

A THEMATIC INSIGHT TO A DIAOLOGIC APPROACH
OF NBA ORGANIZATIONS
TWITTER CONTENT

by

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Abstract

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This study focuses on how, if at all, NBA organizations are creating dialogue with their publics through the use of the social networking site Twitter. With the use of Kent and Taylor's dialogic approach to public relations, three NBA organizations Twitter accounts were observed using a thematic analysis to develop themes within their tweets and replies. I hope to find themes among the organizations Twitter content that are related to the five tenets of dialogism created by Kent and Taylor. By understanding how the NBA organizations are communicating with their publics we can understand if they are creating a sustainable organization-public relationship that is mutually beneficial to both parties.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In today's society, new media for communication surround us. While the advent of the Internet has not completely replaced traditional media, such as print, radio, and television, new media is correcting for many of traditional media's limitations. New media makes information more accessible and interactive by removing traditional gatekeepers who historically controlled the selection and dissemination of information. The Internet changes the way the world communicates and modifies how people receive messages (McLuhan, 1964). Communication scholars in particular can contribute to discussions about how new media revolutionizes peoples personal lives, organizational lives, and societies at large. From making shopping and entertainment easier to facilitating connections with friends, to helping various political movements organize democracy, the Internet shows how communication constructs the social world. As most innovations do, the Internet is evolving. One way in which the Internet has evolved is through the emergence of social networking sites and blogs that connect widespread individuals and groups. These sites are examples of how the Internet serves interpersonal and organizational communication needs and how it might be a tool for creating dialogue between people and organizations.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how professional athletic organizations use Twitter, a microblogging website, for dialogue with their publics. From a communication-centered perspective, I analyze how three National Basketball Association (NBA) organizations, the Cleveland Cavaliers, the San Antonio Spurs, and the Los Angeles Clippers, use Twitter to communicate with fans. I use the communication concept of "dialogue," or balanced communication among parties, to explore how these organizations can use dialogic tenets in their public relations efforts. This study aims to gauge the quality of the organization-public relationship by examining how, if at all, these organizations use the Internet for dialogue. This thesis will render judgments about the nature of communication on Twitter, and offer suggestions for how organizations can use dialogic principles in their public relations. I argue that

doing so can build stronger relationships between organizations and publics that are mutually beneficial to both parties.

Public Relations and Social Media Persuasion

Public relations is a sub-field of communication and a sensitizing framework for exploring social media uses and effects. The Internet offers PR practitioners a valuable tool for communicating to, and more importantly, *with* publics. In the past, PR practitioners relied mostly on traditional third-party news sources to pick up news releases or attend organizational press conferences to relay information to audiences. One drawback of PR in a more traditional sense is a degree of lessened interpersonal communication between communicators that creates long-lasting relationships. How does the emergence of online social media allow organizations to engage in deeper, more meaningful dialogue with audiences? How can organizations integrate dialogue into PR? These questions are at the center of my thesis.

Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1985) define public relations as “the management function that builds and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 6). In this study, I emphasize the importance of mutually-beneficial relationships. For decades, PR practitioners have tried to figure out ways to successfully create interpersonal relationships with target audiences. The Internet can help PR practitioners cultivate these relationships quickly and without intermediaries. New media presents unique opportunities for practitioners to create organization-public relationships. Each day, millions of Internet users sign into social networking sites and blogs. For example, Facebook, a popular social networking site, surpassed 300 million users in September 2009 (“Facebook Nearly As,” 2009). Twitter, the focus of this study, exploded from 533,000 users in 2007 to over 21 million users in 2009 (Nielson Wire, 2009). With so many people turning to social media for communication with others, it is no wonder that PR practitioners have begun using online social media to accomplish their various objectives. However, it remains to be seen if PR professionals are using this tool effectively. One goal of my thesis is to offer PR practitioners insights into how social media is currently being used, and how it can be used better. I argue that

dialogue is an effective way for organizations to build relationships with audiences. To build meaningful organization-public relationships, organizations must not simply use new media for one-way communication.

The new media environment in which we live is commonly referred to as Web 2.0, or the use of the Internet for sharing information through social software (Cooke and Buckley, 2008). Web 2.0 connects diverse individuals and groups at the click of a button. It allows people to form online communities around their unique opinions and desires. Social media also amplifies the voices of organizations' supporters and opponents, giving them a forum to respond to organizational ideas and actions. The NBA uses social media to get audiences excited about games and players. This online communication can help the organization build and maintain bonds with fans. For example, fans that follow their favorite NBA team on Twitter operate as a type of community that feels a special connection to its team. By following a team on Twitter, this community invests time and energy to promote the team. The NBA benefits from good "word of mouth" online, and PR theorists and practitioners must explore how organizations can and do utilize publics to do their own PR work.

Persuasive tactics surround citizens everywhere. Advertisements, television shows, sporting events, concerts, billboards, business cards, and just about every organizational website invite the public to "follow us on Twitter." Celebrities, organizations, and everyday people need a Twitter page to stay relevant. One can no longer turn on the television without seeing calls for audiences to hashtag certain phrases or to offer their feedback on Twitter. Twitter is not only used to connect people but to sell things, be they products or ideas. Since Twitter is a medium through which content can be diffused (and redistributed) in seconds, the site holds lots of untapped PR potential. This is because, by answering the site's question, "What are you doing" Twitter users, including organizations, are engaging in persuasive activity that influences the ideas and actions of others, all in one common area, creating a sense of togetherness and community.

Twitter, which I explain in more detail later in this thesis, began as a way for people to share their thoughts and daily activities in a short message, Twitter has quickly become an advanced communication tool that organizations and businesses, like people, can use to accomplish their goals. Twitter users obtain breaking news, communicate with friends, or celebrities and organizations, follow the latest sports events, and share their thoughts and ideas with others. Twitter explains its success by saying “people are eager to connect with other people and Twitter makes that simple” (“About Twitter,” 2009). By simply “following” a friend, nonprofit organization, or corporation, users are instantly connected to them, and can view and disseminate shared content. PR practitioners are therefore turning to Twitter to relay corporate information to publics. While information-sharing is an important component of the organization-public relationship, communication must be reciprocal to maximize benefits. The organization-public relationship is the bond created when both parties come together to engage in dialogue with a common goal in mind. PR professionals could therefore use the unique features of Twitter to engage in dialogue with their publics and create a quality organization-public relationship. Previous studies on the use of Twitter by non-profit organizations and Fortune 500 companies report that many organizations simply use Twitter as a means of one-way communication, tweeting information but never interacting with their publics (Rybalko & Svetlana, 2010; and Water & Jamal, 2011). This study hopes to add to existing research on organizational uses of social media. I take a dialogic public relations approach to analyze how three NBA organizations use Twitter. I hope to gain a better understanding of how PR practitioners are using Twitter, and also to develop suggestions for developing mutually advantageous organization-publics relationships.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding my thesis are:

How, if at all, does communication between the Cleveland Cavaliers, the San Antonio Spurs and the Los Angeles Clippers and their Twitter audiences reflect dialogic tenets?

How, if at all, do these teams build reciprocal communication relationships through dialogue with their fans on Twitter?

To answer my research questions, I explore the use of dialogue in public relations. Relationship building through social media has become a new frontier for PR scholars and practitioners; yet, more research measuring the effects of social media technology on relationship-building is needed. A dialogic approach to PR, which I elaborate on in Chapter 2, can help analyze the ways in which organizations are using sites like Twitter when engaging with their publics. I draw on Kent and Taylor's (1998) definition of dialogic communication as "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions," (p.325) in this thesis. These authors recognize sites like Twitter as vehicles for relationship-building. Working from Kent and Taylor (2002)'s dialogic public relations theory, I explore how PR could facilitate dialogue by establishing channels and procedures for dialogic communication to take place. Assuming that online communication can foster dialogue, I argue that organizations have an opportunity to build important relationships with publics. However, in order to accomplish this goal, organizations cannot simply relay information to audiences and be done with the "conversation". Rather, organizations must use dialogue in their PR efforts.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, I review literature on dialogue, public relations, and social media to highlight the importance of new media in facilitating communication between organizations and publics. I review the tenets of dialogue that can help establish and maintain strong organization-public relationships. I conclude this literature review by describing some of the unique features of Twitter that can lead to dialogue between organizations and audiences.

A Dialogical Approach to Public Relations

Dialogue is a ubiquitous and increasingly important concept in public relations (PR). Many scholars use the term “dialogue” when discussing effective public relations. Historically, dialogue in PR simply meant one-way communication through which an organization would tell the public or desired audience what it wanted them to know. In this frame, audiences had few or no opportunities to offer organizations feedback. In recent years, PR scholarship on the aims and scope of dialogue is changing. Today, thanks to new media sites like Twitter, new dialogic interactions between organizations and audiences are easier than ever. As PR begins to center interpersonal channels of communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002), a new type of virtual dialogue is being used. PR theorists and practitioners must therefore account for how new media connect organizations to their consumers and broader audiences. In short, as dialogue evolves, the professionals that depend on its use must evolve with it.

The concept of dialogue is rooted in a variety of disciplines: philosophy, rhetoric, psychology, and relational communication. “Dialogue”, is philosophical and abstract in nature (Theunissen, 2012). Philosophers and rhetoricians have long considered dialogue as one of the most ethical forms of communication and as one of the central means of separating truth from falsehood. Theologian Martin Buber (1985), considered by to be the father of the modern concept of dialogue, suggests that dialogue involves an effort to recognize the value of the other—to see him/her as an end and not merely as a means to achieving a desired goal. Although the term dialogue "means many things to many people," (Johansen 1990) scholars

agree that a dialogic perspective "focuses on the attitudes toward each other held by the participants in a communication transaction,"(Johansen 1990). For the purposes of this study, dialogue emphasizes how genuine communication between an organization and its publics relies on the active participation of both parties. For a dialogic relationship to exist, parties must view communicating with each other as an important goal of the relationship. As new media technologies allow for the actualization of virtual dialogue, it is important to understand how their uses influence organization-public relationships (Kent and Taylor, 1998). According to Kent and Taylor (1998), the Internet as a dialogic medium may be viewed as a "convivial tool" that creates conversation between many parties.

Grunig's (1992) concept of public relations as "building relationships with publics that constrain or enhance the ability of the organization to meet its mission" was instrumental in shifting the emphasis in public relations from managing publics and public opinion to building, nurturing and maintaining relationships (Leddingham & Brunig 2000). Incorporating *dialogic communication* in organizational contexts creates a relationship between an organization and its publics by attempting to equalize power and influence. Organizations now have the responsibility to build relationships with their prospective audience in order to maintain the dialogical approach (Broom et al. 1997). As Botan (1997) explains, "traditional approaches to public relations relegate publics to a secondary role, making them instruments for meeting organizational policy or marketing needs; whereas, dialogue elevates publics to the status of communication equal with the organization." (p.196). Social media is perhaps better suited for enabling dialogue between organizations and individuals because such convivial communication tools, as Clifford Christians (1990) explains:

...maintain a kind of open-ended conversation with their users. Because convivial tools conform to the desires and purposes of their users, rather than transform human desires to fit the shape of the tools, they can become true extensions of human subjects (p.272).

In sum, a turn toward dialogue in organizations enhances engagement between organizations and the people who support them.

Tenets of Dialogism

Since dialogue can be thought of as a product of ongoing communication and relationships (Kent and Taylor, 2002), it involves “trust,” “risk,” and “vulnerability” (Kent & Taylor, 2002). The public, as dialogic participants, should be able to trust in organizations to provide them with honest and open information. Organizations must understand themselves to be morally responsible to stakeholders. This mutually beneficial organization-public relationship emphasizes what critical organizational communication scholar Stanley Deetz calls “co-determination” through more democratic organizational communication. Of course, dialogue cannot force ethical organizational behavior; organizations must willingly commit themselves to taking a dialogical approach, which is not easily operationalized.

While a dialogic approach cannot be reduced to a series of steps, it does consist of several coherent assumptions (Kent and Taylor, 2002). Previous studies of the concept of dialogue in communication, public relations, philosophy, and psychology reveal five overarching tenets of dialogism that are useful for this thesis. They are: (1) mutuality; (2) propinquity; (3) empathy; (4) risk; and (5) commitment. Before I discuss each tenet, it is important for readers to understand that dialogue is not a cure for “bad” PR. A dialogic approach cannot force an organization to behave ethically, nor is dialogue appropriate in all circumstances. Some public relations work is necessarily reactive, and practitioners typically lack sufficient time and freedom to respond in collaborative ways (Leichty, 1997). Dialogue is also time-consuming and assumes a relationship of equality and mutuality between participants that is rare, if not impossible, in the real world. In other words, not all communication can or should be dialogic. For example, high-reliability organizations, such as first responders, require speed and centralized decision-making to accomplish their goals. Even so, a dialogic framework shows that organizations have an ethical responsibility to engage the public in reciprocal communication, rather than simply relay top-down messages to them. I work from the premise that, when it is possible, dialogue is an ideal that organizations should strive for. Here, I overview each of Kent and Taylor’s (2002) tenets of dialogism.

