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## Understanding How the Southeastern Conference Football Teams Use Twitter Through a Content Analysis

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Understanding How the Southeastern Conference Football Teams Use Twitter  
Through a Content Analysis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Journalism

by

Kristin Elise Pearson  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Science Education in Recreation & Sport Management, 2013

May 2016  
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **Abstract**

The influence of social media on intercollegiate athletic departments has been prominent in the past few years. With tight budgets, the departments are forced to find different means of marketing and promoting their brand – through embracing social media platforms. Research on social media and intercollegiate athletics is limited; therefore, it is necessary to research how the departments are utilizing social media. With the agenda setting theory as a foundation, this study explores how the 14 SEC football teams are utilizing Twitter. A total of 3,176 tweets were collected from two constructed weeks. Overall, the findings show that the *information sharing* category, presumably the *game scores and highlights* sub-category was the most used category by the 14 teams. Results also show that the majority of tweets are published during conference games as compared to non-conference games or non-game days. Additionally, schools that were never ranked at some point during the football playing season were less likely to produce tweets in the *information sharing*, *promotional*, *diversion*, and *interactivity* categories but more likely to produce tweets in the *fanship* category.

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## **Dedication**

This master's thesis is dedicated to my wonderful husband, Brandon, who has been my constant source of support and encouragement throughout the many challenges of graduate school. I am beyond blessed to have him in my life. This work is also dedicated to my parents, Dan and Ellen Odell, for setting the academic standards and for loving me unconditionally. Your good examples have taught me to work hard for everything that I seek to achieve in life.

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## **Introduction**

The Southeastern Conference (SEC) has won 211 national team sports championships since its formation in 1933, including seven of the last eight college football national championships, and holds the record for the largest total football attendance of any conference in the United States for the 33<sup>rd</sup> consecutive season (“About the SEC,” 2014). The conference’s revenues were at a record \$289.4 million for the 2012-13 fiscal year (Hinnen, 2013; Schroeder, 2013). Despite these significant revenues, fewer budgetary dollars are allocated towards advertising, marketing and promotion in the athletic departments. To get an idea of how much these SEC schools are spending on athletics, “NCAA Finances” (n.d.) compiled a list of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) schools’ total revenues and expenses; in the top ten, Alabama’s total expenses for the 2012-13 fiscal year were at \$116,607,913, Tennessee’s were at \$110,269,194, Florida’s were at \$106,972,983, and LSU’s were at \$105,312,018, all of which are mostly spent on coaching/staff salaries and bonuses, athletic-related student aid and scholarships, facilities maintenance and rental fees, team travel and game day expenses, and equipment and uniforms, among other things. It stands to reason that intercollegiate athletic programs must embrace the social media platforms, including Twitter, as they provide inexpensive ways to market their brand and connect with their many publics and avid sports fans (Clavio, 2011; Dittmore, McCarthy, McEvoy, & Clavio, 2013).

To this day, even though sports entertainment is considered to be one of America’s most popular pastimes, there has been a significant lack of scholarly research in the field of sport communication (Yoo, Smith, & Kim, 2013). Little research has been conducted on the interactions between national sports affiliations, individual athletes and sports enthusiasts. For example, the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) used Twitter to distribute

surveys to its fans; and the National Lacrosse League (NLL) used Twitter to provide fans with game play-by-plays (Hambrick et al., 2010). Kassing and Sanderson (2010) found that professional cyclists competing in the 2009 *Giro d'Italia* used Twitter to discuss the race as it unfolded. However, research on social media and college sports is limited, as intercollegiate athletic programs have been “remarkably slow in embracing and accepting social media as a tool for marketing, networking, and public relations” (Clavio, 2011, p. 309). Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a study that explores the usage trends of intercollegiate athletic programs. Using the agenda setting theory, this study is an analysis of the content, format and usage trends of the 14 SEC football teams’ official Twitter accounts. Individual tweets, published during the 2014 football playing season, were analyzed for type of content (interactivity, diversion, information sharing, fanship, and promotional) and format (an original tweet versus retweet) and the presence or absence of hashtags, links, visuals, and the reply function. Usage trends included such variables as the day of the week, the type of game (conference versus non-conference games), and team rankings to better determine the type of content the teams produced for their fans and followers.

## **Literature Review**

### *Athletic Organizations as Media Companies*

Intercollegiate athletic departments are “evolving from merely being content producers to being content distributors as well” (Dittmore, 2014, p. 48). In the past, athletic departments sought out news organizations and beat writers to produce and distribute their information; nowadays, they function in the same way as any media outlet, creating and delivering information to their target audiences. Some examples of this include the University of Tennessee’s five-hour in-house production of signing day in the spring of 2014 and Auburn

University's increased media presence through the utilization of beat writers (Dittmore, 2014). The researcher suggests that Auburn's approach reflects the increased importance of having an online presence; this includes a team's official athletic website, blogs, and social media pages.

### *Web 2.0 and Social Media*

Web 1.0, the predecessor of Web 2.0, was characterized mainly by one-way communication experiences; organizations created websites, and fans could visit those pages to read the content; yet the "only interaction available to them was through e-mail or, if the Web site had one, a message board" (Pegoraro, 2010, p. 503). With the newer Web 2.0, however, fans can now interact with teams or athletes via User Generated Content (UGC), where they "construct their own Internet content and share it with others, primarily in a framework where all such content is relatively equal among users" (Clavio, 2011, p. 310). The content is frequently modified by a succession of users, allowing sport organizations to increase player accessibility and "bring fans closer to the game" (Pegoraro, 2010, p. 504). Athletes are able to easily converse with fans and respond to followers' inquiries. Kassing and Sanderson (2010) analyzed tweets from American cyclists during the 2009 *Giro d'Italia*, the second most important race in professional cycling, and found that cyclists provided their fans and followers with "behind the scene" experiences, including team meetings, course strategy and other exclusive race information. Cyclist Levi Leipheimer asked his Twitter followers to participate in a contest on his Facebook page and provided a hyperlink for them to follow; the cyclist replied "23 minutes later saying 'That link was bad, sorry about that... Try this'" (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010, p. 123). His Twitter followers notified him about the bad link he had posted, and he immediately posted a working hyperlink for those who were interested in the contest.

In the past, social media has been banned from all intercollegiate athletic events in attempt to control media exclusivity. Some schools and universities have gone as far as prohibiting student athletes from posting on social media, fearing that they would generate embarrassing, offensive, or inappropriate content (Clavio, 2011). However, nowadays student athletes may use the social media platforms; yet they are under strict surveillance and the consequences are more severe, unlike the rules and policies of their professional counterparts (Browning & Sanderson, 2012). Intercollegiate athletic teams and programs are beginning to use the social media platforms to send out pertinent information and connect with their fans. For example, the official Twitter account belonging to Louisiana State University's football team answered fans' questions when they asked which sideline would host the home team. The team later responded via Twitter "#LSU is the home team and will be on the east sideline. RT @LSUfan71: Will LSU be the home team against Wisconsin? East or West sideline?" That same day, the team even responded to individual fans directly by using Twitter's reply function, saying "@justingiglio Yes the new merchandise is in now." Clearly, the team's fans were asking about merchandise, and the university was quick to respond.

