

**Athletes on Twitter -An investigation of
communication patterns during the Olympic Games
2012 in London**

By

Arne Siegner

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Supervisor: Thabo Ramphabole
Co-Supervisor: Dr. Janina Wozniak

Department of Journalism, Media and Philosophy, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan
University

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I Abstract

Recent studies have shown an increasing impact of online social networks such as *Twitter* on sports media. The following study aims to provide insight about communication patterns of athletes during the Olympic Games 2012 in London.

Drawing on literature from traditional fields such as social capital (Field 2003), the 'uses and gratifications' approach (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 1974), self- presentation (Goffmann 1971) and recent studies about social media in sports (Kassing and Sanderson 2012), a *Twitter*-analysis of ten athletes was conducted during the Olympic Games 2012 in London.

Following a content analysis of 1042 tweets (including 246 pictures), the research findings of this study reveal that athletes predominantly use *Twitter* as a platform for self- presentation. Furthermore, the analysis showed the possibility for fans to use *Twitter* in order to overcome the parasocial orbit (Kassing and Sanderson 2012) of virtual space and engage in actual social interaction with athletes. It is concluded that linkages of athletes with various stakeholders and the official framework of social media guidelines by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), result in self- restricting communication patterns of the athletes during the Olympic Games 2012.

Chapter One: Introduction

There is little doubt that social online networks have become an integral part of people's daily media consumption. In view of the enormous number of memberships in networks like *Facebook* or *Twitter*, more and more studies aim to investigate how people use such platforms and integrate them into their everyday life. Besides the potential change of communication habits, new possibilities of online social networks also affect the production of media content. Indeed, the rise of social online networks resulted in significant changes of the whole media landscape. With reference to sports, the microblogging service *Twitter* led to several transformations of how people perceive and obtain information about certain events or athletes.

On the other hand, organizational structures of sport events utilize the network in order to provide additional information and features. Furthermore, recent studies (Kassing and Sanderson 2009; Marwick and Boyd 2011) have shown that *Twitter* presents a suitable platform for famous personalities in sports. Considering the popularity and connectivity of the social online network, *Twitter* turned out to be an integral instrument for athletes since its inception. Against the backdrop of recent studies and the ongoing development of online social networks, the following study examines online communication patterns of ten athletes during the Olympic Games 2012. In this context, a content analysis was conducted on every statement (*tweet*) by the athletes in a given timeframe around the event. The study focuses on the way athletes make use of *Twitter* in order to communicate with the public. The findings of this analysis reveal that athletes follow similar communication patterns in order to provide information and constitute themselves as well-recognized individuals in the media.

Chapter Two: Social Networks

Organizational systems are an essential part of our everyday life. They provide immunity, guidelines and formal rules on how to behave in order to achieve certain goals. The organization of our working environment, hospitals or schools is rather defined through positions instead of persons. In contrast to most organizations, social networks are usually based on interactions among people, and thus provide a friendlier environment of decision-making. In order to achieve a certain outcome of things, “people often prefer to bypass the formal system and talk to people that they know. Calling on trusted friends, family or acquaintances is much less stressful than dealing with bureaucracies, and it usually seems to work faster and often produces a better outcome” (Field 2003: 2).

One of the earlier theoretical approaches towards social networks derives from reflections of the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim. He described the social change from a “mechanical solidarity” that was based on fixed structures and obligations towards the “organic solidarity” in an industrial society, where people “entered into a multitude of connections that were based on a variety of interactions, each of which was entered into because it served a purpose” (Field 2003: 5). Based on this differentiation, Ferdinand Tönnies (1887, cited from Field 2003: 5) distinguished further between a purposive association, what he labelled as 'community' and the instrumental association which he called 'society'. Tönnies' approach can also be compared to Max Weber's (1904, cited in Field 2005: 5) concept about authority and charisma on the one hand and his consideration of a shared lifestyle as a basis for status groups on the other hand (Field 2003: 5).

According to Field, the common assumption about the social structure of media networks is based on the reciprocal influence between the social infrastructure and communication. In this regard, the increased use of media networks resulted in some fundamental social changes and transformed our society towards new forms of communicational behaviour, social organization or even social identities. While traditional societies were based on

direct interactions between people, the rise of new communication technologies has led to new considerations about the correlation of space and time.

In contrast to some critical presumption about the vanishing importance of the terms space and time, Jan van Dijk (2006) puts the terms in a new context of social networks. Van Dijk describes the historical transformation as 'time-space distantiation' and concludes with the following statement:

All in all, the process of time- space distantiation is marked not only by the extension of space and time, but also by the contraction of space and the compression of time. As a result, time and space in some respects gain importance, instead of losing relevance. Their meaning has radicalized. The technological capabilities of bridging space and time enable people to be more selective in choosing coordinates of space and time than ever before in history (Van Dijk 2006: 157).

2.1. Social Capital

According to Anthony Giddens (1984), the concept of social capital refers to the conjecture that people who have something in common and share certain values are more likely to help each other in order to achieve mutual goals. In this context, social networks can be seen “as part of the wider set of relationships and norms that allow people to pursue their goals, and also serve to bind society together” (Field 2003: 3). In contrast to formal systems which often inhere hierarchical elements and sometimes result in discrimination of others who do not belong to the system, social capital is based on membership of networks and a set of shared values. According to Field, the term of 'capital' as a form of social phenomena is ambivalent. Due to capital as a source of power and influence that is rooted in social settings, it results in reciprocal obligations between people. As opposed to this aspect, social capital can also be referred to “the human capital tradition of thinking about the ideas of investment, accumulation and exploitation that have been seized upon in such

areas as global development and anti-poverty strategies or the study of business innovation and technological change” (Fields 2003: 3).

2.1.1. Pierre Bourdieu

One of the most important theorists on social capital is Pierre Bourdieu, who explained the concept on the basis of cultural symbols as a form of distinction concerning the position in a social structure. His term of 'cultural capital' refers to the idea that “some types of cultural taste enjoy more status than others” (Bourdieu 1960, cited in Field 2003: 14). Furthermore, 'cultural capital' does not correlate with financial resources and can “to some extent operate independently of monetary holdings and even compensate for lack of money as part of an individual's or a group's strategy to pursue power and status” (Field 2003: 14). Bourdieu summarizes the ways in which people try to manifest their position in a certain network by stating that “social capital is the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119). Although this definition by Bourdieu was published in 1992, when the current impact of the internet on social networks was not even rudimentarily existent in people's everyday life, his statement has since become a new dimension of meaning in our contemporary network environment.

Despite the fact that Bourdieu based his concept of social capital on Marx' idea about economic capital as the root for other types of capital, he argued that our social world can only be comprehended by “acknowledging the role of capital in all its forms, and not solely in the one form recognised by economic theory” (Bourdieu 1986: 422). In recognition to the role of capital as a resource for relationships within a network, he considers the number of connections that can be mobilised and the volume of social,

cultural and economic capital as the major factors for the value of an individual's ties. In this context, Bourdieu highlights the fact that the solidarity of these connections requires work and is only possible because of the symbolic and material profits of a network's membership. In order to maintain those profits, it “requires investment strategies, individual or collective aimed at transforming contingent relationships, such as those of neighbourhood or workplace or even kinship, into social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term” (Bourdieu 1986: 249).

2.1.2. James Coleman

Another important theorist who dealt with social capital in a more inter-disciplinary way is the American sociologist, James Coleman (1961; 1966) For him, social capital “represents a resource because it involves the expectation of reciprocity, and goes beyond any given individual to involve wider networks whose relationships are governed by a high degree of trust and shared values” (Field 2003: 20). Based on a series of studies about the performance of pupils at Catholic schools compared to state schools, Coleman concluded that communities function as a source of social capital and are able to compensate for the impact of economic and social disadvantages within a family.

His early attempt of a general definition explored the contribution of social capital to the development of human capital and he describes social capital as “the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organisation and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person. These resources differ for different persons and can constitute an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital” (Field 2003: 24). Coleman (1994, cited from Field 2003: 25) sees social capital acting as a resource on the individual's level as well as on the collective one. In this regard, the actual extent of obligations and the level of

trustworthiness of the social environment affect the impact of social capital in the context of social structures. For Coleman, social capital has to be treated as a public good rather than a private good. In his function as the main moving force behind the rise of rational choice theory in contemporary sociology, his definition remained abstract and functionalist:

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure (Field 2003: 26).