Tenet 1: Mutuality

Mutuality refers to the acknowledgment of the inextricably linked nature between organizations and publics. There are two characteristics of the tenet of mutuality. The first is *collaboration*, which allows all parties involved in dialogue to advocate for their position without fear of retribution. Dialogue is premised on intersubjectivity; it seeks to understand the positions of others and how they reached those positions (Anderson et al. 1994). The second characteristic of mutuality is *spirit of mutual equality*, which means that parties involved in the dialogue should maintain relationships of equality. Organizational experts, such as CEOs and directors, should be thought of as equals, not superiors to audiences. The blatant exercise of power or superiority should be avoided in dialogue so that participants feel comfortable discussing any topic free of ridicule or contempt. Within dialogue there will be opposition amongst parties, however, it is key that neither party dominates the exchange or manipulates the other into abandoning their position. Contestation in dialogue can lead to democratic outcomes. Ethical dialogue necessitates acknowledgment of “the other.” The mutual interrelatedness of dialogic participants must be part of all exchanges. That is, even when one speaks for one’s self, or for one’s organization, the needs, desires, and views of other dialogic partners should not only be acknowledged and recognized, but should be apparent (Anderson et al. 1994).

Tenet 2: Propinquity

Propinquity, or closeness, refers to the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics. In the field of communication, especially public relations, closeness and proximity are key concepts in creating and maintaining relationships. For organizations, dialogic propinquity means that publics are consulted in matters that affect them, and for publics, it means that they are willing and able to articulate their demands to organizations. For example, comment sections on commercial Internet pages allow publics to express their feelings about products. When a company takes these comments into consideration and make changes or updates to a product, dialogic propinquity played a role in the relationship between consumers and corporations. In traditional PR, organizations are viewed as distinct and separate from their

publics (Kent and Taylor, 2001). For this reason, the public had little influence in organizational decision-making. Proximity, according to Kent and Taylor, is created by three features of dialogic relationships: (1) immediacy of presence, (2) temporal flow, and (3) engagement. These features of dialogue clarify the process of dialogic exchanges in general, and between organizations and their audiences, in particular. First, immediacy of presence suggests that parties are communicating in a shared space, such as social mediums. It also suggests that parties involved are communicating in the present about relevant and timely issues. Second, temporal flow refers to dialogic communication as being relational. This means that dialogue involves an understanding the past and present with both parties having an eye on the future relationship. Finally, engagement, which is at the forefront of this study, is initiating dialogue from both an organizational and public standpoint. Dialogue engenders engaged interaction between organizations and the people they seek to reach. For example, when an organization expands its view of the organization-society relationship and engages its community in new ways, it creates for itself a broader communication skill set. It also develops a wider range of perspectives to draw on in its decision-making. Engagement between organizations and publics benefits both parties by allowing for the development of solutions to shared problems and interests (Botan, 1997; Kent and Taylor, 2002).

Tenet 3: Empathy

The third tenet of dialogue as an orientation is empathy, or the supportiveness and confirmation of public goals and interests. Empathy refers to the atmosphere of support and trust that must exist if dialogue is to succeed. These authors list three characteristics that are connected to empathy: (1) supportiveness, (2) communal orientation, and (3) confirmation. First, supportiveness involves creating a communication climate in which others are not only encouraged to participate but their participation is aided. Unlike debate that is based in competition, dialogue between parties seeks the other's good (Pearson, 1989). Second, communal orientation is a concept based on Kruckeberg and Starks (1988) notion of public relations as a community building function, a way to create, rebuild, and change local and global

communities. A communal orientation to the organization-public relationship focuses on the importance of organizational involvement in local communities and the public at large. As the boundaries between the public and private become more and more blurred, organizations survive and thrive by engaging a wide range of communities (Kent and Taylor, 2002). The final characteristic associated with the dialogic tenet of empathy is confirmation, or the process of acknowledging the voice of the other. Confirmation creates trust within the relationship, which, as PR scholars know, is difficult to regain if and when it is lost. Organizations most effectively acknowledge their audiences by validating not only the concerns of those parties who agree with their practices and policies, but also those parties who oppose them. Confirmation validates the other in dialogic interactions.

Tenet 4: Risk

Kent and Taylor's fourth tenet of dialogism, risk, is the willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their own terms. Parties involved in dialogue risk relationship formation, but they also risk yielding great rewards, such as an understanding what the publics want, gaining valuable information from the public, and creating a relationship with the public. All organizational and interpersonal relationships are risky. Implicit in risk are conditions of vulnerability and consequence (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Because dialogue involves the sharing of information, individual beliefs, and desires, with others, individuals and organizations alike are vulnerable to manipulation by the other parties. Vulnerability in dialogue, however, should not be viewed as completely negative because risky self-disclosure can enhance the organization-society relationship. For example, the UT Arlington athletic department introduced a social media campaign in the summer of 2014 called "Maverick Monday" to gain followers on Twitter and Instagram. During the campaign, UTA Mavericks answered fans' questions on Twitter, and posted pictures to the UTA Athletic Instagram account. This campaign showed vulnerability on the part of UTA but the organizations reaped great benefits, including an increased number of social media followers. Since dialogue is creative and generative, it can yield unanticipated

consequences that both parties should be open to addressing. For this reason, a level of comfort with uncertainty is therefore important in dialogic interactions.

Tenet 5: Commitment

The final tenet of dialogism is commitment, or the extent to which an organization gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation, and understanding in its interactions with publics.

Kent and Taylor (2002) argue that commitment encompasses three characteristics: (1) genuineness and authenticity, (2) commitment to conversation, and (3) a commitment to interpretation. First, genuineness means that parties come to the dialogue in an honest and forthright manner. Each participant will discuss their position in a truthful manner; Kent and Taylor (2002) describe it as “shooting from the hip.” When organizations and publics deal truthfully with one another, they are much more likely to come to mutually beneficial solutions. The second characteristic is commitment to the conversation, or an agreement among both parties to come together for a common purpose or understanding. Sharing the same meanings or working toward common understandings is crucial to dialogic relationships between organizations and publics (Heath, 2000). Finally, commitment to interpretation means that both parties involved in the dialogue are open to diverse opinions and positions. Genuine dialogue occurs when parties agree to set aside their differences long enough to come to an understanding of the others’ positions. Dialogue is not equivalent to agreement (Kent and Taylor, 2002), but it assumes that both parties share a genuine desire to understand one another better.

To this point, I have overviewed the five tenets of dialogism as they are expressed in extant literature on dialogue, namely Kent and Taylor (2002). Having a clear understanding of the five tenets of dialogue can help PR theorists and practitioners facilitate more dialogic communication between organizations and publics. While dialogue requires organizational resources, such as time and energy spent on training, it can also lead to greater organizational rewards in the form of increased public support, enhanced image/reputation, along with other benefits (Kent and Taylor 2002). For publics, dialogue can mean increased organizational accountability, a greater say in organizational operations, and increased

satisfaction (Bruning and Leddingham 2000). In the following section, I focus on how organizations incorporate dialogue into public relations.

Incorporating Dialogue in Public Relations

Incorporating a dialogic approach requires that organizations fully commit themselves to building relationships with their audiences. If an organization just relays information to the public without seeking its feedback, then genuine dialogue has not occurred. Scholars agree that ethical PR is established through sound communication systems (Kent and Taylor 2002), and dialogue is one such system that should be used to establish more meaningful organization-public relationships. How can dialogue be incorporated in day-to-day public relations? Kent and Taylor suggest the answer to this question involves three foci: (1) the interpersonal, (2) the mediated, and (3) the organizational. Each of these ideas has important implications for how social media can increase dialogic communication between organizations and publics.

The first way dialogue can be incorporated into daily public relations activities is through building interpersonal relationships. Organizational leaders can use social media to engage the public. In order to successfully engage in dialogue with the public, these leaders must have interpersonal skills, such as being able to identify common ground between parties, thinking about long-term rather than short-term objectives, and seeking out groups and individuals with opposing viewpoints (Kent and Taylor 2002). When an organization uses these skills for its social media outreach, it has a better opportunity to build relationships with its publics. Take the case of the “Maverick Monday” social media campaign: UTA took the time to engage in dialogue with its public (the UTA student body) and allowed fans direct access to athletes, which in turn created new relationships with fans and enhanced the relationship between the organization and its loyal fans.

A second way that an organization can reinforce its commitment to dialogue is through mediated communication channels (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). For mediated communication to facilitate dialogue, channels like websites and blogs must do more than display

information. Organizations must offer the public a forum for engaging organizational members about important issues. Popular Internet channels like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have been successfully used by organizations to elicit the public's ideas about various issues. Tech companies, such as Apple, do this very well. Whenever a new product comes out, Apple turns to social media for their public's reactions to it and quickly responds with any necessary updates or changes. As Newsom, Turk, and Kruckeberg (2000) note, "it is virtually impossible to practice effective public relations today without using the Internet" (p.399). Today, successful PR requires the use of the Internet for relationship-building. Social media's real-time interaction comes as close to the interpersonal ideal as is possible in our networked society (Kent 2001).

Finally, in order to incorporate dialogue into PR there must be some structure or organizational support. Three dialogic procedures offer a "first step" toward ethical organizational communication (Collins & Gunson, 1997): (1) that no topic should be excluded *a priori* from discussion, (2) that no type of communication be considered *a priori* as inappropriate or irrational, and (3) that during discourse, communicators have the option of changing "levels of reflexivity" (Pearson 1989). For dialogue theorists and practitioners, these procedural norms, or some variation of them, form the basis of equitable organizations–publics dialogues. In relation to current PR practices, these procedures can consist of being forthcoming on social media sites about organizational news (be it good or bad), acknowledging all types of comments from the public, engaging in dialogue with people that disagree with organizational choices, and being consistent and timely when engaging people.

A dialogic approach to PR is not easy or possible in all situations, but it can benefit organizations and publics alike. Dialogic communication impacts the organization-public relationship, and helps shape it into something worthwhile. A prominent example of how organizations incorporate dialogue into PR, and the focus of this thesis, is social media use.

Social Media as a Tool for Dialogue

Social media changes the way we communicate, interact, and construct our relationships with family, friends, co-workers, politicians, news media, celebrities, and companies

(Reitz, 2012). Social media are unique platforms that encourage active participation in the creation, development, and dissemination of information (Henderson & Bowley, 2010). Social media fuses sociology and technology, altering communication from monologue (one to many) into dialogue, and transforming people from content readers into publishers (Henderson & Bowley, 2010). In the past, individual citizens lacked voice, or access to public deliberation and decision-making. While one could write a letter to the editor of a newspaper or call into a radio show to express an opinion, one could argue that there was limited voice from the public being heard. Today, however, social media amplifies individual voices. According to Boulous and Wheeler (2007, p. 2):

The second incarnation of the Web (Web 2.0) has been called the “Social Web”, because, in contrast to Web 1.0, its content can be more easily generated and published by users, and the collective intelligence of users encourages more democratic use.

Social media have “radically altered” the way organizations and publics communicate, assemble, and manage one another (Shirky, 2009). Lines between content provider and content consumer fade as the consumer assumes the role of information provider (Giurgiu & Barsan, 2008).

Organizations use social media applications, such as Twitter and Facebook, for dialogue that makes information creation and consumption a transactional, rather than unidirectional, process (Reitz, 2012). Social media applications have the potential to enhance dialogue due to the dual creator ability and the synchronicity of the unique environment. Organizations can benefit from leveraging the participation of their publics in this new environment. For example, Giurgiu and Barsan (2008) argue that users’ comments can aid in evolutionary product development through suggestions, opinions, and preference, which may have the power to outpace product development in traditional models. User suggestions, comments, and preferences provide organizations with rich, unfiltered data directly from their consumers that aids in the development of future products and services and meets consumer needs and wants (Singh & Cullinane, 2010). Although this study does not focus on tangible

consumer products, it explores organizations (e.g. sports teams) as a sort of product that is created and supported in part by consumer desires. Therefore, social media contributes to organizational, or “team” development via the public’s suggestions, opinions, and preferences in ways that traditional media does not.

Furthermore, social media amplifies the public’s opportunity to influence one another and widely diffuse opinions about an organization (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). If interpreted strategically, these opinions may positively impact an organization’s image, reputation, and relationships with key publics (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Singh & Cullinane, 2010). Building and maintaining strong consumer relations through social media allows companies to engage with their customers in a new, and potentially dialogic, way. Doing so asks that companies and their customers exchange useful information that builds a mutually beneficial relationship (Gillin, 2007). If dialogue between consumers and companies is successful, loyal consumers might transform into passionate and outspoken brand advocates (Swedowsky, 2009; Wong, 2009).

In addition, consumers, as members of the larger public, can benefit from the participatory environment of social media. First, by providing opinions and comments about the organization, the public is more likely to get what they need and want out of the organization (Singh and Cullinane, 2010). Second, publics can use social media to stay up-to-date with organizational information and gain valuable knowledge about organizations (Hyllegard et al., 2011). Finally, social media serves as a forum for voice. Assuming that consumers have Internet access, they can use social media to share their experiences relative to organization satisfaction/dissatisfaction (Hyllegard et al., 2011).

In sum, while I recognize the flipside to social media, such as the anonymity that can foster negative communication or even severe bullying, this study is informed by my belief that social media can foster dialogue through which publics share their interests with organizations (Hyllegard et al., 2011; Singh & Cullinane, 2010). A democratic use of social media also helps organizations adapt and adjust their policies and practices to their consumers (Gillin, 2007; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Singh & Cullinane, 2010). This two-way communication

environment is the fundamental underpinning of dialogue in PR, and it is vital to an organization's survival in the 21st century. In the following section, I introduce readers to the social media channel at the center of my analysis: Twitter.

