. In 2010, newspaper Twitter accounts showed an average of 14,596 posts for their lifetime, while television station accounts showed a lower average of 11,636 posts.

Table 3: Adoption of Twitter

	2009	2010
Newspapers	90.9% (n=90)	100% (n=99)
Television	90.0% (n=90)	99.0% (n=99)
Total	90.5% (n=180)	99.5% (n=198)

On the Twitter accounts of newspapers, 95% (n=981) of the posts were news related and 5% (n=52) personal in 2009 and 97.6% (n=322) news related and 2.4% (n=8) personal in 2010. Similar results were found for television stations. In 2009, 92.9% (n=497) of the posts were news related and 7.1% (n=38) were personal. In 2010, 96% (n=751) of the posts were news related and 4% (n=31) were personal.

Hardly any difference was also found in the use of hyperlinks. Of the newspapers' Twitter posts 95.3% (n=984) included a hyperlink in 2009 and 97.9% (n=323) in 2010. Of the Twitter posts by television stations 88.6% (n=474) included a hyperlink in 2009 and 94.5% (n=739) in 2010. Newspapers and television stations also mostly linked to their own websites. In 2009, 99% (n=974) of the hyperlinks directed user to the

newspapers website and 99.7% (n=322) of the hyperlinks in 2010. Of the hyperlinks in the Twitter posts of television stations 97.7% (n=464) directed to the station's website in 2009 and 99.2% (n=733) in 2010.

Discussion

The results of this study show that traditional news organizations have been quick in adopting the microblogging platform Twitter between 2009 and 2010. Most news organizations adopted social bookmarking tools for Twitter and are engaged on their Twitter accounts. The use of social bookmarking tools on the news organizations' websites has emerged as an important tool in the news distribution. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates a difference in the adoption of social networking sites in traditional media bookmarking with Twitter quickly increasing its adoption by newspapers and television stations.

The study discovered that every news website studied allowed consumers to share articles by e-mail. Most of the websites included buttons or links that allow users to conveniently share news stories with others on a number of social networking or social bookmarking platforms. From 2009 to 2010 the average number of available social media sharing tools has increased dramatically, especially on the websites of television stations. While television stations were lagging behind in 2009, they have fully caught up with newspapers and are leading the way now.

The study also demonstrated a difference in the adoption rates between Twitter and other social networking sites in traditional media bookmarking. MySpace, for instance, only experienced a modest increase. Facebook, on the other hand, is fully

adopted by news organizations. It is a surprising finding, however, that nearly all news organizations had a Twitter account in 2010 while almost every 10th did not provide a Twitter social bookmarking function on its website. For some news organizations there seems to be a disconnect between their own Twitter engagement and allowing their audience to engage directly as well.

Traditional news media have fully adopted Twitter accounts as tools for news dissemination. A news organization without a Twitter account has been the rare exception in 2010. However, while Twitter facilitates open dialogue, traditional news media are not using Twitter as a community-building tool, nor are they engaging with their audiences on a frequent basis on their main twitter accounts. While the generalizability of the results of a one-day analysis is limited, it was striking to find that one-third of news organizations with Twitter accounts did not post anything on the day of the analysis in 2009. In 2010, still one-fourth of the news organizations did not tweet on the day of analysis. This shows that Twitter is not used regularly by all news organizations that have an account. The differences in usage are also underlined by great variation in the number of daily tweets. While some news organization did not tweet at all, others posted around 100 times in one day. Overall, the average of posts also decreased between 2009 and 2010, which could signal a greater selectiveness of news organizations of what they tweet about. Newspapers tweeted fewer times in 2010, while television stations tweeted more. However, the average number of tweets over the lifetime of all Twitter accounts show that there has been great activity by news organizations overall.

The findings of this study show, nevertheless, that Twitter is used like the Web during its initial stages in the 1990s. Shovelware still dominated the news organizations' Twitter accounts in 2009 and in 2010. Most posts by newspapers and television stations are news related and link to the news organizations' websites. The use of the news organizations' official Twitter channels has not yet developed beyond the utilization as a promotional tool to drive traffic to their websites. Very few posts point to a personal interaction with Twitter followers. Even television stations, which increased their adoption and use of Twitter, did not change their overall strategy on the microblogging platform.

While Twitter now is fully adopted by news organizations, its full potential as a community building and engagement tool has not been developed, yet. While Twitter facilitates an open dialogue in many areas, traditional news media are not using their main Twitter accounts as a community-building tool, nor are they engaging with their audience on a frequent basis. Instead, Twitter is being used like a streaming RSS service for news stories that promotes and re-distributes previously published news content. News organizations should address this lack of community engagement and develop guidelines that do allow for a better dialogue with their audiences and to make use of Twitter's full potential as a social network.

Conclusion

This study stresses the importance that Twitter has gained in the news dissemination strategy of major news organizations in the U.S. It also found weaknesses in that strategy of most newspapers and television stations, which can be addressed by

increasing the engagement with the Twitter community in the news organizations' main Twitter accounts.

As with all research, this study has limitations. This study did not take into account personal Twitter accounts of reporters, editors, producers and anchors. It is likely that individual Twitter accounts of news personnel will show a greater engagement with news audiences. This should be an area addressed in future research. The lack of engagement in the main Twitter accounts of news organizations should also be analyzed in a study that tracks posts over a longer period of time.

Nevertheless, even if a news organization has a strategy in using its main Twitter account as a news promotion tool and leaves the audience engagement to its news personnel, its strategy could backfire. As reporters and anchors change jobs, they will take audiences with them or their personal Twitter accounts will be discontinued. In either way, news organizations are risking to lose their community engagement and to having to rebuild their Twitter audiences. A better audience engagement on their main Twitter accounts will not only allow them to use the microblogging platform to its full potential as a social network, but will also guarantee that their community building and engagement efforts are to last.

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