### *Twitter*

Twitter was founded in March 2006; and by May 2010 it had more than 19 million users worldwide, making it the most popular networking tool for social engagement via the Internet (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Waters & Williams, 2011). Twitter is a free, real-time micro-blogging network that allows users to create and share information in the form of 140 character messages or "tweets" (Pegoraro, 2010; Waters, & Williams, 2011). The information in users' tweets varies greatly. Twitter users can post about "mundane topics like what they ate for breakfast and what they plan to watch on television," doctors have been reported to share

medical procedures and research information, and multiple businesses have asked for customer feedback (Hambrick et al., 2010, p. 455). Sports fans follow their favorite teams' Twitter accounts "to see the followed user's tweets and respond if they wish" (Pegoraro, 2010, p. 503). Twitter has garnered significant attention for its ability to connect users in real-time via messaging.

In a study examining the government's public affairs practitioners extent of incorporation of the traditional models of public relations via Twitter (Waters & Williams, 2011), the researchers first configured summary statistics (i.e. how many users they followed on Twitter, how many users followed them, average number of tweets, percentage of tweets with urls and hashtags) on the 60 Twitter accounts of the sampled government agencies. The agencies followed 314 Twitter users on average (SD) = 552.1 and an average of 13,300 users followed the agencies' Twitter accounts (SD = 52,610.9) at the time of the study. The accounts had an average of 118.3 tweets (SD = 19.92), or publicly shared updates, during the course of the study; 74.5 percent of tweets (or 1,341 of 1,800) provided hyperlinks, or urls to non-Twitter websites, and 12.6 percent of tweets (or 226 of 1,800) used a hashtag (#), which is used as an indication that the tweet is part of an organized and searchable topic of discussion (Waters & Williams, 2011).

Pegoraro (2010), building upon the work of Hambrick et al. (2010), identified the top five Twitter accounts for athletes in different professional leagues and collected the tweets for each of the athletes ( $n = 49$ ) over a seven-day period; 45.85 percent (or 547 of 1,193) of tweets were original messages, otherwise known as public messages, and the remaining were retweets of another user's message, specified by "a note [that] appears below the athlete's tweet, indicating where it originated" (p. 506). Hyperlinks were only present in 7.21 percent of tweets and visuals (i.e. pictures and videos) in only 4.27 percent. Both studies utilized similar content categories;

although the researchers labeled them differently, the intent was the same. The categories were: 1) *responding to fans*, or *interactivity*, defined as direct communication between athletes and their friends and fans; 2) *diversion*, or non-sport related information, defined as pop culture or landmark references (i.e. TV shows, musicians, politicians, famous landmarks) and any information relation to personal life; and 3) *other sport or athlete reference*, or *fanship*, defined as any comment relating to other sports, athletes, or coaches. The most popular content category among most of the sampled leagues was *interactivity*, with 49.54 percent (or 591 of 1,193) of tweets were placed into this category. The *diversion* category amounted to 33.27 percent (or 397 of 1,193) of tweets, and the *fanship* category was only present in 10.81 percent (or 129 of 1,193) of tweets (Pegoraro, 2010).

In another study, Kassing and Sanderson (2010) found that professional cyclists competing in the 2009 *Giro d'Italia* used Twitter to discuss the race as it unfolded; the researchers computed summary statistics (i.e. total tweets, daily average, overall proportion, and number of Twitter followers) to understand the pattern of use. Then the researchers categorized the cyclists' tweets into one of three emergent themes; 1) the sharing of commentary and opinions, 2) fostering of interactivity, and 3) cultivating of insider perspectives. As the study was mainly exploratory in nature, there was some overlap among categories. The cyclists posted their opinions about many issues (e.g. the race course, speed of cyclists, etc.), shared pictures with their followers, and directed followers to blogs and postings elsewhere on the internet using hyperlinks, and provided followers with a "behind the scenes" experience with postings such as warm-up or cool-down routines, team meetings, and injury reports (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010).

In a 2013 study examining the perceived utility of Twitter accounts in intercollegiate athletics (Dittmore et al., 2013), researchers examined the presumed primary target audience or

intended readers of the accounts according to survey respondents. They calculated survey results from 188 athletic directors, marketing directors, and sports information directors. Researchers found the majority of the intended target public was alumni (33%), current students (23.8%), and existing ticket holders (23.2%), with the remaining 20% being prospective ticket holders (9.2%), media (8.1%), donors (2.7%), and sponsors (0.0%). The researchers described three primary purposes of Twitter. These were 1) *interpersonal* (aka *interactivity*), defines as fan-athlete/coach and fan-to-fan interaction or the communication of non-sports related information about athletes/coaches; 2) *informational/information sharing*, defined as the communication of athletic news and upcoming/ongoing competition updates; and 3) *promotional*, defined as the communication of marketing information, promotion of games, contests and giveaways, and other events (Dittmore et al., 2013). In the survey, the researchers used a Likert scale to ascertain the importance of using Twitter for the purposes of communication. Using an exploratory factor analysis and reported mean scores, the researchers found significant statistical differences in the purpose of Twitter communication based upon job position. Athletic directors were significantly more likely to communicate interpersonally or interactively, as the overall mean rating of athletic directors ( $M = 3.958$ ) exceeded the mean rating of the sports information directors (SIDs) ( $M = 3.218$ ;  $p = .000$ ) for the *interpersonal* factor. Marketing directors communicated more interpersonally than the SIDs, as the mean for marketing directors ( $M = 3.610$ ;  $p = .007$ ) exceeded the mean rating of the SIDs ( $M = 3.218$ ;  $p = .007$ ). Clearly, athletic directors thought *interpersonal* communication via Twitter was most important, whereas the sports information directors thought it was of lesser importance compared to the other communication factors.

### *Twitter and the Southeastern Conference*

According to each of the 14 SEC football team's official Twitter pages, the Vanderbilt Commodores were the first team to join Twitter in 2008, with three more teams signing on in 2009, another five in 2010, four more in 2011, and the Arkansas Razorbacks in 2012. Samuels (n.d.) compiled a list of the top 25 college football Twitter accounts based on the number of Twitter followers; as of July 10, 2013, the SEC had nine teams represented on the list. Six of the universities (Louisiana State University, University of Alabama, University of Tennessee, Texas A&M University, Auburn University, and University of Florida) were represented in the top seven. Louisiana State University was ranked second with 106,182 Twitter followers, Alabama ranked third with 84,300 followers, Tennessee ranked fourth with 69,003 followers, Texas A&M University ranked fifth with 63,117 followers, Auburn ranked sixth with 62,464 followers, and Florida ranked seventh with 53,893 followers. A complete list of the 14 SEC football teams' official Twitter accounts can be found in Appendix A.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Within the field of sport communication, Dittmore et al. (2013) cite that several theoretical frameworks have been used to closely examine social media's impact on intercollegiate athletics; however, they do not specifically mention which frameworks have been used. Some studies are exploratory in nature and do not use a theoretical framework, while other studies use such theories as parasocial interaction (PSI), uses and gratifications, and reputation repair and crisis communication theories (Pegoraro, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Brown & Billings, 2013). There is a paucity of sport communication research that uses the agenda setting framework. The agenda setting theory is "the process through which increased media focus on a topic raises the salience of that issue relative to others in the minds of media consumers" (Seltzer

& Dittmore, 2009, p. 343). The theory suggests that media professionals “do not tell people what to think, they tell people what to think about” (Yoo, Smith, & Kim, 2013, p. 10). This theory has been used in multiple communication studies outside the realm of sport communication.

