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Social Media and Sports Journalism:

How is the rise of Twitter affecting
football journalism?

Louise Matthews and Daniel Anwar

“I can’t think how I would live without it (Twitter) actually. There are people who resisted for a long time – colleagues of mine – but they all see the light.”

Raphael Honigstein, football correspondent,
The Guardian, Süddeutsche Zeitung,
Stuttgarter Zeitung

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Phil McNulty, chief football writer, BBC Sports

In the fast-moving world of social media developments, Twitter, like other tools before it, may decline and be replaced by something new. But many of the journalists in this chapter suggest it has already altered journalism practices in ways that will live on regardless of any individual tool. In a sense, the rise of social media in its various forms means the genie is out of the bottle and it is unlikely things will go back to the way they were. So sports journalism faces the challenge of changes presented by social media, which include being actively involved in it or simply dealing with its impact.

As this chapter was being written, sports journalists were still debating the extent to which something so relatively

new had affected their daily work even those who chose not to use it. “There’s already discord among the press corps because of Twitter,” says Iain Macintosh (*The New Paper*, *The Irish Examiner*, *Sports Illustrated*), recalling one incident when journalists were travelling with Manchester United to European games:

“Rio Ferdinand was standing up throughout the entire flight because his back was giving him problems. As soon as he landed two or three of the younger journalists tweeted it immediately, which caused fury among some of the older journalists who weren’t on Twitter. They were looking at Rio Ferdinand and thinking: “Boom! There’s my story, write that and go for a drink”, but because it was out on Twitter it was no longer a story.”

As we’ll see in this chapter, Twitter has even more uses for sports journalists including audience interaction to inform and feed back on work, driving audiences to their work, increasing their audience by establishing a profile or ‘brand’ and, of course, finding news and stories.

Some side effects of Twitter are unexpected, occurring as they do because of basic human interactions and communication. Its original purpose was ‘social networking’ and it is really through its users’ activities that it sometimes appears to take on a life of its own – but its speed and scope can certainly amplify some messages.

This chapter should be useful even if Twitter alters or is even long gone when you read it. Indeed, exciting research in it captures a fascinating moment of change for many top football writers. We’ll look at some key challenges for sports journalism, specifically relating to Twitter and football reporting. Some key concepts surrounding this, such as gatekeeping and gate-watching, will be outlined and defined as will Twitter itself. We’ll see what academic researchers have to say about these concepts, while journalism professionals give differing opinions, informed by their experience. These include Phil McNulty, the BBC’s chief football writer who moved to online journalism after a traditional print background, and several leading national and international football print journalists.

So, this chapter will examine the effect of social media or

social networking on sports reporting, by focusing on Twitter and football journalism. Specifically:

- Has Twitter affected the way in which football journalists report the news?
- To what extent is Twitter an essential tool for football journalists?
- How will Twitter affect football journalism in the long-term?

What is Twitter?

Twitter is a social network and micro-blogging site established in 2006 with its unique difference of all updates being public by default and restricted to 140 characters as status updates (Miller, 2010). Since its launch, its user base has grown exponentially (for example, from 1 million to 17 million visitors in one year, April 2008 – 2009) and is now at over half a billion (500 million) with new accounts signing up at a rate of nearly 1 million a day in a still-accelerating process - and it now has a multitude of purposes (Mediabistro.com, 2012; Johnson, 2009; Taylor, 2011; Shultz and Sheffer, 2010: 227). People use it to keep in touch with friends and promote their work or interests, companies promote their brand, and the news can be delivered and discovered through Twitter.

Twitter users post updates – or tweets – which appear on their followers’ Twitter homepages in the form of a timeline. The content of each Twitter user’s timeline is determined entirely by them by choosing to follow other users whose tweets will then appear in the timeline, usually in a steady stream of postings. Users add links to their tweets to spread articles, photos and videos. Twitter is accessible from almost any device with an internet connection, including smartphones with all their advantages of putting the tweeter and receiver immediately in place and moment.

