Twitter’s diffusion in sports journalism: Role models, laggards and followers of the social media innovation

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Abstract
The roles of sports journalists have been affected considerably by the influence of Twitter, but what is not known is how the social media application has been adopted across a range of sports newsrooms in different countries. Employing Rogers’ diffusion of innovations theory, this study examines how Twitter has been accepted or rejected on the sports desks of six broadsheet/quality news organisations in Australia, India and the United Kingdom. A mixed methods approach is employed, combining 36 in-depth interviews with a content analysis of 4103 print and online articles. This allows a comprehensive analysis of issues such as when and why sports journalists adopt this innovation, and how much Twitter-related content appears in the sports pages. Twitter adoption contains many benefits for individuals and their organisations, and the results from this study have implications for sports journalism in other nations at various stages of diffusion.

Keywords
Diffusion of innovations, Rogers, social media, sports journalism, Twitter

Introduction
Twitter is a popular tool for journalists and news organisations across disciplines and platforms, and it affects the roles and routines of those with accounts. However, it is not known how the social media platform has been adopted across newsrooms in different
nations, particularly in regard to sports journalism. Employing Rogers’ (2003) diffusion of innovations theory, this study examines how Twitter usage differs across the sports departments of six broadsheet/quality news organisations in Australia, India and the United Kingdom. While other research have discussed what sports journalists utilise Twitter for (see Price et al., 2012; Schultz and Sheffer, 2010; Sheffer and Schultz, 2010, 2013; Sherwood and Nicholson, 2013), this study concentrates on when and why journalists started using the social media application, and the amount of Twitter mentions in the sports pages. When journalists opened individual accounts is particularly important to the analysis in regard to the diffusion of this technological innovation. This element helps to situate users into the adoption categories developed by Rogers (2003), and enables the comparison of these findings with his diffusion model. Furthermore, applying this approach allows for analysis of the relationship between individual, organisational and national adoption rates of Twitter, and the diffusion of this application into actual print and online story content.

While Twitter is a fast-growing area of media research (Hermida, 2013), there have been only small amounts of scholarship into its impact on sports journalism. While the technology is a relatively recent addition to online media, it has had a significant – and sudden – impact on journalism. Rogers (2003) describes diffusion as a type of ‘social change’, and Twitter has certainly caused alterations in the roles and routines of journalists (p. 6). The first tweet was sent on the micro-blogging site in 2006 (Arceneaux and Weiss, 2010; Hermida, 2013), and 6 years later, the site had grown to include 140 million users across the world (Arthur, 2012). Twitter has become valued as a news-breaking platform, as well as for promotion of stories and developing contacts (Hermida, 2012; Lasorsa et al., 2012). This applies to journalists across all areas of news, including sport (Sheffer and Schultz, 2010).

The swift expansion of Twitter and other social media networks has led to more journalists using these applications for varying professional reasons (see Gulyas, 2013; Hermida, 2012). Hermida (2010) states Twitter has been adopted quickly in newsrooms and become essential in the process of delivering news, especially for print journalists (see also Schultz and Sheffer, 2010). However, Hermida (2012) concludes there have been mixed reactions to Twitter’s effectiveness for journalists (see also Gulyas, 2013). With Twitter’s short history, it is not surprising that there has been somewhat limited academic research into journalism’s relationship with this social media application (Gulyas, 2013; Hermida, 2010).

**Twitter and sports journalism**

Unsurprisingly, Twitter has also become a heavily utilised aspect of sports journalism (Butler et al., 2013; Price et al., 2012; Schultz and Sheffer, 2010; Sears, 2011; Sheffer and Schultz, 2010, 2013; Sherwood and Nicholson, 2013). As a result, the application has resulted in changes to traditional news gathering and publishing techniques in sports coverage (Sanderson and Kassing, 2011). The social media site is one on which sports journalists break news, promote stories (Schultz and Sheffer, 2010), monitor news, research and discuss issues with the audience (Sherwood and Nicholson, 2013). They also display or re-tweet posts of athletes, sports organisations and fans. Sheffer and
Schultz (2010) argue the advantages of Twitter, which include real-time interaction, apply in greater depth to sport. While sports news breaks on Twitter, including through athlete and official posts, Sheffer and Schultz (2010) state that Twitter has more applications than strictly breaking news. In terms of features employed by the news organisations in this study, Twitter feeds of prominent sports identities appeared on the sports homepages of the Guardian and The Daily Telegraph. The Australian hosted a feed on its sports site, and The Sydney Morning Herald included Twitter handles of its journalists at the bottom of stories. Either of these elements were included in any Indian publication during the period of the data collection in 2012.