The agenda setting theory posits that the journalists and editorial staff of media outlets can set their audience’s agenda, highlighting particular issues in coverage while completely neglecting others; by controlling the type and amount of coverage on each issue, the media outlets can guide the public to think about specific aspects of an issue by repeatedly highlighting certain information for their target audiences to consume (Peng & Tang, 2010; Yoo, Smith, & Kim, 2013; Seltzer & Dittmore, 2009). For example, television news channels can suggest the importance of an issue simply by mentioning it on the news. All other media outlets, including social media, only need to repeatedly draw attention to a person, issue, or other topic of discussion to convey its eminence (Carroll & McCombs, 2003). Similarly, newspapers and print media communicate certain cues “about the relative salience of the objects on their daily agenda,” with variables including front page versus inside pages, headline size, and even a story’s length (Carroll & McCombs, 2003, p. 37). The newspapers’ cues are attributes; the second-level agenda setting theory states that the salience of the intensified attributes determines how the public will view the issues at hand (Seltzer & Dittmore, 2009).

In other words, the intercollegiate athletic departments act like gatekeepers, or news organizations, for they have the power to choose what content to publish, how they want to promote themselves to their fans, and they play a vital role in shaping and framing the content or issues by determining its importance in relation to other issues. The intercollegiate athletic department’s communication or sport information director (SID) completes journalistic activities similar to those completed by a news organization of a local newspaper or television station.

Through a content analysis, researchers are able to determine the importance and salience of the published content (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Second-level agenda setting, sometimes referred to as framing, proposes that the “salience of specific attributes attached to an issue” by the media professionals can also determine how people perceive the issue (Seltzer & Dittmore, 2009, p. 343). To put it simply, the second-level agenda setting theory suggests that media professionals can not only tell the public what to think about, but that they can also influence the minds of the public and tell them *how* to think about a certain issue.

Brown and Billings (2013) examined how University of Miami sports fans utilized Twitter to implement crisis communication strategies, or reputation repair strategies (i.e. ingratiation, reminder, attack the accuser, divert attention, denial, justification, scapegoat, excuse, and apology), due to the increased media focus and salience of the NCAA violations and potential infractions on the Miami Hurricanes. The researchers explain that, upon receiving an official Notice of Allegations, athletic departments must “employ calculated communication techniques in an attempt to minimize the potential negative outcomes from this type of crisis” (Brown & Billings, 2013, p. 75). Fans of the Miami Hurricanes assisted with these efforts via social media platforms; the top three reputation repair strategies used by the fans included: 1) *ingratiation*, when one praises the organization’s stakeholders for their support (34.6 percent or 147 of 425 tweets); 2) *reminder*, when one boasts the organization’s previous good works (23.1 percent or 98 of 425); and 3) *attack the accuser*, when one verbally attacks those who made the claims against the organization (15.1 percent or 64 of 425). The agenda setting theory states that the media or authorized account users are able to tell their audiences what to think about based on what they post, and second-level agenda setting further supports the idea that an issue’s accompanying attributes can also determine how audiences view or address the issue at hand

(Wimmer & Dominick, 2011; Yoo, Smith, & Kim, 2013; Seltzer & Dittmore, 2009). In this case, the increased salience of the potential infractions created a fan reaction, where they applied communications strategies that focused on messages that either “portrayed the university in a more positive light or attacked the negative headlines perpetuated by much of the mainstream media” (Brown & Billings, 2013, p. 79).

Seltzer and Dittmore (2009) combined the agenda setting and second-level agenda building theories as the basis for their work to examine national and regional media coverage of the National Football League (NFL) Network carriage dispute in a total of 149 press releases. Media stories were coded for the presence or absence of frame attributes including mentions of the NFL, mentions of the cable companies, point-of-view (pro-cable frame or pro-NFL frame), and tone (negative, neutral, or positive) among other things to identify which predominant frame, either pro-cable or pro-NFL, each release favored most. Again, the agenda setting theory explains that the media organizations tell their audience what to think about, whereas second-level agenda setting, or framing, “suggests that the media also tell the public *how* to think about the issue” (Seltzer & Dittmore, 2009, p. 343).

Primary issue attributes were divided into two categories: pro-cable company (*blame NFL, make money, pay content, and narrow appeal*) and pro-NFL (*blame cable, premium tier, broad appeal, expand coverage, and competition*) (Seltzer & Dittmore, 2009). About 43.6 percent (or 65 of 149) of the stories used the pro-NFL framing attributes, 19.5 percent (or 29 of 149) used the pro-cable companies’ frame when covering cable operators, and 36.9 percent (or 55 of 149) of the articles were neutral, or balanced between the pro-NFL and pro-cable frames (Seltzer & Dittmore, 2009). As 43.6 percent of the stories used pro-NFL framing attributes, it

seems that they were more successful in framing the carriage disputes in a way that was positive or pro-NFL to the audience, putting blame on the cable companies (Seltzer & Dittmore, 2009).

Intercollegiate athletic departments have evolved to function very similar to news outlets; they create and deliver information to their fans, and one way they do that is through the use of social media platforms. In the past, they had restrictions on the use of social media and even banned players from posting to it. Now, they see it as an opportunity to share information and connect with fans across the globe. Dittmore et al. (2013) studied the perceived utility of social media, mainly Twitter, and found that Athletic Directors thought *interpersonal* communication, or *interactivity*, was the most important utility. Hambrick et al. (2010) found that *interactivity* was the most widely used category on Twitter, indicating that athletes use the social media platform to create dialogue with their fans. Therefore, we can predict that *interactivity* could be the most popular content category used by the 14 SEC football teams on their official Twitter accounts.

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

Considering the importance of embracing the social media platforms, as they provide intercollegiate athletic organizations with the means of inexpensively communicating with their target audiences, we need to better understand how the 14 Southeastern Conference (SEC) universities' athletic departments are currently utilizing Twitter (Clavio, 2011; Dittmore et al., 2013). The social media platforms can be valuable marketing tools for athletic departments; they can build their brand name, engage fans and create positive exposure, among other things (Pegoraro, 2010; Dittmore et al., 2013).

Pegoraro (2010) found that the most popular content category for the leagues was *responding to fans*, which is comparable to *interactivity* proposed by Hambrick et al. (2010). In a

study by Dittmore et al. (2013), the researchers found that the purposes of communication via Twitter varied based on position; Athletic Directors (M = 3.958) surpassed the mean rating of the Sports Information Director (SID) (M = 3.218;  $p = .000$ ) for the *interpersonal* category (aka *interactivity*), or fan-athlete/coach and fan-to-fan interaction. This suggests that the *interactivity* category might be most popular among the official accounts belonging to the 14 SEC football teams. Based on the literature review, the following assumptions and research questions were created:

**RQ1a:** Do the 14 SEC football teams vary on their use of Twitter for *interactivity*, *diversion*, *information sharing*, *fanship* and *promotional* purposes?