Retweeting is an important feature – if a user believes another user’s tweet is particularly interesting they can “retweet” it, which places it in the news feed of all of their own followers – which “transforms it from a simple bit of information to word-of-mouth.” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011:107). Users can simply ‘retweet’ tweets as they are with one easy

click or with their own added comments.

Another key feature of Twitter is the hashtag, which is central to organising the vast amount of information on Twitter (Small, 2011). Key words or phrases are marked with a # symbol - e.g. #MOTD for Match of the Day - which allows users to look at all the tweets on that particular subject in real time, giving an overview of current opinion.

Twitter's speed and brevity mean it is well suited to delivering breaking news as it happens. There are always new developments and stories in football - transfers, suspensions, injuries, and team line-ups and more - and Twitter is an ideal format to disseminate news quickly to the large audience for this information. As Spezia states:

"Sports give rise to icons and give people something to believe in, as following a team or player acts as a way of life. As a result, when a service such as Twitter allows fans to track the latest news, scores, or gossip in real time, it can shape the journalism industry in significant ways." (Spezia, 2011:4-5)

In a previous breakdown of more than 200 million users, around 100 million are active users who log in once a month and 50 million log in once a day (Taylor, 2011). Of these 'active' users, 55% use Twitter on their mobile phones (Richardson, 2011) - largely due to the proliferation of internet-enabled, 3G phones such as the iPhone and Blackberry in recent years (Hutchins, 2011) - highlighting the platform's ability to deliver news to people wherever they are. As of March 2011 an average of 140 million tweets were sent every day (Twitter blog, 2011) though unofficial analysts now set this at 175 million ([Mediabistro.com](http://mediabistro.com), 2012).

Twitter & Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is a term for the process by which the media decide what information is and is not delivered to the public. McCombs states that citizens are presented with a 'second-hand reality' - people tend to only know what journalists tell them and little more (2004).

Bruns (2011) argues that while gatekeeping was necessary in the past because of a scarcity of news outlets, the wide array of

media platforms and organisations in modern society is rendering the process irrelevant. While in the past there was little scope for direct audience participation in the “newshole” and editors and journalists maintained complete control over the agenda, this is no longer the case.

“News organisations may continue to control the news agenda in their own publications, but they are unlikely to drive public debate ever again throughout this complex, multifaceted media environment... journalism has become a mass participation activity.” (Bruns, 2011:132-3)

Richards (2011) claims that newspapers and broadcast journalism cannot compete with the immediacy of Twitter. She says Twitter has negated the need for a “lead-time to prepare and present news to the public” (2011:618). As news organisations have adapted to the use of Twitter, they now tweet breaking news along with a link to the story on their own website, which has the basic details and is updated as the story develops. Also, Twitter removes any entry barrier needed to express opinions publicly, so that:

“Twitter has a clear distinction from other websites by doing more than simply connecting people socially; it creates an avenue for people to share their opinions with the world.” (Richards, 2011: 618)

While this used to be the exclusive territory of journalists and those whose words were covered by them, now anyone with a Twitter account can potentially reach a worldwide audience from their computer or mobile phone. Ahmad (2010) writes:

“Now, for the first time in recorded history, witnesses to news events are able to post their unmediated testimonies as events unfold, in real time.” (Ahmad, 2010:145-54)

The internet – and Twitter as a result – allows people to shift their media habits from “passive consumption to active engagement” says Hermida (2011:6). Despite this, he states that journalists still see themselves as an “elite group”, who “mediate the flow of information to the public” (2011:16).

But, as Hutchins (2011) points out, when a high-profile

athlete sends a tweet, they are now addressing the public without the need for a journalist to deliver the message. Communicating instantaneously with fans, friends and observers, bypassing the gatekeeping functions of journalists, publicists and sports officials. (Hutchins, 2011: 237).

