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TALKING SPORTS: RHETORICAL BENEFITS OF BLOGGING SPORTS
JOURNALISM

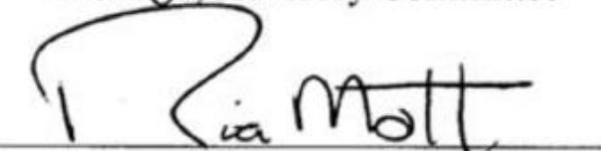
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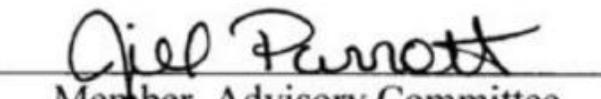
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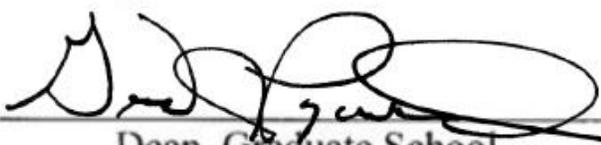
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TALKING SPORTS: RHETORICAL BENEFITS OF BLOGGING SPORTS
JOURNALISM

BY

LUCAS PREWITT GREEN

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

2018

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to my late grandmother, Clairetta. I promised you in your final days that I would graduate from college and earn a degree. I accomplished that goal without any idea that I would write this thesis years later. To this day, I strive to make you proud and even though you are no longer with us, you make me better every day. I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am using this space to thank and acknowledge everyone who contributed to this thesis project.

I wish to start by acknowledging the chair of my thesis committee, Dr. Dominic Ashby. Without your knowledge and support I would not have gotten through this process. There were some shaky moments and trying times that pushed the bounds of my sanity, but with your guidance and advice I persevered to complete a product for which I am extremely proud. I cannot begin to thank you enough for all of the time you spent and help you provided me, but here goes nothing: Thank you!

I also want to acknowledge my other committee members Dr. Jill Parrott, Dr. Rick Mott, and Robert D. Johnson for all of their hard work and diligence in helping me complete this project. Each of you played a very important and special role in the production of this thesis and I want to thank you for all of your time, constructive comments, and beneficial suggestions.

Also, sincerest appreciations to all of the individuals who participated in the research process, specifically to J.R. Wilco, Joe Londergan, William Chase, and Cyrus Smith for taking the time to contribute to the project and help a lowly graduate student chase their dreams.

And last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my parents, Steve and Susan. Thank you for continuing to believe in me even when I may not and thank you for always pushing me to do my best and reach beyond my own expectations. I will be forever grateful to you both for giving me every opportunity to succeed and supporting me every step of the way (even when you may not be sure where that next step leads).

ABSTRACT

The introduction of new publishing platforms like blogs into the world of sports journalism has forced journalists to modify their technique and approach to writing. This paper addresses that shift through examination of rhetorical theory, in-depth first-person research, and a culmination of rhetorical advantages for digitally publishing sports journalists. In the first section of this thesis, the author establishes the rhetorical act of blogging through the theoretical lenses of Mikhail Bakhtin and Mary Hocks while analyzing the sports blog, *SB Nation*. Then, the author conducts survey-driven research with actual blogging sports journalists to understand their opinions and viewpoints about blogging. After collecting all of the information, the author concludes with a discussion of two profound rhetorical benefits for digital publishing sports journalists: availability and audience outreach.

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few rhetorical affordances of digital publishing for sports journalism but organized their results to fit into other categories around the journalists' professional careers and personal preferences (i.e. audience and credibility). The authors were trying to understand the *personal* benefits of the sports journalists that posted on a blog and not the *rhetorical* benefits of the act of blogging. A study solely focused on the rhetorical benefits of publishing something on a blog *for* sports journalists has not been conducted, so my project will fill that gap by focusing the research around the actual blog, which will create a more persuasive argument for the inclusion of blogging in sports journalism.

Therefore, this thesis will begin with a section devoted to the visual aspect of blogs because that is an inherent rhetorical affordance of digital writing environments. Many established blogs effectively deliver information to their audience. Those blogs each use unique techniques to deliver that information. A visual rhetoric- and design theory-influenced dissection of these blogs should help to not only show journalists some effective theory-based techniques to design their own blog, but also understand how the blogs connect images and text on the page to create meaning for the reader. The best example of a theory of visual rhetoric to use for such an examination is Mary Hocks' three key terms for understanding visual rhetoric in digital writing environments: audience stance, transparency, and hybridity. Also, perhaps more important to blogging than Hocks' three elements, is Mikhail Bakhtin's heteroglossia. Heteroglossia is a term created by Bakhtin that essentially describes multiple voices working together on a page to create meaning. Although heteroglossia is not commonly linked with digital rhetoric, blogging opens a new lens through which to examine its

rhetorical importance. The next logical step is to then apply these elements of digital rhetoric in an examination of one of the most popular sports blogs, *SB Nation*, to show how a popular blog exemplifies these traits on its website which will happen later.

Although theory is important to understanding the visual rhetorical appeals of digital writing environments and how to effectively communicate with an audience, the best way to truly understand the benefits of blogging sports journalism is to talk to blogging sports journalists. In terms of the actual bloggers, Schultz and Sheffer's study was an important start, but left a lot of room for growth and exploration. Shultz and Sheffer wrote a follow-up research paper in 2009 that focused on the managers and editors of these sports journalists. After they conducted the new research, they compared their new findings with the information they received in their research with the journalists. The main argument of their 2009 paper was that managers have asked journalists to blog but did not take the necessary steps to support blogging's success, which suggests difficulty in implementation and adoption. Although Shultz and Sheffer conducted a follow up study, it was not focused on the actual act of publishing on a blog, but rather it was still focused on the managers and editors of sports journalists who use blogging platforms. The follow-up also did not address the changes in the journalist's feelings in the time between the studies. This thesis *will* address those issues. The best way to understand the status of sports blogging is to speak with sports bloggers themselves. My research will be focused on bloggers who publish through *SB*

Nation and I will ask them questions concerning their viewpoints about the act of blogging about sports.

But before we begin, I think it is important to establish and define journalist. Throughout this thesis you will see that *journalist*, *blogger*, and *writer* are used interchangeably (this divide will come up later too) much like digitally publishing and blogging, and that is to make apparent how real and impactful of a shift this is; it is not meant to confuse but simply make you (the reader) aware of how these terms and preconceived ideas work together. For this thesis, a journalist or blogger is a writer or editor who gathers, presents, creates, and/or publishes (breaking news, opinions, features, or columns) to be viewed by an audience for their knowledge. This definition may seem broad, but for a study like this, the definition, frankly, cannot be too broad. The identity of digitally publishing sports journalists is such a new entity that an absolute definition has not been established. Hopefully this research will lead to a closer and more inclusive definition and understanding of digitally publishing sports journalist. To begin to understand the importance of blogs, the most influential affordance of digital and visual rhetoric should be examined. After all, there must be a method to the madness of putting stuff on the internet.

CHAPTER II

Digital Rhetoric in Digital Writing Environments

Describing the visual rhetoric (as opposed to the alphabetic rhetoric) of digital writing environments is not as simple as many of the other rhetorical benefits for bloggers, but for sports journalists, understanding the specifics of visual rhetoric could lead to more hesitation than gumption for writing in those digital writing environments. Understanding the basics of visual rhetoric and its connection to sports journalism may make the transition smoother. As mentioned above, Hocks (2003) defines the term “digital rhetoric” as “a system of ongoing dialogue and negotiations among writers, audiences and institutional contexts, that focuses on the multiple modalities available for making meaning using new communication and information technology” (p. 632). Digital rhetoric provides a foundation for describing how visual rhetoric operates in digital writing environments, but, Hocks neglects to include another important term in digital rhetoric that is important for understanding digital writing environments: heteroglossia. As was mentioned above, heteroglossia showcases the different voices within a text or, in this case, a web-text. In other words, in alphabetical rhetoric, the audience is only reacting to the text on the page, but by adding images or other visual rhetorical appeals, the reader, the images, and the text all work together and individually to make meaning for the reader. Heteroglossia is just as important as the other three terms that Hocks uses in describing visual rhetoric in digital writing environments. To prove that point, three things must happen: first, we must dissect and explain Hocks’ three key elements to establish a foundation; second, we must define and expand our

understanding of heteroglossia to show the importance to digital rhetoric; and finally, we must analyze a web text through the lens of heteroglossia to showcase its validity.

Hocks (2003) establishes the importance of visual rhetoric in today's world by noting that, "Scholarship in rhetoric and composition has begun to emphasize the central role of visual rhetoric for writers, especially those working in digital writing environments" (p. 629). There has been a large push within the composition community to incorporate multimodality into the field. Hocks understands the importance of those multimodal tools and strives to understand their complexities. Although her target audience is teachers and instructors who may not be familiar or comfortable incorporating multimodality into the classroom, the point of her article reaches far beyond the bounds of the classroom.