Assuming that schools with larger enrollment sizes have more alumni than schools with smaller enrollment sizes, a greater number of alumni could potentially lead to more interest in the institution's football program. Appendix A lists the 14 SEC football teams' official Twitter accounts and the number of Twitter followers each football program had since joining the social media platform through February 20, 2015, the date the data were collected.

**RQ1b:** Do institutions of varying enrollment sizes (up to 24,999, 25,000 to 29,999, 30,000 to 44,999, and 45,000 or more) differ on how they use Twitter for *interactivity*, *diversion*, *information sharing*, *fanship* and *promotional* purposes?

**RQ1c:** Does the type of game (conference versus non-conference) have an impact on the use of *interactivity*, *diversion*, *information sharing*, *fanship* and *promotional*, using Twitter?

The Associated Press (AP) Poll provides rankings of NCAA football programs; rankings are noted by surveying media professionals. When a program or team is ranked as one of the top 25, the media organizations essentially set the agenda for the athletic programs, providing them

with media coverage. We can assume that football programs that were not ranked will need to create more of their own content, rather than relying on the media organizations to do it for them.

**RQ2:** Do the 14 SEC football teams' Twitter content and characteristics vary based on whether the teams were ranked by the AP Poll at some point during the playing season?

The literature review suggests that producing User Generated Content (UGC) via Twitter will be more successful if the organizations utilize one or more of the basic functions found on the platform (i.e. an original tweet versus retweet, and the presence or absence of hashtags, links, visuals, and the reply function) to attract and engage sports fanatics. Waters and Williams (2011) found that 74.5 percent (or 1,341 of 1,800) of the sampled tweets provided hyperlinks to websites other than Twitter and hashtags were present in 12.6 percent (or 226 of 1,800) of the sampled tweets. From the research, we can determine that hashtags and hyperlinks will be used most out of the different tweet characteristics.

**RQ3a:** Do the 14 SEC football teams vary on the use of the tweet characteristics of *original tweet, retweet, hyperlink, hashtags, visuals, and the reply function*?

**RQ3b:** Do tweets that are generated by SEC teams using hashtags, visuals, hyperlinks, or the use of the reply function on Twitter get retweeted or favorited more than tweets that do not use these Twitter functions?

## **Methodology**

A content analysis of 3,176 tweets from the 14 Southeastern Conference (SEC) football teams' official Twitter accounts (see Appendix A) during the 2014 football playing season from Monday, August 25, 2014, through Sunday, November 30, 2014, ("Southeastern Conference Schedule – 2014," n.d.) was conducted.

Composite or constructed week sampling (Riffe, Aust, & Lacy, 1993; Hester & Dougall, 2007) was used by “identifying all Mondays, and randomly selecting one Monday, then identifying all Tuesdays, and randomly selecting one Tuesday, etc.” until all the different days of the week were equally represented for both constructed weeks (Hester & Dougall, 2007, p. 812). A random number generator from Mathgoodies.com was used to randomly select the different days of the week from the collection period (Monday, August 25, 2014 through Sunday, November 30, 2014) to create two constructed weeks, a total of 14 days. All 14 Twitter accounts were monitored for the same periods of time (12:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. for each day), during the same 14 days, so that a direct comparison of variables could be made. Constructed week sampling produced better results than a simple random sample or a consecutive day sample, and two constructed weeks were better at representing a six- to twelve-month “population,” as well as the population’s unspecified boundaries, than one constructed week (Riffe, Aust, & Lacy, 1993; Hester & Dougall, 2007; Peng & Tang, 2010; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

Using Twitter’s advanced search tool, tweets from the 14 accounts published on the selected days that made up the constructed weeks were accessed and recorded. The advanced search tool had an option to include retweets in the search results; the option was used in order to retrieve all original messages and retweets for each team.

Coding the format of each tweet (i.e. an original tweet versus retweet, and the presence or absence of hashtags, links, visuals, and the reply function) was the next step in the content analysis (Pegoraro, 2010). Refer to Appendix B for complete definitions on tweet format.

The content of each individual tweet, as well as the retweets from other Twitter users, were coded and categorized as *diversion*, *fanship*, *information sharing*, *interactivity*, or *promotion* (Clavio, 2008; Hambrick et al., 2010). The codebook was developed using previous

literature, but each category was adjusted to fit the current study. Refer to Appendix C for complete definitions of the five content categories.

Summary statistics were run on the number of tweets each team had in the sample, how many tweets were produced each day of the week, and the frequencies of each Twitter format and content categories by SEC team (Waters & Williams, 2011). Then chi-square tests, or crosstabs, were used to further describe the sample and determine whether the relationships between variables were significant or not (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011, p. 310).

## **Results**

A total of 3,176 tweets were collected for this study. Table 1 depicts the number of tweets each team had during the 14 days that made up the two constructed weeks. As the table illustrates, 34.23% (or 1,087 of 3,176) of the tweets collected for the study were published by the University of Tennessee. Mississippi State University published 12.25% (or 389 of 3,176) of the tweets, Vanderbilt University published 9.16% (or 291 of 3,176), the University of Missouri published 8.41% (or 267 of 3,176), the University of Arkansas published 5.42% (or 172 of 3,176), the University of Florida published 4.50% (or 143 of 3,176), Louisiana State University published 4.44% (or 141 of 3,176), the University of Mississippi published 4.28% (or 136 of 3,176), the University of Kentucky published 3.72% (or 118 of 3,176), as did the Texas A&M University, the University of South Carolina published 2.83% (or 90 of 3,176), the University of Alabama published 1.92% (or 61 of 3,176), and the University of Georgia published 1.64% (or 52 of 3,176). Therefore, from this brief overview of the data analysis, it appears that The University of Tennessee's football team's official Twitter account is the most active of all the 14 SEC football teams.

Table 2 illustrates the number of tweets collected on each day of the constructed week. Over half of the tweets in the sample were posted on Saturdays, indicating that the 14 SEC teams were most active on Twitter on that day. Sundays saw the least amount of activity, only making up 6.55% (or 208 of 3,176) of the sampled tweets.

Day of the Week	Frequency	
	N	%
Monday	244	7.68
Tuesday	245	7.71
Wednesday	286	9.01
Thursday	210	6.61
Friday	323	10.17
Saturday	1660	52.27
Sunday	208	6.55
	3176	100.00

#### *Tweet Format*

The data in Table 3 illustrates that most of the tweets in the sample were original messages, making up 95.56% (or 3,035 of 3,176) of the sample, and only 4.44% (or 141 of 3,176) of the tweets were retweets. Of the 3,176 tweets, 21.16% (or 672 of 3,176) contained a hyperlink, 53.24% (or 1,691 of 3,176) contained a hashtag, 29.91% (or 950 of 3,176) contained visuals, and 34.23% (or 1,087 of 3,176) used the reply function.