Football journalists and Twitter

In practice, how did sports journalists come to use Twitter? Many say they initially resisted but soon saw the potential. Phil McNulty, BBC Sport website chief football writer who worked on regional and national newspapers until going 'online', had "observed it from afar and never thought it was for me". He was encouraged by his then-editor Lewis Wiltshire (who then became head of sport at TwitterUK) who explained its worth as a tool for breaking news and hearing about breaking news, as well as a platform for his own work and the work of others at the BBC. McNulty was still skeptical.

"Why would anyone want to sum things up in 140 characters when we could use all our writing skills to paint a bigger picture?" he said. But: "I was converted within about five minutes of creating an account. Everything Lewis said fell right into place."

Twitter is a 'constant source of news and opinion,' says McNulty, with a rising 150,000 followers (July 2012). Initially prolific on Facebook, he admits he has scaled down his use of this.

"I use Twitter to break news, pass opinions on football (and the odd word or two on music), link to blogs or stories I have done – and especially to provide instant live coverage of events I attend. Many people follow live sport on Twitter now. The reaction to this is huge. Twitter is excellent for live match reporting and it used extensively by pretty much every reporter I know. It can also be used as part of a running live text commentary on a sporting events, as it is on the BBC."

Iain Macintosh (The New Paper, The Irish Examiner, Sports Illustrated) also remembers initially not seeing 'the point' of Twitter.

“I’m ashamed to say I was one of those people saying things like: ‘Why do I want to know what everybody else has had for breakfast?’ Failing to realise, of course, that if you’re following people who are talking about what they’re having for breakfast you’re doing it wrong. Eventually enough people said to me there’s enough potential here and you can get your name known. To cut a long story short, it just changed everything in a very short space of time.”

Oliver Kay (The Times) initially felt it was “self-indulgent and a bit egotistical” and was persuaded to join Twitter by an American journalist who told him it was going to be “so important long-term” particularly for journalists’ profiles and driving traffic. He told Kay he should do it even if he didn’t think at first it was worth doing, because “it would ultimately have a great worth in terms of individual profile”, which Kay says proved true within two years.

Jeremy Wilson (football news correspondent, The Daily Telegraph) says he had “mixed feelings” about Twitter being all time-consuming and yet ‘another thing to be doing’, especially when observing early-user colleagues.

“People like Henry (The Daily Telegraph) and Daniel Taylor (chief football writer, The Guardian) – you would always see them on their phones doing it all the time and people are like ‘do you ever get a few hours off from thinking about football?’ But then, anyone with anything about them could see that there were advantages and potential benefits and also that it was becoming a big thing. It becomes a no-brainer really; you have to be involved with it, if everybody is doing it and it’s clearly becoming important as a source of stories.”

He says other benefits are communicating his stories, “selling and pushing yourself and your work”.

As does Gabrielle Marcotti (world football columnist for The Times, also Corriere dello Sport, Wall Street Journal, Sunday Herald, Melbourne Age) who says he initially found it useful as an immediate news source but increasingly realized its power in promoting his own work whether an article or a radio appearance.

In the case of the BBC, McNulty feels that Twitter benefits his employer by increasing his profile as a reporter and writer, and

enabling him to do the same for colleagues by retweeting their stories and encouraging people to follow them.

Jack Pitt-Brooke (The Independent) is uncertain how effective tweets are at driving traffic to his newspaper's website, as Twitter is full of people asking others to "read my stuff!"

"I probably read about 3% of things I see on Twitter, if that, and that means that your conversion rate isn't going to be that high. Obviously the more followers you have, the more chance you have of getting read. I think it's not always that successful, as much as you'd like to be."

But Iain Macintosh (The New Paper, The Irish Examiner, Sports Illustrated) believes Twitter has transformed his career due to its uses as a platform for content. Without it, for example, his articles on English football for Singapore-based The New Paper would pretty much remain read in that country alone. He has over 20,000 followers and consequently anything that he provides a link to on Twitter potentially has an audience of that size - and even bigger due to Twitter's retweet function. He recalls tweeting out a link to one topical blogpost and seeing it pick up 10,000 views within the hour and getting up to 60 audience comments within minutes. As Twitter is an online medium, anything a football journalist posts is not restricted by the geographical limitations that bind the reach of a newspaper. Articles can be read and shared by people anywhere - as Raphael Honigstein (The Guardian, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Stuttgarter Zeitung) says: "It's opened up the world even more for you, because people read your shit all over the world".