Twitter

Twitter is a global social networking site (SNS) and business/organizational platform that attracts more than 270 million users who produce approximately 500 million tweets a day (Aladwani, 2014; Twitter, 2014). User-generated messages elicit widespread engagement among global audiences on a variety of pop culture issues. Its global reach, ease of communication, and usefulness make Twitter appealing to many individuals and organizations (Aladwani, 2014). Twitter users interact with friends, celebrities, and organizations around the world via brief (140 character) messages known as "tweets." User profiles contain information such as name, organizational affiliations, contact information, and background information. A user can set the account as either public (other users can access the content and/or follow the profile) or private (only permitted followers can access profile content).

Twitter users can also follow and be followed by other users. Following and re-tweeting of messages by Twitter users results in the diffusion of various hyperlinks, photos, videos, and other content (Aladwani, 2014). Tweets are presented in a time-stamped record called a timeline that are presented on users' profiles chronologically. In addition to offering users a public forum for information-sharing, Twitter also allows for private (direct) contact between users via messages that function like email. When Twitter users want to respond directly to each other, they use three popular tweeting symbols: (1) "@", which is followed by the Twitter account name of the party to whom a user is referring; (2) "RT", a sign that one user is "re-tweeting" another's previously published tweet; and (3) "#", which is commonly referred to as a "hashtag" that signals to users the theme or topic of a tweet. Here is an example of how these symbols are used on Twitter: "I cannot wait to watch LeBron and @TheMiamiHeat destroy it tonight....#NBAFinals". In this particular example, anyone who viewed this tweet could click on the link, "#NBAFinals" and view all other tweets using the same hashtag.

As noted earlier, previous studies have focused on a few aspects of individual or organizational uses of Twitter such as frequency of use, continued use, content sharing, and characteristics of users (Chen, 2011). Others examine the forum's popular tags, trends, and reactions (Jansen et al., 2009). In most cases, Twitter use was viewed as a single-level construct (Aladwani, 2014), meaning that the organization simply sent out content in the form of tweets but never engaged with the interaction from their followers. They did not respond to mentions or re-tweets, they simply relayed information to their publics and had no subsequent interaction. This study, however, shifts the focus away from micro-level interactions on Twitter to explore how organizations are developing new ways to successfully utilize this SNS for dialogue with audiences (and potential consumers). In other words, since Twitter's increasing popularity makes it so that businesses and other public organizations see it as a useful marketing and advertising tool (Jansen et al., 2009), I explore how effectively they use it as such.

Organizational Uses of Social Networking Sites

According to Singh and Cullinane (2010), social media sites enable the rapid dissemination and exchange of information. Since Twitter messages are short, they are speedier and typically receiver-friendly. While many Twitter critics argue that 140 characters is too limiting for meaningful information; many organizations are using it for much bigger purposes (Lovejoy, Water, & Saxton, 2012). For example, Twitter has opened up new possibilities for organizations to connect with their publics through real-time feedback and conversations on organizational announcements. Most research focuses on the interpersonal implications of social networking; however, a few organizational-level studies point to a great variance in relationship cultivation behaviors (Lovejoy, Water, & Saxton, 2012). For instance, research on environmental organizations has found that, although some utilize the dialogic capacity of social media, most simply broadcast one-way messages (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009). Similar findings across a broad cross-section of the nonprofit sector were found by examining the relationship-building features of Facebook pages (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). These studies concluded that organizations are losing opportunities to engage with key supporters on social media sites.

Lovejoy, Water, & Saxton (2012)'s study highlighting how nonprofit organizations used Twitter found that these organizations do not use SNS to maximize stakeholder involvement. Instead, they use social media as a monologic platform. Indeed, 20% of organizational tweets demonstrated conversations and only 15% demonstrated indirect connections to specific users. These authors' findings suggest that many organizations use new media technologies to reify more traditional PR practices. This finding is confirmed by another study conducted by Waters and Jamal (2011) who argue that a lack of online interchange between nonprofit organizations and their audiences potentially damages organizations' reputations.

Organizational research specifically dedicated to Twitter is scarce, but evidence points to continued findings of lost opportunities for dialogue. Twitter is only used by 35% of *Fortune 500* companies, with only 24% of those reporting active SNS involvement (Barnes & Mattson, 2010). Another analysis of corporate tweeting found that these accounts blend customer testimony, complaints, and product/service inquiries (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009). Organizations frequently disseminate information to their followers, but rarely succeed at engaging in transactional communication. One-way communication is still the most pronounced form of messaging strategy used by organizations on Twitter (Waters and Jamal, 2011), and securing one-way message receivers is the most common non-communication strategy (Rybako & Seltzer, 2010). Rather than capitalizing on the interactive nature and dialogic capabilities of SNS, organizations mostly use Twitter as a means of sharing information. While this is important, organizations should follow up on information-sharing with building relationships with publics. Unfortunately, many organizations seem concerned only with the appearance of social media presence.

Twitter's PR Functions

Given the overwhelmingly disappointing organizational uses of SNS, PR professionals must highlight how SNS like Twitter can move organizations beyond just posting content to facilitating communication. For example, Twitter users can directly address one or several users by "tagging" them within a message. Tagging users is done by using the "@" symbol followed by

the targeted user's Twitter handle (e.g. username). This process compels the target's attention to the message, and increases the likelihood of a response from that user. Users who follow a particular organization's Twitter profile use this tactic to ask questions, to direct attention to a tweet, and to start a conversation. For example, a Cleveland Cavaliers fan who follows the team on Twitter might post "I really enjoyed watching @TheCavaliers last night." By tagging (or mentioning via the "@" symbol) the Cleveland Cavaliers, this user might begin a conversation with the team, who is automatically notified when it is tagged in a tweet. Another way users communicate with organizations on Twitter is by "re-tweeting," or quote-tweeting, specific content from a follower. This is done when a user inserts another user's tweet in their timeline. Re-tweeting broadens the reach of a tweet by disseminating messages to users who may not have been included on the original message. Finally, Twitter facilitates dialogue through direct, private messages between users, which can make communication between organizations and publics speedier than other channels. How do organizations use these tools for dialogue? How can they do this better? While organizations cannot possibly respond to every Twitter mention, they can use SNS to build relationships with their audiences. In recent years studies have found that with over two million followers, the NBA is the number one sports league in the world on Twitter (Vincenzini, 2014). Therefore, this study explores how organizations do this and suggest some ways for doing it better. Specifically, my study centers around three NBA organizations as an example for corporate use of social media for dialogue between organizations and their publics (e.g. fans and consumers). The following chapter of this thesis provides an overview of my method of analysis.

Chapter 3

Method

My thesis uses a qualitative thematic analysis to investigate how, if at all, the three NBA organizations use Twitter to engage in dialogue with their publics. I also analyze how dialogue affects the organization-public relationship. This exploratory study sought to understand the ways in which NBA PR practitioners used Twitter for engaging with their fans. To do so, I used Kent and Taylor's five tenets of dialogue (mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment) as a sensitizing framework through which to explore dialogue between the teams and their Twitter followers. This chapter offers readers an overview of my method of analysis.

Qualitative Communication Research

Qualitative research encourages an inductive approach to understanding wherein theory is derived from observations rather than imposed onto observations (McDowell, 2014). As an interpretive researcher, I tend to ask "why" and "how" questions about communication phenomena. Although quantitative research methods, such as statistical analyses, offer compelling reasons to explore certain communication phenomena, my area of interest and expertise constitutes an interpretive research goal. In other words, I value the importance of all types of research methods but my own mind makes sense of the world with through description and narrative more than numbers. By describing and interpreting the organizations' Twitter content, I can develop insights into dialogue (or the lack thereof) on Twitter.

Content Analysis

One advantage of qualitative research is the richness of the collected data. However, for research purposes, these data need to be coded congruently and consistently in a valid and reliable way. One way to do this is by conducting a qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis techniques seek to classify the discussion material into an effective number of categories that represent similar meanings. These categories represent themes present in the content. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), qualitative content analysis is a "research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic

classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (pg. 1283). Having a systematic coding process allows for interpretation of subjective data to be analyzed in a justifiable way (e.g. with reasonable inference from data to claims).

Content analysis is a methodological tool for analyzing all types of mass media, including SNS like Twitter. Many content analyses fit within quantitative communication research and involve the counting of instances or certain types of messages or techniques used to convey messages. However, qualitative content analysis emphasizes thematic meanings associated with the messages rather than with the number times message variables occur. For example, when an organization tweets about their team participating in a local charity event, the intent and meaning behind that specific content could be multiple things including, raising awareness for the charity, showing that their athletes care about the community, trying to gain a positive reputation, etc. While my interpretation of messages is subjective, it is also based in evidence.

Content analysis in PR takes many forms ranging from examinations of compositional form and mechanics focusing primarily on brand building and brand relationships, to more abstract interpretations focusing on underlying social and cultural themes, such as crisis management. For my research purposes, I analyzed Twitter content on NBA pages with critical attention to dialogical tenets, and evaluated the quality of communication on Twitter. Content analysis organizes data thematically, helping me to determine how themes relate to dialogic communication in PR. I analyzed specific Twitter content to determine which trending topics yield dialogue between teams and fans and among the teams’ followers. Having a clear understanding about what topics interest fans and teams sheds light on the quality of dialogue between teams and fans.

NBA Teams

Criterion for this study includes being a part of the NBA organization, having an active social media presence, and more specifically having a Twitter account. Also, this study analyzes a specific timeframe within the 2014-15 NBA basketball season to ensure that teams have played the same number of games. This will help ensure that each team has the same opportunity to

report game day information, game day stats, and any additional content related to the NBA season. Although game day tweets will not be the center of this research project, they will also be analyzed. The three teams I analyzed were: (1) the Cleveland Cavaliers (Central division); (2) the San Antonio Spurs (Southwest division); and (3) the Los Angeles Clippers (Pacific division). These teams were chosen for specific purposes which I briefly discuss here.

First, I chose the Cleveland Cavaliers because the team had a great signing year for the 2014-15 season. After three years without LeBron James, the Cavaliers re-signed him, along with power forward, Kevin Love, and 3-point shooter, Mike Miller. In their first year without James, the Cavaliers went 21-45 in league play and finished 5th in the NBA Central Division. In their second year without James they finished 24-58 and again were 5th in the NBA Central Division. Last season, the Cavaliers finished 33-49 and 3rd in the Central Division. They still could not get to the .500 mark (winning just as many games as they lost). This year, “the King” LeBron James, returns from his stint as a member of the Miami Heat to his hometown of Cleveland in hopes to win the NBA Finals. The Cavaliers have had little success in the past three years and now have what many consider the greatest player in the NBA back on their team. Fans who were once burning James’ jersey are now wearing it proudly, and I believe their Twitter content will be full of rich and interesting data for me to investigate.

Second, I chose the San Antonio Spurs because the team prides itself on tradition and loyalty. They have three stars on their team who have spent their NBA careers with the Spurs organization. Their head coach, Gregg Popovich, has been a part of the organization since 1996 and has a win-loss percentage of .685 (over .500). He has also led the Spurs to five NBA Final Championships. The Spurs organization not only wins, they have truly loyal fans. Due to the long-standing tradition of the Spurs organization and their loyal fans, I believe their Twitter content will yield a multitude of fan interactions along with other rich data to analyze. In addition, the Spurs are the reigning NBA Champions, and I think their tweets offer a unique dimension to this study that others do not.

Finally, I chose the Los Angeles Clippers because the organization recently revamped its team and began making headway in the Pacific Division. In the 2010-2011 season, the Clippers drafted the number one pick from University of Oklahoma, Blake Griffin, and hired new head coach, Vinny Del Negro. For three seasons under Del Negro's coaching and Griffin's play, the Clippers increased their win-loss percentage from and moved from an average of .390 (2010-11) to a .683 average (2012-13). However, this improvement was not good enough for the Clippers organization, which recently added point guard Chris Paul and a new head coach, Doc Rivers. With these two additions in the 2013-14 season, the Clippers finished the season 57-25 and were first in the Pacific Division. In the past five years, the Clippers went from being a losing team with no stars (and little national attention) to one of the top-four teams in the league. The Clippers are a great organization because of their large market of Los Angeles, their newfound pride, and the recent rejuvenation of Clippers fans.

Procedures

After a two-day trial period of gathering Tweets from just one NBA organization (e.g. the Cleveland Cavaliers), I found that there was plenty of interesting information for my study. With careful deliberation I decided to limit data collection to one week's time. I believed a week would give the organizations enough time to send out an array of Twitter content that would not be so specific in one area.

I gathered data effectively and with ease by using a Twitter Analytics app called Twitonomy, which is an app that allows researchers to get detailed and visual analytics on anyone's tweets, retweets, replies, mentions, hashtags, and so much more. It allowed me to create a list with the Twitter accounts I wanted to focus on—in my case the Cleveland Cavaliers, the San Antonio Spurs and the Los Angeles Clippers. I gathered data from February 1, 2015 to February 7, 2015. Below is a step by step process of what I did on a daily basis for each NBA organization:

I logged into Twitonomy using my personal Twitter account. This brought up all of my followers, including the three organizations.

I clicked on the list tab within Twitonomy and selected the organization I wanted to look at, and accessed its tweets.