In her essay, Hocks (2003) attempts to evaluate two digital texts and "defines and illustrates some key features of visual rhetoric as they operate in two interactive digital documents designed for the World Wide Web" (p. 631). She dissects these two texts for instructors looking to include digital texts in their classrooms, but those same techniques can be applied by anyone looking to understand visual rhetoric in any field, including sports journalism. The fact that the theory can be applied to a wide variety of disciplines leads her to establish a definition of digital rhetoric: "digital rhetoric describes a system of ongoing dialogue and negotiations among writers, audiences and institutional contexts, but it focuses on the multiple modalities available for making meaning using new communication and information technology" (Hocks, 2003, p. 632). To show how and where visual rhetoric occurs in blogs, Hocks then defines three

important terms: audience stance, transparency, and hybridity. To understand these three elements better, I will apply them to a current sports blog like *SB Nation*.

SB Nation (or Sports Blog Nation) is a blogging website that launched in 2005. The main website is a collection of stories from writers across the world writing about sports. The site contains over 300 individual blogs for different and unique world-wide sports teams. Those blogs share important and breaking news information about the team, its players (past and present), and other interesting stories. Each blog has at least one managing editor and a few writers who update the site on a continuous basis. *SB Nation* is owned by Vox media and, according to their website, has 400 million monthly content views, making them the fastest-growing large sports property, according to comScore U.S. (“SB Nation,” n.d.). I chose to assess *SB Nation* because it reaches a wide audience of unique viewers and continually brings in new viewership daily; one reason that all those viewers come to the site is because of its alluring audience stance.

Hocks (2003) defines audience stance as “the ways in which the audience is invited to participate in online documents and the ways in which the author creates an *ethos* that requires, encourages, or even discourages different kinds of interactivity for that audience” (p. 632). In alphabetical rhetoric, the audience is reacting to the text on the page, but by creating this audience interaction on the screen, the digital text invites readers to become more involved with the information. Hocks explains that the interface through which the information is *displayed* greatly influences the audiences’ understanding and meaning-creation with the information that is being *displayed* to them. *SB Nation*’s audience stance is apparent as soon as the home page pops up. Upon opening the page, the viewer is immediately shown images atop article headlines

(Figure 1). The images vary in size but remain easy to navigate and do not appear to clutter the screen. The titles are displayed in an easy-to-read font that encourages the viewer to click through and read the article. Navigational tabs are located at the top of the screen that the viewer can use to easily click through by league or sport to find exactly what they are searching for (Figure 1A). To that end, an interactive magnifying glass button signifies to the viewer a search field where they can search for specific topics or keywords located in the top right corner of the tab bar (Figure 1B).

As the viewer scrolls down the main page, a list of “THE LATEST” articles published on the site as a whole are displayed (Figure 2). While the site contains multiple different blogs for multiple different teams, “THE LATEST” list shows the most recent articles published on the site regardless of blog or team. However, if that is

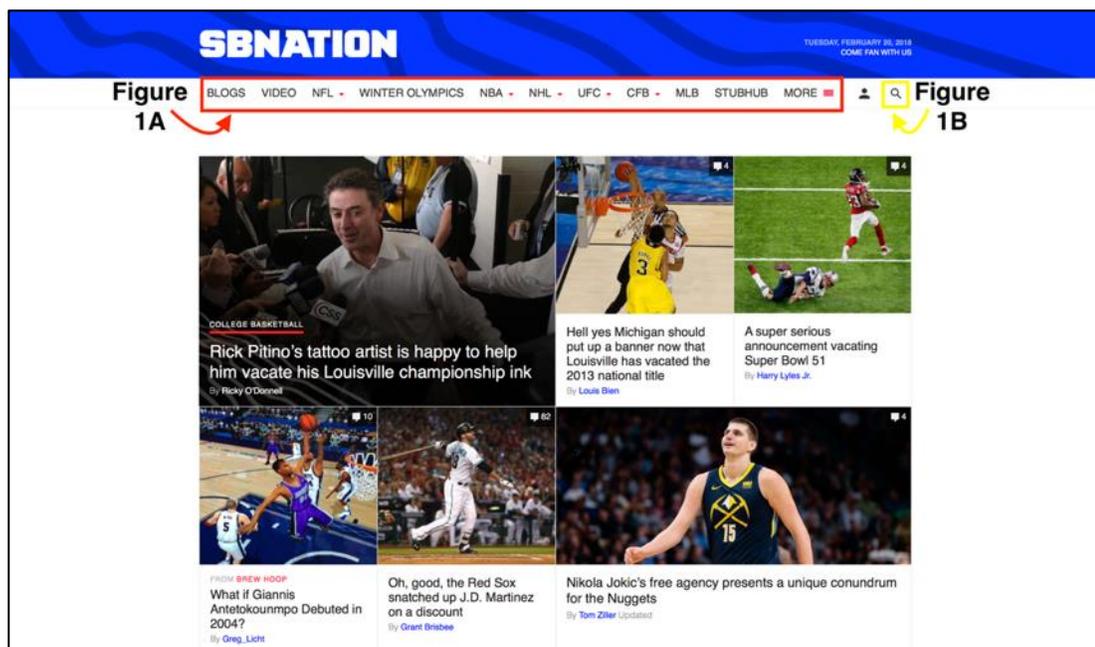


Figure 1: Screenshot of the main SB Nation web page that shows the images and titles on the screen. (Retrieved from <https://www.sbnation.com/>)

too much for the viewer to digest, filters at the top of right corner of the list are very easy to see and use as they condense the list into stories only about the NFL, NBA, MLB, or NHL. (Figure 2A)

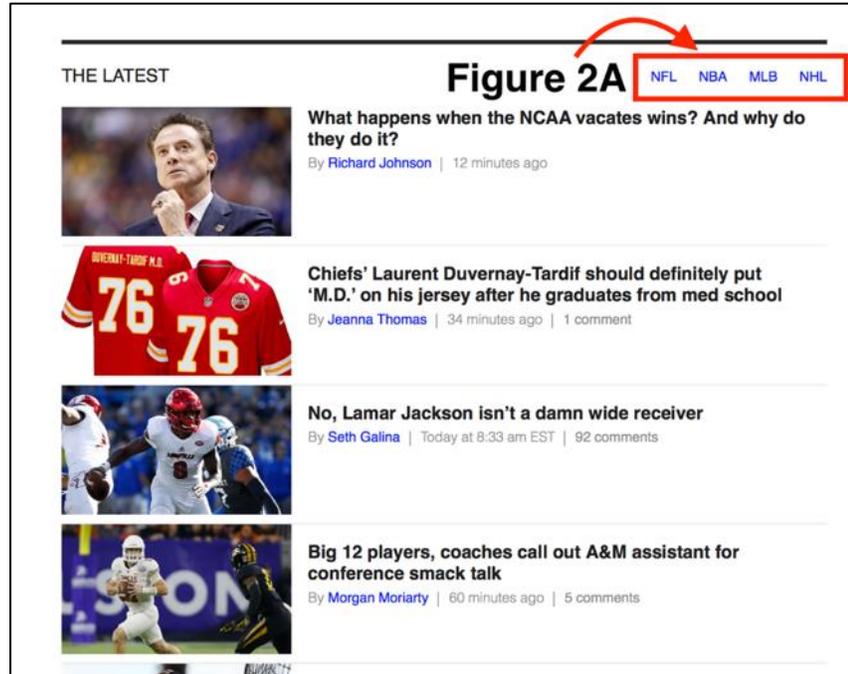


Figure 2: Screenshot of "The Latest" list on the SB Nation website that shows the thumbnails and filter tags above. (Retrieved from <https://www.sbnation.com/>)

The second term that Hocks (2003) introduces is transparency: “the ways in which online documents relate to established conventions like those of print, graphic design, film, and Web pages. The more the online document borrows from familiar conventions, the more transparent it is to the audience” (p. 632). Once the viewer clicks on an article, the transparency of the site becomes clearer. The articles on the site share many similarities with those published in print. The font is clear, legible, and consistent throughout the entire screen, which contributes to the professional look of the site (Figure 3). Much like print-based articles, the title is slightly larger than the text in the body of the article and a byline containing contact information for the author of the article is located below it. A picture that relates to the article below it is also shown below the byline and title (Figure 3A). The text is black in color on a white background,

which contributes to the familiarity that viewers will have to reading something in a newspaper or magazine. The article is structured like something found in a newspaper. But, sports journalists understand that a digital writing environment or blog

does not necessarily have to be read in a certain order. Much like a print newspaper, the articles can be read at the pace and order of which the reader chooses. By catering the blog to this point of a non-linear order, the journalist can continue to write like they did for print publishing. Showing the audience how to navigate the blog is still important, however. Subtle clues can be used within the blog to guide the reader through the blog without forcing them to digest the information in a particular sequential order, which also contributes to the hybridity of the article.