The balance can be trickier, however, for print journalism, which needs a fine balance not to 'give away' stories and make its newspaper defunct. Although this could happen previously with the internet, Twitter amplifies the risk. It's an ongoing issue for the tweeting football writers of the national newspapers.

Honigstein says "I think you have to be very careful because you don't want to scoop yourself! That wouldn't make much sense." He often tweets a small "taster" to his work, encouraging his followers to buy the newspaper or read the full article online.

Every Friday The Sun's Charlie Wyett tweets a link to his

interview column in the paper, but takes measures to avoid affecting sales of his newspaper, as he explains:

“I make a point of posting it late morning to early afternoon. I’m not one of those, and each to their own and I’m not criticising them, that puts it on at 11 o’ clock at night because I’m a firm believer in people buying the paper.”

For Daniel Taylor (The Guardian, The Observer) the dilemma tends to be more between a tweet or his digital-first paper’s website. “Sometimes if you hear something at 3:58 for example, and it’s going to be announced publicly at 4 o’clock, you just think “I haven’t got time to write 500 words for the website”, so you announce it (on Twitter)”. So it is, he says, that

“quite often good stories are broken on Twitter. If you follow the right people, there are a lot of foreign journalists, decent people to follow. It’s always interesting and useful to monitor what they’re saying – for example a Portuguese journalist might tweet he’s heard someone from Manchester United is at a game in Portugal, you might not have known that otherwise.”

As a consequence of the speed with which tweets are sent and received, news has become more immediate and football writers have had to adapt their print content accordingly. Daniel Taylor said: “It has changed the world we live in, in terms of newspapers, everything’s so immediate now.” But Twitter is just the fastest of the methods pressurizing print news, he says:

“If you write a match report on a game on Saturday at 3 o clock Monday’s paper, it can look horrendously out of date. It’s already old news by Monday because everyone knows via Twitter or the internet, or Match of the Day later on what a good goal you may have seen or something. So you have to always be always trying to throw things forward.”

The Daily Telegraph’s Jeremy Wilson believes that Twitter is particularly well suited to reporting on football news because fans are so eager to learn any new information about the team that they follow. Some stories won’t make it into space-restricted newspa-

pers (and even online stories) but are well suited to Twitter:

“There’s certain stories that you might know - like the dates of Arsenal’s pre-season games. If I offered that as a story for my paper there would be more important things to put in, but if I tweeted that on Twitter that’s of huge interest to thousands of people out there – that’s their team, it might affect when they have their holiday that summer.” (Wilson, 2012.)

Wyett says it’s all about finding the balance:

“As a journalist you want to use colour to tell the readers something they didn’t know from a match, be it body language between the manager and a player, maybe some of the chants from the fans, the banners in the stadium. All sorts of things - things that they wouldn’t know. Now, there’s a fine line between putting that on Twitter and saving it for your article. If you put everything on Twitter, who’s going to read your article the next day? There is a balance, and I’m all for saving stuff for the paper.”

Meanwhile chief football correspondent Oliver Kay at The Times (which has a paywall) argued that stories being placed on newspaper websites the night before publication was more damaging to the industry than Twitter.

“I think the newspaper industry as a whole does itself no favours by putting things out at 11 o clock at night for free, I find it very self-defeating. I think that is far more of a threat to newspapers than Twitter is.”

Twitter’s impact on the relationship between journalists and footballers

The general consensus amongst the journalists interviewed was that the relationship between footballers and the media has deteriorated in recent years for a number of reasons. The Guardian’s chief football writer Daniel Taylor argued that modern footballers are now financially rewarded so abundantly that they do not require newspaper interviews to boost their own profile and as a result “feel like they don’t need the

newspapers anymore”.