I downloaded a PDF file of its tweets and an Excel file. (This allowed me to download 90+ tweets from the organization, most of the time I had two-three days' worth of tweets in one document). This allowed me to examine each tweet and the mentions/replies they received from the organization's followers.

I then took a screen shot of the mentions and compiled them into a Word document along with the Tweet it came from.

After using this process to compile the data for each of the three teams, I reviewed the content of tweets and mentions and organized them thematically. The reviewing process was rather simple, I simply would read through each tweet and mention and jot down a few words on exactly what I was reading. I quickly realized that I was writing down a lot of the same words and phrases across all three organizations' tweets and mentions. These phrases then became my themes and main focus of study. The following chapter presents the findings of my analysis.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this project is to better understand the use of Twitter use among the three NBA teams. Guided by a dialogic theory of public relations, I explore if and how the organizations engage in dialogue with their fans and followers to create and sustain the organization-public relationship.

In this chapter, I reveal my findings. First, I present the themes in the teams' tweets. Due to the fact that there were no major distinctions between the Cavaliers, Clippers, and Spurs' tweets, I analyzed team tweets together. In the final section of this chapter, I present themes in mentions, which are replies to the organizations' original tweets. When an organization sends out a tweet, followers often reply to that specific message via a mention. These replies appear below the organization's original tweet and notify the organization that someone has replied to its original content. Since the mentions are public, Twitter users can reply to the organization and its specific fans/followers as well. Therefore, creating separate themes for mentions is vital to determine if NBA organizations are using Twitter as a platform to participate/create dialogue.

Team Tweets

There were four major themes in all three teams' tweets: (1) Engagement, (2) Information, (3) Promotion and (4) Trends. Below, I overview these themes and provide key exemplars for each.

Engagement:

Engagement occurs when the recipient of a message, whether that message is a news release, a video, a tweet or a news article, takes an additional step after consuming the content. When analyzing the three teams' tweets, engagement surfaced as a main way through which teams keep their stakeholders' or publics' attention. Twitter's two-way-communication capabilities allow an abundance of engagement from both organizations and the public. It is the responsibility of the organization to use this tool to engage with their fans and confirm that their

voice is heard. After analyzing the data, I found that all three organizations had some form of engagement within their Twitter content.

One way in which the three NBA organizations engaged with the public on Twitter was through the use of retweets. Retweets are reposted or forwarded messages on Twitter. A tweet will come across on the timeline as the original message from the original sender, however, somewhere within the message box (mostly the bottom) there appears lightened text that states “Retweeted by” and the organization, such as Clippers, Spurs, or Cavs. Use of the acronym “RT” followed by the person’s handle also indicates a retweet. Once a tweet is retweeted by the organization, everyone who follows the organization will see the tweet from the original creator. The creator will also get a notification from Twitter making them aware that the organization has retweeted them. There are also instances when an organization can retweet a follower and add a comment within the message. This is known as a quote tweet because the organization quotes the message and adds a reply to it. My analysis reveals that the main way the three teams engage their fans is through the medium of retweets. Below are two examples of how the organizations utilize engagement through retweets:

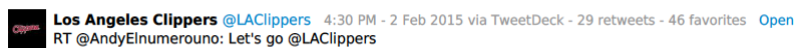


Figure 4-1 LA Clipper Engagement



Figure 4-2 Cleveland Cavaliers Engagement

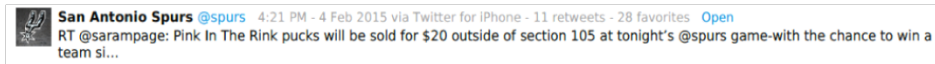


Figure 4-3 San Antonio Spurs Engagement

Another way the teams engage with their publics is by creating Twitter content that causes their fans to perform subsequent actions such as retweeting, adding as a favorite, or replying. There were many instances where the organizations requested that their followers offer input about the success of the team, expecting some engagement in return. Below are a few examples:

@Cavs “What will it take to win ELEVEN STRAIGHT? @CavsJoeG details the FIVE KEYS to #CavsSixers”

@LAClippers “Does Big Baby have a future in broadcasting with NBAonTNT’s broadcast?”

@LAClippers “ROLL CALL: Where are you watching the game from?”

@Spurs “Will you be representing Spurs Nation during Rodeo Road Trip? Be sure to use #SpursRRT and you could be featured.”

@Spurs “Patty will be at Academy (1604 & Potranco) to meet fans & sign autographs at 2pm today – limited to first 250 fans so get there early!”

@LAClippers “We’re @backinblue today in our short-sleeve alternate uniforms. Get yours and post pictures with hashtag #backinblue! <http://t.co/PqzKYW8z3L>”

Engaging fans begins a conversation in which fans participate by retweeting, replying or even using a hashtag. Although engagement with fans is important, the NBA organizations also engaged with other entities. There were many instances in which the organizations retweeted their players' tweets, their arena's tweets, their fan shop tweets, and even the larger NBA. Although this is not engaging directly with the fans themselves, the organization was still engaging a variety of different channels. Here are a couple of examples:

@Cavs "RT @QMascots: FINAL PUSH! Please support the mascots as we #tacklethetower for @ClevelandRNH. Who can help with \$5 or a RT?"

@LAClippers "RT @NBACom: Vote for players to follow in @cavs-@LAClippers duel with #TNTOT's multiple cameras (8 ET)."

@Spurs "RT @theborisdiaw: Game day San Antonio against Orlando. Any fans coming to the game tonight? I will be there! #GoSpursGo

@Cavs "RT @CavsTeamShop: Get 20% off select @Cavs jerseys as tonight's item of the game @TheQArena. #CavsSixers.

By engaging these entities, the teams expand the audiences they are engaging with. Fans are able to engage a broader group of stakeholders as well.

Information

The second prominent theme within the organizations' tweets was *information*. My analysis reveals that the three teams' use Twitter to relay information about their organization to their fans/followers. This information includes game day information, game updates, and post-game information. All three organizations used the hours leading up to game time to relay information about the game and to pump up teams for game day success. These tweets varied

topically from game time, to where to watch the game, game starters, keys to winning the game, and player information. The following tweets are exemplars of the theme of information:

@spurs “We’re baccckkkk. #SASvsORL tips off tonight at 7:30 on @FSSouthwest Preview.”

@Cavs “#CavsSixers BROADCAST INFO: TV: #CavsLive starting at 6:30 on @FOXSportsOhio, @MY43WUAB RADIO: @wtam1100, @wmms, @LaMega877 #AllForOne”

@LAClippers “Preview: #Clippers vs #BrooklynNet – <http://t.co/tH5KltlF6Y> TV: Fox Sports #PrimeTicket | Radio: @TheBeast980”

@Cavs “#CavsSixers STARTERS: @Kyrielrving @TheRealJRsSmith @KingJames @kevinlove Timofey Mozgov”

@spurs “INJURY REPORT: Belinelli is listed as questionable for tomorrows game vs the @OrlandoMagic Details: <http://t.co/jpD66qVRYg>”

@Cavs “One key to make it a DOZEN? Feed off #TheLand to go 8-0 in the West. @CavsClippers KEYS: <http://t.co/hdBvYglot4>”

In addition to pre-game information, all three organizations use Twitter for live updates during the game. Fans/followers may not have the luxury to watch the game or listen; therefore, the organizations keep them up to speed by tweeting big plays, score updates, and highlights throughout the game, such as:

@Cavs “HALF: #Cavs lead 47-35. Get another look at this monstrous MOZGOV SLAM & tune in to @FoxSportsOH for the 2nd half! <https://t.co/UeZdEkv061>”

@spurs “Kawhi drives to the bucket and lays it in! Spurs lead 33-28 with 8 minutes to go in the half. #SAvORL”

@LAClippers “J.J. Reddick questionable to return with back spasms”

@Cavs “FINAL: @CAVS WIN 97-84 – ELEVEN STRAIGHT! Delly locked it, 3/4 from the 3. #CavsSixers”

Post-game information is also shared with fans/followers of the organization. Information such as player interviews, coaches' interviews, highlights from the game, stats, and milestones that were reached were also evident in the following tweets:

@LAClippers “Jordan Gets His First Ever 20-20 Game Deandre finished Monday night's game vs the Nets w/ 22 pts and 20 rebs. MORE – <http://t.co/kCLqStl9Z3>”

@Cavs “Taking care of business...#CavsClippers...[RECAP]
<http://t.co/wasEYGzx4kN> [PHOTOS] <http://t.co/SaM8JxdTfG>”

@spurs “Coach Pop // Postgame // #SASvsORL WARCH:
<http://t.com/tnoAxGyUW7>”

Finally, the three NBA organizations use Twitter to relay information simply pertaining to the organization and its entities. Although it is evident that their main concern is the team itself, they are also involved with other issues such as the organization's D-League team (the NBA

Development League, or NBA D-League, is the National Basketball Association's official minor league basketball organization), dance teams, and events pertaining to the organization.

@Cavs "Louis Stokes, @chones22 & @CampyRussel welcome former Olympians John Carls & Herb Douglas to CLE at #CavsBHC lunch!"

@Cavs "RT @CantonCharge: ASSIGNMENT: Joe Harris will join th Charge in Sioux Falls. #ChargeUp"

@LAClippers "Meet Clippers @SpiritDanceTeam on 2/5 (5-7) pmat Applebee's in Mira Loma Courtesy of @corona"

@spurs "RT @SilverDancers: Professional Dance Workshops start Sunday Feb. 8! Check out our video and register here: <http://t.co/9gqiYryvjs>"

Promotion

The third theme is *promotion*. Promotion keeps teams and the NBA at large in the minds of consumers and helps stimulate demand for various products. Promotion involves ongoing advertising and publicity (or mention in the press). The ongoing activities of advertising, sales and public relations are often considered aspects of promotions. The NBA, whose goal is to sell its product of teams/franchises to fans, uses Twitter as a platform to promote its team, players, community projects, team merchandise, and sponsors.

Player promotion tweets are those in which the organization mentions a player(s). My analysis reveals that the three teams promote their players in terms of what they contribute to the organization. There are also instances in which organizations use Twitter as a platform to defend a player or release information related to the player. Player promotion tweets

include retweeting a player, mentioning a player in a tweet, or giving information about a specific player. Below are some examples:

@Cavs “TEN STRAIGHTL @KingJames and @kevinlove get the job done in Minnesota. #CavsWolves.”

@LAClippers “Chris Paul said last night was only about the call, and that's it”

@LAClippers “.@blakegriffin32 on the over 250,000 shots that went into improving his mid-range game, for @playerstribune.”

@Cavs “Congratulations to @KyrieIrving, the Eastern Conference Player of the Week. DETAILS: <http://t.co/SD9WCaSkxI>”

@Spurs “Patty will be at Academy (1604 & Potranco) to meet fans & sign autographs at 2pm today – limited to first 250 fans so get there early!”

The organizations also use Twitter as a medium to promote other aspects of the team, such as the teams' website for fans to view top photos or highlights from previous games. Getting fans to take a step of action and visit another area of the organization gives the team more online presence and creates an engaging forum. Promotion leads to the process of identification, or a means through which organizations get consumers to feel like part of the organization. Identification creates loyalty among customers and can help them become brand advocates. . Twitter functions as a platform for organizations to send out content related to promotion:

@Cavs "#CavsTV highlights the BEST f the Wine & Gold's streak in January's TOP PLAYS! <http://t.co/qgBARUP3JI>"

@spurs "#SASvsORL Photos >> <http://t.co/EQCne9G3IK>"

@LAClippers "Getting close to tipoff in Brooklyn. Follow along on Fox Sports #PrimeTicket, @TheBeast980"

@LAClippers "This week's "Top Five" pays homage to @deandrejordan6's impressive week of denials. WATCH – <http://t.co/oAQOnHDVhm>"

Promotion falls under a larger advertising goal. The three teams engaged in promotion of four types: (1) to promote purchasing merchandise, (2) to promote community, (3) to promote their sponsors, and (4) to promote giveaways. First, the teams promoted themselves by asking their followers to buy a jersey, tickets, or other team merchandise:

@Cavs "RT @CavsTeamShop: Get 20% off select @Cavs Jerseys as tonight's Item of the Game @TheQArena and @ <http://t.co/gstfqlyZEJ> #CavsSixers"

@LAClippers "We're @backinblue today in our short-sleeve alternate uniforms. Get yours and post pictures with hashtag #backinblue! <http://t.co/PqzKYW8z3L>"

@Cavs "THEY'RE HERE! MT @CavsTeamShop: Select #CavsNavy jerseys are now available @TheQArena and online"

@Cavs "So clutch. Pick up #Cavs @FatHead Tradeable NOW at your local @Drug_Mart for just \$1.59 – for a two pack!"

Another form of promotion revealed in my analysis is community promotion. There were several occasions where the organizations retweeted content pertaining to things they were doing to better the community. From hosting charitable events, to dedicating portions of game profits to a charity, to promoting community outreach projects, teams promoted not only their merchandise, but their connection to the public:

@LAClippers “Visit <http://t.co/dh0CrZLqd5> & pick a school project in SoCal! Share it & tell why w/ #KialImpactLAC Sponsored by @kia.”

@LAClippers “Steve Ballmer grants student’s dream to cover the team: <http://t.co/fk9U9GxA4H> (via @hsinsider)”

@LAClippers “Clippers and @LAKings get involved to promote 2015 Special Olympic World Games – <http://t.co/zxZU91BIK5>”

@spurs “RT @sarampage: TONIGH at the Spurs Game we’ll have a Pink Puck Fundraiser for #RampagePinkWeek! Stop by section 105 to get yours...”