Based on his studies with pupils and his interest in children's cognitive development, the family inheres a privileged place as a social structure that facilitates the individuals' choice of actions. Coleman considered the decreasing influence of primordial organizations like families as resulting in a long-term erosion of social capital. In his opinion, the decline is triggered due to the transfer of responsibility towards constructed forms of social organizations such as schools. For him, “the family in particular represented a societal keystone, and he was frankly pessimistic about the prospects for social control rooted in a more artificial set of arrangements” (Field 2003: 26). With reference to the online environment, *Twitter* represents an artificial set of arrangements which differs from such primordial organizations like families. Based on Coleman's contributions, it is possible to evaluate the potential of *Twitter* to function as a framework for the development of social capital.

2.2. Social Identity

In the following section, I will summarize the most important aspects of social identity in order to examine its impact on *Twitter* with regard to forms of membership. Henri Tajfel (1981) based his discussion about the framework of social identity on the definition of “an individual's self-concept which derives from knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1981: 255). In this context, Tajfel highlights the deliberate limitation of this definition in order to avoid endless discussions and enable space for further investigations.

Although his concept considers the individual's social and physical view in relation to a particular surrounding, Tajfel sees the membership of certain social groups or categories as playing a crucial role in defining social identity. Based on this intergroup perspective of social identity, “social categorization can therefore be considered as a system of orientation which helps to create and define the individual's place in society” (Tajfel 1981: 255). Based on Berger's (1966) view that society creates psychological reality and the individual “recognizes his identity in socially defined terms and these definitions become reality as he lives in society” (Berger 1966: 106), Tajfel points out several consequences for group membership:

- a) It can be assumed that an individual will tend to remain a member of a group and seek membership of new groups if these groups have some contributions to make to the positive aspects of his social identity; i.e., to those aspects of it from which he derives some satisfaction.
- b) If a group does not satisfy this requirement, the individual will tend to leave it unless: (i) leaving the group is impossible for some 'objective' reasons, or, (ii) it conflicts with important values which are themselves a part of his acceptable self image.

Furthermore, Tajfel concludes about possibilities to leave a group and summarizes two solutions:

c) If leaving the group presents the difficulties just mentioned, then at least two solutions are possible: (i) to change one's interpretation of the attributes of the group so that its unwelcome features (e.g., low status) are either justified or made acceptable through reinterpretation; or, (ii) to accept the situation for what it is and engage in social action which would lead to desirable changes in the situation. (Of course, there may be various combinations of (i) and (ii) such as, for example, when the negative attributes are 'justified' and social actions to change them is undertaken at the same time). d) No groups lives alone – all groups in society live in the midst of other groups. In other words, the 'positive aspects of social identity' and the reinterpretation of attributes and engagement in social action only acquire meaning in relation to, or in comparison with, other groups” (Tajfel 1981: 256).

A different approach that combines social identity and the self-concept is Schlenker's (1980) theory of impression management. According to Schlenker, “impression management is the conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions” (Schlenker 1980: 6). Similar to the idea of social identity, the self-concept emerges from social interactions and is based on the process of people's self-categorization during the socialization process. For Schlenker, the “people's self- concepts develop as they see themselves reflected in the actions of significant others” (Shaw and Costanzo 1982: 329). The self-concept functions for three major aspects in an individual's life. Firstly, the concept can help to maximize pleasure and minimize pain over a lifetime because of the awareness of own capabilities and potentials. Secondly, the self-concept serves as a guide for processing self-related information in a complex world, and thus provides the organizational and interpretative framework for people's experience. Thirdly, the self- concept serves as a major factor in maintaining self-esteem. The last function of the self concept has also important impact on the impression management

theory which “assumes that everyone is motivated to create and maintain the highest self-esteem possible” (Shaw and Costanzo 1982: 329).

2.3. Self-esteem

In the last years, more and more studies (Steinfeld, Ellison and Lampe 2008; Medizadeh 2010) examined a significant correlation between the use of social online networks and a person's level of narcissism and self-esteem. Soraya Mehdizadeh's 2010 study titled “Self-Presentation 2.0: Narcissism and Self-Esteem on *Facebook*” revealed how narcissism and self-esteem are manifested in the online social network *Facebook*. Mehdizadeh collected several self-reports and conducted a correlation analyses which “revealed that individuals higher in narcissism and lower in self-esteem were related to greater online activity as well as some self-promotional content” (Mehdizadeh 2010) than other users. In view of the new importance of self-esteem with regard to social online networks, the following chapter outlines a theoretical approach towards self-esteem. The overall negative or positive attitude towards the self has been described as global self-esteem and is used as the overall definition of the term. In order to understand the concept of global self-esteem, it is necessary to illustrate the meaning of a high and low level of self-esteem. In this context, Simmons states that “high self-esteem does not signify arrogance or conceit but simply acceptance of oneself as a person of worth; low self-esteem means a view of oneself as unworthy” (Simmons 1972, cited in Honess and Yardley 1987: 172). In addition, Simmons differentiates between happiness and depression from high and low levels of global self-esteem and states that both terms can be distinguished “conceptually and in terms of measurement; and it can be shown that the two variables correlate but are not identical” (Simmons 1972, cited in Honess and Yardley 1987: 173). A crucial point in studies that have been conducted about self-esteem is the question of whether there is a general entity of self-esteem or whether individuals evaluate themselves segmentally.

In fact, the concept of self-esteem has to be broken down into specific sub-forms depending on the task, situation, role-relationship or identity involved. Several researchers (Epstein 1973; Harter 1983) “emphasise global self-esteem on one hand (perhaps as the superordinate construct in a hierarchy) and more specific dimensions of self-evaluation on the other – particularly, ratings of self- competence (or self- efficacy), or worthiness in the moral dimension, of power or control and of social acceptance (or love- worthiness)” (Simmons 1972 in Honess and Yardley 1987: 173). Despite these specific abstractions of the term and in order to conduct valid measurements, for the researcher it is more important to distinguish between general criteria and specific criteria instead of developing a comprehensive theoretical construct of the term. With reference to online social networks, it is assumed that self-esteem can derive from recognition of others. In this context, a *tweet* that was recognised and *retweeted* by other users of *Twitter*, can result in self-evaluation, and thus in a high rating of self-competence as a sub-form of self-esteem.

2.4. Self- presentation

In light of social interactions, status or image, the concept of self-presentation is a recurrent issue for several decades. Since the rise of the online environment and the possibilities to express oneself to a sizeable audience, the concept of self-representation has experienced new considerations for researchers. Without doubt, Erving Goffman (1971) can be considered as the main force behind the concept of self- presentation. In his early work titled “*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*”, Goffman used a metaphorical approach to explain how people try to present a authentic version of themselves towards others. In this context, he considers life as a stage on which individuals perform in the presence of others who take influence on the behaviour and performance of the observed individual. This process, which he labelled as 'impression management' is bounded by two different stages.

On the 'front regions' or 'frontstage', he refers to the place where an actual performance is given. On this stage, the performance of an individual can “be seen as an effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards” (Goffman 1971: 110). These standards can be grouped in two ways. On the one hand, the standards can be referred to as a form of politeness that deals “with the way in which the performer treats the audience while engaged in talk with them or in gestural interchanges that are a substitute of talk” (Goffman 1971: 110). “The other group of standards has to do with the way in which the performer comports himself while in visual or aural range of the audience but not necessarily engaged in talk with them” (Goffman 1971: 110). In contrast to the concept of a 'frontstage', the 'backstage' is a place where suppressed facts are invisibly making an appearance. Goffman defines the 'backstage' “as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course” (Goffman 1971: 114). For Goffman, the performance in the back region “is located at one end of the place where the performance is presented, being cut off from it by a partition and guarded passageway” (Goffmann 1971: 116). “In general, the back region will be the place where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude” (Goffman, 1971: 116).

With regard to the online environment, some researchers refer to Goffman in order to examine the digital dimension of self-presentation. For Huan Liu (2008), the surveillance and interaction with others in social networks results in the reflective self-awareness of identity. Liu states “that a user’s friends’ connections are an expression of identity and the public display of friend connections constitutes a social milieu that contextualizes one’s identity (Liu 2008, cited in Cover 2012: 183). They are, according to Liu, willful acts of context creation that aim to produce group identifications through solidarity between a user’s tastes and a social group’s taste norm” (Cover 2012: 183). In his study about the presentation of self in the age of social media, Bernie Hogan (2010) primarily focused on Goffman's metaphorical approach and tried to apply his theory to the online environment

of social networks. His literature review revealed that most existing articles consider the individual to

employ impression management (or the selective disclosure of personal details designed to present an idealized self). However, several articles draw more explicitly on the dramaturgical approach to suggest that sites based on access control are inherently private, and therefore, a 'backstage'" (Hogan 2010: 379).