Iain Macintosh suggested the misrepresentation of footballers by the media - a frequent occurrence in his opinion - was another contributing factor.

“The thing players hate when they talk to some journalists is that certain things they say may be twisted out of context and thrown together with a different headline and opening paragraph to make them look really, really bad.”

According to The Sun’s Charlie Wyett the relationship was much more affable ten years ago. He describes it as such:

“You’d just be able to ring players and have a chat... I’d probably have eight or nine numbers from the Tottenham team, four or five from the Arsenal team... now it’s very different and not for the better.”

Football clubs want complete control over all media coverage focusing on the club and its players, he says, and it is increasingly difficult for journalists to secure interviews with footballers. Taylor said:

“It’s very hard to get interviews out of footballers... you’re looking at maybe one a season at a top club – a proper interview, sitting down and having a good 45 minutes to an hour with them.”

Wyett notes the irony in political journalists having more access to the people tasked with running the country than football journalists do with the footballers they report on.

With Twitter and footballers speaking directly to their audience, there is a removal of the journalists’ gatekeeping role as previously discussed – and Jack Pitt-Brooke feels when players use Twitter to reveal news and their opinions it “removes journalists from the equation” - but paradoxically for the journalists there are also benefits.

Jeremy Wilson believes Twitter allows journalists to circumnavigate the bureaucracy that would otherwise be required for a journalist to get in contact with a footballer. He said: “this whole industry of press officers, sponsors, agents has created a

buffer in between players and journalists a lot of the time. With Twitter, that barrier disappears”.

He added: “It’s amazing how many footballers, if you directly deal with them, are happy to deal with you back”.

Phil McNulty says it varies but agrees:

“Manchester United’s Rio Ferdinand is very active on Twitter and prepared to interact with journalists. I have contact with players through Twitter, such as Everton captain Phil Neville, and as a single example I once set up an interview with West Ham’s chairman. I contacted him via Twitter and we set it all up. I’ve also had instant responses to questions from the likes of England coach Gary Neville so it can really work for a journalist.”

While Twitter may give footballers an unmediated outlet, Gabriele Marcotti and Oliver Kay believed that the overwhelming majority of what they tweet is not newsworthy – “99% of what they tweet is completely anodyne,” says Marcotti. However Kay also said that if footballers want something to appear in the media, they were still more likely to talk to a journalist than write a tweet although Wilson suggests footballers often feel more comfortable tweeting their thoughts, as opposed to talking to a journalist and appear unguarded in some tweets. “On Twitter it’s quite emotional and reactive to things, it’s quite surprising what people say – it’s provided a whole stream of stories.”

And McNulty believes it has been a “force for good” in improving direct contact between journalists and players. “In fact it is one of the few remaining ways of making direct contact,” he says.

Some footballers have used Twitter to correct what they say are erroneous newspaper stories. Taylor (and others) believe this has made football journalists more accountable and forced them to be even more rigorous in their fact checking before submitting a story:

“If I was writing a transfer story about Rio Ferdinand, I would want to make sure that it was absolutely 100% nailed on before writing it, rather than have him tell two million people that I’ve just written a load of shit.”

And Wilson feels that for players who regularly tweet – “it gives them a more human face” – and they are giving a clear-

er sense of their personalities than if mediated through press officers with some “coming across amazingly well” and even transforming previous perceptions.

Twitter’s impact on the relationship between football journalists and their audience

Equally Twitter provides an element of instant accountability in terms of the audience too. However when Bruns (2011) refers to the ability of the audience to feed back to the journalist, he doesn’t make mention of problem of unmitigated abuse which has caused some journalists and footballers to leave Twitter.

Twitter provides an easy means for readers to provide feedback on the articles they read as the medium makes users are so accessible, as already shown by Macintosh’s example. And he will use his Twitter audience to inform his work:

“It’s very difficult to say anything even slightly contentious about big clubs, because you vanish underneath an avalanche of abuse, but that’s important as well. You get so many sides of the argument. If I’ve got a difficult article to write I’ll often start talking about it on Twitter, just to see the different sides of the debate.”