@Cavs “How will you make a DIFF in the community? Celebrate @CavsBHC & those who’ve paved the path for the next generation.

@Cavs “RT @CavsMoondog: I got my bowtie on! Help us beat Prostate Cancer, it starts with a vote. #UTTieONeOn <http://t.co/Jh15EMoQKr>”

@Cavs “Only ONE WEEK left unit! @CupidRunCLE! Donate now to help support @ChildrensTumor: <http://t.co/A6aZGir6y3> #EndNF”

The third form of promotion evident in team tweets is sponsorship. The majority of professional athletic organizations have sponsors that they count on for monetary support. Therefore, the three organizations use Twitter as a means to promote some of their sponsors. There were different ways that the organizations promoted their sponsors, such as the use of hashtags, giveaways, mentioning the sponsor within a tweet and retweeting the sponsor. Here are some examples:

@Cavs “Check out Mozgov BLOCK, Love to Smith TOUCHDOWN:
<http://t.co/SWL6Sle5SX> #CavsSixers #AssistOfTheNight brought to you by @StateFarm”

@Cavs “Spend #TGIF at @BarLouie Lundhurst for #CavsPacers! Delicious food, drinks & #Cavs prizes await you. See you at 7PM!”

@Cavs “Looking to upgrade you #CavsClippers experience tonight? Let @Kia hook it up! Swing by West Bay (Sect 108) for info.”

A final form of promotion evident in the three NBA organizations is giveaways. Organizations or sponsors of the organizations used Twitter to announce and promote giveaways or contests. In most cases, they would either retweet the sponsor who was hosting the giveaway or mention the giveaway within their original content. By promoting giveaways, the organization typically acts to promote itself or its sponsor(s):

@LAClippers “Your chance to train like a pro is here! Enter the @ObertoBeefJerky Sweepstakes through 2/11 – <http://t.co/NzoJJvm82B>”

@LAClippers “ClipperNation Don't miss your shot to win Blake's Tickets vs Rockets on Feb. 11! Enter now: <http://t.co/TzKbNZXFsw>”

@LAClippers “Giving away a VIP day with Clippers! Game seats, locker room, signed gear. ENTER HERE: <http://t.co/oi8norikV3>”

@Cavs “ MOZGOV's 3Q SLAM (X3!) earns YOU a FREE iced coffee from @DunkinDonuts! DETAILS: <http://t.co/BZdoOD5nV8>”

@Cavs “RT @georgiosofp: Here's your chance to win #Cavs tickets from us, and entering is easy! ENTER HERE: <https://t.co/5GtzK5Krhz>”

@Cavs “Bringing the kids to #CavsLakers? Children 14 and under will score THIS @matrix13 backpack presented by @keybank! <http://t.co/AYwx9cYa73>”

@Cavs “Happy WINSday! Celebrate the arrival of #CavsNavy – RETWEET this vine & you could win this @RealTristan13 jersey! <http://t.co/0q0YaRERYe>”

Trends

The final theme found in the three teams' tweets is trends. This theme should not be confused with “Twitter Trends,” which are Twitter's most popular topics being discussed on the site at that particular time. In this case, trends are unique to each of the three teams; they provide a form of togetherness and similarity. Trends are the subject of many of the organizations' posts within a short period of time. Trends can include phrases that the three teams created and used more than once, hashtags that are used over and over again to create a common bond, even a simple word dramatized to the extreme. I did not assume every hashtag used would fit in the

trend category, only those that would/could be used by the fan community. Trends focus audiences on certain uniform issues. The organizations used trends when tweeting about players, big plays, big games and game days. Below are examples of trends for the Spurs, the Clippers, and the Cavaliers respectively:

Spurs Trends:

@spurs "**Mamma Mia!** Marco is back on the court!"

@spurs "**Mamma Mia!** Marco with the TRIPLE!"

@spurs "Gear up for next Saturday with Marco's best triples from this season.

#MammaMia!"

@spurs "**THREEEEEEE**, Manu! Sprurs up 18-15 with 3:37 to go in 1Q"

@spurs "**THREEE**, Kawhi!"

@spurs "**THREEE**, Kawhi x2"

@spurs "**THREEEEEEE** Kawhi Leonard! That's his third triple tonight and 11th point! #TheKlaw"

@spurs "Make that 29-25 after a THREEE from @manuginobili! **#GoSpursGo**"

@spurs "Early in the 3Q, Spurs lead Heat 56-47. **#GoSpursGo**"

@spurs "RT @pattymills: GAME DAY BALA GAME DAY!!! #vsMiami

#GoSpursGo"

@spurs "RT @pattymills: GAME DAY BALA GAME DAY!!! #vsToronto

#GoSpursGo"

Clippers Trends:

@LAClippers "**ROLL CALL:** Where are you watching tonight's game from?"

@LAClippers "**ROLL CALL:** Where are you watching tonight's game from?"

@LAClippers “**ROLL CALL**: Where are you watching tonight’s game from?”

@LAClippers “RT @blackbatchoco: Lets go @LAClippers! **#BeRelentless**”

@LAClippers “**#BeRelentless** <http://t.co/UW3u2hyuLa>”

@LAClippers “**#WontBePlayingInAllStarGame** RT @RowanKavner: First
20/20 game ever for DeAndre Jordan”

@LAClippers “**ShouldBeGoingToTheAllStarGame** RT @latbbolch: DeAndre
Jordan has 22 points and 19 rebounds.”

@LAClippers “Meanwhile back in Los Angeles **#ClipperNation** is lining up for a
special fan viewing party at Tom’s Urban”

@LAClippers “RT: victoriahoopin: out here supporting LOB CITY in Cleveland!
#ClipperNation <http://t.co/c61eAqS3o0>”

@LAClippers “**#ClipperNation** Don’t miss your shot to win Blake’s tickets vs
Rockets on Feb. 11th! Enter now: <http://t.co/TzKbNZXFsw>”

@LAClippers “Thank you **#ClipperNation** for coming out in full force to tonight’s
fans viewing party at Tom’s Urban”

Cavaliers Trends:

@Cavs “**#MOZGOV** muscle <http://t.co/9ryG3uqEqP>”

@Cavs “**Mozzy** starting earthquakes in **#TheLand!**”

@Cavs “**MOZGOV** SLAM! Cavs up 17-12 in Indy.”

@Cavs “Filthy **#ChargeUp** @CantonCharge”

@Cavs “RT @royistheboy: **D3LLY** DAGG3RS”

@Cavs “**DELLY** with a CLUTH trey. #CavsSixers DIFF =8 with 2:13 left”

@Cavs “**Delly** trey alert. #CavsSixers”

@Cavs “The #**ELEVENSTRAIGHT** edition of the @Drug_Mart Insider show tips off at 7PM! Listen on @wtam1100”

@Cavs “11 wins, 2 eastern conference players of the week.

#ELEVENSTRAIGHT | BY THE NUMBERS”

To summarize, I have presented the four major themes in all three teams’ tweets: (1) Engagement, (2) Information, (3) Promotion and (4) Trends and provided key examples for each. I turn now to the themes in mentions.

Mentions

For the purpose of this study, simply looking at the original tweets of the NBA organizations would not help me to offer insights on dialogic communication. The use of mentions (e.g. replies) makes Twitter different from one-way communication media. Given its two-way communication capabilities, the social networking site might facilitate dialogue. To explore the extent to which Twitter does (or does not) do this, I also gathered the mentions to team Tweets. I analyzed a weeks’ worth of mentions from each organization and developed seven themes: (1) fan excitement, (2) fan disappointment, (3) organization/player critique, (4) organization/player appreciation, (5) fan-to-fan engagement, (6) organization-to-fan engagement and (7) taunting via “haters.”

Fan Excitement

The first theme in mentions is *fan excitement*. My analysis reveals that after teams tweeted information about themselves, (e.g. game day information or live tweeting), fans showed their excitement by replying to the organization. From a PR standpoint, getting the

audience excited about a product or brand is critical in creating and sustaining a relationship between organizations and their publics. The three NBA organizations have already established a loyal fan base but they are constantly working on ways to create new fans. One way to broaden a fan base is by generating excitement. Below are some examples of fan excitement on Twitter:

LA Clippers

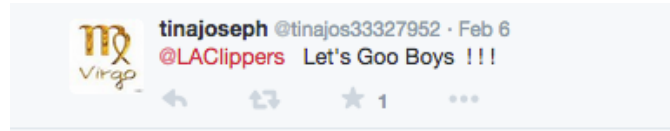


Figure 4-4 LA Clippers Mention

Cleveland Cavaliers



Figure 4-5 Cleveland Cavaliers Mention

San Antonio Spurs



Figure 4-6 San Antonio Spurs Mentions

Fan Disappointment

The second theme in mentions is *fan disappointment*. With any company or organization there are always going to be consumers who seek to express their disapproval. This does not mean that the consumer goes to find another company to buy from, however. Instead, disapproval might serve as a way to prompt organizational change and improvement. Review sites like Yelp, for example, are dedicated to disappointed consumers seeking a forum for a voice. Similarly, in this case, Twitter serves as a platform where fans can go to voice their disapproval of their beloved teams. Fan disappointment is evident in the following tweets:

LA Clippers

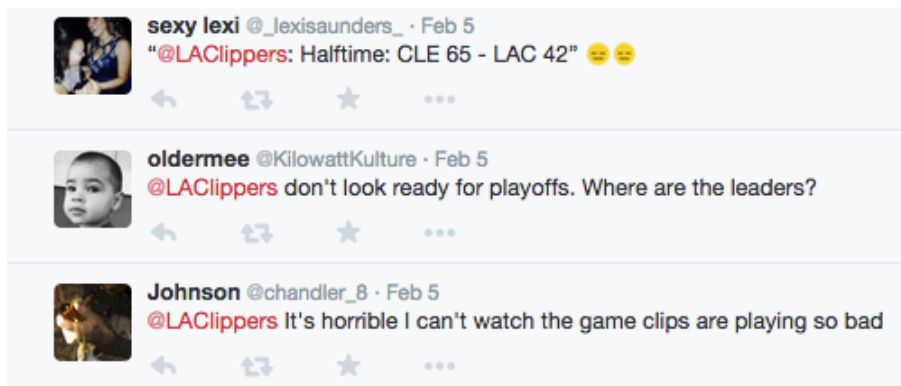


Figure 4-7 Clippers Disappointment

San Antonio Spurs



Figure 4-8 Spurs Disappointment

Cleveland Cavaliers

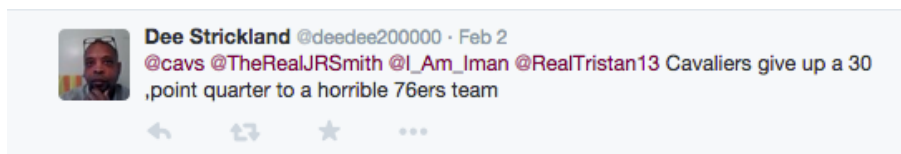


Figure 4-9 Cavaliers Disappointment

Organization/Player Critique

The third theme found in mentions of the NBA organizations' tweets was *organization/player critique*. There were many instances where fans/followers would play the role of "coach" or general manager (e.g. "GM") and tell the organization what they think about where the team is headed and what it could do to make it better. Unlike disapproval, instead of just stating their disappointment, in this theme, fans/followers gave organization/player ideas on how to be better.