Hybridity is the third and last term used by Hocks (2003): “Hybridity: The ways in which online documents combine and construct visual and verbal designs. Hybridity

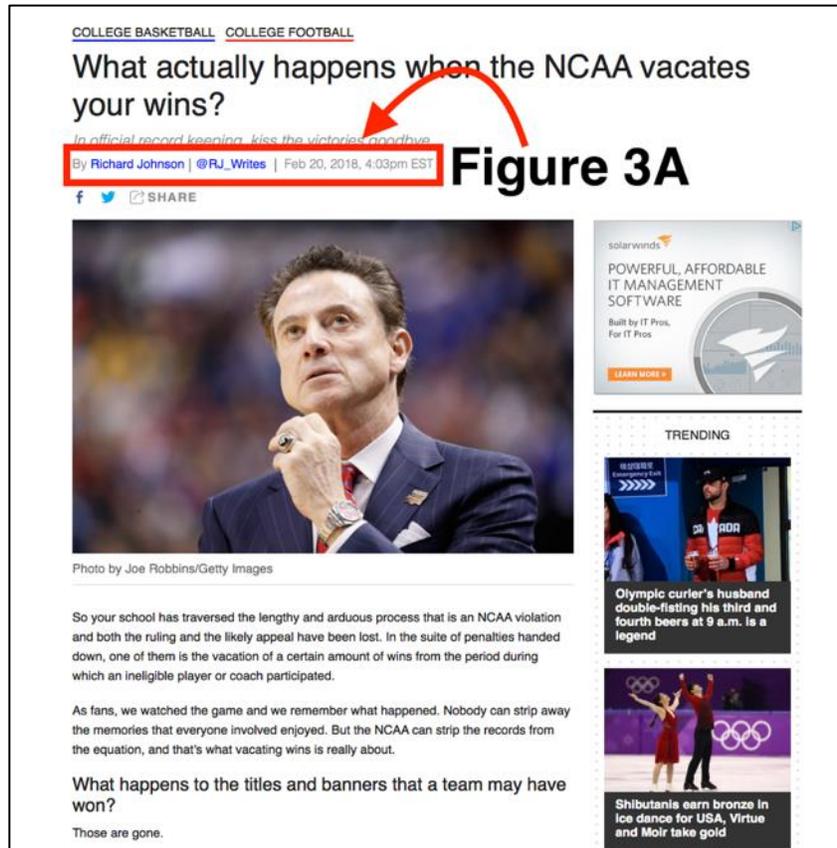


Figure 3: Screenshot of an article posted on SB Nation. (Retrieved from <https://www.sbnation.com/college-basketball/2018/2/20/17032636/what-does-it-mean-when-the-ncaa-vacates-wins>)

also encourages both authors and audiences to recognize and construct multifaceted identities as a kind of pleasure” (p. 632). Perhaps the most immediate example of hybridity on *SB Nation* is the image at the top of the article. Every article has an image (a benefit to blogging) that directly relates to the article below it. They are all located in the same spot on the page and they are generally the same size. The images are tools that draw the viewer in to read the article. The images are shown not only above the article, but also on the homepage as part of a strategy to draw in the viewer. For instance, “THE LATEST” list does not just list the title of the article. A smaller sized image of the larger image displayed above the article is presented beside the article’s title called a thumbnail (Figure 2). This is extremely beneficial for the writer because some of the viewers will look at the images before reading the text of the title and decide to click through just because of the image. Print journalists do not have that luxury. Many articles published in a newspaper will not be accompanied by an image especially if the article is not on the front page of the Sports section. Therefore, the choice of using an image on a blog is extremely beneficial for the digitally publishing sports journalist and also contributes to the multiple voices speaking through the page. At first glance, transparency and hybridity may appear to be too similar to need a distinction, but they *are* different.

Jay David Bolter talks about this issue between hybridity and transparency in his article, “The Desire for Transparency in an Era of Hybridity.” In his article, Bolter tries to explain the difference between transparency and hybridity and, in turn, show that they are mutually exclusive. Bolter (2006) agrees with Hocks in saying that, “Hybridity is not only a feature of contemporary digital art but also an accepted strategy in the

production and consumption of popular media forms and technologies” (p. 109).

However, Bolter (2006) argues that hybridity and transparency are opposites: “The opposite of hybridity is transparency: those practices that strive for seamless, transparent representation of the real within a single medium or media form” (p. 110). Bolter (2006) goes on to say that “the goal of transparent representation is to efface the technologies and techniques of representation and to place the viewer in an apparently unmediated relationship to the objects or events represented” (p. 110). That goal is unnecessary. Transparency does not prevent the reader from seeing the technology (or in Hocks’ case: a digital writing environment), but instead become familiar with the technology through association with something that is more comfortable. For instance, on SB Nation’s blogs the transparency and the hybridity work together and individually to make meaning for the reader. The transparency of the site to traditional print articles familiarizes the reader with the blog while the hybridity allows the reader to create meaning with the visuals and the text to create meaning. They can both coexist within a blog and foster creative meaning for the reader. Bolter makes a good point, but in digital writing environments both transparency and hybridity are keys to understanding visual rhetoric.

Hocks’ three terms (audience stance, transparency, and hybridity) are a great way to start a definition of digital rhetoric. However, Hocks left out one very important term to digital rhetoric and one that is crucial to describing how visual rhetoric operates in digital writing environments: heteroglossia. Although, Mikhail Bakhtin first

introduced heteroglossia as something that is found in a novel, it can and should be applied to digital rhetoric, blogs, and other digital writing environments.

Heteroglossia in Digital Writing Environments

Mikhail Bakhtin first wrote about heteroglossia in his book *Discourse in the Novel*. In Bakhtin's (1989) words, "Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms for its incorporation), is another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse" (p. 324). Edirisingha Arachchige Gamini Fonseka (2014) described it more clearly in "A Discourse-Analysis Based Critical Approach to Contextual Interpretation of Heteroglossic Situation in the Novel" by saying, "Bakhtin argues that the power of the novel originates in the coexistence of, and conflict between, different types of speech: the speech of characters, the speech of narrators, and even the speech of the author" (p. 170). Basically, Bakhtin is saying that multiple voices act together within a text to create meaning and, given the importance of the audience to digitally publishing sports journalists, heteroglossia is something that should be considered by sports journalists. But, digital writing environments did not exist in the same way they do today for Bakhtin and Gamini so did not have the opportunity to explore heteroglossia in anything other than novels and print texts. Today, heteroglossia can also be applied as a theoretical approach to the visual side of digital writing environments.

Individual readers may understand things differently and create meaning in different ways. Every digital experience can and should hold different voices or viewpoints expressed within it. Visuals allow the reader an opportunity to gather their

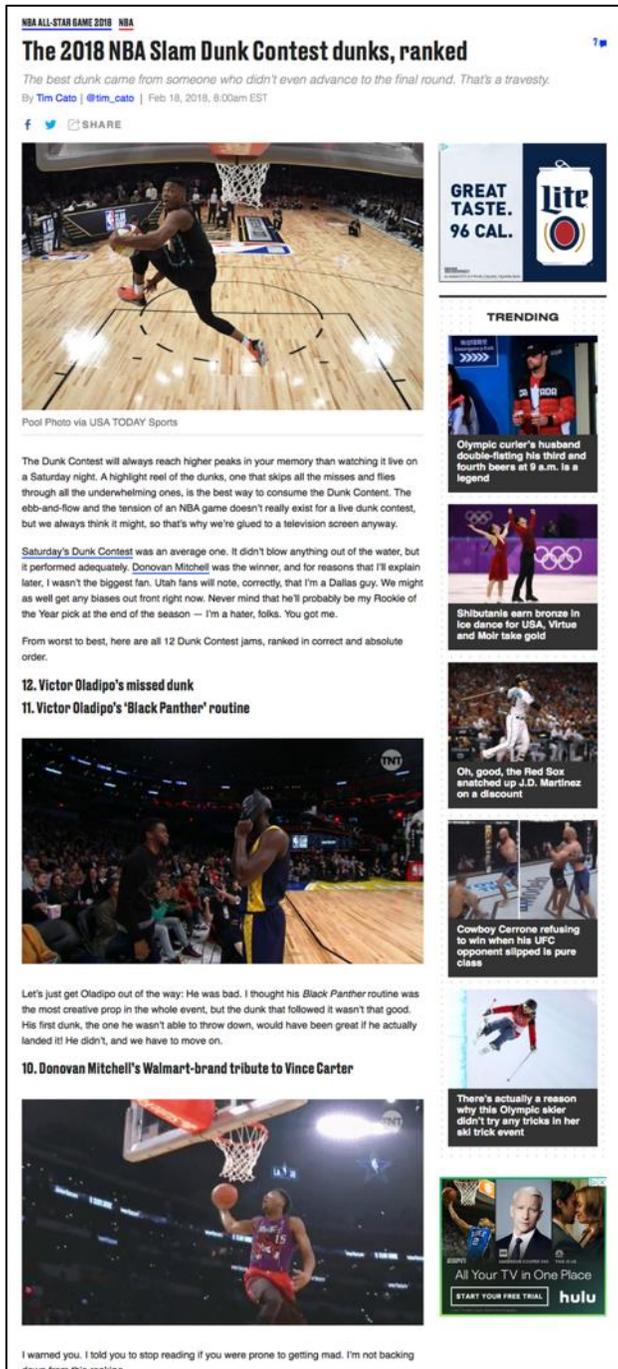


Figure 4: Screenshot of an article posted on SB Nation showing still images, text, and video. (Retrieved from <https://www.sbnation.com/2018/2/18/17024548/2018-nba-slam-dunk-contest-ranked>)