In this context, Hogan uses Goffman's concept of a 'backstage' and redefines the idea in an online environment. He criticises the existing approach to consider social online networks like *Facebook* as a 'backstage' because of the features to hide certain information and uses the aspect of privacy to apply Goffman's approach to the online world. For him, the approach that certain information is hidden from other people is not the same thing as stating that hidden information is inherently part of what is used on a 'frontstage'. Furthermore, Hogan states that the online backstage "fails to capture the role of a third party in regulating who has access to information about an individual" (Hogan 2010: 379). In addition, he reconsiders the aspect of privacy in social online networks and states that allowing only friends

to see specific does not suggest that this content signifies a backstage to other possible content that is available for anyone to see. To expect privacy online is not to imply that one has something worth hiding or a presentation that may contradict one's role in other spheres of life. Rather, it signifies that some individuals are classified as being considered contextually appropriate for this specific information" (Hogan 2010: 380).

Hogan illustrates the dilemma of applying Goffman's concept of different stages to the online environment by using the example of showing musical taste in the context of *Facebook*. He examines the disposition to reveal personal preference in musical taste and concludes that “musical tastes are not a backstage but rather are a front. Some people carefully select which tastes to show, and thus, give a clear reason to make their profile less private. It is not that others with a narrower range of music want to hide their musical tastes but that they are indifferent to the association of taste and identity” (Hogan 2010: 380). Davis states that a great number of studies in the past years also dealt with the differentiation of social behaviour in online and offline contexts. In general, it can be assumed that online users consider the norms of their online behaviour “to be quite broad, flexible, and somewhat more transgressive than offline social norms” (Davis 2011: 646).

Earlier studies have shown that people tend to reconcile their online and offline self-expression instead of using the online environment as an anarchic place for actions outside the boundaries of accepted offline behaviour. Davis' study concludes that “while some differences between online and offline self-presentations are acceptable, people generally do not deviate dramatically from their offline behaviour when they go online” (Davis 2011: 647). Based on the previously outlined concepts about identity, self-esteem and self-presentation in social networks, the following chapter examines their impact on social networks in the online environment. In this context, chapter three considers some of the outlined concepts as integral parts of *Twitter* and illustrates the potential to apply them in the context of online social networks.

Chapter Three: Online Social Networks

In view of the constant modifications and convergent innovations within the context of online social networks, it is vague to give a recent definition that can be used for further research in the future. In fact, it is not even advisable to focus on a definition that tries to inhere an overall core of online social networks. Based on this observation, this chapter concentrates on behavioural and performative aspects to investigate what defines a social online network. In order to provide a comprehensible framework of social online networks, the whole chapter includes recent studies about the construction and impact of identity, as well as traditional approaches towards social online networks in terms of motivational usage and exertion of power. In order to approach a recent stance towards the definition of a social online network, Cover (2012) suggests to combine post-structuralist, anti-essentialist theories of subjectivity and identity with earlier work on social networking and demands for two purposes:

- (1) To expand the critical frameworks by which online social networking can be contextualised within the broader cultural practices of identity and selfhood;
- (2) further destabilise the problematic dichotomy of a 'real identity' in an offline capacity and a 'virtual identity' represented in digital, networked communication.

(Cover 2012:178)

Based on Butler's (1990) theories of performativity that consider identity and subjectivity as "an ongoing process of becoming, rather than an ontological state of being, whereby becoming is a sequence of acts, that retroactively constitute identity", it is illustrated that "social networking activities and behaviours are both means by which identity can be performed and stabilised and, simultaneously, made more complex and conflicting" (Cover 2012: 178). Furthermore, Cover considers social online networking to inhere a huge variety of personal interactivities which also involve self- presentation and other identity

performance through “an array of activities that require users to ‘work’ to perform a coherent, intelligible selfhood extending across all these online activities in addition to offline behaviours” (Cover 2012: 178). With regard to Butler's analysis of social networking outside the online environment, Cover simply adapts the concepts for online social networking in which

behaviour is just as much a performance as any other ‘real life’ act, and just as equally constitutes a sense of self and identity; online behaviour should not be understood as an activity separate from those more ostensibly embodied performances of identity categories. (Cover 2012: 179)

For Cover, most online activities that include some kind of presentation can be performed in two different ways. On the one hand, the modification of the user's profile includes the publication of personal information, as well as the requirement for ongoing updates. On the other hand, online performances should inhere interpersonal aspects of identity, such as making new contacts. On social online networks, the current modification of the profile provides performative coherence that results in the consistence and coherence of identity. According to some researchers, the publication of private details on certain profiles can be considered as “an act of biographisation of the self, in which users select a more or less complex representation of themselves” (Cover 2012: 181). Another theoretical way to approach social networks in an online environment derives from their consideration as virtual communities. Even at the beginning of the rise of social online networks, the public referred to them “as a powerful technology enabling individuals to take control of the Information Age and proclaimed it to be an online metropolis that promotes community and collaboration on a scale never seen before” (Parks 2010, cited in Papacharissi 2011: 106). Among theorists, the conceptualization of social networks as communities is often characterized by aspects regarding the “nature of social ties within physical and mediated setting” (Parks 2010 cited in Papacharissi 2011: 107). While social networks used to rely

on aspects of face-to face communication, the new possibilities of an online environment tend to replace physical aspects of communication with technology. In this context, “virtual communities are defined as social groups that display the psychological and cultural qualities of strong community without physical proximity” (Parks 2010, cited in Papacharissi 2011: 107). In his literature review, Parks outlines the extent to which online groups function as virtual communities on the basis of five aspects. First of all, he refers to the ability to engage in collective action as an essential test of the authenticity of virtual communities. On the one hand, this collective action reflects the group think of itself as a community, and the member's identification with the community on the other hand. Furthermore, he points out the fact that communities are the result of a 'ritualized sharing of information' and in order to gain sustainability, “a community must engage in such information- sharing rituals on a regular basis” (Parks 2010, cited in Papacharissi 2011: 108). The following table by Parks illustrates the previous mentioned aspects of a community's definition and the associated social requirements for social network systems.

<i>Defining elements of community</i>	<i>Associated social requirements on SNSs</i>
<p>Less relevant for virtual communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing geographic space • Self-sufficiency 	
<p>More relevant for virtual communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to engage in collective action • Shared rituals, social regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users must create and visit their profiles with some regularity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patterned interaction among members • Identification, a sense of belonging and attachment • Self-awareness of being a community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users must personalize their profiles • Users must make social contacts and respond to other users

Table 1: *Recurring themes in definitions of community and associated requirements on SNSs* (Parks 2010, cited in Papacharissi 2011: 108)

With reference to the conceptualization of community in the context of social online networks, it is necessary to distinguish further between certain platforms. Although *Myspace* marketed the network as a “place of friends”, Park's study could show that some members only have a few or no friends at all within the network. In contrast to *Myspace*, other networks such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* are almost essentially focused on making contact with other members. Considering the different features and applications on those two networks, it is also possible to examine differences concerning relational aspects between members. On *Facebook*, every member can gain recognition in his own circle of contacts, in which one individual takes a certain role and position in correlation to other members of the circle. Depending on the form of relationship towards those members, the individual constructs a certain identity that is based on performances on different stages (Goffman 1971) in different contexts. In this regard, it is necessary to further investigate such forms of relationships, as the social status and role of one member, has a significant impact on the number and form of contact.

As the communication in online social networks is characterized by the reciprocal aspect of sharing information, celebrities often merely interact in the form of a one-way communication. On *Twitter* especially, the communicational aspects tend to be in a form where individuals state a mere comment (or *tweet*) which is published again by another member (*retweet*) instead of receiving an actual response to it. This phenomenon can significantly be displayed in the context of famous people within the network. For example, in light of the awareness about the American president, Barack Obama, who can be considered as one of the most recognized persons in our contemporary era, it would be a huge effort for him or his *Twitter* manager to stay in contact and reply to every *follower* on *Twitter*.

If we look at the following *tweet* by Obama from 29 October 2012, it is displayed that 1,411 people on *Twitter* reacted to this statement.



Figure 1: Barack Obama Tweet (@BarackObama on 29 October)

In view of the huge number of members who replied and *retweeted* the message, it is very unlikely that president Obama is even able to interact with everyone in the context of the message. This example should point to the different contexts of messages in different social online networks and how differently they are received. Based on the provided framework of online social networks, the following sections illustrate the most important concepts concerning *Twitter* as an online social network. In this context, I will also illustrate the new dimensions of identity in the online environment and outline a theoretical communication model of *Twitter*.