There have only been small amounts of academic research into sports journalism and the rise of Twitter, with some major projects coming from the United States (Butler et al., 2013; Sanderson and Kassing, 2011; Schultz and Sheffer, 2010; Sheffer and Schultz, 2010, 2013; Sears, 2011). There is, therefore, a gap for comparative analysis of sports journalists’ adoption of Twitter across the three nations in this project. Schultz and Sheffer (2010) studied the impact of Twitter through a survey of sports journalists who tweeted, noting that uncertainty over the use of the technology was a factor in holding back print sports journalists. While this research is relatively recent, it can be expected that the diffusion of sports journalists using the technology has expanded since then. For example, Sears (2011) describes 2009 as being crucial ‘in the marriage of Twitter and sports journalism’ (p. 9). Sheffer and Schultz (2010) expanded on their initial study by examining how sports journalists used Twitter. There were some similarities between the studies, with print journalists employing Twitter to break news more than colleagues in other media (Sheffer and Schultz, 2010). Sherwood and Nicholson (2013) interviewed 27 sports journalists in Australia to determine whether they were using Twitter, with 20 having personal accounts. Monitoring the news was the main way journalists were utilising Twitter, and there was disagreement over whether to break news on the platform or save it for the newspaper. A similar result was found in England by Price et al. (2012).

While previous research outlines that the application has had an impact on work practices and publishing, it has not examined Twitter’s influence on sports journalism in relation to diffusion of innovations theory, particularly the adoption or rejection of the technology.

**Diffusion of innovations research**

Diffusion of innovations theory is a popular and valuable research method in the communication field (Rogers, 2003). Rogers (2003) defines innovation as ‘an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or another unit of adoption’ (p. xx). In this study, the innovation is Twitter, and the analysis focuses on its diffusion among sports journalists in Australia, India and the United Kingdom. Rogers (2003) developed five ideal adopter categories, which classify ‘members of a social system on the basis of innovativeness’ (p. 22). These are innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. The first type of adopters is innovators, individuals whom Rogers (2003) calls ‘venturesome’; they play a ‘gatekeeping role’ in regard to new developments, introducing the idea into the system (p. 282). Early adopters form the second category. Rogers (2003) argues they are role models who are more integrated into local
social systems, and have the ‘highest degree of opinion leadership’ (p. 283). They are also capable of increasing the rate of diffusion, and therefore assisting the push towards critical mass. It is in this phase that the S-shaped curve of diffusion starts to take shape. This pattern often occurs in the diffusion process (see Garrison, 2001; Rogers, 2003).

The next ideal category is the early majority, which Rogers (2003) has found makes up about a third of the system of adopters. These users embrace an innovation slightly ahead of average members of the group, but they do not usually have opinion leadership roles. As Rogers (2003) states, ‘They follow with deliberate willingness in adopting innovations but seldom lead’ (p. 284). The late majority and the laggards are the final categories. After the average members of a group have joined, the sceptical late majority arrives and, like the early majority, this section makes up about a third of the overall system (Rogers, 2003). Finally, there are the laggards, a group with little opinion leadership and a tendency to look to the past. In journalism studies, Paulussen et al. (2011) and Nguyen (2008) have recognised the scepticism, fear and resistance of journalists towards innovations. Boczkowski (2004) also argues newspapers have ‘a culture of innovation’, but they react to social and technological developments rather than contribute proactively to them (p. 171). While diffusion of innovations theory can relate to individuals, it also applies to organisations, which pass on policies to staff (Rogers, 2003).