own interpretation of the information in front of them with multiple voices playing in coexistence and conflict with each other in digital texts and digital writing environments. As shown in Figure 4, the article is a combination of text, images, and video that all create meaning for the reader. Separately, they can tell the story, but when they are put on the same page, that heteroglossia shines through. That differentiation of voices is one of the major traits that separates digital texts and print texts.

Fortunately, a great deal of scholarship exists about heteroglossia in different discourses. However, with all of that information comes a downside: a general consensus does not exist of what heteroglossia is in every discourse. Therefore, with such a broad and

undefined central focus of heteroglossia the application can be much more difficult.

Jannis Androutsopoulos (2011) tries to explore heteroglossia in computer-mediated discourse and comes to a similar conclusion in his article entitled “From Variation to Heteroglossia in the Study of Computer-Mediated Discourse,” but he finds a bright spot in all of the literature: “It allows us to ‘think big,’ offering space to envisage heteroglossic relations between signs of various kind of structural properties, whose coexistence and dialogue may be established at different levels of discourse” (p. 283). Androutsopolous’ statement opens the door for exploration and implementation of heteroglossia into multiple different forms of discourse including digital writing environments. In order to understand heteroglossia in digital writing environments more clearly, a further dissection of the two most important players (the author and the reader) must take place.

The journalist has a rhetorical affordance of creating a text that can house different voices within it. The easiest and most effective way for an author to do this is to use different mediums of conveying meaning. For instance, the use of images and text could be used as a heteroglossic approach to digital writing environments. The image and text may contain the same meaning for the author, but the image and text each hold a unique voice. The best example is an internet meme. An internet meme is an image that is usually supported by text that is continually shared by users on the internet. These internet memes show both an image and text in the same graphic. However, those two things (the image and the text) contain unique voices. Alone they may hold different connotations, but together they coexist to create a unified meaning.

The reader also has a heteroglossic approach to a digital writing environment. They are able to experience these different voices within the digital text and create

meaning from themselves as the consumer. As readers of the text, it can be argued that their understanding and meaning making of the digital text will be unique. Much like a print-based text, the meaning of a story or novel may be understood differently by everyone that reads it. However, with digital texts this difference is exaggerated. The old saying goes, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” The ability of a digital text to hold pictures or images allows the reader to create their own meaning through the visuals. The reader can form their own heteroglossia by playing off the author, the words in the text, or other reader’s experiences with the text as a whole.

The heteroglossic impact on the *SB Nation* site is evident from the moment the homepage loads. The images on the page write their own unique story. Clearly, they are a welcoming mechanism for the viewer to want to click on the link and read the attached article. However, the viewer can surmise the idea of the article from the visual. The images that the writer chooses to go with their article is not a simple decision. The image should be able to stand alone and on *SB Nation*, they do. The images hold their own story and the viewer can read into the image and determine the tone of the forthcoming article. If the image is of a player’s face that is happy then the viewer understands the emotion intended, but if the image is sad then that emotion is projected, too.

While the images tell a story of their own, the images also work with the text like the text works with the images: they work together to create meaning while not overshadowing one another. They both contribute to creating meaning and writing the story, and if the text and image are viewed as separate entities then the meaning will be separate too. If there is an image of a basketball player beside the title of an article, the

reader understands that the article will be about basketball. Likewise, if the title of the article is about a specific player or team, the reader understands (even if they are not familiar with the individual or team) that the visual beside the title is of the person or the team. The image and text speak together as one to create a unique meaning.

Multiple voices co-exist on the page that all work alone and together simultaneously to create meaning for the reader. *SB Nation*'s pages allow for the reader to interpret their own meaning by looking at the visuals, reading the text, or reacting to both harmoniously. *SB Nation* effectively showcases all four of the elements of visual rhetoric in digital writing environments for the viewer to create meaning on their site. *SB Nation* clearly distinguishes itself from a print newspaper while still holding true to many of the traditional aspects of print journalism.

In an article written by Caroline Tagg (2016) called "Heteroglossia in Text-Messaging: Performing Identity and Negotiating Relationships in a Digital Space," Tagg addresses social media as digital writing environments. "To Bakhtin, language is social and ideological, reflecting and constructing social relations. Meaning develops particularly through social and ideological tensions, as people use language to compete, argue and dissent" (p. 61). These spaces allow individuals to become authors *and* readers instantaneously with a constant awareness of the multiple voices that play on each other and coexist within these environments. Tagg mentions YouTube as a digital space in which heteroglossia is prevalent. The creators can produce content for their viewers while reading those viewers live comments and feedback. Likewise, the readers are watching the content and composing their own feedback to the creator *and* other

viewers watching the same thing. Multiple voices coexisting together creating meaning within a digital writing (creating) space.

Heteroglossia works with audience stance, transparency, and hybridity when it comes to visual rhetoric in digital writing environments. The idea of multiple voices coexisting within a text is crucial for a digital writing environment. The author and the reader must create voices and meaning. The inclusion of heteroglossia into the description of *SB Nation* shows how valuable it can be when examining a digital text or digital writing environment. Although Bakhtin originally intended heteroglossia as a concept to be associated with print texts and specifically novels, it easily applies to digital writing environments. Heteroglossia can help broaden the understanding of visual rhetoric in digital writing environments and blogs to make those who are not comfortable with them more comfortable.

Again, the ultimate goal of this project is to address the on-going shift in sports journalism from print to digital publishing on blogging platforms, understand the perceived rhetorical benefits of blogging for sports journalists (from journalists themselves and previous research findings), and, ultimately, understand the unique aspects and challenges of blogging sports journalism. The literature is a good start to understanding the shift, but gaps still need to be filled, and some updated research could help to fill some of those holes. Therefore, I decided to take on a research study and get answers to some of my remaining questions from actual sports bloggers.

CHAPTER III

Research Introduction

The conversation from literary theorists is important to understand, but the opinions and thoughts of bloggers themselves are equally important. We must look at the conventions and the standards of blogging. Carolyn R. Miller and Dawn Shepherd's "Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog," defines blogs by classifying it as a genre. Miller (1984) suggested, "in rhetoric the term 'genre' be limited to a particular type of discourse classification, a classification based in rhetorical practice and consequently open rather than closed and organized around situated actions" (p. 155). Miller and Shepherd (2004) argue that because blogs and blogging have gained their name and a definition in a community, blogs are a genre. In fact, they state that "the weblog seems to have acquired this status very quickly, with an increasing amount of attention and commentary in the mainstream press reinforcing its status" (p. 1). The speed with which blogs have acquired this title of a genre shows how impactful blogs and blogging is to an audience. Miller and Shepherd (2004) state that, "blogs originated as a way to share information of interest" (p. 6), which is not much different than today. In the early days, blogs did three things: "they were chronologically organized, contained links to sites of interest on the web, and provided commentary on the links" (Miller and Shepherd, 2004, p. 6). Much like blogs' popularity, the definition of a blog has changed. My definition (which aligns much more with Miller and Shepherd's later definition of a blog) is that blogs must have a reverse chronology, they must frequently be updated, and they must contain a conversation between links, images, and text (Miller and Shepherd, 2004, p. 6). Now

that we have a foundation of rhetorical theory, we should hear from journalists themselves and their ideas about blogging. The following study is an update to Shultz and Sheffer's study from 2007 by focusing more on the blogs and the act of blogging from the view point of a sports journalist.

Methodology

The first order of business to begin the study was to find a list of journalists that would not only qualify as digital publishers but be perfect individuals to study. I started with online search engines to find active blogging sports journalists and I found many blogging sports journalists who were quintessential subjects for the survey. Once I had established a list of journalists, I created a survey (see Table 1) that would reveal opinions and beliefs of the journalists, confirm the ideas found in previous research, and unearth new and interesting conventions of blogging sports journalism. I also decided that prompting journalists for open response questions of the survey would be too restrictive and not allow the journalists to express their true feelings and ideas. Therefore, I included a link at the end of the survey that asked the journalists to participate in an interview that would prompt more in-depth responses than the survey questions could provide. The time then came to send out the surveys but finding contact information for the journalists was not as simple.