Table 3  
*Frequencies of Tweet Format*

Tweet Format	Frequency	
	N	%
Original Tweet	3035	95.56
Retweet	141	4.44
Hyperlink	672	21.16
Hashtag	1691	53.24
Visuals	950	29.91
Reply Function	1087	34.23

*Tweet Content*

The *information sharing* category was the most frequent type of tweet in the sample, where 8.75% (or 278 of 3,176) of tweets contained information on *players of the week and awards*, 1.86% (or 59 of 3,176) of tweets contained information on *team trainings and practices*, 1.57% (or 50 of 3,176) of tweets contained information on *team travel*, 42.66% (or 1,355 of 3,176) of tweets contained information on *game scores and highlights*, and 18.67% (or 593 of 3,176) of tweets contained information on *press conferences and quotes*. Within the *diversion* category, 1.23% (or 39 of 3,176) of tweets talked about *players/coaches personal lives*, and only 0.16% (or 5 of 3,176) of tweets talked about *student/campus life or other non-sports related information*. Within the *interactivity* category, 3.15% (or 100 of 3,176) of tweets were *interactivity with one account* and 1.04% (or 33 of 3,176) of tweets were *interactivity with groups and organizations*. The *fanship* category was present in 5.82% (or 185 of 3,176) of tweets, and the *promotional* category was present in 15.05% (or 478 of 3,176) of tweets. Results suggest that the most tweeted content category was *information sharing*, more specifically, the *game scores and highlights* sub-category with 42.66% (or 1,355 of 3,176) of tweets containing information on game information.

Under the assumption that larger schools have a greater number of alumni and social media followers, we can theorize that there could possibly be a difference in content (*interactivity, diversion, information sharing, fanship and promotional*) based on the institution's enrollment size (up to 24,999, 25,000 to 29,999, 30,000 to 44,999, and 45,000 or more). Table 4 breaks down the frequency of content categories by SEC team. Looking back at Table 1, three of the 14 SEC football teams (University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, and Vanderbilt University) had an enrollment size up to 24,999, four (University of Arkansas, Auburn University, University of Kentucky, and University of Tennessee) had an enrollment size of 25,000 to 29,999, four (University of Alabama, University of Georgia, Louisiana State University, and University of Missouri) had an enrollment size of 30,000 to 44,999, and three (University of Florida, University of South Carolina, and Texas A&M University) had an enrollment size of 45,000 or more.

Table 4  
*Frequencies of Content Category by SEC Team*

SEC University	Interactivity		Diversion		Info Sharing		Fanship		Promotional		Total Number of Tweets
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
University of Alabama	0	0	0	0	47	2.01	1	0.54	13	2.72	61
University of Arkansas	7	5.26	1	2.27	134	5.74	1	0.54	29	6.07	172
Auburn University	1	0.75	2	4.55	97	4.15	2	1.08	9	1.88	111
University of Florida	27	20.30	5	11.36	89	3.81	3	1.62	19	3.97	143
University of Georgia	1	0.75	1	2.27	24	1.03	6	3.24	20	4.18	52
University of Kentucky	1	0.75	0	0	106	4.54	2	1.08	9	1.88	118
Louisiana State University	13	9.77	1	2.27	102	4.37	5	2.70	20	4.18	141
Mississippi State University	57	42.86	12	27.27	234	10.02	6	3.24	80	16.74	389
University of Missouri	5	3.76	7	15.91	216	9.25	6	3.24	33	6.90	267
University of Mississippi	8	6.02	0	0	93	3.98	3	1.62	32	6.69	136
University of South Carolina	0	0	2	4.55	58	2.48	5	2.70	25	5.23	90
University of Tennessee	5	3.76	9	20.45	821	35.15	138	74.59	114	23.85	1087
Texas A&M University	3	2.26	4	9.09	79	3.38	0	0	32	6.69	118
Vanderbilt University	5	3.76	0	0	236	10.10	7	3.78	43	9.00	291
	133	100	44	100	2336	100	185	100	478	100	3176

Results suggest that schools differ on the use of *interactivity*, *diversion*, *information sharing*, *fanship* and *promotional*, using Twitter based on enrollment size. Schools with enrollment sizes up to 24,999 or 45,000 or more were significantly more likely to use hyperlinks in tweets than those with enrollment sizes of 25,000 to 29,999 or 30,000 to 44,999 [ $X^2(3) = 39.166$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ]. There was a significant effect for use of hashtags in tweets,  $X^2(3) = 419.722$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , with schools of larger enrollment sizes of 25,000 or more using hashtags more frequently than schools with an enrollment size up to 24,999. There was a significant effect for use of visuals,  $X^2(3) = 55.994$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , with schools with enrollment sizes of 30,000 to 44,999 or 45,000 or more using more visuals in tweets than those with enrollment sizes up to 24,999 or 25,000 to 29,999. There was a significant effect for use of Twitter's reply function,  $X^2(3) = 8.914$ ,  $p \leq .030$ , with more replies to the tweets of schools with enrollment sizes up to 24,999 than those of other enrollment sizes.

There was a significant effect for use of the *interactivity* category,  $X^2(6) = 97.455$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , with schools of enrollment sizes up to 24,999 or 45,000 or more having more interactivity with fans than those with enrollment sizes of 25,000 to 29,999 or 30,000 to 44,999. There was a significant effect for use of the *diversion* category,  $X^2(3) = 11.995$ ,  $p \leq .007$ , with schools with enrollment sizes of up to 24,999 or 25,000 to 29,999 using more diversion in their tweets than those with enrollment sizes of 30,000 to 44,999 or 45,000 or more. There was a significant effect for use of the *information sharing* category,  $X^2(15) = 190.252$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , with schools with enrollment sizes of up to 24,999 and 30,000 to 44,999 having more tweets in the sub category of *player of the week*. Schools with an enrollment size of 30,000 to 44,999 were more likely to produce tweets in the sub categories of *trainings and practices* and *game scores and highlights*; schools with an enrollment size of 25,000 to 29,999 were more likely to produce

tweets in the sub categories of *team travel* and *press conferences and quotes*. There was a significant effect for use of the *fanship* category,  $X^2(3) = 74.457$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , with schools with an enrollment size of 25,000 to 29,999 having more tweets including fanship than schools of other enrollment sizes. There was a significant effect for use of the *promotional* category,  $X^2(3) = 43.591$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , with schools with an enrollment size of 25,000 to 29,999 posting fewer promotional tweets than schools of other enrollment sizes.

Results suggest that the use of *interactivity*, *diversion*, *information sharing*, *fanship* and *promotional* differs based on whether or not the tweet was published on a non-game day or game day, and the type of game (conference versus non-conference). There was a significant effect for use of the *interactivity* category,  $X^2(4) = 22.577$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , with more interactivity between the teams and their followers happening on non-game days than conference and non-conference game days. There was a significant effect for use of the *diversion* category,  $X^2(2) = 23.029$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , with teams posting more tweets in the *diversion* category on non-game days than both conference and non-conference games. There were significant differences within the *information sharing* category,  $X^2(10) = 1521.464$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . Teams were more likely to tweet about *player of the week and award*, *trainings and practices* and *team travel* on non-game days; teams were more likely to tweet about *game scores and highlights* during conference games and non-conference games than non-game days, with the highest scores in conference games; and teams were more likely to tweet about *press conferences and quotes* on non-game days than during conference and non-conference games. There was a significant effect for use of the *fanship* category,  $X^2(2) = 215.631$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , with teams producing more tweets including fanship during both conference and non-conference games than non-game days. There was a significant effect

for use of the *promotional* category,  $X^2(2) = 44.445$ ,  $p \leq .001$ , with teams producing more promotional tweets on non-game days than conference and non-conference games.