While diffusion of innovations theory is a popular and effective approach for communication research (Garrison, 2001; Rogers, 2003; Singer, 2004), it also plays a role in the field of contemporary journalism. Singer (2004) studied convergence in four US newsrooms, finding online journalists were ‘particularly likely to include innovators’, but ‘true innovators among the newspaper and television staff seemed to be fairly few’ (p. 13). Arceneaux and Weiss (2010) examined Twitter’s diffusion in the media in its first 3 years and found a generally positive approach towards the technology. In an analysis of dynamic content in online newspapers, Tremayne et al. (2007) conclude that larger newspapers are more likely to be early adopters than smaller organisations. The absence of diffusion of innovations research into Twitter adoption among sports journalists ensures this study adds knowledge to a fast-growing area of new media.

**Method**

The main aims of the study were to discover the diffusion of the Twitter innovation across and within the three nations, and the amounts of Twitter material in the sports pages. As a result, the study’s research questions were the following:

RQ1: What were the reasons for sports journalists in the sample adopting Twitter?

RQ2: At individual, organisational and national levels, when did sports journalists adopt Twitter?

RQ3: How much Twitter-related content appeared in the print and online sports pages of the six organisations and three nations?

A mixed methods approach was employed to answer the research questions, combining 36 in-depth interviews with a content analysis of 4103 print and online articles. The
interviews were utilised to consider RQ1 and RQ2, while the content analysis was required for discussing RQ3.

The interview sample included six sports journalists from each of the six broadsheet/quality news organisations in Australia, India and the United Kingdom. The titles were The Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian; The Times of India and The Hindu; and the Guardian and The Daily Telegraph. Sports journalists in six different positions were interviewed: a sports manager (for example, executive sports editor, sports editor); a subeditor; an online staff member; a senior writer, such as a columnist or chief sports writer; a general sports reporter; and a specialist sports reporter. A snowball sample was employed in conjunction with personal contacts and selecting writers from bylines (see Jensen, 2012). Respondents were asked to outline when they adopted Twitter – or whether they rejected it – and reasons for their decisions. Answers in terms of adoption times were cross-checked with the web tool available at http://www.whendidyoujointwitter.com/. This verification process helped to overcome what Rogers (2003) describes as one of the ‘methodological curses’ of diffusion research (p. 126). This relates to ‘recall data’ of respondents, who can have difficulty remembering their adoption date. The interviews occurred between March and July 2012, and were between 35 and 40 minutes when conducted on the telephone. Due to the sample size, it is important to recognise these results are not representative of all sports journalists, and are a limiting factor in generalising the findings. Nevertheless, they are valuable in highlighting trends in the six organisations across the three nations, as well as in identifying elements that can be relevant to other media systems in similar states of diffusion.

In the content analysis, 4103 articles were examined to determine stories containing material mentioning Twitter. This was particularly in relation to the sourcing of quotes from posts of athletes and sporting bodies. Each print and web story from the newspaper sports sections and sports homepages was analysed. This occurred during the 12-day constructed sample, over 2 weeks from Monday to Saturday, between 20 August and 10 November 2012. Applying this technique is considered superior to random sampling and consecutive-day sampling (Riffe et al., 1993). In content analysis, Rössler (2012) has explained the requirement for procedural equivalency. Each article was coded to determine whether it included Twitter referenced as the only quotes source of the story, as part of multiple sources (for example, in conjunction with an interview or press release), or whether the application was mentioned in some way without accompanying quotes. Articles in the daily sports section were part of the sample, along with those appearing at 1 p.m. local time on the sports homepage. A screengrab was taken to ensure an accurate analysis of the site. A story was defined as including at least one sentence of copy and its own headline. The data were analysed using computer program SPSS and a chi-square test was applied. Employing in-depth interviews with content analysis allowed for a comprehensive examination of Twitter usage and diffusion among the individuals, organisations and nations in the study.

**Sample of nations and organisations**

In selecting these three particular countries, it was expected they would be positioned at different stages of the adoption process, therefore providing differing perspectives at
national, organisational and individual levels. There are two Western nations in this project and India, a developing nation (Hanitzsch et al., 2010). The concept of equivalence is important in comparative research to provide relevant comparisons, both in relation to similarities and differences (Esser and Hanitzsch, 2012; Rössler, 2012). Rössler (2012) mentions the importance of guidelines for selection, and recognises ‘most similar’ and ‘most different’ design systems (p. 462). The choice of the nations in this study includes aspects that are closely related, and in significant contrast. In terms of similarities, the three countries have strong Commonwealth histories and contemporary links, particularly in the sporting field. This is especially relevant in regard to cricket (English, 2013), but also in relation to broader sporting events such as the Commonwealth Games. However, the nations also have diverse sporting interests. Australia has a strong focus on Australian rules football, rugby union and rugby league, while hockey and football have been traditionally important in India. Football and rugby union are also well supported in England. English is a language spoken by large parts of the population in each nation, and only English-language publications were considered. Geographically, each country is part of a different continent.