There was unexpected difficulty in finding contact information for journalists around the country. I distributed the surveys through Google Forms, so an email address needed to be used to send a link to the survey. Finding email addresses for blogging sports journalists proved to be more difficult than anticipated, which was surprising. Perhaps naively, I assumed that journalists who publish their content online would be

more willing to put their contact information online and would want to be contacted about their stories but that was not the case. Therefore, the direction of this research project shifted slightly.

For this study, 138 journalists around the United States received the surveys with questions pertaining to online and blogging sports journalism. Of those 138, 120 were contributors on *SB Nation* blogs. The remaining 20 journalists were a mixture of bloggers from other publications including *Five-Thirty-Eight*, *Bleacher Report*, and the *Lexington Herald-Leader*. Of the 138 surveys sent out, 6 returned error messages indicating the email address was no longer active or receiving incoming emails. Therefore, the sample size was officially set at 132 journalists. Out of the 132 journalists, 19 filled out the survey for a 14.3% response rate. 7 of those journalists also agreed to be interviewed and of the 7 that agreed to be interviewed, 4 journalists set up a time and were subsequently interviewed. *SB Nation* was the right focal point given the accessibility of the writers and the plethora of journalists from different locations across the United States that post on the site.

Hypotheses

I determined the hypotheses for each of the questions on the survey before they were distributed to the journalists. Specifically, my hypothesis for the first question was that sports journalists appreciate the rhetorical benefits of blogging more than the rhetorical benefits of print publishing. It was also expected that the journalists would post more frequently on blogs than in print and that they would find it easier to post online. Also, it was hypothesized that the journalists would receive more feedback from their audience and enjoy that increased communication. Hopefully, the journalists being

surveyed would say that they believe bloggers (themselves) are journalists and that they are just as credible as traditional print journalists. Also, the journalists should have positive opinions about the visual appeal of their blog and take significant time to make sure the visual design of the site is high quality and attractive to their audience.

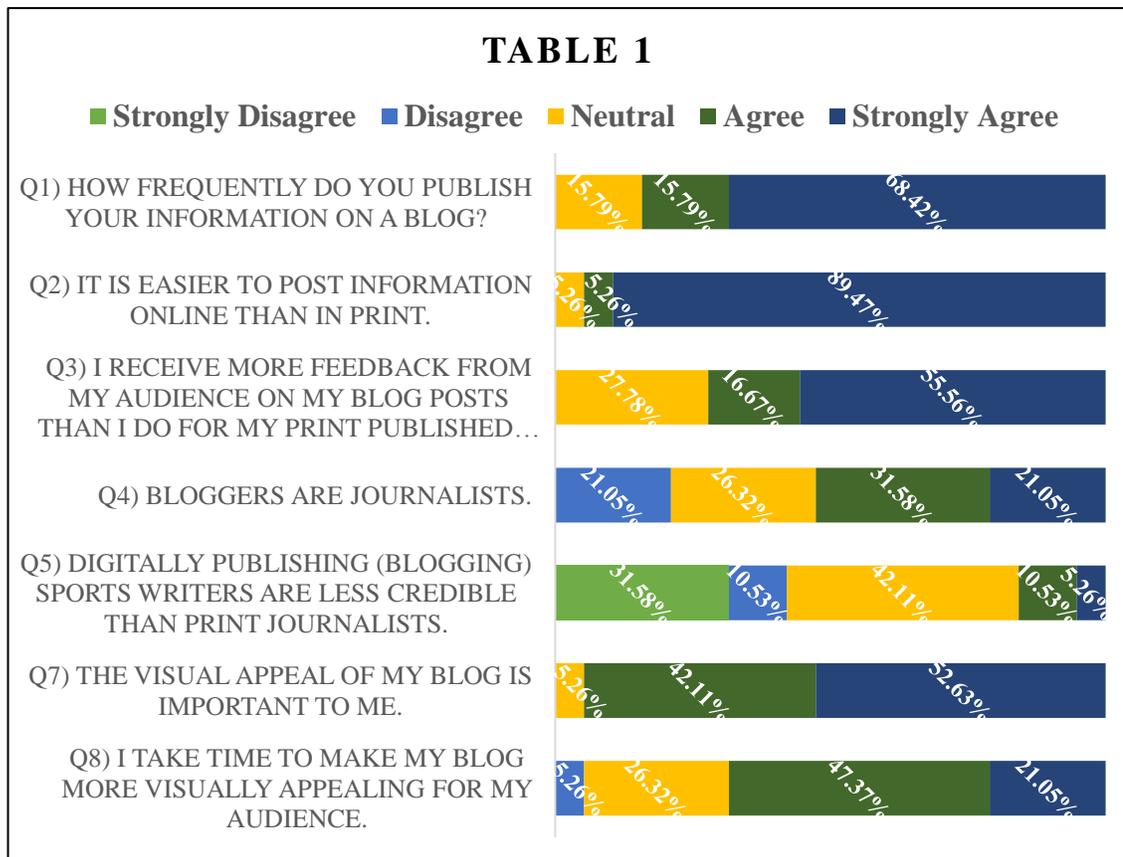
CHAPTER IV

Survey Results

Most of the responses were aligned with the hypotheses and the averages for each answer indicated very strong opinions about each answer. There were some specific correlations that were particularly interesting, though. Specifically, Q1 and Q2, Q4 and Q5, and Q7 (See Table 1) correlate in an interesting fashion.

When asked in Q1 about how frequently the journalists post on a blog with 5 being always and 1 being never, the journalist’s average response was a 4.5. That average lead to the conclusion that the journalists almost always post their articles on a

Table 1: This table shows the interview questions (left column) and the average of the answers to the questions (right column). (Q6 was an open response question could not be coded.) The responses are in Likert scale format and the percentages denote the percentage of responses for each answer to each question.



blog. In Q2, the journalists were presented the statement of: “It is easier to post information online than in print” with a Likert scale response where 5 was “Strongly Agree” and 1 was “Strongly Disagree.” The journalists’ average response was an astounding 4.8, which indicated that it was much easier for the journalists to post their information on a blog. Therefore, the data shows that journalists who frequently publish their information on a blog find it much easier to post online than in print. This high rate may be a result of bloggers who do not post on any other platform or in print. Even if that were the case, the responses show that the blogging journalists are perfectly happy publishing online. In fact, that high rate suggests that they have not explored those options and will not explore those options in the future.

Another interesting observation occurred in the response for Q4 and Q5. Q4 stated “Bloggers are journalists” and prompted the survey-takers to answer on a scale from 5 (Strongly Agree) to 1 (Strongly Disagree). The average response was a 3.5, which was surprising. All of the journalists that were surveyed used a blog to post their stories; therefore, it was assumed that those individuals would say they were journalists. However, an average of 3.5 indicated that it is not as cut and dry as it may have appeared. In fact, absolutely no consensus about whether they are journalists or not was reached. The standard deviation for Q4 was 1.07. On a Likert scale response system, anything above a 1-point standard deviation is pretty drastic. This shows that the responses were extremely varied, which raises more questions about why the journalists answered so differently. Clearly there is no consensus, but why? One answer may lie in a response on one of the comment sections of the survey.

A journalist wrote, “I wasn't sure whether to participate in this at first, as I consider myself more of a blogger than [a] journalist.” Perhaps many of the journalists see themselves as bloggers and not journalists. The shift from print publishing to digital publishing may contribute to this issue, too. Without a distinct line that differentiates a blogger from a journalist. Traditionally, journalists printed in a local paper, but now journalists can post on any platform that they choose. The titles fluctuate depending on the person without one real definitive answer as to who is a journalist and who isn't.

After looking at the standard deviation of Q4, the other responses deserved a closer look too. Q5 was the only other question to have a standard deviation above 1-point at 1.2. Q5 was another Likert scale response that posed the statement: “Digitally publishing (blogging) sports writers are less credible than print journalists.” Again, the response scale was from 5 to 1 with 5 being Strongly Agree and 1 being Strongly Disagree. The average response was a 2.47. At first glance the average was not that surprising. Most blogging sports journalists would probably disagree with the claim that they are less credible than print journalists, and an average response of 2.47 shows that to be the case. However, a 1.2 standard deviation showed that the responses were not as universal as was initially expected. Under closer inspection, the results were widely varied. It was the only question that included at least one 1 and 5 as responses. Although the average still showed that most blogging sports journalists do not see themselves as less credible than print journalists, the standard deviation explained that the original hypothesis is not as wholly encompassing as first thought.