Raphael Honigstein said people have less of an inhibition to contact people they don’t know on Twitter as opposed to via email or other means of communication.

Charlie Wyett enjoys the interaction and believes that it has had a positive effect on the relationship between football journalists and their readers. He said:

“I’ve always been open to what people have to say, whether in a restaurant or a pub or my friends, and this is an extension of that.”

Honigstein believes the quality of debate on Twitter was generally high and Oliver Kay felt that the open dialogue between journalists and those who view their work has fostered a better relationship.

“Sometimes when you’ve got the opportunity to explain things a little more it helps build up a little more trust and a

better relationship between journalists and the reader.”

Football fans are very passionate about the team they support and as a result many struggle to read articles objectively, in the opinions of Jeremy Wilson and Jack Pitt-Brooke. Wilson said: “someone will say one thing and someone will have a completely different view and that’s all just part of football really.”

Daniel Taylor said: “It’s very hard now to make comments and opinions as I once could because you do get abused and it does become a bit relentless” Wilson did feel there was an air of predictability about people abusing journalists online: “Twitter allows anyone to say anything doesn’t it? So it’s pretty inevitable that you’re going to get people on there saying stupid things. I don’t see that as that big a deal”.

Phil McNulty says it’s been the catalyst for a closer relationship with readers, although this inevitably can be good and bad.

“There are those who respect you are trying to inform them and I am happy to cultivate a relationship with them but sadly there are others who just wish to deliver abuse - but you can block those. I have now formed contacts with some readers on Twitter who have actually proved to be quite reliable sources of information, but you have to trust your judgement very carefully on that. The capacity to make yourself look foolish is great.”

All those interviewed were aware of the professional limitations on what they might tweet, whether media law or practice-based. “If you are working on a story and someone pays you for that you cannot reveal the information before it’s been printed,” says Honigstein, who also thinks “every single time, very hard” about what reactions a tweet might get. “As Wyett says: “I treat it as though my editor is reading it.” Honigstein, like others, has experienced the almost intangible effect of Twitter in making contacts:

“I think the beauty of Twitter is also that it’s almost a third thing – it’s definitely not your email address, it’s not your Facebook account, it’s almost like a public profile and I think

there is less of an inhibition to get in touch – and people expect that you will respond. If I was to read a writer I respect somewhere I wouldn't think of writing him an email, but if he's on Twitter I find myself making points to people I don't know. Then there's a really interesting phenomenon of actually getting to know these people and I've met so many people, colleagues, but also people from related industries through Twitter it's unbelievable. I can say that every single one so far has been absolutely brilliant. My non-professional life is much richer as a consequence."

So how essential is Twitter for print football journalists?

Those interviewed all agree football journalists should be monitoring Twitter, though vary on how essential it is for the journalists to tweet themselves.

Honigstein said: "I can't think how I would live without it actually. There are people who resisted for a long time – colleagues of mine – but they all see the light". Macintosh said that Twitter, along with a keyboard, was one of his most essential tools.

Marcotti and Taylor did not feel it was perhaps essential for football journalists to actively tweet themselves – both mentioned the Daily Mail's Martin Samuel as an example of an excellent football writer ("for my money, the best football journalist in England," says Marcotti) who does not use Twitter. However, as they also shared the belief that it was important to keep an eye on Twitter. Taylor said: "I think it is essential, not to tweet, but to monitor it, because you get so much breaking news".

Oliver Kay feels Twitter had become an important part of a football journalist's armoury because of the increased profile that it can give to football journalists. He said: "If you can have more of a presence online then it's clearly a good thing, and I think Twitter is a real guaranteed way of having that presence online".