LA Clippers

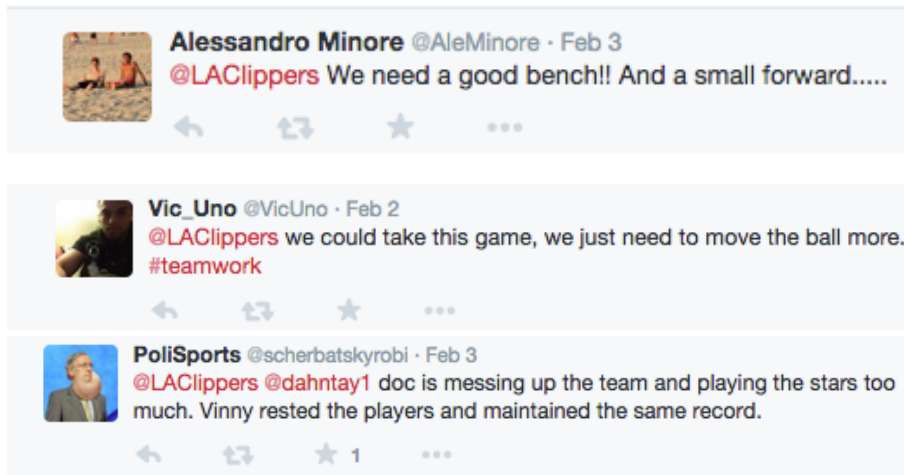


Figure 4-10 Clippers Critique

San Antonio Spurs

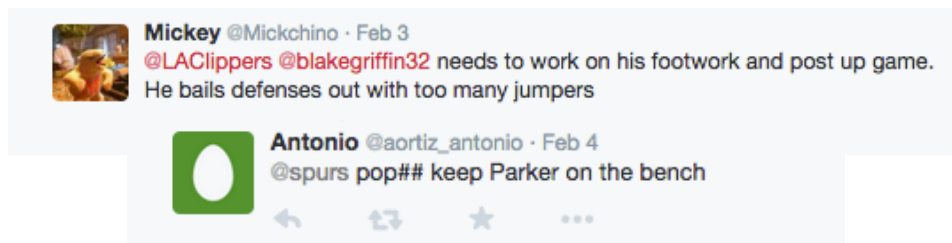


Figure 4-11 Spurs Critique

Cleveland Cavaliers

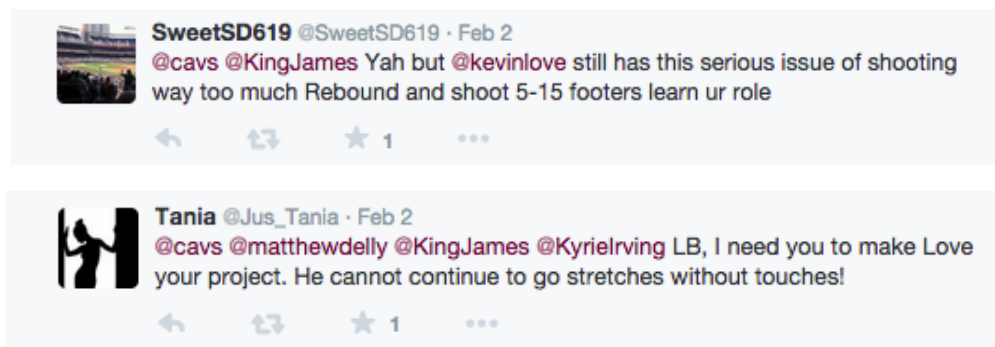


Figure 4-12 Cavaliers Critique

Organization/Player Appreciation

The fourth theme found within the organizations' mentions was *organization/player appreciation*. Although fans seemingly love to use Twitter as a platform to express their disapproval, they also use it to let the organization and players know how much they appreciate them. This was seen across all three organizations and came through tweets about what a player had done throughout the game, player highlights, game information tweets, and even organizational news. Receiving positive comments reassures the organizations that they are doing things right. It confirms that the organization is meeting the need of their fans/followers:

LA Clippers



Figure 4-13 Clippers Appreciation

San Antonio Spurs



Figure 4-14 Spurs Appreciation

Cleveland Cavaliers

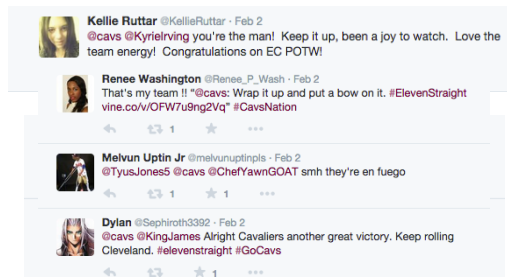


Figure 4-15 Cavaliers Appreciation

Fan-to-fan Engagement

The fifth mentions theme is *fan-to-fan engagement*. One aspect of social networking sites is the ability to connect to anyone, anywhere at any time. The organizations' tweets provided a starting point from which fans and their rivals, or opposing teams' fans, participate in communication with one another. By adding a person's Twitter handle within the tweet/mention, the opportunity for back and forth communication is created. My analysis reveals

that positive and negative communicative interactions between fans occur on Twitter. Here are some exchanges:

LA Clippers

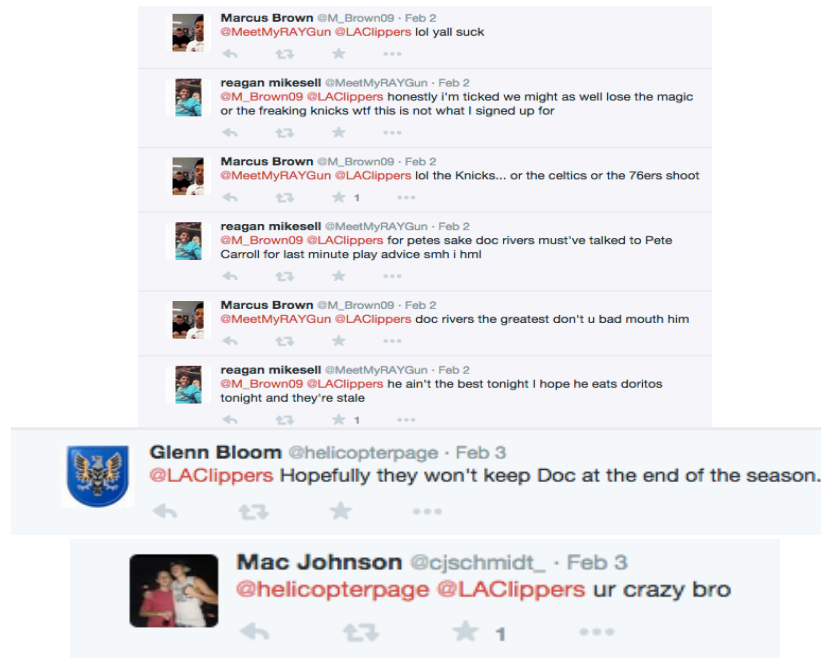


Figure 4-16 Clippers Fan Engagement



Figure 4-17 Clippers Fan Engagement 2

San Antonio Spurs

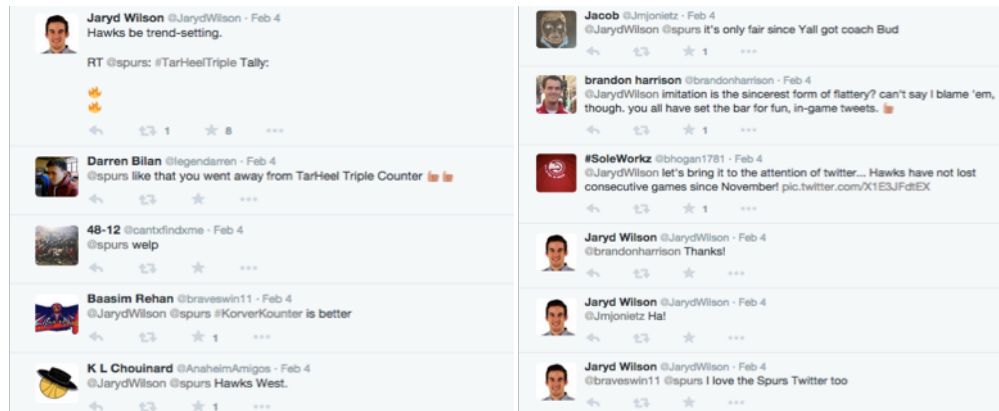


Figure 4-18 Spurs Fan Engagement

Cleveland Cavaliers

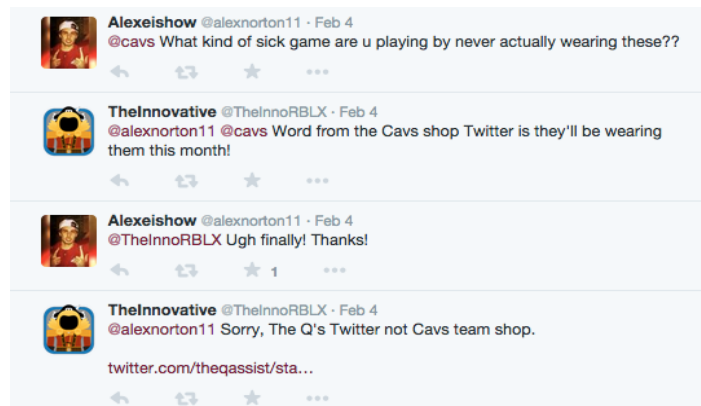


Figure 4-19 Cavaliers Fan Engagement

Organization-to-Fan Engagement

The sixth theme that was found within the organizations' mentions was *organization-to-fan engagement*. Revealing ways the organization is engaging and communicating with fans/followers was the basis of this study; therefore, being able to find organization-to-fan engagement within mentions takes us one step closer to discovering how organizations are using dialogic communication to create relationships with their publics. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the NBA organizations' displayed a form of engagement with fans/followers by retweeting their tweet or quote tweeting their tweet. The three organizations' have taken engagement one-step further by replying to their fans/followers within their mentions. Below are some key exemplars of this type of engagement:

LA Clippers

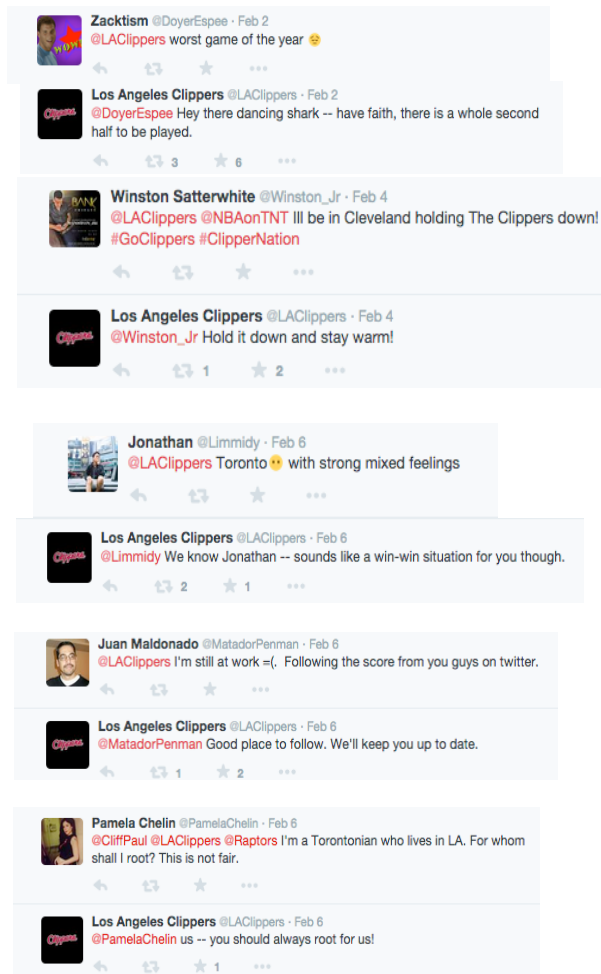


Figure 4-20 Clippers Org/Fan Engagement


San Antonio Spurs


During the time frame of February 1-7, 2015 the San Antonio Spurs did not reply to fans/followers within their mentions.


Cleveland Cavaliers


During the time frame of February 1-7, 2015 the Cleveland Cavaliers did not reply to fans/followers within their mentions. However, their arena Twitter account, which is related and tied to the organization, did engage with fans/follower throughout the


Cavaliers mentions:


 **MDM** @ekimatlam · Feb 3
@cavs @CavsTeamShop @TheQArena when will they be wearing the navy again?


 **The Q Assist** @TheQAssist · Feb 3
@ekimatlam @CavsTeamShop @TheQArena Should be this month! Stay tuned... #CavsNavy


 **Kian** @Joenni10 · Feb 3
@cavs @CavsTeamShop @TheQArena Why won't you play in the navys more often? This is the best looking color of them all.


 **The Q Assist** @TheQAssist · Feb 4
@Joenni10 @cavs @CavsTeamShop @TheQArena The Cavs will be wearing them again soon! Stay tuned...

 **Andrew Watson** @AWatson22 · Feb 4
@cavs @Kyrielrving trying to buy #CavsClippers tix with the all star code and it is staying there are none left am I doing something wrong?

 **The Q Assist** @TheQAssist · Feb 4
@AWatson22 It's possible the section/# tix you selected doesn't meet the inventory. Try another combo & let us know if issues still arise!

 **Andrew Watson** @AWatson22 · Feb 4
@TheQAssist okay thanks I'm looking for 4 in any section but it looks like there are none left even without the allstar code

 **The Q Assist** @TheQAssist · Feb 4
@AWatson22 Hmm...if you can DM us a phone number, we can put you in touch with a rep to help you find a spot!

 **Kevin Huyghe** @JCUSTreaks10 · Feb 4
@cavs @CavsWGUnited I did... i wasn't invited...


 **The Q Assist** @TheQAssist · Feb 5
@JCUSTreaks10 @cavs @CavsWGUnited Saw you tweet! Can you please DM your contact info so we can reach out? Thanks!