Other differences include Internet and Twitter usage. The rates of Internet use, which is a key component for an application such as Twitter, range from 87.0% in the United Kingdom and 82.4% in Australia, to 12.6% in India (International Telecommunication Union, 2012). Determining accurate, comparable numbers of Twitter users in each nation is difficult due to the various measures employed. In terms of estimated Twitter users in each country in 2012, the United Kingdom had approximately 10 million (Arthur, 2012), India 15–16 million (Mody, 2012; Tripathy and Bhattacharjya, 2012) and Australia 2 million (Bruns et al., 2012; Social Media Statistics, 2012). A comparison of these figures with their respective nations’ populations (see Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Census of India, 2011; Office of National Statistics, 2013) indicates the United Kingdom has approximately one in six Twitter users; Australia one in 11; and India one in 80. It is interesting to note the United Kingdom’s position in comparison with the United States, which as a nation can also be considered a role-model adopter (see Rogers, 2003). Employing the same formula for calculations, the United States has approximately one in eight users (see Nielsen, 2012; Pew Internet, 2012; United States Census Bureau, 2012). This places the United Kingdom ahead of the United States in comparative adoption terms. There are also significant variations in the three nations’ newspaper circulations, with India’s figures among the highest in the world (De Souza, 2010; The Times of India, 2009). The circulations in the other two nations were considerably smaller – and falling (Rowe, 2011). India is similar to Australia in having a decentralised newspaper market, in contrast to the primarily London-based UK environment. Consideration of this range of issues establishes equivalence of the nations in the sample, as well as describing similarities and differences.

The six broadsheet/quality news organisations were selected to ensure similar standards of media outlets were analysed. These titles are considered leading products in terms of quality (see Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006). In Australia, The Sydney Morning Herald is the country’s oldest daily newspaper and owned by Fairfax Media. The Australian, which is controlled by News Limited (now News Corp Australia), is the only national non-financial broadsheet newspaper in the country. National title The Times of
India is owned by The Times Group, and has been described as the largest-selling English-language broadsheet in the world (The Times of India, 2009). The Hindu, a national publication based in Chennai and owned by Kasturi & Sons Ltd, was first published in 1878. In the United Kingdom, The Daily Telegraph is a conservative title controlled by the Telegraph Media Group. The left-leaning Guardian is governed by the Scott Trust. The publications from each of the three nations, therefore, have wide distributions and influence (see Rössler, 2012). As a result, the content analysis focuses on providing data at organisational and national levels, but does not relate directly to the individual journalists.

Results and discussion

Of the 36 sports journalists in the study, two-thirds had individual Twitter accounts for work purposes. In order to answer RQ1, the interview responses were grouped into themes. These showed staff adopting for three reasons: monitoring news, sources and other information; promoting stories and to reach readers; and either to satisfy newsroom structures or because they were told to have an account by senior staff. Fifteen of the 24 journalists said monitoring news or following sources was their motivation for joining. This approach signalled a significant change in work routines. Not only did reporters and editors have another platform to monitor, but there was also another space for them to provide content, adding to traditional writing and editing roles. These changes have also been recognised in other sports journalism research (see Price et al., 2012; Sears, 2011; Sherwood and Nicholson, 2013).