Looking back at Table 1, nine of the 14 SEC football teams (University of Alabama, Auburn University, University of Georgia, Louisiana State University, Mississippi State University, University of Missouri, University of Mississippi, University of South Carolina, & Texas A&M University) were ranked in the AP Top 25 at some point during the football playing season, and five of the 14 teams (University of Arkansas, University of Florida, University of Kentucky, University of Tennessee, & Vanderbilt University) were never ranked in the AP Top 25. Teams that were ranked at some point in time during the season produced 42.98% (or 1,365 of 3,176) of the tweets in the collection. The teams that had never been ranked in the AP Poll Top 25 during the season produced 57.02% (or 1,811 of 3,176) of the tweets in the collection, an average of 363 tweets per school.

Results show that the 14 SEC football teams' Twitter content and characteristics of tweets vary based on whether or not the team was ranked by the Associated Press' college football poll at some point during the playing season. There was no relationship between the use of hyperlinks in tweets and whether or not the school was ranked by the AP Poll,  $X^2(1) = .025$ ,  $p = .873$ . When comparing the use of hashtags in tweets and school rankings, teams that had been ranked in the AP Top 25 at one point in the season were more likely to use hashtags than teams that were never ranked during the season,  $X^2(1) = 107.360$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . When comparing the use of visuals in tweets and school rankings, teams that had been ranked in the AP Top 25 were more likely to post visuals than teams that were never ranked during the season,  $X^2(1) = 24.095$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . When comparing the use of Twitter's reply function in tweets and school rankings, teams

that had been ranked in the AP Top 25 at one point in the season were more likely to use the reply function than teams that were never ranked during the season,  $X^2(1) = 4.418$ ,  $p = .036$ .

SEC teams that were ranked in the AP Top 25 during the football playing season were more likely to use *interactivity* than teams that were never ranked,  $X^2(2) = 32.871$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . When comparing school rankings and *diversion* category, teams that were never ranked in the AP Top 25 during the season were less likely to use *diversion* than teams that were ranked,  $X^2(2) = 9.573$ ,  $p = .002$ . Teams that were never ranked in the AP Top 25 during the season were less likely to tweet about *player of the week and awards* than ranked teams, they were less likely to tweet about *trainings and practices* than ranked teams, they were more likely to tweet about *team travel* than ranked teams, they were less likely to tweet about *game scores and highlights* than ranked teams, and they were more likely to tweet about *press conferences and quotes* than ranked teams,  $X^2(6) = 175.283$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . Teams that were never ranked in the AP Top 25 during the season were more likely to use the *fanship* category than teams that have been ranked,  $X^2(1) = 48.509$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . Teams that were never ranked in the AP Top 25 during the season were less likely to use *promotional* tweets than teams that have been ranked,  $X^2(1) = 34.463$ ,  $p \leq .001$ .

Table 5 illustrates how each of the 14 SEC football teams vary on the use of the tweet characteristics of *original tweet*, *retweet*, *hyperlink*, *hashtags*, and *visuals*. The University of Tennessee composed 34.73% (or 1,054 of 3,035) of original tweets and Mississippi State University retweeted the most out of any other team, with 35.46% (or 50 of 141) of the retweets in the sample belonging to their team's official Twitter account. The University of Tennessee also accounted for the highest use of hyperlinks, hashtags, visuals, and the reply function, as they produced the most tweets in the sample.

Table 5  
*Frequencies of Tweet Format by SEC Team*

SEC University	Original Tweet		Retweet		Hyperlink		Hashtag		Visuals		Reply Function	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
University of Alabama	61	2.01	0	0.00	17	2.53	56	3.31	27	2.84	8	0.74
University of Arkansas	165	5.44	7	4.96	29	4.32	141	8.34	55	5.79	51	4.69
Auburn University	110	3.62	1	0.71	0	0.00	101	5.97	11	1.16	7	0.64
University of Florida	137	4.51	6	4.26	50	7.44	90	5.32	27	2.84	62	5.70
University of Georgia	50	1.65	2	1.42	14	2.08	48	2.84	36	3.79	12	1.10
University of Kentucky	117	3.86	1	0.71	12	1.79	103	6.09	18	1.89	20	1.84
Louisiana State University	132	4.35	9	6.38	17	2.53	108	6.39	36	3.79	56	5.15
Mississippi State University	339	11.17	50	35.46	121	18.01	114	6.74	127	13.37	241	22.17
University of Missouri	262	8.63	5	3.55	24	3.57	161	9.52	102	10.74	78	7.18
University of Mississippi	124	4.09	12	8.51	38	5.65	80	4.73	24	2.53	31	2.85
University of South Carolina	89	2.93	1	0.71	14	2.08	88	5.20	56	5.89	20	1.84
University of Tennessee	1054	34.73	33	23.40	257	38.24	457	27.03	351	36.95	426	39.19
Texas A&M University	109	3.59	9	6.38	42	6.25	115	6.80	52	5.47	42	3.86
Vanderbilt University	286	9.42	5	3.55	37	5.51	29	1.71	28	2.95	33	3.04
	3035	100	141	100	672	100	1691	100	950	100	1087	100

Hashtags, visuals, hyperlinks, or the use of the reply function on twitter are associated with the number of times a tweet gets retweeted or favorited by other Twitter users. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of hyperlinks, hashtags, visuals, and the use of Twitter's reply function. There was a significant effect of hyperlink use in tweets and the number of times the tweet was retweeted by other users at the  $p < .05$  level for the hyperlink and no hyperlink conditions,  $[F(1, 3,174) = 23.638, p = 0.000]$ . There was a significant effect of hashtag use in tweets and the number of times the tweet was retweeted by other users at the  $p < .05$  level for the hashtag and no hashtag conditions,  $[F(1, 3,174) = 170.982, p = 0.000]$ . There was a significant effect of visuals in tweets and the number of times the tweet was retweeted by other users at the  $p < .05$  level for the visuals and no visuals conditions,  $[F(1, 3,174) = 161.809, p = 0.000]$ . There was a significant effect of the reply function in tweets and the number of times the tweet was retweeted by other users at the  $p < .05$  level for the reply function and no reply function conditions,  $[F(1, 3,174) = 27.846, p = 0.000]$ . Taken together, these results suggest that tweets that use hyperlinks, hashtags, visuals, and the reply function are more likely to be retweeted by other Twitter users than tweets that do not use these functions.

There was a significant effect of hyperlink use in tweets and the number of times the tweet was favorited by other users at the  $p < .05$  level for the hyperlink and no hyperlink conditions,  $[F(1, 3,174) = 13.952, p = 0.000]$ . There was a significant effect of hashtag use in tweets and the number of times the tweet was favorited by other users at the  $p < .05$  level for the hashtag and no hashtag conditions,  $[F(1, 3,174) = 67.959, p = 0.000]$ . There was a significant effect of visuals in tweets and the number of times the tweet was favorited by other users at the  $p < .05$  level for the visuals and no visuals conditions,  $[F(1, 3,174) = 99.658, p = 0.000]$ . There was a significant effect of the reply function in tweets and the number of times the tweet was

favorited by other users at the  $p < .05$  level for the reply function and no reply function conditions,  $[F(1, 3,174) = 9.089, p = 0.000]$ . Taken together, these results suggest that tweets that use hyperlinks, hashtags, visuals, and the reply function are more likely to be favorited by other Twitter users than tweets that do not use these functions.