Iain Macintosh agrees:

"It puts you in a very strong position for attracting more freelance work, because people will say not only can this person write - hopefully – but also this person can bring eyeballs to the website. If you get Gabriele Marcotti to write for a website you're not just getting him, you're getting (an audience of)

100,000 followers. So, it makes you more useful in an industry that is contracting all the time."

Which is something Raphael Honigstein has found when working on a TV project. "The fact that I had 40,000 followers made it a much more believable proposition, it allowed the person who's making it to say: "we want to do something with Raphael Honigstein, and by the way he's got 40,000 followers."

There are football journalists who continue to be successful without using Twitter, although Wilson said: "I would say it's possible to still be very good without using it, but I think you can be even better if you do use it".

And Phil McNulty firmly believes:

I don't think there is any turning back now. Twitter is here as an important tool reporting live in matches, events and also breaking stories. I think more and more journalists will use this immediate form of reporting."

Gabriele Marcotti believed that Twitter could have a "democratising" effect on football journalism, resulting in a wider variety of content (Marcotti, personal interview, 24 April 2012). He used Michael Cox, creator of the football tactics website Zonal Marking, as an example. Cox analyses matches from a tactical point of view and Marcotti knew that mainstream media outlets and newspapers were not interested in this subject from his own experiences. Cox's website proved to be successful and Twitter played a significant role in attracting his readership.

"It's a voice that would not otherwise have been heard prior to the web obviously, but really prior to Twitter because it's just so easy to disseminate stuff like this via Twitter... I think that's really the main way it can impact football journalism going forward. Media organisations necessarily have to be cognisant of trends and changes, and hopefully people will be a little bit more willing to experiment and do things differently going forward."

In Honigstein's opinion, the faster news cycle that Twitter has helped to perpetuate has increased people's desire to learn new information about the background to the stories they read, and as a result it provides real benefits to writers of comment pieces and

features.

“If you have a tool that breaks the news even quicker and manages to inform people better, then the effect in my view is not that they want to hear less, but they actually want to hear more. You’ll get a lot of feeds about something and then you still have a question – why?”

Honigstein also revealed that he had spoken to employees of Twitter about communication with German football clubs. He asked them about the company’s plans to make the company profitable in the future, and while they did not provide details, Honigstein believes writers with a large following will want a share of the revenue that Twitter generates – perhaps through adverts running alongside a user’s news feed.

Kay believed the ability to develop an online profile and to promote an individual journalist as their own brand was one of the major benefits Twitter provided for football writers. If Twitter users with large followings do eventually receive financial reward for their use of the service, this will only become more important.

But back to the basics of reporting, Phil McNulty has no doubts over Twitter’s value:

“Twitter is essential as a tool to break news, hear breaking news and is now essential for newsgathering. Plenty of journalists remain sniffy about it, and I can understand this to an extent because it has its dangers, but I firmly believe journalists should be on Twitter and more will be in the years to come.”

As we’ve seen in this chapter, there is no doubt that social media is influencing aspects of sports journalism. As the example of Twitter shows, an increasing number of stories are rising from the Twittersphere itself and journalists adept in the medium are likely to have the advantage at spotting them and developing them. But finding news and stories is only one use, as our subjects have explained. Sports journalists are using Twitter and other social media to harness audience interaction to inform and feed back on work, drive audiences to their work, increase their audience by establishing a profile or ‘brand’ and, of course, network. There are some pitfalls to be avoided, and downsides to be accepted, but the general view – albeit a slightly surprised one

– is that Twitter is a positive tool.

Notes

Many of the personal interviews were obtained in the course of research by Daniel Anwar for the purposes of his Bournemouth University BA (Hons) Multimedia Journalism degree dissertation.

Challenging Questions

- How has Twitter affected the way in which football journalists report the news?
- How do football journalists use Twitter as a platform for their own content?
- How has Twitter affected the relationship between footballers and the media?
- How has Twitter affected the relationship between football journalists and their readers?
- To what extent is Twitter an essential tool for football journalists?
- How will Twitter affect football journalism in the long-term?

Recommended reading

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