Specific news events were behind journalists in Australia joining the site. The tweets of cyclist Lance Armstrong during his 2009 comeback prompted a reporter and subeditor at The Australian to open accounts. A post from Australian cricketer Phil Hughes, which said he had been dropped during the 2009 Ashes series, also attracted sports journalists to the technology. ‘Obviously at that point you realise that this could be a very useful tool’, a reporter from The Australian said. Following athletes and administrators was also a key motivation for two Indian journalists. The quality of unguarded information provided by athletes and officials was considered attractive. While a reporter from The Herald recognised the whole story would not be revealed by a tweet, it could provide a revealing insight. As he said, ‘Players can get brain fades on Twitter and they don’t get prompted from their media managers. You can have something up for 10 seconds and decide to pull it … but you can’t do anything about it’. Controls over information have become tighter in contemporary sports media, and Twitter offers a more direct and casual link to sources. These comments were interesting because they contrasted with Sanderson and Kassing (2011), who argue Twitter offers athletes more control over the release of information. However, the respondents in the current study outlined how there were fewer one-on-one interactions with athletes and officials. As a result, these sports journalists feel platforms such as Twitter bring them closer to their subjects, providing information which can be more attractive than bland comments from a press release or press conference. Sports journalists in a variety of positions and organisations spoke of the importance of monitoring Twitter throughout the day for news. ‘You’ve got to look at Twitter’, The Australian’s sports manager said.

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Another justification for starting a Twitter account was due to the structures in place in the office, or because respondents were told to join by senior staff. This applied to six journalists, and highlighted the socialisation of the newsroom. The individual attitudes were developed in response to the organisation, with journalists conforming with company guidelines (see Breed, 1955; Rogers, 2003; Shoemaker et al., 2009). A couple of respondents from Australia and the United Kingdom said they adopted when switching jobs to organisations more attuned to multimedia. The most revealing comments came from staff who recognised the office policy and joined under this pressure. Two of these came from the Guardian, with one reporter revealing he was ‘put on a three-line whip’ before an overseas assignment. The other staff member outlined his motivation by saying, ‘For me the primary aim of it is to keep my job. I just picked up the signals, if I hadn’t picked up those signals I would have been encouraged to do it’.

Promoting articles and engaging readers was the final category, with three journalists saying this was why they started accounts. These reasons involved additions to the journalists’ routines, but tweeting links to stories resulted in more traffic to the web site. Journalists with large numbers of followers are in effect operating as sole publishers. The Daily Telegraph’s football correspondent, Henry Winter, had approximately 338,000 followers in June 2012, while Daniel Taylor, his counterpart at the Guardian, had more than 60,000. In the Winter example, an individual reporter had more than half the number of followers as the entire print sales of his newspaper, which averaged 573,674 in the same month (guardian.co.uk, 2012). The respondents indicated that the large number of followers also led to more reader interaction. For example, the senior writer at the Guardian employed Twitter for sourcing ideas, asking followers what they thought of an issue, before deciding whether it was suitable for a published piece. ‘It’s like doing a tour of the provinces, trying out new material before you actually print it’, he said. In an environment in which declining circulation figures and advertising revenues are a concern in Western markets (see Rowe, 2011), Twitter appears to offer opportunities to expand online readership through the operations of individual journalists. If all journalists employ social media as an avenue to promote content and connect with readers, it provides newspaper brands with the potential to expand online.

In this context, it is therefore surprising to note 12 respondents, or a third of the sample, had not joined Twitter by the cut-off point of 30 June 2012. This figure is comparable to the Australia-only study of Sherwood and Nicholson (2013), in which 26% of respondents did not have accounts. Sports journalists who did not use Twitter justified their decisions by saying they were too busy, old fashioned, or were not pursuing extra duties. This relates to the findings of Paulussen et al. (2011) and Nguyen (2008), who note the resistance and scepticism of journalists towards innovations. Senior writers at The Daily Telegraph and The Sydney Morning Herald blamed overwork for not joining, while their counterpart at The Australian pointed to the platform being constantly ‘distracting’ for sports writers, essentially preventing them from watching the event they were covering. At The Hindu, a reporter said he did not feel the need to tweet because ‘I have nothing to say’. Not all journalists without accounts were dismissive of social media. Three Indian respondents were on Facebook, which they argued had greater penetration in their market. Overall, given the importance of promoting stories and following breaking news, it was surprising that a third of the sports journalists did not have Twitter accounts.
When journalists started using Twitter

Locating when journalists joined Twitter was vital to reflect individual, organisational and national trends in the diffusion of this innovation among sports journalists. In order to answer RQ2, and discuss emerging themes, responses were placed into 6-monthly segments, starting from the first half of 2007. They were then situated in adopter categories (see Figure 1).