## Discussion

An intercollegiate athletic department's communication or sport information director (SID) might complete journalistic activities by creating and distributing information, but he or she is different than a journalist or editorial staff in a news organization of a local newspaper or television station. SIDs act like news outlets, as they play a vital role in shaping the issues and help determine the importance of the issues they share, but they are not news outlets. That communication or SID can also bypass the local newspaper or television station and communicate their own agenda or news directly with their target audience, followers, and fans, separate from the agenda set by the local newspaper or television station. This research, although an early attempt to understand how intercollegiate athletic departments utilize Twitter, provided some insight as to what they post online for their fans and followers. Generally speaking, the agenda set by the directors of the SEC football teams on their Twitter accounts seems to be the sharing of team information, including information on *players of the week and awards, team trainings and practices, team travel, game scores and highlights, and press conferences and quotes*. The most popular sub category within the *information sharing* category was *game scores and highlights*. Original tweets were more popular than retweets and hashtags were the most widely used Twitter function.

The study's findings also suggest that the size of the school is associated with the use of Twitter functions and the type of content, with the assumption that the larger schools have a

larger following base and larger budgets, essentially creating larger resources (i.e. more staff to post and monitor the content produced for Twitter). Schools with an enrollment size of up to 24,999 were more likely to use hyperlinks and the reply function than other Twitter functions; they also posted more in the *interactivity*, *diversion*, and *promotional* categories and the sub category of *player of the week*. The agenda set by schools with an enrollment size of up to 24,999 was non-sport related information and promotional tweets. These schools spent more time interacting with their fans and followers; they also promoted upcoming games.

Schools with an enrollment size of 25,000 to 29,999 were more likely to use hashtags than any other Twitter function. They were also more likely to post tweets in the *diversion*, *fanship*, and *promotional* content categories, as well as the sub categories of *press conferences and quotes* and *team travel*. The agenda set by schools with an enrollment size of 25,000 to 29,999 included behind-the-scenes sport related information, such as post-game press conferences and team travel; these schools focused more on these content categories than game related information (the sub-category of *game scores and highlights*). Schools with an enrollment size of 30,000 to 44,999 were more likely to use hashtags and visuals; they also posted most within the *information sharing* category. The agenda set by schools with an enrollment size of 30,000 to 44,999 consisted mostly of information pertaining to *players of the week and awards*, *team trainings and practices*, *team travel*, *game scores and highlights*, and *press conferences and quotes*; these schools spent more time tweeting about sport related information than schools of other enrollment sizes.

Schools with an enrollment size of 45,000 or more were more likely to use hyperlinks, hashtags, and visuals; they were also more likely to post within the *interactivity* and *promotional* categories than any other content category. The agenda set by these schools included more

promotional tweets and interactions between coaches, athletes, and fans. Pegoraro (2010) found that professional leagues were more likely to post in the *interactivity* category and Dittmore et al. (2013) found that the perceived use of Twitter was for the purposes of communication between fans and athletes or coaches. Schools with enrollment sizes of less than 25,000 or more than 45,000 support this notion. Larger schools were also seen using Twitter's characteristics more than smaller schools, suggesting that they better utilized Twitter to attract and engage more sports fans via social media.

Most football teams tweeted about game scores and highlights on game days; on non-game days, teams were more likely to tweet in all other content categories. Teams that were ranked at some point during the playing season were more likely to use hashtags, visuals, and the reply function than non-ranked teams. These teams better utilized Twitter's functions to reach a larger audience. Non-ranked teams were less likely to tweet in the *information sharing*, *interactivity*, *diversion*, and *promotional* categories but they were more likely to publish tweets in the *fanship* category. Agendas set by non-ranked teams were centered more on *fanship*, or information regarding sports other than their own team, coaches and players; this included former players that were currently playing in the NFL.

The five football programs not ranked in the Top 25 produced 57% of the sampled tweets, an average of 363 posts per school. The nine schools that were ranked at some point during the playing season only averaged 151.7 posts per school. Teams that were ranked didn't produce as many tweets as the unranked teams. Perhaps this is because the media outlets generate enough publicity for the ranked programs, highlighting particular information regarding the ranked programs and their teams, conveying their prominence to the public. The news organizations set their audience's agenda, increasing the salience of the ranked teams and neglecting the unranked

(Peng & Tang, 2010; Yoo, Smith, & Kim, 2013; Seltzer & Dittmore, 2009). Looking back at the theoretical framework, these findings support the notion that athletic programs are effectively creating and distributing information, engaging in media activity – agenda setting – much like news organizations do when they set the public’s agenda by raising salience on particular topics (Dittmore, 2014).

The teams that were never ranked needed to create and disseminate information on their own, essentially act as gatekeepers or news organizations, as they are largely ignored by the media and did not have as much national media coverage as the teams that were ranked by the AP Poll. If this notion is true – that the ranked teams get more local and nationwide media coverage than the unranked teams because they were ranked by the AP Poll – it seems that these ranked teams are missing an opportunity to set their own agenda. They are relying too heavily on the media to promote their team or information when they could be creating and distributing information of their choosing, framing it however they please.

### *Limitations*

When the advanced search tool on Twitter was accessed to collect each of the teams’ tweets from their official pages, it did not pull up all retweets by the teams – even though the boxed marked “include retweets” was checked in the search. Researchers who plan to use this tool in future studies should note that Twitter’s advanced search tool may not always work as anticipated. Collecting the sample concurrently versus retroactively would also help.

Since the tweets were collected during the same constructed weeks, not all teams had games on those weekends. Even though an argument was made for the use of constructed weeks in research studies that use the agenda setting framework, bye weeks may have influenced the activity of tweets making the sample an uneven representation of the population. Some teams

had as many as three games represented in the sample, whereas other teams only had one game represented in the sample.

### *Future Research*

As research shows, intercollegiate athletic departments are beginning to utilize the social media platforms to communicate with their target audiences, engage fans, and create means of marketing their brand. Twitter has greatly impacted the world of sports communication because of the many functions that boost interactivity between users; therefore, it creates many new opportunities to further research in the area of sports communication.

Using the agenda setting theory as a foundation, future studies should focus on intercollegiate athletic departments' use of Twitter as a means of team promotion and marketing towards prospective student-athletes and recruits. Several variables were not considered in this case study, for instance the university, community, or national news' influence on the type of content produced by the teams. Many of the social media accounts have a large following base – some have over 100,000 followers – but the audience's demographics and psychographics are unknown. Future research can dig a little deeper into who is following these sport organizations' Twitter accounts and why they choose to follow these accounts (uses and gratifications). Other possible routes for research include exploring the possible association between rankings and increased media salience on a team's media activity, including the type of content, volume of posts, and distribution of information to targeted audiences.

### **Conclusion**

As research on social media and intercollegiate sports is somewhat limited, it was necessary to conduct a study that explored the agendas set by intercollegiate athletic programs. Using the agenda setting theory, this study analyzed the content, format and usage trends of the

14 SEC football teams' official Twitter accounts. Overall, this study provided insight to the different agendas set by the 14 teams. The agenda set by SEC football teams on their Twitter accounts consisted mainly of team information, including information on *players of the week and awards, team trainings and practices, team travel, game scores and highlights, and press conferences and quotes*. The most popular sub category within the *information sharing* category was *game scores and highlights*. Many teams posted play-by-plays, score updates, and other game related information. Perhaps the most relevant takeaway of this study is the AP Poll's rankings. The teams that are ranked didn't tweet as much as the teams that were not ranked; the teams that don't tweet as much are losing an opportunity to set their own agendas, as they're mainly relying on the news media and rankings to set an agenda for them.