3.1. Digital Identity

The publication of Sherry Turkle's work titled “*Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*” provides one of the first studies about identity in the online world. In her study, Turkle tried to investigate the reality of online life and conducted an ethnographic research in 'Multi-Use Domains' (MUDs) such as chat rooms and other text-based communication forms. The new online environment changed the perception of identity and facilitated a form of play for the users. Turkle described the new dimension of identity play by stating that in the new online environment compared to face-to-face communication, it is “easier to change the way people perceive you, because all they've got is what you show them” (Turkle 1996: 184). According to Vincent Miller (2011), the new possibility to slip into whatever identity the user wants to is based on four aspects of the online environment:

1. The degree of anonymity that is possible in online environments creates a freedom not attainable in the offline world.
2. That a person can perform whatever identity one chooses, because online identities are base primary on self- descriptive text that can be called in any manner desired by the user.
3. That multiple selves can be explored in parallel, creating an environment of identity shifting, hybridity and fluidity.
4. That identities can be created that are impossible in offline worlds.

(Miller 2011: 163)

Other theorists like Kenneth Gergen (2009) went even further and described the impact of the internet on the construction and maintenance of the self and how the internet exposes users to more people, cultures and understanding of the world.

According to Gergen, the online environment

offers us the opportunities of varied context which, when combined with anonymity, freedom of self-expression, the ability to lead parallel lives (and introduce a quality of imagination into those lives), creates conditions that are increasingly untenable in the notion of a stable, centred self. (Miller 2011: 163).

In contrast to this rather intrinsic view about identity in the online environment, some researchers like Wynn and Katz (1997) based their theoretical framework on an extrinsically based 'deconstructive psychology' of identity. On the basis of personal web pages, they suggested that

identity was still indeed grounded in embodied, offline life and that web users generally had a desire to maintain a coherent sense of identity in the online sphere. Rather than portraying a decentred, fragmented, disembodied self, personal home pages are actually attempts at identity integration by demonstrating to others what is important to the individual: 'an attempt to pull together a cohesive presentation of self across eclectic social contexts in which individuals participate'. (Miller 2011: 166)

In addition, Wynn and Katz (1997) refer to Goffman's (1971) consideration of self-presentation and criticize the existing view on anonymity in the online environment. They argue that anonymous identity play on the internet is unsatisfactory to the user, as a mode of social interaction, and indeed, obstructive for the integration of offline life aspects into online identities. With regard to social networks, discussions about identity arise with the works of Manuel Castells (1997) who considered the relationship between identity and the network society as antagonistic.

For him, the construction of identity is a reaction to the threat of the uprising homogeneity of globalization and a reduction of idiosyncrasy in the world that shifted the concept of identity to become a tool of political mobilization and resistance (Castells 1997, cited in Miller 2011: 171). With the rise of social network sites that are based on contacts and features- besides text - based information - also photos and videos, the construction of identity narrowed the gap between several anonymous online selves and selves that are actually embodied in daily life. On social networking sites like *Facebook*, “the self-representing profile is grounded within the context of offline friends and contacts, as well as in photographs, in what has developed into a highly image-oriented medium” (Miller 2011: 172).

In this context, it is necessary to consider the construction of identity as inconsistent and volatile, Miller argues. Due to new potential contexts, such as friends, tastes, events or personal happenings, the self and identity is dependant on those external contexts. In this regard, Ismael's (2007) concept of the 'situated self' is considered to be a suitable theoretical framework concerning social online networks. According to Ismael,

the self is a reflexive representation in a continual cycle of self- location and relocation. In other words, the self continually maps itself egocentrically through representation and the creation of locational context. The social networking profile can be seen as one obvious attempt at an egocentric mapping of the self through relational context of friends, images and consumer tastes. (Miller 2011: 172)

In the case of *Twitter*, the most popular microblogging service, the potential content a user can give is limited to a maximum of 140 characters. For Miller, this limitation is grounded in “the maintenance of connected presence and a sense of communion among a network of friends. To efficiently sustain this presence, *Twitter* is necessarily almost completely devoid of content and relies in the main on phatic communications” (Miller 2011: 205).

3.2. Twitter: A theoretical approach

In order to understand the social and medial impact of *Twitter*, it is necessary to introduce a theoretical framework to the social media platform. In his sociological study on the phenomenon of *Twitter*, Murthy defines the micbrologging service

as an internet-based service in which (1) users have a public profile in which they broadcast short public messages or updates whether they are directed to specific user(s) or not, (2) messages become publicly aggregated together across users, and (3) users can decide whose messages they wish to receive, but not necessarily who can receive their messages; this is in distinction to most social networks where following each other is bi-directional. (Murthy 2012: 3)

In his definition, Murthy also refers to *Twitter* as form of social media that is “designed to facilitate interactive mulitcasting” (Murthy 2012: 4), based on the concept of self-presentation. In particular, Murthy speaks of 'self-production' due to the regular postings by users and 'self-affirmation' that he refers to Bourdieu's argument that even “the daily, sometimes 'banal', is pregnant with meaning” (Murthy 2012: 4). For Murthy, postings on *Twitter*, which are labeled *tweets*, are part of the maintenance of identity and consider *Twitter* “to provide ways for individuals to assert and construct the self which are contingent on a larger dialogic community” (Murthy 2012: 5). In his analytic approach towards *Twitter* as a sociological phenomenon, Murthy also refers to Goffman's (1971) concept of embedding. Murthy understands his concept as “the distinction between the situational circumscription of speaker and the fluidity of who ‘owns’ those utterances” and uses Goffman's approach to illustrate the importance of *retweets* that “most often bears reference to the original *Tweeter*” (Murthy 2012: 9). In this context, Murthy labels *Twitter* with some aspects of 'asynchronicity' and refers to a 're-embedding' of *retweets* into the situated present of the certain recipient which is displayed in the chart below, based on Murthy's illustration. While Murthy does not consider the situation, audience and

embeddings of *tweets*, the chart below involves the particular contexts to highlight the different frameworks of *tweets* and *retweets*. The modified chart also includes Murty's argument of 'asynchronicity' and the potential distortion of the initial contextual framework of Tweet A due to the wrong attribution of User C.