The first tweet was sent in 2006 (Arceneaux and Weiss, 2010; Hermida, 2013). In this sample of sports journalists, the initial user was from The Daily Telegraph in the first half of 2007. While this adoption timeframe does not make the journalist – in this case an online staff member – an innovator in terms of overall Twitter usage, it qualifies him as one in this study. The five respondents who joined in 2008 were categorised as early adopters – Rogers (2003) describes them as ‘role models’ – but there was no dominant reason for joining (p. 283). Justifications from all three of the categories outlined previously were described. There were 11 respondents in the early majority, with these users opening accounts in 2009 or the first half of 2010. Sears (2011) nominated 2009 as being crucial in the ‘marriage’ of sports journalism and Twitter (p. 9). In this study, nine journalists – a quarter of the overall sample and 37.5% of those with accounts – began utilising the site during 2009. As mentioned previously, respondents outlined specific events during this year, involving cycling and cricket, as being responsible for their Twitter adoption. Sports journalists who joined to follow news were therefore an important element within this category. These results indicate the innovation was then in the ‘critical mass’ phase (Rogers, 2003: 343). The late majority, which Rogers (2003) considers ‘sceptical and cautious’, included seven staff who signed up between the second half of 2010 and the end of June 2012 (p. 284). Again, it is necessary to recognise 12 journalists did not join Twitter by this cut-off point. Journalists without accounts have been situated in the laggard category, which involves people who tend to look to the past (Rogers, 2003). Rogers (2003) argues the relationship between age and innovativeness is inconclusive, and the results in this project have no clear pattern. However, it was evident the Twitter innovation had not finished diffusing through the sports journalism fields of these nations.

Figure 1. When journalists adopted Twitter by news organisation.
A comparison with Rogers’ model

Figure 2 reveals the levels of adoption in each category from this study in comparison with the Rogers’ (2003) model. It is immediately clear the results do not currently match a typical adopter curve, due to the large percentage of respondents in the laggard category. Twitter had been diffusing among the sports journalists for approximately 6 years by the time of the interviews. However, the innovation had not yet diffused throughout the sports journalism environment, resulting in a third of respondents being categorised as laggards. The innovators, early adopters and early majority categories were closely matched with Rogers’ model. This indicates an S-shaped curve through what Rogers (2003) argues is the take-off phase, occurring between 10% and 20% of adopters. It also suggests the pattern may develop into a more conventional curve through the late majority and laggards in coming years.

Twitter adoption at the national level

In national terms, the United Kingdom was the fastest to embrace the technology, ahead of Australia and India (see Figure 3). Only four of the UK journalists were classed as being in the late majority or laggards. The nation had the most respondents in the innovator and early adopter categories, and was tied with Australia in the early majority segment. These findings support Gulyas (2013) and Singer et al. (2011), who found that due to competition and commercial aspects, organisations and journalists within the UK media system were faster to embrace new technologies. These cultural factors and forces therefore influence the earlier adoption rates. In this way, the United Kingdom operates as a role model at a national level, which supports the general usage rates per population discussed previously. Comparing these results with sports journalists in other role-model nations, such as the United States, could be advantageous and further research may be beneficial.

Half of the Australians were situated in the early adopter or early majority categories, indicating slower diffusion than in the United Kingdom. This suggests more leadership in terms of adopting innovations in the United Kingdom, whereas Australia is more
likely to include ‘willing’ followers (Rogers, 2003: 284). The most innovative users in India were in the early majority, but the dominant component was laggards, which possessed little technological leadership (see Rogers, 2003). This was due to an entrenched view, which was explained consistently during the interviews, that the traditional print medium remained the most important and profitable. The findings indicate the diffusion of Twitter is most likely to be embraced first in the United Kingdom, with Australia following, and India significantly later in the adoption curve. Once again, it is argued, this is the result of India’s thriving newspaper industry. However, the huge amounts of capital created have the effect of reducing the speed of online innovation through its media system. Cultural and commercial factors within the nation were therefore influential. This is a valuable consideration for other developing nations, such as China, which currently enjoy a thriving print product (see Rowe, 2011).