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Appendix A  
List of Twitter Accounts

The 14 Southeastern Conference (SEC) football teams' official Twitter accounts. Each account was verified through each team's football website. TweetReach, a free Twitter analytics tool that provides snapshot reports, was used to gather insight into each team's official Twitter account (i.e. number of tweets, number of accounts the team is following, and the number of followers the account has since joining Twitter). The data was collected on February 20, 2015.

<i>Twitter Accounts &amp; Account Activity Since Joining Twitter*</i>									
University	Twitter Handle	Tweets		Following		Followers		Estimated Reach <sup>2</sup>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
University of Alabama	AlabamaFTBL	3,948	2.30	43	0.90	226,959	15.32	229,933	15.41
University of Arkansas	RazorbackFB	5,645	3.29	261	5.45	79,772	5.39	94,658	6.35
Auburn University	FootballAU	8,899	5.19	330	6.89	104,677	7.07	34,122	2.29
University of Florida	GatorZoneFB	15,411	8.99	464	9.68	98,627	6.66	252,155	16.90
University of Georgia	FootballUGA	4,964	2.90	1,334	27.84	143,776	9.71	95,339	6.39
University of Kentucky	UKFootball	4,311	2.52	352	7.35	56,446	3.81	212,933	14.27
Louisiana State University	LSUfbal	8,586	5.01	372	7.76	192,122	12.97	60,888	4.08
Mississippi State University	HailStateFB	19,356	11.29	135	2.86	62,923	4.25	97,457	6.53
University of Missouri	MizzouFootball	9,113	5.32	191	3.99	28,552	1.93	72,079	4.83
University of Mississippi	OleMissFB	4,631	2.70	238	4.97	70,879	4.79	63,632	4.27
University of South Carolina	GamecockFB	6,941	4.05	219	4.57	99,273	6.70	128,872	8.64
University of Tennessee	Vol_Football	52,481	30.62	699	14.59	166,369	11.23	37,641	2.52
Texas A&M University	AggieFootball	9,913	5.78	89	1.86	124,921	8.43	30,038	2.01
Vanderbilt University	VandyFootball	17,176	10.02	65	1.36	25,926	1.75	81,968	5.49
		171,375	99.98	4,792	100.07	1,481,222	100.01	1,491,715	99.98

*Note.* \* = activity on Twitter since joining through February 20, 2015, the date TweetReach was accessed.

Appendix B  
Tweet Format Variables

Twitter is a micro-blogging social network that allows users to create and share information by publishing “tweets” or posts consisting of a maximum of 140 characters (Hambrick et al., 2010; Pegoraro, 2010; Waters, & Williams, 2011). The micro-blogging network provides indicators to identify certain formats (Pegoraro, 2010).

Table B1

*Description of Tweet Format & Other Variables*

Category	Definition	Example	Code
Original Tweet (Direct Message)	Publically shared updates or posts of 140 characters or less originating from the user (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, forthcoming)		Yes = 1
			No = 0
Retweets	Users can share or “retweet” another user’s original message; and indication (RT) appears below a tweet to indicate its origins (Pegoraro, 2010; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, forthcoming)		Yes = 1 No = 0
Hyperlinks	Links to an outside, non-Twitter website indicated by the shortened urls (e.g. <a href="http://bit.ly/1gZrTTw">http://bit.ly/1gZrTTw</a> )	<a href="http://t.co/SwtPqMFy">http://t.co/SwtPqMFy</a>	Yes = 1 No = 0
Hashtags	Indicated by the pound symbol (#) which means that the published tweet is part of a searchable topic of discussion (e.g. #NEVERYIELD, #WPS, #football)	#LSUvsTAMU, #12thMan, #WPS, #NEVERYIELD	Yes = 1 No = 0
Visuals	Pictures or videos indicated by Twitter links (e.g. <a href="http://pic.twitter.com/7RQ569IRMf">pic.twitter.com/7RQ569IRMf</a> )	Pictures or videos	Yes = 1 No = 0
Number of times Tweet was Favorited	Raw number indicating how many other users favorited a post		Expressed in raw numbers
Number of times Tweet was Retweeted	Raw number indicating how many other users retweeted a post		Expressed in raw numbers
Type of Game	Conference game is played when two SEC teams play against each other; a non-conference game is between a SEC member institution and another Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) conference		Non-Game = 0 Conf. = 1 Non-Conf. = 2

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Table B1 (Cont.)

*Description of Tweet Format & Other Variables*

Day of the week      A 24-hour period of time (12:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m.)

Monday = 1  
Tuesday = 2  
Wednesday = 3  
Thursday = 4  
Friday = 5  
Saturday = 6  
Sunday = 7

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Appendix C  
Content Category Variables

These five content categories were derived from previous literature (Clavio, 2011; Wang et al., 2008; Li et al., 2013; Ebersole & Woods, 2007).

Table A1  
*Description of Twitter Content Category Variables*

Category	Definition	Example	Code
Interactivity	The direct, original communication from the authorized administrators of the official football Twitter accounts to their Twitter followers. The current study modified the category to reflect the conversations they have with other Twitter users via direct messages or responses to posted tweets.	“Congratulations to @III_Flowers for being named SEC Defensive Lineman of the Week > <a href="http://bit.ly/1x36uA9">http://bit.ly/1x36uA9</a> #WPS”	1
Diversion	Non-sports-related information provided by the authorized administrators of the official football Twitter accounts, including both original tweets and retweets. Tweets in the diversion category can range from stories relating to campus life and families to conversations about favorite movies and restaurants. The current study used diversion to reflect any tweets with a non-sports message, whether they discussed friends and families or other personal interests such as a player’s personal life, student or campus life, or the weather.	Player getting married, proposals outside stadiums,	2
Information Sharing	Insight into the team’s players or sport, such as details about practices and training sessions, recent competitive events and results, sports-related traveling and community service. The category is similar to Clavio’s (2008) information gathering which he defined as “unique sport and team-related content available on college sport message boards, including content generated by other users” (p. viii).	Press conferences, team practices, travel to games, game scores and highlights	3
Fanship	Occurs when the authorized administrator mentions sports other than their own team, coaches and players. The current study incorporates tweets with either positive or negative comments about players and teams other than their own.	Mentions of other university and professional sports, games or players	4

Table A1 (Cont.)

*Description of Twitter Content Category Variables*

Category	Definition	Example	Code
Promotional	Publicity from the authorized administrators of the official football Twitter accounts regarding sponsorships, upcoming games, and related promotions such as discounted tickets or giveaways. The category derives from Seo and Green's (2008) economic motive, which they defined as the "motive to get promotional incentives that a team provides" (p. 86). The current study expanded on the definition. Athletes may use Twitter to promote sponsorships, upcoming activities, and events (e.g. autograph signings, TV appearances), in addition to providing information about discounted tickets or game-day promotions.	Upcoming games, including information on that game (e.g. what color to wear, ticket availability, etc.)	5