Finally, the last interesting observation from the survey data comes from the questions about the visual aspects of the blogger's platforms. The journalists who write

for *SB Nation* sponsored blogs do not create their own website. The site has a uniform structure they must abide by; therefore, it was interesting to observe the results from their thoughts about the visual and design aspects of the blogs they write on. Although they do not have much control over their blogs, the visual appeal of their blog is very important (as evidenced from the 4.5 average response on a 5 to 1 Likert scale with 5 being Strongly Agree and 1 being Strongly Disagree). There was also only a .6 standard deviation which means that the answers were fairly uniform. Even though these journalists do not have much creative control over the layout of the blog they post on, they still value the visual appeal of the site.

Q7 states, "I take time to make my blog more visually appealing for my audience." On a Likert scale with 5 being strongly agree and 1 being strongly disagree, the average response was 3.8 with a standard deviation of .8. This is an interesting response when compared to the answers from Q6. From the survey data, journalists find the visual appeal of their blog to be very important, however, they do not take time to make it more visually appealing. This may be due to the fact that they do not have much control over their blog on *SB Nation* and those restrictions prevent them from spending time on the visual aspect of their blog.

CHAPTER V

Rhetorical Affordances

Availability

Availability is one of the most important affordances of digitally publishing journalists because (1) of the ease with which the journalist can write and publish their content and (2) the ease with which the journalist can grow their “brand.” The accessibility of being able to write anywhere at any time and subsequently publish that piece anywhere grants the journalists an ability that they do not have with print publishing. In order to publish something in traditional print journalism, the journalist must first write the piece, then send it to their editor, and then have the editor send it to press so it can be printed. After that process is complete, the piece will not be available to the public until the next day, or perhaps many days later (depending on the form of publication). The ability to publish the piece digitally removes over half of that process. Now journalists need only write the piece (and maybe consult with their editor, but sometimes this is not necessary) and publish it on the internet. The journalist may not need to speak to the editor because many of these journalists do not have an editor, and if they do, the editor does not ask to read the piece before publication. Shultz (2007) quotes an anonymous journalist as saying, “Editors want three or four people to read something before it gets in the paper, but don’t care that no one reads anything before it goes online” (p. 71). *SB Nation* may be unique in the fact that many of their blogs do have an editor who looks over the final draft of the piece before publication. J.R. Wilco, Editor-In-Chief for *Pounding the Rock* blog, began his journey by commenting on the San Antonio Spurs community blog (*Pounding the Rock*) and then “kind of fell into it.”

Wilco eventually took over control of the blog, created his own staff, and fell in love with editing: “I can’t write all day long, but I can edit all day long.” Although, Wilco, as the editor, has the final say about what is published on his blog, that does not restrict his writers. Blogging sports journalism is not only more relaxed than print journalism in terms of editing, but the journalist also has more creative opportunity in blogging sports journalism.

The most apparent benefit of digital publishing to Joe Londergan (a co-editor of *BuildingTheDam* blog and a contributing writer and podcaster for *UnderdogDynasty* blog) speaks to the creative aspect of blogging. Londergan stated that blogging sports journalists have “much more room to interject [their] own opinion.” A blogging sports journalist can choose their own topic and run with it without having to jump through hoops to get a story published. Londergan also stated that blogging brings “more creative freedom.” He added, “if you have an idea for an article you can pretty much just kind of roll with it.” Once the journalist has chosen their idea, written their piece, and are ready to publish it, they can choose to post on unique platforms including blogs, Instagram, Facebook, or maybe the most important: Twitter.

Twitter is by far the most well-known and arguably the most used platform by sports journalists who publish digitally. Journalists are able to get their thoughts and ideas out in 280-characters or less with the touch of a button. They do not have to wait for something to get published and they do not have to write an entire article to distribute a solitary idea. In the one-thing-after-another, rapid world of sports where everything happens quickly, Twitter is a huge affordance for journalists and writers. An article entitled, “Curmudgeons but Yet Adapters: Impact of Web 2.0 and Twitter on

Newspaper Sports Journalists' Jobs, Responsibilities, and Routines" discusses a study conducted on the use of Twitter from newspaper sports journalists. The authors interviewed 12 different journalists about their use of Twitter and their findings were very interesting in that one of the participants said, "When you find out news, you have to put it out there immediately somewhere. Whether your story is well formed or not now matters less. Twitter is the primary outlet that almost all of us (sports reporters) use for first reporting and then you use the paper's website for a short story" (Kian and Murray, 2012, p. 66). One of the most prominent sports journalists who uses Twitter is Darren Rovell.

Rovell currently works for ESPN and although he works for the World Wide Leader in Sports the majority of the journalistic work he does revolves around sports. During his first stint with ESPN in the early 2000's, Rovell "reported for ESPN's flagship, SportsCenter; its investigative show, Outside the Lines; and had weekly segments on ESPNEWS" ("Darren Rovell," n.d.). After 2006, Rovell moved to CNBC and continued his investigative sports business journalism for the network and hosted the NBC Sports Network show, CNBC SportsBiz: Game On. During that time, Rovell began using Twitter and establishing a fan base that he carried to ESPN when he signed back on with them in 2012. Upon extending Rovell's contract with ESPN earlier this year, John Kosner, ESPN Executive Vice President, Digital and Print Media said in a statement, "Darren is the best sports business reporter in the industry. His creative storytelling across media is unmatched. He has a thoughtful and tireless approach to reporting that provides sports fans with news and insights no one else can provide" (Ota, 2016). Darren Rovell has over two million followers on Twitter (Rovell, n.d.), and

he has found an audience that listens to what he says. He understands the best way to get the information he knows to them is through Twitter. Twitter has not only given Rovell a following, but it has given him a multi-year contract with one of the biggest sports empires in the world. By using these different and unique digital platforms, digitally publishing journalists, like Rovell, not only have the availability to publish in more places, but they also gain the ability to grow their own “brand.”

A brand encompasses what an individual is known for, their reputation, their image, and their view from other people. Digital publishing means that writers can personalize their work and add things they may not be afforded when publishing in print, in turn, creating and growing their brand with unfiltered comments and thoughts their audience can view. The writer can hone in on a specific target audience. For instance, writers can specialize in different sports like basketball writers or football writers, but within those categories, writers can also diverge into even smaller niche disciplines: individual athletes, the uniforms and clothing the teams use, the front office and executives of the teams, or the business side of the athletes. There are too many divisions to list in detail, but a writer can still find something unique to discuss and someone in the public will want to hear about it. William Chase, Staff Writer for *The Cannon* blog, commented, “I think it’s good there’s so many options and opportunities for people who want to write or be a journalist.” Clearly, many different angles of availability from the audience, to the journalist, to the story all benefit from a blogs availability. Availability may also lead to other things like another benefit to blogging that I have touched on briefly: time.

Twitter also grants another classic rhetorical affordance for sports journalists: the kairotic moment. Kairos is an ancient Greek term that represents a perfect moment in time, with time being the opportune word. In fact, Mark Longaker and Jeffrey Walker (2011) simply state that kairos “basically means time” (p. 9) in their chapter titled, “Kairos and the Rhetorical Situation.” They go on to elaborate that kairos is a particular “*moment in time*, and especially the *right time* or the *opportune time*” (Longaker and Walker, 2011, p. 9). A kairotic moment for a sports journalist is extremely important for many reasons, including *getting* the information and *reporting* it. Let’s save the discussion of the kairotic moment of actually gaining the information for another time and focus more on the kairotic moment of delivering the content to the audience in this paper. Imagine a breaking news story hits and, as a journalist, you must get the information out immediately. Before these digital platforms existed, print was the only option and the kairotic moment to deliver the news was a much longer time (maybe even a few days). With digital publishing, *that* time has significantly decreased and if a sports journalist is not the first person to break a story, they are essentially the last because their audience has most likely already gotten the news from another source. Twitter allows journalists to capitalize on this kairotic moment of delivery and get the breaking news out to their audience immediately. Longaker and Walker (2011) state that kairos “names the immediate, moment-by-moment opportunities and constraints that can arise as the discourse itself progresses” (p. 10). (The discourse for the purpose of this argument is sports journalism and any story or discussion in that field.) This perfect kairotic moment, when appropriately used, could be advantageous for the journalists and Twitter is not the only outlet that allows for these moments.

The kairotic moment for a blog is slightly different from Twitter, but equally important. As I mentioned earlier, Twitter restricts the tweeter (the individual composing and posting the Twitter message, or tweet) to 280-characters. While that is perfect for getting short, quick jolts of information to an audience, it does not leave much room for explanations, qualifications, or commentary from the tweeter. Blogging, however, allows the composer to expand upon the subject while still distributing the information in a timely fashion that is generally much quicker than any print published article.