**Twitter adoption at the organisational level**

At the organisational level, *The Daily Telegraph* had the most staff adopting in the early and innovator stages (see Figure 1). Only the staff member who rejected Twitter entirely had not joined by the early majority. In comparison, the *Guardian* had a longer lag towards five staff adopting, with no innovators and two being part of the late majority. Twitter diffused more quickly through the two UK companies than the others in the study. One reason for this trend was organisational attitudes. The company view was clearly stated by the sports manager at the *Guardian*, who said it was ‘indefensible’ and ‘bizarre’ not to be involved. ‘How can you purport to be a journalist in the year 2012 and not have a social media presence?’ he asked. *The Daily Telegraph*’s approach was generally less explicit in the interviews, even though more journalists in the newsroom indicated this reason for joining. However, one staff member said reporters had been told to tweet in order to promote stories. While *The Sydney Morning Herald* had two journalists as early adopters in 2008, the rate of acceptance was slower through the newsroom. The next respondents to start an account were either side of the early majority–late majority border; two rejected the technology. Four journalists at *The Australian* were part of the early majority, signalling a shift in mindset within the company at the start of 2009.
Rogers (2003) notes how adopters in this category are followers rather than leaders. The organisational attitudes were also more relaxed in these newsrooms than in the United Kingdom. At *The Australian*, reporters were ‘encouraged’ to tweet, while at *The Herald* the sports manager said staff were more self-motivated than being directed by policy. At *The Hindu*, the three staff to sign-up to Twitter did so as part of the early majority; two users at *The Times of India* adopted in the late-majority phase. The remainder of respondents in these organisations rejected the innovation. In India, there was neither pressure nor encouragement to utilise social media, signalling the lack of value placed on these features in comparison to the almost single-minded focus on newspaper production.

**Twitter mentions in the sports pages**

To determine the direct impact of Twitter on sports content, each article was coded for mentions of the social media site. There were 183 stories with some type of Twitter content from a total of 4103 items (see Table 1). These included articles with Twitter as the only source of the story, as part of multiple sources or a mention without accompanying quotes. An example of a Twitter story with quotes as the single source occurred in *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper football story ‘Ferdinand will not shake Terry’s hand’ on 13 September 2012, which attributed a comment from Rio Ferdinand’s account. A multiple-source item appeared on the same day’s web edition, with Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) president Sepp Blatter’s post included in the article ‘Hillsborough families call for full FA apology’. Examples of stories without quotes included mentioning an athlete’s account, a trending story, hashtag or trolls. While the overall number of articles with Twitter inclusions was small, there were some useful findings.

The reliance on Twitter for story content was greatest in the United Kingdom, with 8.0% across the three categories. This was more than double the percentage in Australia (3.9%), and four times the figure in India (2.0%). Again, it is important to note the numbers are not large, but the results highlight the value placed on the platform as a destination for sources and information. It also reflects a link between the earlier adoption of respondents from the United Kingdom and the amount of Twitter-related content in those publications. The *Guardian* was the most reliant on overall Twitter content at 8.5%, and also published the most single-sourced Twitter stories across the news organisations. *The Daily Telegraph* was second in overall content at 7.6%, but was the first when it came to employing Twitter as part of multiple-sourced items. The social media tool was clearly a small-yet-important element to coverage in the United Kingdom.

In Australia, there were fewer mentions; but again, both organisations applied overall Twitter content at relatively similar levels. Twitter mentions were even less likely in India across each category. While there were instances when the number of articles in sections was higher – for example, *The Times of India* had more single-sourced Twitter stories than *The Daily Telegraph* – these figures were well below figures of other organisations in terms of percentages. *The Times of India* utilised Twitter in a majority of cases for single-sourced stories, and all but two mentions came as a result of quotes-related inclusions. *The Hindu* had the smallest usage in real and percentage terms, a result which reflected the delayed adoption of the innovation in the newsroom, as explained during the interviews. The Indian results were unsurprising given the slower diffusion of social media innovations through
At a national level, $\chi^2(6, N = 4103) = 83.13, p < .001$, with a Cramer's $V$ of 0.10, suggesting a weak relationship.

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the individuals, organisations and nation. This is reflected in the different rates of Twitter adoption within the country as previously discussed. With the social networking application being used by approximately 1 in 80 Indians, it is unrealistic to expect the nation’s broadsheet/quality sports journalists to be as reliant on the platform as counterparts in Australia and the United Kingdom. Again, it is evident that cultural and commercial aspects of the respective nations’ media systems impact on rates of adoption.