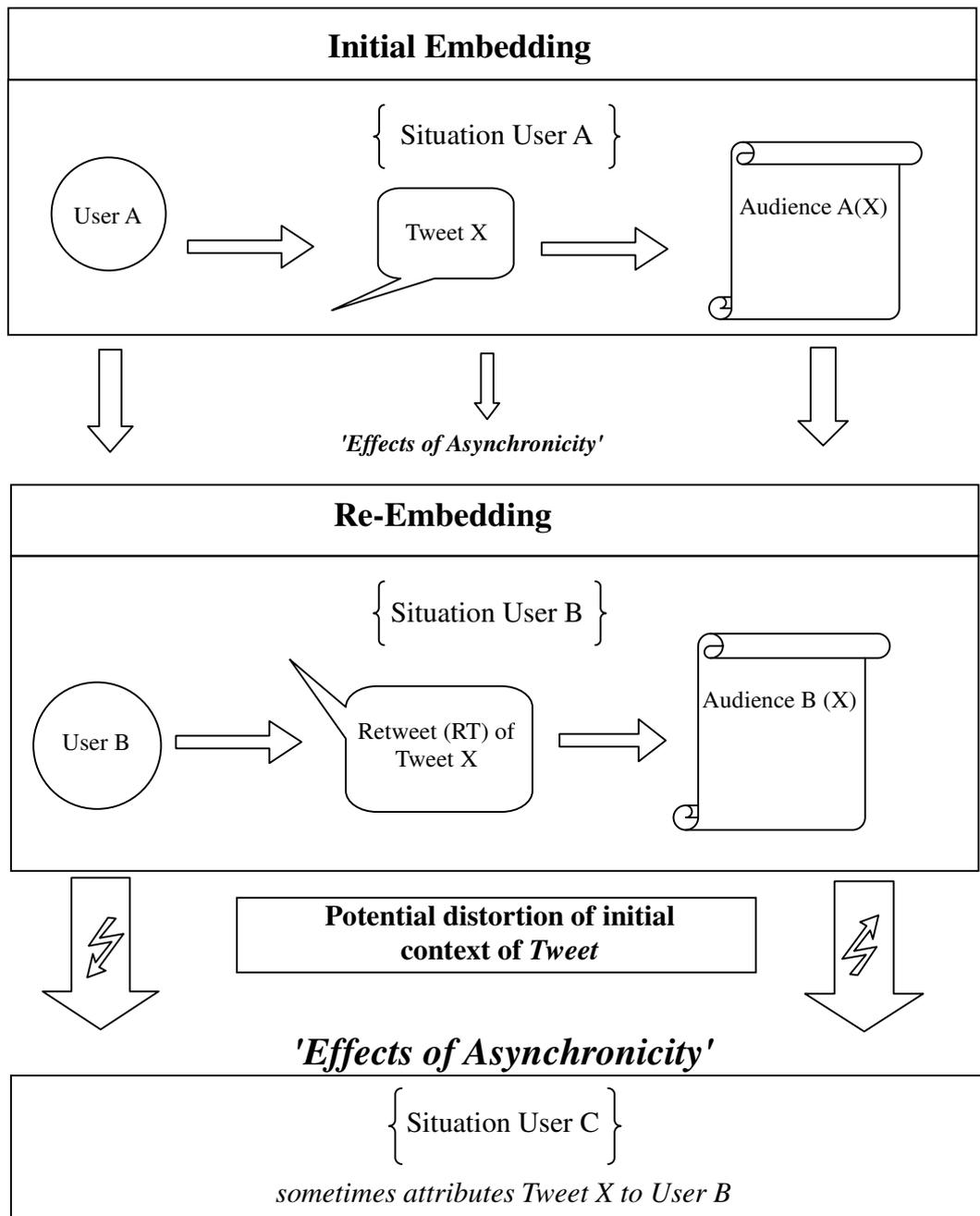


Figure 2: Communication framework of Twitter (Based on Murthy 2012: 10)

However, as Murthy mentions, “some recipients of *retweets* do pay particular attention to the original *Twitterer* (and decide to follow them, etc.) and future empirical research will no doubt shed more light on this” (Murthy 2012: 9). In addition, it should be indicated that the intensity of 'asynchronicity' usually extends with every new *retweet*.

3.3. Celebrity as a Twitter practice

Another interesting study that contributes a useful impact for this research, examined the use of *Twitter* by famous people and aimed to conceptualize celebrity as a practice. In her study, Alice Marwick (2011) considers the term of celebrity as an “ever-changing performative practice [that involves] ongoing maintenance of a fan base, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona” (Marwick 2011: 140). Like many other researchers in this field, Marwick refers her theoretical framework to Goffman's (1971) concept around performance and concludes that “celebrity practice involves presenting a seemingly authentic, intimate image of self while meeting fan expectations and maintaining important relationships” (Marwick 2011: 140). Those intimate insights that celebrities seem to provide about their lives, the “illusion of backstage” (Marwick 2011: 140), give a fan or potential *follower* the impression of being a 'friend' and strengthens the feeling of affiliation towards a famous individual. In this context, Marwick highlights the fact that most profiles of *Twitter* are created and updated by fans or public relations teams, and thus only verified accounts were used for her study. The findings refer to the fact that celebrities who engage with fans instead of just publishing publicity information are regarded as more authentic. Furthermore, she defines the success of a celebrity on *Twitter* as a “co-performance that requires fan deference and mutual recognition of unequal status to succeed –otherwise, the practitioner is famous only in his or her own mind” (Marwick 2011: 155).

One of the key features of *Twitter* with regard to celebrities is the impact of making private conversations – especially with other celebrities – publicly visible. According to Marwick, this practice requires new dynamic processes of celebrities “to navigate skillfully the performative friendships, feuds, and negotiations with others, all in front of their fans and the mainstream media” (Marwick 2011: 156). In light of *Twitter*, celebrities have to develop new skills and strategies to maintain their status of fame. On the other side, this development demands new expectations on celebrities towards the aspect of the intimacy and forces them to “expend emotional labor maintaining a network of affective ties with their followers” (Marwick 2011: 156).

3.4. Uses and Gratifications Theory in Social Online Networks

In order to investigate further the intentional motivations due to which celebrities present themselves on *Twitter* and why people are interested in those presentations, the following section will focus on the 'uses and gratifications' theory in the context of social online networks. According to Katz, Blumler and Guveritch (1974) who – among others – contributed the most famous aspects to the approach, earlier researchers were mostly

concerned with (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) different patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.

(Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 1974: 20)

The methodological approach refers to the audience members as active participants, whose needs and gratifications shape the mass communication. In this regard, “the media compete with other sources of need satisfaction” while “many of the goals of mass media use can be derived from data supplied by the individual audience members themselves” and “value

judgements about the cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended while audience orientations are explored on their own terms” (Katz, Blumler, and Gurervitch 1974: 22). In other words, the 'uses and gratifications' approach “simply represents an attempt to explain something of the way in which individuals use communications, among other resources in their environment, to satisfy their needs and to achieve their goals, and to do so by simply asking them” (Katz, Blumler and Guvertich 1974: 21). In recent years, some researchers applied the 'uses and gratifications' approach to *Twitter* in order to examine the gratifications associated with the social network.

Hence, in their study about motives and satisfaction of *Twitter* use, Johnson and Yang (2009) filtered the aspects of information and social activities as the primary gratifications for the user. Furthermore, they labelled the feature of connecting people and communication between users as the prevailing strengths of *Twitter* and suggested that the social network “serves as an information filter, since users can select who they follow” (Greer and Ferguson 2011: 147). Their results also concluded that meeting new people on *Twitter* is characterized by information motives because “when you meet a new person on *Twitter* and follow them, that user becomes an additional information source” (Johnson and Yang 2009: 17). They also included the aspect of satisfaction towards the social online network and indicate “that *Twitter's* strength in satisfying its users lie with its ability to help users connect and communicate with many other users, while also allowing users to share their thoughts in a public forum and keep track of what other users are talking about” (Johnson and Yang 2009: 18). Finally, they suggest to reconsider *Twitter* as an information network instead of a social network and state that

Twitter was created for its social aspects to keep in touch with friends via status updates of what a user is currently doing – but data strongly suggest that *Twitter* is primarily used as an information source, and as a means to share information.
(Johnson and Yang 2009: 20)

In another study about local television news personalities, Greer and Ferguson (2011) conducted a survey of 212 followers to examine the different motivations in using social media. Their study “examined the extent to which connectivity might be associated with interpersonal motivations or parasocial interaction when following local news personalities on *Twitter*” (Greer and Ferguson 2011: 153) and highlighted the significant relationship between interaction and TV affinity. One of the findings suggested “that the *Twitter* sites of news personalities may enhance the connection and loyalty of audiences to the news person's TV station” (Greer and Ferguson 2011: 153). In view of the positive correlation between parasocial interactions and arousal motivations, the authors concluded that “since the arousal motivation is associated within concepts such as excitement and being thrilled, perhaps *followers* look forward to frequent updates as if receiving communication from someone they trust as a *friend*” (Greer and Ferguson 2011: 153). In addition, Greer and Ferguson suggested the sense of companionship of a *follower* towards *Twitter* personalities, to be associated with “constant communication due to the frequency of postings by the news person” (Greer and and Ferguson 2011: 153). In summary, the 'uses and gratifications' theory focuses on the active user and its motives as the main reason for using *Twitter*. Although data in previously conducted studies could verify certain gratifications received from the use of *Twitter*, the research findings based on the 'uses and gratifications' theory did not consider the framework in which the users interact among each other. As most members of *Twitter* regard themselves as unconfined while using the social online network, the next section opposes the concept of 'uses and gratifications' and discloses the restrictive character of *Twitter*.

3.5. Power in social online networks

In the following section, I will outline the correlation between power and online identity in social online networks. In this context, Michel Foucault's (1998) thoughts on power,

surveillance and identity are used as a basis to approach the common assumption that online networks are free of surveillance and control. First of all, it is necessary to understand Foucault's work as a de-theorizing approach that does not aim to provide final formulations of his thoughts. As Foucault does not provide an absolute form of truth and rather suggests an ongoing discourse about the emergence and form of power, his theory can be used as a suitable template to discuss the power of *Twitter* in our contemporary media landscape. The French postmodernist considers power as a “kind of metapower or regime of truth that pervades society and which is in constant flux and negotiation” (Foucault 1998: 63). For Foucault, power is manifested through accepted forms of knowledge, understanding and truth. Those accepted forms are the result of constant discourses and institutions through educational systems, political ideologies or the media. In this case, *Twitter* plays a crucial role as a media institution in the discovering of an accepted truth. As Foucault's contributions towards the notion of power are quite extensive, this section will concentrate on those aspects that can be adjusted to the context of social online networks. His concept of panopticism refers to Jeremy Bentham's (1791) conceptualization of a panopticon that illustrates the impact of discipline as a means of power in prisons. The panopticon is a watchtower in the middle of a circled wall in which the prisoners are jailed. The tower is equipped with a light and represents the physical manifestation of power. According to Foucault,

the light emanating from the tower prevented prisoners from knowing whether they were being observed or not, and thus the panoptic gaze served to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. (Vie 2007: 28).