That timely fashion is the kairotic moment for a blogger. They can deliver their commentary or article to the world in a kairotic moment that not only delivers the information to their audience, but also allows the blogger to include more information and commentary than they could in a tweet. While a blogger's kairotic moment may be a little longer than a tweeter, the time is still faster and more effective than a print journalist. Most articles are published within the hour after the news initially breaks on a blog as opposed to the next day. Time is an impactful benefit for a sports journalist, and the kairotic moment for a blogging journalist is much more effective than a print journalist.

No matter the platform, digital writing environments grant journalists affordances that print publishing simply cannot offer. Availability is a communicative benefit to digitally publishing sports journalists because it is easier for the journalist to write and publish their content. Journalists can write, proof, and publish their content on their own time and they are not restricted to a daily paper or publication. They are also able to build their own brand outside of the publication because (like with Darren

Rovell and ESPN) they are no longer “a reporter for ESPN” they are “Darren Rovell.” They can have a name separate from their publication that leads to better opportunities for them in the future. The kairotic moment for a blogging sports journalist also allows the journalist to find the perfect time or kairotic moment to post their story for their audience, which leads to the most important feature of availability to sports journalists and that is their availability to their audience. After all, that is for whom they are writing.

Audience Outreach

Another rhetorical affordance that digital publishing brings sports journalists is audience outreach. Although it closely aligns with the aforementioned affordance of availability, the audience is well deserving of its own separate benefits to digital publishing. Clearly, the journalists are more available to their audience, but in terms of audience outreach, the journalists have a wider audience spectrum and readership base, it is easier for the writer to communicate with their audience, and the journalists can give and receive information straight from the source.

With digital publishing, sports writers can reach a much broader audience than they could with only print publishing. For instance, in a local newspaper, a sports journalist writes an article that previews the local high school’s basketball team and their upcoming season. That article may only be published in the newspaper and not online. Generally speaking, that paper (and therefore, article) will only reach the people in the town who read the paper everyday (maybe reaching only a couple hundred people). If that article is written and published digitally however, an infinite number of people can read that article. People from all across the world and from any background

can search that article and read it. There could be someone who was born in the town but has moved away and wants to stay in touch with the team. If the article is only published in the paper, the likelihood that they would be able to read it is slim. But that likelihood is exponentially multiplied if the article is published online because they can read it whenever they have an internet connection. Wilco echoed this point when asked about the communicative benefits of blogging about sports by replying, “My reach is global.” Wilco enjoys the audience outreach side of digital publishing: “If I was just print then I wouldn’t have the global reach.” As mentioned earlier, Wilco is the Editor-in-Chief for *Pounding the Rock* blog which is a blog about the NBA’s San Antonio Spurs. The Spurs do not get a lot of national or world-wide coverage due to many reasons including the smaller market size of the city of San Antonio. However, fans all across the world want their Spurs fix. In fact, the Spurs have one of the largest percentage of foreign born players on their team, so these fans are a target audience that a blogger like Wilco can capitalize on and deliver information to them from San Antonio in an instant. Not only can Wilco send information to them, he can also communicate directly with them immediately.

Another key component to digital publishing that has proven to be invaluable for that wider audience base—and the sports journalist—is the ability for the writer to communicate *with* their audience and have their audience communicate back to them which is much easier than in print journalism. Most of the blogs and sites that publish full articles have a comment section below the article where readers can post comments, ask questions, and agree or disagree with the writer’s stance. That interactive element is particularly important for blogs, because a lot of those blog posts are opinionated. They

may house some explanatory facts, but for the most part, sports blogs are highly subjective and as Chase explained, “[as a blogging sports journalist] You can get instant responses right away.” When a sports writer writes something that a reader does not agree with in print, the reader may find it difficult to get in touch with the writer to relay their own opinion. With digital publishing, the reader can click a button and immediately post their thoughts about the article straight to the writer. The writer can view and respond to any comment on their original post immediately after a reader has posted a comment themselves. Print journalists have never been able to take advantage of this immediacy of communication. Benegi (2009) relays this point saying, “Local newspapers and television affiliates are slow to embrace an interactive forum that has proven profitable and credible to emerging audiences - ones less likely to utilize traditional media channels” (Benegi, 2009). It grants them the ability to edit and personalize their work for their audience. It opens up a discussion about a topic between the reader and writer, instead of one person writing a piece and not hearing any direct feedback. Chase acknowledges that the increased interaction with his audience may be due to the community. “I get comments on my Blue Jackets stuff all of the time and part of it is just because it’s kind of a network of Blue Jackets fans who go to the site and comment.” However, this sentiment is not restricted strictly to bloggers.

Some journalists who have predominantly published in print and have moved to blogging or online publishing notice the benefits of audience reaction, too. Jemele Hill, a prominent sports columnist for ESPN.com said in an interview in 2012, "Even if I wrote a really good newspaper column that was informative and provocative, I might get at most 60 e-mails," Hill said. "But when I wrote a good column for ESPN[.com] a

few weeks ago, I got 2200 e-mails" (Kian and Zimmerman, 2012, p. 295). Sports are a very popular topic for discussion and having the ability, as a sports journalist, to continue a discussion lets the writer understand how the general public feels in response to their opinion. But the audience is not just commenting on the article, sometimes they are contributing.

Along the same lines, the writer can gain information straight from the source – the fan. By using digital publishing tools like Twitter and Facebook, a sports journalist can find information straight from the fans. In his TED Talk “How to Separate Fact and Fiction Online,” Mark Nolan (2012) explains that, “as journalists, we interact in real time. We're not in a position where the audience is reacting to news. We're reacting to the audience, and we're actually relying on them. They're helping us find the news” (Nolan, 2012). Wilco admitted that he has “gotten any number of story ideas from really savvy comments on a story where I’m like, ‘That’s brilliant!’” But Wilco also commented that the audience is not only an idea generator, but they also judge the article he produces. “I am guilty of having written a story and, then, sitting there at my computer waiting with baited breath until a few comments come in so that I can see what people are saying about it.” For instance, if a sports journalist missed something that happened in a particular game, they can read on Twitter from fans who were at the game or watching the game to find the information. The journalist can retweet the information straight from the source to prove that the information is credible, without having to write it themselves. Having the ability to read and react to live events in real time, gives sports journalist the affordance to respond immediately. It grants them the ability to report live without interruption about things happening in the moment, which

also raises a problem with blogging sports journalism: credibility (See Rhetorical Disadvantages, below).

Overall audience outreach may be the most important benefit for digitally-publishing sports journalists. Alfred Hermida (2010) states that, “Twitter becomes a system where news is reported, disseminated and shared online in short, fast and frequent messages. It creates an ambient media system that displays abstracted information in a space occupied by the user of the service.” (p. 301). The journalist is able to get their information out to the audience, and the audience is able to dissect and react to what is important to them.

One of the bloggers I spoke with actually started blogging *because* of the audience interaction. Cyrus Smith, Managing Editor at *Underdog Dynasty* blog, said, “I always enjoyed the platform for *SB Nation*; their blogs how fan-centric they are,” and added that he “wanted to write from the fans perspective” but print journalism did not allow him that opportunity. Smith also stated: “I like that you can show emotions in your writing” on a blog that you cannot necessary showcase in print journalism. “[The audience interaction] is the biggest reason why I joined that platform - having the ability to interact with not just my readers but other writers in that community.” That audience interaction is dependent upon a steady viewership base and one way to attract more viewers is the visual appeal.

Visual Appeal

The visual appeal of the site should be important to all journalists, but interestingly some blogs do not have full control over that aspect of their blog. When I interview the *SB Nation* journalists, they told me that *SB Nation* controls the layout of

all of the blogs. As an editor, Wilco understands that fact, “they own the look and feel.” Wilco added, “[The visual appeal of the blog] is important to me, but *SB Nation* makes changes and, honestly, I can’t do anything but provide feedback.” However, writers still have the ability to choose which images go with their articles. Londergan commented, “when I am composing articles, I try to make sure that we have pictures or embedded media, videos, photos that complement the story. I know that people aren’t just gonna read through 1000 words of straight, uncut text.” Londergan also has control over the thumbnails: “I try to make those as relevant to what I’m talking about and then try to find a happy medium between relevancy and being attention grabbing, something that is going to generate clicks.” Smith matched Londergan’s opinions about images: “I am really big on pictures: making sure the crop is fine, the subject is in the picture, and the picture is related to the story.” Chase raised an interesting point when approaching the question by bringing up the different devices used to access his articles and how that impacts the decision he makes when choosing the perfect accompanying visual. “It’s not just how it looks on a computer, but you want to be sure it is responsive on your phone or tablet.” While there may not be much literature on sports blogging journalists, what is clear from my interviews is that the visual appeal of the blog is important to the journalists even if they do not have total control.