**Conclusion**

While this study has focused on only three nations and therefore contains limitations in its ability to generalise findings, the results have implications for sports journalists and their organisations in a global context. Through the interviews it is clear Twitter adoption – and subsequent usage – contains many benefits for individuals and their organisations. It is evident that the ‘social change’ Rogers (2003: 6) discusses is occurring through the innovation of Twitter in this area of journalism. In relation to RQ1, respondents joined Twitter for three main motivations: to follow sources; to promote content or interact with readers; or because of office structures or directives. A third of the sports journalists did not have individual accounts. Through the interviews, it was apparent that the diffusion of Twitter was occurring at different rates through national, organisational and individual levels. In overall terms, UK journalists – and their organisations and media system – were more likely to have adopted earlier than colleagues in the other nations. This was an important finding for RQ2, with the United Kingdom able to be classified as a role-model nation (see also Gulyas, 2013; Singer et al., 2011). Australia can be categorised as a follower while India was most regularly positioned in the laggard sector. It is important to note that with Twitter diffusion continuing throughout sports journalism, these results are expected to develop in coming years, which means follow-up research could be valuable.

Through the study, it is clear that the benefits of Twitter adoption are particularly relevant in terms of staff having an influence on readership figures of the online edition through their promoting of stories and engaging with readers. With concerning circulation and advertising declines in Western markets (see Rowe, 2011), Twitter provides an opportunity for sports journalists to increase story hits through their tweets and links. In this environment, it is therefore surprising that a third of respondents did not have individual accounts. The Guardian’s sports manager said it was ‘indefensible’ and ‘bizarre’ for contemporary sports journalists not to have a presence on social media. It appears a large segment of sports journalists are missing Twitter’s key benefits of following sources, promoting stories, engaging with readers, and receiving up-to-the minute news. The results in this study may encourage organisations in the three nations – and those around the world in different phases of adoption – to ensure more comprehensive usage of Twitter as a way of building circulation and relationships with online readers. This could be particularly important in safeguarding the future of sports journalism, which in many areas is suffering with falling circulations, revenue and staffing, which in turn increase workloads (English, 2014).

Sports journalists as a group are more likely to be earlier adopters in the United Kingdom, which operates as a role model, than in the other two countries. There is a link between earlier adoption and actual content in the sports pages. This was an interesting
finding in relation to RQ3. While the number of stories explicitly mentioning the platform was relatively small, with 183 out of 4103 articles, the UK titles were most likely to generate stories from Twitter sources. In contrast, the Indian titles were the least likely to utilise this type of material. The three nations’ results reflected the adoption patterns outlined during the interviews. Again, India’s position was primarily due to the power of its print industry, as well as lower Internet and Twitter usage rates in the general population. With the stronger newspaper focus remaining the priority, there is less urgency to utilise online methods. This factor is also relevant to other developing nations with powerful print industries, such as China.

Twitter adoption among the nations had an influence on how the technology was utilised in sports journalism. A higher usage rate within the general population occurred in the United Kingdom than in Australia. Both nations were significantly ahead in comparison with India. It has been important to recognise the potential Western bias when examining the Indian results (see Hanitzsch, 2009). While India, and its sports departments and individuals, has contributed heavily to the laggard segments, these descriptions have been a result of applying Rogers’ (2003) adopter categories. Crucially, the Indian media system contains huge benefits not currently experienced in Australia and the United Kingdom, with the enormous circulation and revenue generated by its newspapers. Therefore, cultural and commercial factors in each media system also impact on adoption rates.

However, the United Kingdom, with its role-model tendencies, provides a guide of what is likely to become the reality in the future for sports journalism in Australia and India – as well as other nations in similar adoption phases. A greater focus on Twitter material for stories can be expected in these nations as the diffusion becomes more complete, although this will occur at different rates. Furthermore, it is evident that the future of sports coverage in all three nations is likely to include more Twitter-related material as a result of reluctant athlete sources due to tighter media management, smaller staff levels and constant deadlines. The results from the United Kingdom and Australia have implications for other Western nations, including the United States, which are either role-model adopters or ‘willing’ followers (Rogers, 2003: 284). The same applies to India and developing nations, in which usage of this innovation is not as widespread. The results in this study provide an indication of what is occurring in three sports journalism markets at different stages of adoption, and are therefore important examples for other media systems planning for the future of sports journalism.

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