In this context, normalization is the final aim of the panopticon which “demands that individuals conduct themselves appropriately; determined, of course, by those in power, those who are able to apply the disciplinary judgment to enforce their own values and ideals in others” (Vie 2007: 29). Due to the light of the watchtower, the prisoners are not

able to see the guards, which results in the prisoner's assumption of constant surveillance – even if no actual person is sitting in the tower. This assumption regulates the prisoner's actions and behaviour according to the given standards of the prison and turns him into the principle of his own subjection. This form of regulation does not involve physical threats or punishments. Due to the constant feeling of observation, “individuals begin to self-regulate and finally dominance becomes so complete that they no longer necessarily need reminders of their watchers” (Vie 2007: 30). The figure below illustrates the basic design of a panopticon in the context of a prison.

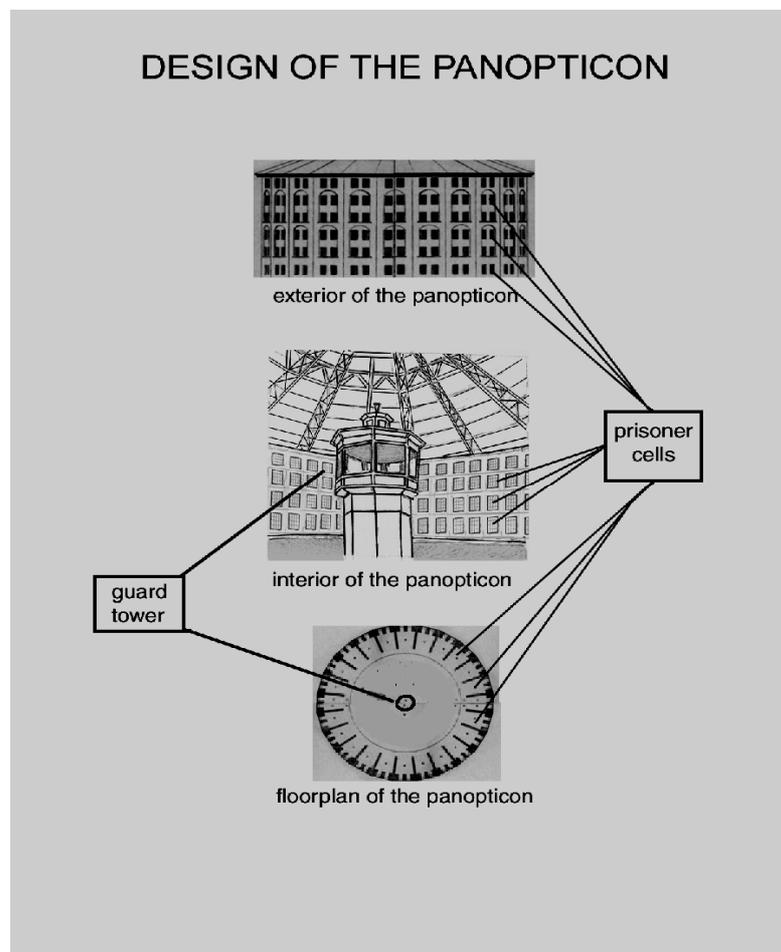


Figure 3: *Design of the Panopticon* (Caitlinscriticalblog 2012)

To some extent, the user's increasing reliance on the online environment and forms of behavioural self-monitoring can be referred to Foucault's concept of panopticism. In contrast to the context of a prison, *Twitter* does not force people to become a member of the site's network. Membership of *Twitter* is not only unsolicitous, it also does not require any monetary contribution for the user to become part of the network. Nevertheless, the Foucauldian power aspect of *Twitter* also includes the individual's assumption of what could be the actual power. In the context of social online networks, the assumption refers to certain requirements, such as providing personal details, maintaining relationships or adding new contacts. The feature of *tweets* can also be seen as a form of confession which Foucault depicts as “a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship” (Foucault 1990: 61). Even though the confession in form of posting intimate personal details may be considered as an exertion of power, “Foucault points out that the agency of domination resides in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know” (Vie 2007: 33).

Members of social online networks are following a self- regulating principle that is based on self- awareness. Thus, an individual user becomes constantly aware of his or her own actions as well as reciprocal actions with others. Although a member of *Twitter* might consider all actions to be free and unrestricted within the network, in fact, every personal update can be referred to the concept of panopticism. Individual members tend to inscribe the power relations within the network where the user plays both roles: On the one hand, the role of providing sensitive material to a huge audience and on the other hand, the role of reading, evaluation and monitoring other users of the network. This process finally results in the member's principle of own subjection. Based on the concept of panopticism, the lack of the previously discussed 'uses and gratifications' approach becomes even more evident. As social online networks like *Twitter* recommends new followers, sites and content that are based on existing interests, the user is caught in a sort of bubble where

Twitter and other users are taking influence on the actions of other users. While the 'uses and gratifications' approach only focuses on the user's needs, the Foucauldian perspective also discloses the power and influence other users and the framework of *Twitter* itself. Based on the explanations in the previous sections about the significance of online social networks, the following chapter examines the correlation between media and sports. In chapter four, I will explain the most important concepts about sports in the media and provide a framework about the nexus of *Twitter* and sports.

Chapter Four: Media and Sports

The impact of sports on the media coverage has always been an integral element for journalists and media producers. Due to the popularity of sports within society, sports media enjoy high recognition within the frameworks of media reporting. Considering the fact that “the two most watched television events in the world are international sporting events – the Olympics and the soccer World Cup (Billings, Butterworth and Turman 2012: 4), it is evident that sports in the media is significantly linked to economic aspects that involves huge investments from different stakeholders. One of the most affected sporting events in terms of advertising is the annual Super Bowl. In 2012, the final game was watched by over 100 million people in the US and it is reported “that marketers are paying about \$3.5 million for a single 30-second spot and that spots during Super Bowl XLVI, the game, are sold out. The price represents an increase of 59% in the past decade” (TommyToy 2012).

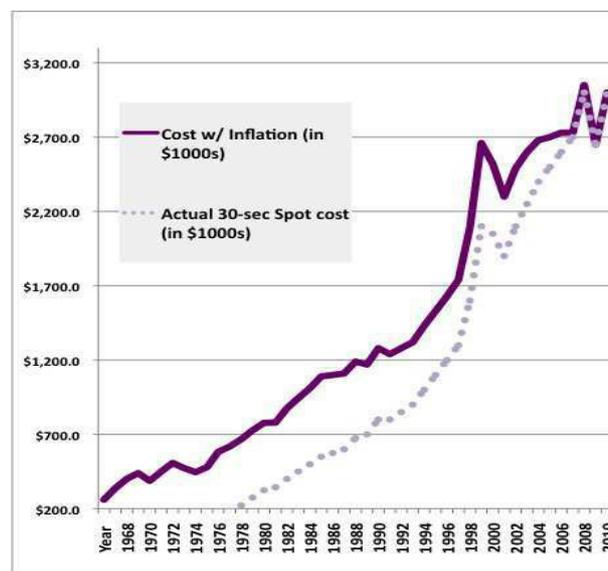


Figure 4: Advertising rate between 1968 and 2010 (TommyToy 2012)

The figure above illustrates the cost development of a single spot on television during the Super Bowl from 1968 until 2010. With reference to figure 4, it is understandable why advertising agencies and multinational corporations are willing to pay such amounts for a timeframe of just 30 seconds in which they can market a product or service.