CHAPTER VI

Discussion

So, what have we learned? The most obvious thing is that the shift from print publishing to digital publishing is still happening and progressing every day. Something that I have not touched on yet that is contributing to this shift is the failing newspaper industry and the fact that newspaper sales are starting to deteriorate. One of the reasons that newspapers are beginning to fail is that newspapers are largely funded by advertisements and classified ads in their papers. George Brock (2013), who is the Head of Journalism at the University of London said, “The internet made things worse for newspapers and was lethal to classified advertising income” (Brock, 2013). All businesses need money in order to operate effectively and continue to produce their goods, but as Brock notes, newspapers may be losing out on their most valuable method of acquiring that money.

Advertisements are the lifeblood of the journalism industry and newspaper companies sell space in their newspaper to individuals or companies in the classifieds section. A lot of the money that a newspaper makes comes from these advertisements and if people are not going to read the paper, then prospective sellers are not going to buy ad space in the paper. Some of that lost income from newspapers is going to blogs because of the increased viewership and because ads are the most effective way to make money for bloggers. Sounds like a win-win for blogs like *SB Nation* who use ads on their site to bring in revenue. Unfortunately (for newspapers), it appears that the trend toward digital advertising space for companies will continue. In his article “The Print Apocalypse and How to Survive It”, Derek Thompson (2016) said that, “Between 2000

and 2015, print newspaper advertising revenue fell from about \$60 billion to about \$20 billion, wiping out the gains of the previous 50 years” (Thompson, 2016). Without money coming in to fund the journalists who write the articles, these classically trained journalists may start looking elsewhere for employment. I saw this trend in my interviews when two of the four writers said without me asking that they graduated college with journalism degrees. To me, that fact explains two very important things.

First, it shows that the shift is happening. Individuals with a tradition journalism education and experience are writing on these platforms. They are leaving the familiar confines of traditional print journalism and wading into the unknown waters of blogging journalism. It shows that journalists who graduated with a degree in journalism and experience in the field see job opportunities outside of the print industry as credible and attainable. Jobs in print journalism are becoming more and more difficult to land while, the opportunities for journalists who can publish their stories online are limitless.

Second, this trend of traditionally trained journalists publishing on an online platform shows that the information from Shultz and Sheffer’s 2007 study is dated. In the study, Shultz and Sheffer claim that journalists are not happy with the shift and do not like to publish their information on blogs. Clearly, that is changing. In fact, from my small sample size, it could be argued that journalists today find blogging as a much more logical direction to take their careers. Most of these journalists do not blog as a full-time means of income and many do it on the side as a hobby. If more and more traditionally trained and educated journalists make this shift and decide that blogging is a career path worth exploring, then that will probably change. As mentioned above, the idea that the information that is published on a blog is written by some random person

that has no experience with journalism is a common misconception. And while random, untrained journalists can post their information on a blog, many traditionally trained journalists are starting to write on those platforms too and I suspect that more will continue to transition in the future. Not surprisingly, three of the most important benefits to blogging for these journalists who are switching from print to digital is the availability, audience interaction, and the visual aspect of the blog.

For one thing, it is easier for the journalist to write and publish their content. The literature and surveys both back up that claim. Secondly, blogging sports journalists have more control over their story and how to deliver their content. Journalists can write, proof, and publish their content on their own time. Finally, they are able to build their own brand outside of the publication and that fact contributes not only to their credibility but also allows them to differentiate themselves from others in a very crowded and competitive field. However, bloggers availability to the audience may be the most intriguing for the journalist and their readers.

The audience is a clear benefit to a blogging journalist, and apparently one of the main reasons that a writer would consider writing on a blog. The audience interaction is a unique trait of blogging that print journalism simply cannot duplicate. The one-on-one interactive nature of commenting and reacting to an article instantaneously can only be found in these environments. For journalists seeking this kind of interactivity, blogging is the only choice, and in certain circumstances, the audience or reader becomes part of the story and an idea generator for the journalist that

cannot happen in print. These things are great, but blogging does not come without its fair share of disadvantages.

CHAPTER VII

Rhetorical Disadvantages

Although digital publishing brings sports journalists many rhetorical it also has plenty of disadvantages, too, like a loss of credibility, difficulty in setting your “brand” apart, and inconsistencies and falsehoods. One of the more prevalent negatives that goes along with digital publishing is the loss of credibility and diluted material for journalists. If more and more people are writing stories, the likelihood that those stories and topics will be repeated is greatly increased. If anyone and everyone can write and about the same number of stories and topics, then chances are someone else has written about it already. Many sports journalists have been writing for ten, twenty, thirty, even fifty years but a random person could write the same story and reach a bigger target audience without having any experience. These other people can write “journalistically” without any credibility at all, and basically write garbage and post it online with any consequences. Not only can the grammar and writing be garbage, but so can the information.

Another issue regarding credibility is that of the sources and information that is online. The most difficult part of journalism today is finding reputable sources online. The sports world is riddled with falsehoods, and in the past debunking those falsehoods has been the job of professional reporters and journalists. With the plethora of opportunity at the hands of anyone who wants to write now, these new “journalists” do not have to confirm the truth of sources or even use sources to write their stories. Take Twitter as an example. Twitter has over 300 million active users, and those users use Twitter to publish their thoughts and opinions. However, it is impossible to determine if

much of the information of Twitter is accurate or just something fabricated. Having a plethora of opportunity is wonderful if used properly, but with so many people being able to publish whatever they wish, this greatly diminishes the credibility of sports journalism. This increased opportunity also impedes journalist's abilities to differentiate themselves or their brand.

The growth in the amount of "journalists" in the sports world has led to another issue involving the growth of an individual's "brand." Journalists today are having more and more trouble defining themselves and separating from the pack. Many people will write about the same things and finding a unique niche is difficult, but not impossible to do; however, it makes things much more complicated. For a journalist to set them self apart from everyone else, one tactic is to find the kairotic moment. However, quickness is a double-edged sword, because while a hurried piece has a greater chance to reach the audience first it may contain falsehoods and inaccuracies. By creating and publishing an article quickly, the journalist does not give enough time for the information and story to develop, which could potentially lead to reporting false facts. That was not an issue for print publishing journalists because they had time to confirm sources. Although information was not as readily available as it is with the internet, they were forced to confirm every fact they used with a primary or secondary source. The disadvantaged can be fixed or solved, and perhaps some of them can be addressed with more research.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

I asked the journalists in my study if they saw a future of sports journalism that was purely online. Their responses were unique and eye opening. Chase thought that a future where all of the information is posted on blogs may happen because “there is more opportunity.” Chase explained that traditional print journalism “jobs are somewhat limited now.” Londergan agreed with Chase by saying, “I don’t know that print media will ever completely go away, but it is definitely shrinking more and more.” Unfortunately, Londergan accepted that this could lead to issues like, “less opportunities for people that want to write professionally.” Londergan continued, “one person can write an article, and thanks to the power of the internet, it gets distributed to everybody and their brother right away for the most part.” Smith was bolder with his comments. When I asked him if he saw a future in sports journalism where everything is published online he said, “Yes. I do.” Smith added, “I don’t really see a future where our children or grandchildren are going and picking up the newspaper.”

Wilco was not so convinced, “*Can* I see it versus *do* I see it. Can I see it? I can see it.” Wilco added, “[It’s] gonna be years off.” Wilco thinks that print sports journalism will last as long as the papers do. “I can’t see newspapers stopping covering sports in daily print as long as there’s newspapers that survive, they’ll continue to print.” Overall, the journalists were optimistic about the future of blogging sports journalism even though they still see print publishing as existing, which is a good sign for the future and the current state of the shift from print to digital publishing.

Although there may be some people who are hesitant to accept a transition from print journalism, the majority of journalists are using digital publishing. Blogging is a new tool for journalists, and digital publishing has its own learning curve. But if journalists are able to effectively incorporate digital publishing into their career, it appears they will greatly benefit. Digital publishing has far more affordances than disadvantages and even though this project has focused on only a few, digital publishing is a very positive thing. The large shift is all the proof that is needed. Journalists would not be making a conscious effort to publish digitally if they did not think it would behoove them. Of course, digital publishing has its downsides (as most new things do), but the more journalists and writers become aware and comfortable with the new digital platforms, more opportunities for growth within individual careers and the field as a whole will present themselves. One step that journalists can take to become more comfortable is understanding the affordance of digital and visual rhetoric in blogs. Although it can be overlooked by prospective digitally publishing sports journalists, the advantage and benefit of being able to construct and create a unique and aesthetically pleasing platform for text is extremely important.

Further Research

This research was informative but, as I stated previously, my study is just an introductory survey about one specific blogging community; however, the information gained from this research should not be disregarded. While this research unlocked some important information and trends within the digitally publishing sports journalism community, it opened more doors for research. Some of those avenues for further research include: Why was there difficulty in finding emails for journalists? Why did

the journalists say that bloggers are not journalists? Why the divide over credibility?

These are very difficult questions that may only be answered with time, but I think the answers to these questions may help bridge the gap and aid in the transition from print to digital journalism.

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