Figure 4-21 Cavaliers Org/Fan Engagement

Team Taunting via “Haters”

All three teams’ mentions also exhibit the theme of *taunting* via individuals known in popular culture as “haters,” or people who make it a point to expose flaws in others because they, themselves, are likely unhappy, according to the popular website Urban Dictionary. As discussed earlier, Twitter can act as an anonymous platform, allowing people to render judgments without any real accountability. My analysis reveals a final theme of hatefulness in which replies are characteristically derogatory and negative:

LA Clippers



Figure 4-22 Clippers Taunting

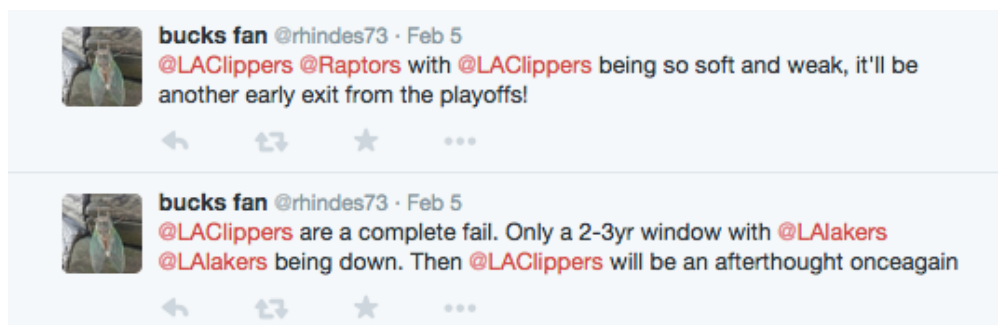


Figure 4-23 Clippers Hate Tweet

San Antonio Spurs

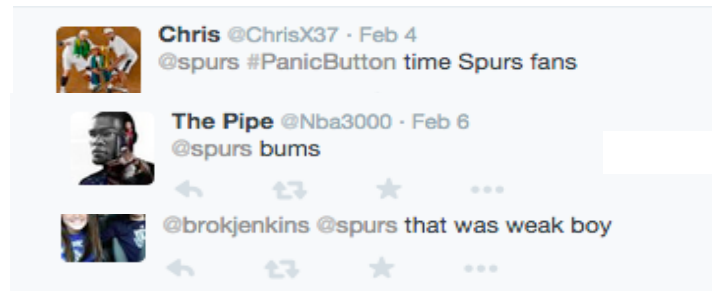


Figure 4-24 Spurs Taunting

Cleveland Cavaliers



Figure 4-25 Cavaliers Taunting

In sum, I have presented seven major themes found in all three teams' mentions: (1) fan excitement, (2) fan disappointment, (3) organization/player critique, (4) organization/player appreciation, (5) fan-to-fan engagement, (6) organization-to-fan engagement and (7) taunting via "haters." In my final chapter, I discuss if and how the findings revealed in my analysis of the teams' Twitter pages are dialogic.

Chapter 5

Discussion

In previous chapters, I reviewed Kent and Taylor's five tenets of dialogue: (1) mutuality, (2) propinquity, (3) empathy, (4) risk, and (5) commitment. The five tenets are said to be the foundation of dialogic communication in PR, and if used to their full extent, can help create and sustain the organization-public relationship. I used the five tenets to guide my interpretation of tweets from the Cleveland Cavaliers, Los Angeles Clippers and San Antonio Spurs. I also used the tenets as frames through which to analyze the replies to each tweet to see if and how the publics of each organization are using dialogue amongst themselves along with the organization. To better understand how the themes I developed in my analysis fit under the concept of dialogue, I place each tenet in the context of this study.

Mutuality

Mutuality is the act of acknowledging the inextricably linked nature between organizations and publics; it simply means that the organization is listening to all followers, not just their fans. Mutuality incorporates collaboration by broadening the range of voices heard in a conversation. Therefore if an organization embraces the spirit of mutuality on Twitter, it invites all contributions and allows all perspectives on an issue to be heard. In other words, everyone who follows an organization would have a voice and opportunity to be heard. My analysis of the three NBA organizations' tweets and mentions demonstrates that there were times where each organization exhibited mutuality within their tweets. One of the most obvious ways mutuality was seen through in tweets was through the use of retweets. When an organization retweets a fan/follower, it creates a dialogic relationship with that person, allowing them to know that they are equals; the fan's tweet is just as important and valid as the organization's tweet. Another way that organizations utilized mutuality within their tweets was with the use of hashtags and trends. By using hashtags within their tweets the organizations created a sense of togetherness, which in turn created dialogue amongst their followers. Hashtags and trends were used by followers within the organizations mentions to create a sense of unity and community. However, just because the

organizations have attempted to create a community, it takes participation from the public to engage in these actions to actually create the community. Ways the public can engage is by using the hashtags amongst their own tweets and within the organization's mentions. If the public chooses not to participate in the creation of community, dialogue does not exist.

With that said, neither the San Antonio Spurs nor Cleveland Cavaliers, acknowledged their publics in Twitter conversations. These two organizations' mentions revealed many instances when a fan/follower would have negative feedback for the organization. However, instead of acknowledging it, these teams either overlooked or ignored negative feedback. Confirmation creates trust within the organization-public relationship, which, as PR scholars know, is difficult to regain if and when it is lost. Organizations most effectively acknowledge their audiences by validating not only the concerns of those parties who agree with their practices and policies, but also those parties who oppose them. Confirmation validates the other in dialogic interactions.

The LA Clippers, however, did show that they listen to all sides and not one opinion is better than another. Here is an example of mutuality in action that the other teams might practice:

@MKingofnyc said "@LAClippers this team has no work ethic. They win a solid game then take a day off drag their feet. Not championship material. Lazy bums!!!"

@LAClippers said "@MKingofnyc Have you ever played 8 games in 15 days spanning over 8,000 miles in 4 time zones and two countries? Tougher than it sounds."

The Clippers organization took a negative comment, acknowledged it, and then defended their team. This is a great example on how an organization can be aware of all sides, negative and positive, and instead of ignoring it, invite critics to engage in perspective taking and consider how it is easier to criticize from the sidelines. While the Spurs and Cavs chose not to respond to negative feedback during the week of observation, they did keep the negative comments within their mentions when they could have easily deleted them in order to just show their organization in a positive light. In other words, at least the team did not censor critique from its followers.

My analysis of the organizations' mentions, or how fans and followers were conversing with one another, reveals a lack of mutuality. There were several instances when fans would refuse to listen to the other side of the conversation, and where both parties demonstrated a lack of open-mindedness by engaging in mostly refutative replies.. Perhaps this is to be expected when dealing with sports. Fans are loyal and will defend their team/favorite player. It is hard to have an open mind about something they care about so deeply. With mutuality comes the aspect of collaboration, which allows all parties involved in dialogue to advocate for their position without fear of retribution. Fans/followers should be allowed to state their opinion but once stated they should not feel disrespected by the other.

Mutuality promotes dialogic communication and although it may not have been extremely visible at first glance, the organizations' did use retweets and hashtags/trends toward the end of greater mutuality on Twitter. Moving forward, I believe if all three organizations truly took the negative comments into consideration and responded to them just as the LA Clippers did, they would not only be participating in richer dialogue but they could create better organization-public relationships.

Propinquity

When an organization distributes information that concerns the public, they are exhibiting propinquity. In the case of the three NBA organizations and Twitter, the organizations display propinquity when they inform their followers with news about game day information, how fans can get involved, how followers can win prizes, or connect with the organization. With propinquity comes immediacy of presence, which means that the public/followers have every opportunity to hear the information and communicate in the present in a shared space. Twitter is a unique example of a shared space; it is relational, present, and above all else an accessible place for those with Internet access to join. Therefore, when the organizations access Twitter to consult their followers/public with matters that concern them, they use Twitter toward the goal of greater propinquity. An example of how NBA organizations are using propinquity through Twitter is with live game day updates. These tweets are relational, timely, informative and done in a

shared space where fans/followers can not only view the information but also engage with the organization and other fans. Here are some examples of propinquity on Twitter:

@LAClippers “ROLL CALL: Where are you watching tonight’s game?”

@MatadorPenman “@LAClippers I’m still at work =(. Following the score from you guys on twitter.”

@LAClippers “@MatadorPenman Good place to follow. We’ll keep you up to date.”

Another aspect of propinquity is temporal flow, which simply means the organization is relaying content that is timely or looking toward the future benefit of the organization and followers. The NBA organizations I analyzed used temporal flow when they discussed the success of the team or individual players. There were instances when the organizations would even ask their fans/followers for their input, which displayed a great use of propinquity and engagement. Take these tweets, for instance:

@Cavs “What will it take to win ELEVEN STRAIGHT? @CavsJoeG details the FIVE KEYS to #CavsSixers”

@Feyenoord14 “@cavs @CavsJoeG Nothing, you just win. Even if you play Haywood as a PG you win...”

@TheDoubleMC “@cavs @CavsJoeG LeBron”

The final aspect of propinquity is engagement. The organizations should be accessible and engage with followers on issues that concern the teams and their fans. It is the responsibility of the organization to use this tool to engage with their fans and confirm that fans ‘voices are heard. My analysis shows that all three organizations engaged publics on Twitter. Propinquity helps organizations gain awareness of what audiences are talking about (be it positive or

negative) and they can use the open, two-way communication to improve organizational goals. My analysis shows that the LA Clippers did a more efficient job of engaging with their fans/followers through replies/mentions than the other two organizations. Within the week of observation and analysis neither the San Antonio Spurs nor the Cleveland Cavaliers had any direct replies/mentions with their fans/followers. Although they may not have engaged with their fans directly, there were instances when the Cavaliers retweeted fans/followers. The San Antonio Spurs did neither. From a PR standpoint, affirming that the public is heard through engagement is key to building and sustaining the organization-public relationship. Therefore, the Los Angeles Clippers used engagement and propinquity to their advantage and affirmed that their publics' voice was heard. For this reason, the team serves as a good example that other NBA teams might emulate. By communicating directly with their fans/followers the Clippers show they are willing to engage in dialogue with their public. The organization has abstained from mundane PR practices of pushing one-way communication to their public, and has utilized the aspects of Twitter to engage with their publics on several levels. As mentioned earlier, communication is shifting from a traditional form to a more active two-way-communication with the use of social networking sites. If organization can utilize them in similar ways as the LA Clippers I believe their organization-public relationship would not only be richer but it would increase amongst the majority of their public.

Empathy

Empathy entails the ability to imagine life from another's perspective or "walk in another's shoes." If an organization can view its publics' problems and issues as its own, it is demonstrating empathy. One way in which the three teams exhibited empathy was by supporting local charities and nonprofit organizations. All three organizations used the dialogic tenet of empathy to support their respective communities. Here are two examples:

@Cavs "Only ONE WEEK left until @CupidRunCLE! Donate now to help support @ChildrensTumor: <http://t.co/juZGlrQMP> #EndNF"

@Cavs “Catch Phrase with @matrix31? These kids played as part of Read to Achieve! #CavsCare”

Through community support, the organizations relayed to their publics that they care about their surrounding area and they are doing what they can to make a difference. This dialogic spirit contributes to a better organization-public relationship because both parties benefit from serving the needs of their communities.

With empathy comes supportiveness, or asking and urging the public/followers to participate in communication. The three NBA organizations used this aspect of empathy several times within the week of observation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, as a part of engagement through NBA tweets, the organizations disseminated content that would ask for the participation of fans/followers through retweets or replies. By engaging with the fans/followers the organizations are creating a stronger organization-public relationship. The fans/followers might see that their favorite teams are reaching out to them for feedback and in return participate in that dialogue. For example:

@Cavs “Happy #WINSday! Celebrate the arrival of #CavsNavy – RETWEET this vine and you could win this @RealTristan13 jersey...”

@LAClippers “Anyone else besides @victoriahoopin in Cleveland tonight to root for the Clippers?”

The organizations’ are creating the dialogue by concerning themselves with the issues and topics that their fans/followers are concerned with. Overall, the LA Clippers and the Cleveland Cavaliers reached out to their fans for participation in attempt to create dialogue. The San Antonio Spurs did not do this in the week of observation. The Spurs used their Twitter

content as a means to relay information about their organization/team/players, but there were no tweets asking for the fans/followers to respond/participate. Although it is hard to speculate why the organization abstained from using Twitter to engage fans/followers to participate there are some possible reasons as to why. The Spurs may use other social networking sites such as Facebook or Instagram on a regular basis to pull engagement from their fans/followers, or perhaps the week that I analyzed the organization did not have a means to engage with their public through Twitter. The San Antonio Spurs organization was the least engaging of the three organizations I followed and tweeted the least amount. Therefore, the Spurs may not see Twitter as a valuable medium to engage and communicate with their publics.

Another aspect of empathy is communal orientation; this means the organization simply perceives their public/followers as their colleagues. This aspect of empathy asks that an organization view its fans as equally important as players to its success. The notion that teams and fans share an identity and common goal is evident in fans' retweets. The reason retweets identifies fans as equals is because the fans tweets become a part of the organizations' Twitter profiles. When content is retweeted, fans/followers' original content is placed in the organizations' timelines and anyone who follows the organizations will see the fans' tweet. The organization has chosen to include the fans tweet in their dialogue with the rest of the public, which demonstrates an attempt to move toward equality. As other fans see this, there is a possibility that they will feel more connected and engaged with the organization. The LA Clippers and Cleveland Cavaliers utilized this aspect of empathy during the week of analysis; the Spurs retweeted content but it was not from fans. In fact, only players or other members affiliated with the organization were retweeted by the Spurs. By simply retweeting people involved with the organization the Spurs are not partaking in dialogue with their publics but simply associating within their organization. Instead of taking steps towards equality, wherein fans are on the same level as other aspects of the organization, the Spurs organizations seems to continue to follow practices that are not engaging with their fans/followers. After analyzing the three organizations it is evident that some

organizations have PR experts who are using twitter dialogically and some who continue to use it as a means for one-way communication.

Finally, when an organization acknowledges the publics' voices, it is being empathetic. Through the use of retweets and replies within mentions, organizations can affirm the voices of followers. The LA Clippers were the only organization to respond to fans/followers within their mentions. The act of empathy through affirmation created direct dialogue between the public and the organization, which improves the organization-public relationship. Neither the Cleveland Cavaliers nor the San Antonio Spurs participated in affirmation through the use of mentions, and the San Antonio Spurs did not affirm one fan/follower throughout the entire week of observation. Affirmation or the process of acknowledging the voice of the other is key to creating and sustaining the organization-public relationship. Affirmation creates trust within the relationship, which, as PR scholars know, is difficult to regain if and when it is lost. Organizations most effectively acknowledge their audiences by validating not only the concerns of those parties who agree with their practices and policies, but also those parties who oppose them. Affirmation validates the other in dialogic interactions. The consequences of not affirming the public could result the public to not view the dialogue as the common goal, therefore there could be less engagement and less participation in the conversation.

Risk

When trying new things there is always some risk involved, but those risks could yield great rewards, especially when it comes to dialogic communication. One risk that comes with organizational dialogue is vulnerability. There is a lot of anonymity within social media, especially Twitter, and there is no real way to know exactly who one is communicating with. With that, organizational vulnerability increases due to the fact that organizations' Twitter accounts have been verified as a legitimate NBA organization. However, their followers have complete anonymity and can say whatever they feel with no one really knowing who they are. Once an organization releases content, it is out there for the Twitter-verse to praise or ridicule.

Anonymity raises the question of mutuality, which states that all parties involved should be viewed as equals. However, when one party has the “advantage” on anonymity but the other has to be forthright with who they are, equality is no longer present. With that said, the question rises if dialogue can occur if this form of equality isn’t shared? I believe it can be, ethical dialogue necessitates acknowledgment of “the other” and the organizations’ do this with every tweet. They are acknowledging that they have fans that are following them to simply participate in the daily dialogue. When one speaks for one’s self, or for one’s organization, the needs, desires, and views of other dialogic partners should not only be acknowledged and recognized, but should be apparent (Anderson et al. 1994). Although there is anonymity the fans/followers are still acknowledging the organizations by replying to their tweets and attempting to participate in dialogue.

Although this is a form of risk, each encounter offers the possibility of growth and knowledge of new perspectives. The promise of dialogue is that it is unscripted and generative. Although an organization may strategically design original Twitter content, it cannot plan how that content is received and perceived. The interactions and conversations that take place afterwards exhibit the risk of dialogue. My analysis of the teams’ tweets reveals that informative tweets from the organizations to fans were risky because they prompt fans to react to good and bad news in a public forum. Informative tweets pertaining to players resulted in some negative ridicule in the organizations’ mentions, especially when players acted in a questionable manner. For example, after a loss, a player from the LA Clippers made a controversial comment about a female referee. Shortly thereafter, the controversial comment became an issue on all the major sport networks and all major social media websites. The Clippers organization made no mention of the incident except for one Twitter statement:

@LAClippers “Chris Paul said last night was about the call, and that’s it.”

Although this tweet is the only public comment about the matter from the Clippers, it was definitely a risky move. This is because anonymous Twitter users could subsequently write

anything they wanted. After analyzing the mentions, I found that there were both negative and positive replies; fans who supported Chris Paul and followers who believed his comment was derogatory and unnecessary. Regardless of the response, the organization did what it felt had to be done by making a statement through Twitter. This act of dialogue was risky but it ultimately yielded more dialogue among fans.

Another aspect of risk in dialogue is recognizing otherness. This dimension of dialogue centers difference as a resource in today's society and seeks to bring diverse groups of people together for a common purpose, in this case, for the love and enjoyment of sports. The three NBA organizations' used trends and hashtags within their tweets to create a sense of togetherness among various organizations and the fans. My findings show that fans of the teams and followers of the organization used these trends within their replies. Although it was not part of my coding procedure, as a Twitter user, I imagine that many fans/followers also use the trends and hashtags within their own original Twitter content as well, expanding the dialogue even further. Take these tweets for example:

@Spurs "Make that 29-25 after a THREEEEE from @manuginobili!
#GoSpursGo"

@PJA_SpursBABE9 "@spurs good warm up. Lol! Now legs get nasty
#GoSpursGo unleash the champs in you."

Readers can see that by inserting the hashtag the @PJA_SpursBABE9 has engaged in dialogue with the organization and has inserted herself into the risk of dialogue from other followers/fans/haters. Throughout the week of analysis all three organizations used hashtags to create dialogue among themselves and their followers, risking the engagement of strange otherness.

Commitment

When it comes to good PR in the NBA, commitment by teams to create dialogue and build relationships with fans demonstrates genuineness. To be genuine means the organizations are honest and forthright with their information, relaying the good and the bad. When analyzing the three NBA organizations' tweets each team played three games during the week of observation. With all three games the organizations relayed correct game information and player information regardless of the outcome of the specific game. Just because the team may have lost, the organization still tweeted the score, tweeted highlights from the game and tweeted player stats; the same was true when the team won.

@LAClippers “#Clippers fall to @BrooklynNets, 102-100. RECAP – <http://t.co/t69fTHLBCi> PHOTOS - <http://t.co/Ef9RieZbcs>”

Despite having “negative” news or information, the organization displayed genuineness by not cherry picking certain favorable information. Another aspect of commitment when it pertains to dialogue is commitment to the conversation. When the organizations and their followers trust one another, they reap mutual benefits, such as coming to Twitter to receive live game stats. The main thing that all three organizations participated in was live tweeting their teams games. Fans/followers trust that the organization will keep them up to date with game day stats and scores and in return the organizations trust that the fans/followers need game day stats and scores in order to stay in tune with the organization. This also means sharing the same meanings or working toward a common goal. Within the NBA organizations it is evident that the organization and the fans want the team to be successful, which is the overall common goal. My analysis reveals many instances in which the fans/followers gave their input on how the team could do better through critique. I found that the only NBA organization to affirm that the public's voice was heard on such critiques was the LA Clippers:

@Vic_Uno “@LAClippers we could take this game, we just need to move the ball more. #teamwork”

@LAClippers “@Vic_Uno Agreed.”

Although the response is curt, the Clippers showed their commitment to the common goal of winning through affirming that the fans critique was not only heard but that they agreed with it. The Spurs and the Cavaliers definitely had original content that proved they were committed to a common goal, but they never directly responded or engaged in dialogue with a fan/follower or their overall public. When the organization commits to interpreting all aspects of the conversation they display their genuineness and their commitment to bettering the public-organization relationship. Another important type of commitment was teams' commitment to community outreach, which yields the use of empathy through communal orientation. By committing to community outreaches, charities and foundations, the organization is not only showing their publics that they care about their community but they are allowing them to see that they do not view themselves pristine over the community or their organizations. All three NBA organizations utilized this aspect of empathy within their Twitter content. They promoted several charity events, along with foundations that players were involved in. By engaging in empathetic dialogue the organization shows that they are willing to “walk in the shoes” of the public. This aspect can ensure the public that the organization not only supports them perceives them as colleagues trying to reach a common goal of communal respect.

Organizational research specifically dedicated to Twitter has been scarce, but evidence points to continued findings of lost opportunities for dialogue within social networking sites. As mentioned earlier, Twitter is only used by 35% of *Fortune 500* companies, with only 24% of those reporting active SNS involvement (Barnes & Mattson, 2010). Organizations frequently disseminate information to their followers, but rarely succeed at engaging in transactional communication. One-way communication is still the most pronounced form of messaging strategy used by organizations on Twitter (Waters and Jamal, 2011), and securing one-way message

receivers is the most common non-communication strategy (Rybako & Seltzer, 2010). This was also true for the three NBA organizations studied, their main focus in tweets was the dissemination of information to their publics. Rather than capitalizing on the interactive nature and dialogic capabilities of SNS, organizations mostly use Twitter as a means of sharing information. While this is important, I believe the organizations should follow up on information-sharing with building relationships with publics through active dialogue from both parties.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Two research questions guided my inquiry: (1) How, if at all, does communication between the Cleveland Cavaliers, the San Antonio Spurs and the Los Angeles Clippers and their Twitter audiences reflect dialogic tenets?; and (2) How, if at all, do these teams build reciprocal communication relationships through dialogue with their fans on Twitter? I developed insights into these questions with a qualitative analysis that centered dialogic communication. My findings illuminate how dialogue is critical for creating and maintaining a worthwhile organization-public relationship. By using the five tenet of dialogue proposed by Kent and Taylor, organizations will not only communicate with their publics in better fashion, they can create and sustain relationships that will be beneficial to all parties. The focus of this research was to see if professional athletic organizations, specifically three NBA teams are utilizing the aspects of social networking sites, specifically Twitter, to participate in dialogic communication with their fans/followers (publics). By following three NBA organizations, the San Antonio Spurs, the Cleveland Cavaliers and Los Angeles Clippers for a total of seven days in which each team played at least three games, I was able to conclude that all three organizations use the dialogic tenets proposed by Kent and Taylor in their original Twitter content. After analyzing the three NBA organization's tweets, it was evident that the tenet used most frequently within original twitter content was propinquity. The majority of the organizations' tweets were related to organization information and relaying that information to the public through the medium of Twitter, which suggests that these specific organizations are still relying heavily on one-way communication by sending out organization content. From a PR standpoint, social networking sites such as Twitter, have created a new realm of media that could be utilized for the benefit of the organization and public if used from a dialogic standpoint. I believe if the organizations balanced the five tenets throughout their social media campaigns they could create a more sustainable relationship with fans/followers. With mutuality they would show their ability to view everyone as equals, propinquity would allow them to relay the information that is relevant and important to the public,

empathetic dialogue allows the public to view the organization as one of their own, risk shows that the organization is not fearful of tackling the tough subjects/issues, and commitment proves that the organization not only hears what the public is telling them but acts on it as well.

My thesis examined not only the organizations' tweets but their mentions too, in order to see how the fans engaged in dialogue with the organizations. Here I found that only one team, engaged with fans through mentions affirming that the public's voice was heard. The Los Angeles Clippers organization proved that within the week of observation and analysis they are an organization committed to participating in dialogue with their fans and followers. Although the Cleveland Cavaliers and San Antonio Spurs did not directly respond to fans through mentions there were occasions where the organizations' retweeted fans/followers, which indicates a form of engagement and affirmation.

As mentioned earlier, dialogue is two-way-communication; it cannot occur if both parties do not participate. After analyzing the NBA organizations, I do not believe they are utilizing the social networking site Twitter to its full capabilities related to creating dialogue with their fans/followers. Although the LA Clippers did the best job conversing directly with fans/followers, dialogue was minimal. Kent and Taylor argue that dialogue emphasizes how genuine communication between an organization and its publics relies on the active participation of both parties. After conducting my research, it is clear that the fans/followers of the three NBA organizations' I analyzed are actively vocalizing ideas and concerns to the organizations, but the organizations are not necessarily participating in the conversation. My findings indicate that, while the three teams have a social media presence and also provide a forum for their publics' voices to be heard, that their Twitter pages (and social media in general) have yet to meet their dialogic potential. Communication scholars know how important dialogue in PR is; and I suggest teams begin to view their social media as an integral aspect to the success of their organization. Although it is extreme to expect the organization to reply to every fan/follower, I believe they could all do a better job in engaging with fans on a regular basis. As mentioned earlier Twitter is set up for quick, timely posts and responses, therefore, it is relatively easy and quick to

communicate with. I believe if the organizations focused engaging with fans more often and confirming that fans voices were heard, communication as a whole would be more dialogic. Having one or two people on staff who are willing to commit to engaging with fans through social media could transform the organization-public relationship to a more sustainable level. The overarching goal of PR practitioners is to create a better outlook for the organization, I believe dialogic relationship with the public is a key step in that process.

Limitations of this Study

There are limitations to all studies and this thesis is no exception. For instance, Twitter has privacy settings that allow users to have private profiles that can only be viewed by users that follow them. The privacy settings also allow the user to have to accept/deny any user who may want to follow them. With that said, users who have their profiles as private could have replied to the NBA organizations' tweets but I would not have been able to view them because I did not already follow them. Therefore, some dialogic content could have been missed. The only way to battle this obstacle is if I had direct access to the organization's account that way I could view all replies. Another aspect that limited the entirety of the research is not knowing if the fans/followers posted replies to the organizations' tweets and subsequently deleted the information. This could have changed the dialogic make-up of the conversations.

Another major limitation was that only three NBA organizations out of thirty were analyzed in my study. Therefore, 90% of the organizations were not present through this study so it cannot be assumed that the findings can relay across the entirety of the NBA. But because generalization is not a goal of this study, I am confident that my contributions offer meaningful insights into three NBA teams and their interactions with NBA fans. Finally, these insights pertain to just one week's worth of tweets. I recognize that limiting the time frame for the purposes of my thesis might constitute another limitation. Still, for what I aimed to do, one week's worth of tweets provided me with ample information to analyze.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should be done to build on my findings and enhance our knowledge on how organizations are using a dialogic approach on social networking sites. For example, exploring my research questions from a quantitative frame could help researchers answer important questions about if and how the dialogic tenets effect the amount of replies the organizations gets, the amount of retweets the organization gets, and if there is any relation to follower growth for the organization. This type of research would focus more on the organizational side of things. Instead of exploring mutually beneficial relationship-building, this research would guide organizations in building a fan base. Additionally, communication scholars might also expand my work to critically examine other corporate organizations. Corporate organizations sell products; therefore, getting feedback through the use of Twitter on how they can enhance their products or how they can create a better relationship with their public may be more evident than it was with the NBA organizations. Also, the use of dialogic tenets may be utilized completely differently within corporate organizations.

In the end, my study begins an important conversation about how the relationships between organizations and individuals become increasingly interdependent in today's world. Organizations have a responsibility to be accountable to the people on whom they rely for success. By using a dialogic approach in public relations, PR theorists and practitioners alike might learn more about how to build relationships that benefit both organizations and publics.

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Bibliography

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