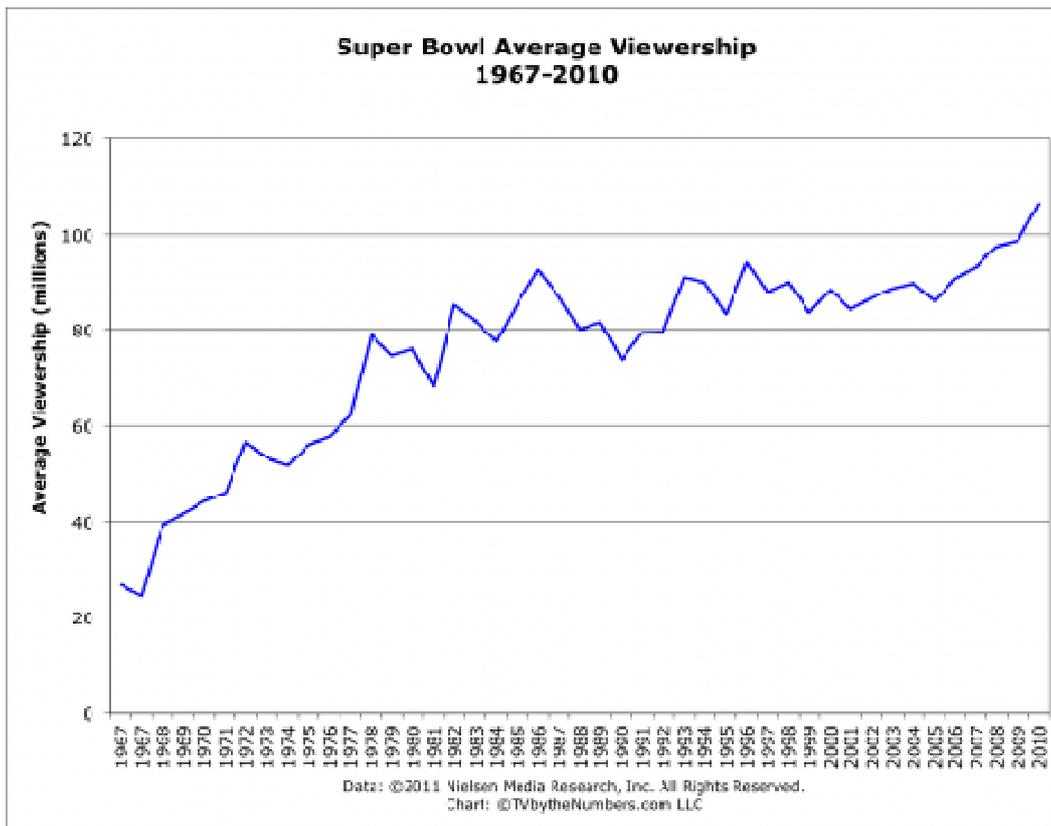


Figure 5: Super Bowl Average Viewership (TommyToy 2012)

While in 1967, the Super Bowl event had 27 million viewers, the number increased to 107 million viewers in 2010. For market researchers and advertisers, these figures represent a huge target group which they would never be able to reach without the prestige around the event. The number of potential consumers, hence represent the reason for such investments during the event. With reference to the Super Bowl, it also becomes obvious why online social networks like *Facebook* have such an enormous share value. In 2012, *Facebook* has

almost one billion users who are part of the network and this is considered to be worth billions of US- Dollars by the stock market. In fact, all users who use the website regularly are potential consumers for a vast numbers of investors. Similar to the Super Bowl, companies are willing to pay enormous amounts of money in light of the potential target group on *Facebook*.

Although this research will primarily focus on sports in the online environment, I will briefly touch on some of the traditional mass media approaches, as they still remain valid in the field of sports media. A great number of theoretical frameworks towards media and sports tried to examine the functions and influence of the media. Based on Birrell and Loy (1979) , it is assumed that media sports perform four different functions. The *information* function refers to the aspect of knowledge about certain aspects in sports that is conveyed by the media. The term of *integration* describes a function of the media which refers to norms, rituals, values or experiences that is internalized by the audience. According to Birrell and Loy, “the third function, *arousal*, adds excitement to one's (perhaps) typical routine and predictable life pattern. The fourth, the *escape* function, underscores the role of media sport in taking us away from our humdrum existences” (Birrell and Loy 1979, cited in Leonard 1998: 402). Historically, the commercialization of television marks one of most important developments in the field of media and affected sports in several ways. The impact of this development can be summarized on the basis of the following assumptions:

- (1) Sports popularity in society is to a great extent the result of the attention the media give it.
- (2) Television's monies have affected player's salaries and franchise locations and relocations.
- (3) The rules of some sports have been altered to accommodate television.
- (4) College athletic recruiting has become more national as opposed to regional in scope.
- (5) Audience perception of reality is conditioned by the selection between sports (which are worthy of attention) and within sports (what aspects are to be emphasized and , of course, the others are neglected). (Leonard 1998: 411)

For most of the researchers in the field of sports media, the theoretical framework is based on communication. In this context, it is suggested “that people enact, produce, consume, and organize sport primarily as a communicative activity” (Billings, Butterworth and Truman 2012: 6). For some researchers, the current key concepts of communication in sports media consider the fans as a new and important aspect in the process of media production. It is assumed that

what percolates to the top of the media conversation may not be the most important stories of the day and it may not be driven by the most credible journalists of our time, yet it has the opportunity to enter the sports media zeitgeist, providing insight on our society simply by underscoring what is of greatest issue to sports fans today.
(Billings, Butterworth and Truman 2012: 301)

In fact, the significance of fans does not only shift from the impact as consumers to the importance of producers; the development of social media indeed enables fans to engage in certain forms of actual interaction with athletes. Based on the use of social media, chapter 4.4. will focus on the medial framework in which fans are enabled to interact with athletes.

4.1. Sociology of Sports

Sports is one of the most influential aspects on society in numerous cultures around the world. In fact, sports constantly shapes our society through media attention, individual consumption and participation. As MacClancy (1996) notes, “sports is not a 'reflection' of some postulated essence of society, but an integral part of society and one, moreover, which may be used as a means of reflecting on society” (MacClancy 1996: 4). From a sociological perspective, the association of meanings, values or beliefs in sports is not an inherent part but rather developed, changed or adapted over time. This assumption leads to

the consideration of sports as “an embodied practice in which meanings are generated, and whose representation and interpretation are open to negotiations and contest” (MacClancy 1996: 4). Due to the involvement of rules, roles, statuses and other relevant aspects in sports that are also part of an individual's everyday life in society, it is necessary to consider sports as an intrinsically social phenomenon. In this context, the sociological consideration of sports includes some aspects that are necessarily connected to the definition. According to Edwards, sport

(a) is characterized by relatively persistent patterns of social organization; (b) occurs within a formal organization comprised of teams, leagues, division, coaches, commissioners, sponsors, formalized recruitment and personnel replacement, rule books, and regulator agencies; (c) is serious competition in which outcomes are not predetermined; and (d) emphasizes physical skill. (Leonard 1998: 17)

As part of the conceptualization of sports, three variables are characteristic for a sociological definition: “(a) the type of activities involved, (b) the structure of the context in which the activities take place, and (c) the participant's orientations” (Leonard 1998: 12). Although some authors consider a general concept of sports undefinable, Edwards (1973) includes – among others- the physical and competitive aspects and defines sport as:

Activities having formally recorded histories and traditions, stressing physical exertion through competition within limits set in explicit and formal rules governing role and position relationships, and carried out by actors who represent or who are part of formally organized associations having the goal of achieving valued tangible or intangibles through defeating opposing groups. (Edward 1973: 57)

4.2. Identity in Sports Media

Theoretical approaches towards identity in sports often refer aspects of certain identifications with persons or clubs. Especially in soccer, the fans and their behavioural aspects of identification with players and clubs provide an integral part of a sociological perspective towards sports. However, in other sports like golf or tennis, identification and affiliation can also derive from different motivations. Researchers could investigate whether, and how, members of expensive golf and tennis clubs rather follow social reasons concerning their membership. In order to be part of a certain group, some individuals “pay their annual subscription fees not so much out of love of the particular sport but because they wish to spend part of their leisure time with people they consider their peers” (MacClancy 1996: 3). During the British era of industrialization in the late 19th century, the membership in clubs or associations not only illustrated an already established identity in the society, it could also be used to create new forms of social, communal or rural identities. Once a sporting club was socially established, they “provided their members with an inter- generational, sub- cultural marker of identity” (MacClancy 1996: 3). Especially for children from lower- income backgrounds or immigrants, memberships in sporting clubs can help to overcome social or financial divides. With reference to Bourdieu (1986), the membership of a club in sports can be labeled as a form of 'cultural capital' that does not correlate with financial resources and can “to some extent operate independently of monetary holdings and even compensate for lack of money as part of an individual's or a group's strategy to pursue power and status” (Field 2003: 14). Jeremy MacClancy (1996) summarizes his view about the correlation about sports and identity by stating:

Sports, in sum, may be used to fulfil a plethora of functions: to define more sharply the already established boundaries of moral and political communities; to assist in the creation of new social identities; to give physical expression to certain social values and to act as a means of reflecting on those values; to serve as potentially contested space by opposed groups. (MacClancy 1996: 7)

For Giulianotti (2005), sport can also play a key role in the construction of a national identity. In his view, “specific 'national' teams may be polyethnic in composition, ensuring that sports commentators struggle to 'narrate the nation' to old assumptions regarding national identity” (Giulianotti 2005: 179). In this context, he identifies four ideal types of spectator identity within sport. While the 'supporters' are more or less formed through marketing aspects of a club, the 'follower' develops his identification because of biographical reasons, for example, if a well-known local player moves to a certain club. The typical 'fan' is usually connected to a club on the basis of “consuming team paraphernalia and through media-dependant identification with star players” (Giulianotti 2005: 180). The last type of spectator identity within sport is the 'flâneur' who embodies “a fluid, transnational consumerism that implies the potential breakdown of national sports identification” (Giulianotti 2005: 180). Researchers have used sport identification to examine the psychological connection of fans to sports. Studies have shown that the high identification of fans results in very strong postgame effects, dependent on the team's performance. Furthermore, some studies observe “positive correlations between team identification and collective self-esteem, psychological well-being, optimism for the team's future performance, and academic success, while being negatively correlated with loneliness and alienation” (Billings, Butterworth and Turman 2012: 52).

The sense of identification is also affected by a certain business model of a club. Especially situations in which a team starts to commercialize its identity and activities due to success and a new environment in a different league or association, some fans lose a certain form of affiliation and feel that their team is becoming a larger part of professional systems, driven by capitalist motivations. In this context, the affiliation and identification of fans in sports can “invoke a variety of emotional responses, which can be further enhanced as advancing technologies provide fans with new opportunities for interacting with athletes and their teams” (Billings, Butterworth and Turman 2012: 55).

Besides the four ideal types of spectator identity within sport discussed above, studies have examined four primary behaviours concerning group affiliation. One of the identified behaviours is labelled as 'in- group favoritism' and refers to the idea that “only members possess positive behaviors or qualities due to the sense of team homogeneity that is fostered” (Billings, Butterworth and Turman 2012: 223). The 'out- group derogation' appears in two different forms – directly to their team and in general to a certain league/ conference/ sport and “occurs by assigning positive traits to group members and undesirable traits to individuals in the out- group” (Billings, Butterworth and Turman 2012: 223). The fan's perceived benefits from their affiliation towards a team, which can result in euphoria and the internal belief in success against all odds, is labelled as 'unrealistic optimism' (Billings, Butterworth and Turman 2012: 223). Finally, Billings, Butterworth and Turman refer to a 'sense of voice' which provides an external form of identification as it is able to “overshadow unsuccessful performances by emphasizing athletic qualities the team possesses despite a loss” (Billings, Butterworth and Turman 2012: 224).

4.3. Sports and the online media environment

The new online opportunities for consumers and producers of sports media have also led to new forms of responsibility, requirements and progress. The technological development of current media devices resulted in new approaches to how sports media content is received and in which forms it is produced. Sanderson (2010) summarizes the impact of a changing technological landscape on sports media and states:

Whereas fans were once dependent on waiting for evening news telecasts or local newspapers to obtain their sports information, they can now access this data immediately via the Internet, cell phones, or other technological devices. This alteration has prompted

some scholars to suggest that the proliferation of Internet sites devoted to sports is creating a vast digital environment for fans to interact about and to consume sports. (Sanderson 2010: 304)

According to Sanderson (2010) more and more fans use the online opportunities for information about sports which demands sports media producers to adapt and progressively develop new platforms, features or applications for the user. Sanderson suggests “that sports fans employ CMC to discuss their experiences at sporting events, parasocially interact with athletes, and contest hegemonic knowledge produced and distributed by sports organizations” (Sanderson 2010: 304). Furthermore it was found that fans tend to build online communities in order to construct a form of online sports identity and share experiences with other fans about teams or athletes, even if they are not active any more. In this context, researchers could investigate the given amount of narrative material, to investigate whether, and how, fans make use of certain digital spaces such as Wikipedia to (a) collectively celebrate and debate the athletes’ achievements and (b) construct representations of these athletes that stimulated future online interaction” (Sanderson 2010: 304). With regard to the correlation of racism in sports and discourses between fans, an analysis of narrative content in a sports forum has revealed that

much of the discussion in the forum collectively served to (re)produce ideological positions that (a) claim racism as nonexistent, (b) blame the victims of racism for their underrepresentation, and (c) suggests any lingering racism is against Whites (e.g., Whites are victims of reverse discrimination). The presence of such commentary essentially silences dialogue and ultimately diverts attention away from current sports practices that reinforce such racial imbalances. (Sanderson 2010: 315)

Another study by Kassing and Sanderson (2009) analyzed fan postings on cyclist Floyd Landis' website in order to trace fan reactions and support towards him. The results indicate that “

fans' interaction with Landis reflected: (a) traditional dimensions of parasocial interaction, (b) relationally appropriate behaviors, and (c) active social interaction behaviors. Overall, the findings demonstrate that internet communication technologies have shifted the nature of parasocial interaction from one-sided and passive to an approximation of actual social interaction and confirm that fans readily interact (para)socially with athletes.
(Kassing and Sanderson 2009)

In order to examine to which extent identity in sports can be adapted to the online environment, the following section will focus on several studies that deal with fandom and identification in an online context. In an analysis of an online network that enables users to manage a football club through a website, researchers tried to examine how fans approach the management aspect of a football club. The findings of their analysis indicate “that networked digital media can provide an environment for quite familiar forms and expressions of football fandom” (Rowe, Ruddock and Hutchins 2010: 312). Facing a potential correlation between activism of fans in an operative context and traditional aspects of fan- culture, the study points out that only “a comparatively small group broke away from the original fan community, but then displayed little in the way of willingness to do anything significantly different” (Rowe, Ruddock and Hutchins 2010: 312).

In their conclusion, the authors outline a rather unsatisfactory engagement of fans concerning management aspects of football and state that “even when engaged in complaint, sport fandom in digital networked media cultures, while both spatially oriented and dispersed, is seemingly at ease with the mediation to which it is, in part, a reaction” (Rowe, Ruddock and Hutchins 2010: 313).

Although the findings of this study remain valid, they cannot be seen in a larger context of other online networks and should only be regarded in reference to the particular network that was analyzed. The development of social media in sports has simultaneously affected consumers and producers of online sports media content. While better availability has facilitated the access to information, the athletes themselves have also become more active in the production of online content. Kassing and Sanderson (2011) label *Twitter* as the “predominant social media of choice for athletes” and focus on “three ways in which blogs and *Twitter* significantly impacts sports media: (a) transformative; (b) adversarial; and (c) integrative” (Sanderson and Kassing 2011: 114). Furthermore, they point out to the increasing conflict between athletes and reporters concerning the publication of material, as journalists see a vanishing importance of their work. However, media producers also benefit from the facilitated release of information, as social media is based on the participation of fans who publish free content for everyone. In this regard, sports organizations are also affected by the publication of certain information by an athlete and are concerned how to take influence on the athlete's publication. Kassing and Sanderson point out, that

one way sports organizations have addressed these concerns is by adopting social media policies that govern when athletes can use these tools. Yet these policies often prove too restrictive, as organizations regularly fine athletes for violating social media policies. (Sanderson and Kassing 2011: 118)

An analysis of the American cyclist Floyd Landis' website after he lost his Tour de France title due to a positive doping test, showed that athletes use social media to gather fan support against a certain enemy. The benefits for sports organizations are also grounded on the fan's active reporting as it facilitates the censoring of an athlete's publications and helps the organization to monitor the athlete's private life. In this regard, Kassing and Sanderson demand fans

to be conscientious about the possibility that messages, particularly those of private and suggestive manner, sent via social media may surface elsewhere and at some time in the future. These situations raise key questions regarding organizational control, censorship, and freedom of expression, all of which arise from the integration of athletes and fans into sports media processes. (Sanderson and Kassing 2011: 122)

With regard to the athletes' use of social media, the authors refer to an important implication. Due to the conjuncture of fans and athletes on social media platforms, blogs and *Twitter* can “serve as a mechanism for evolving parasocial interaction (PSI) within virtual sports communities” (Sanderson and Kassing 2011: 122). The concept of parasocial interaction (PSI) “refers to media users interacting with media personae in ways that resemble actual social interaction” and indicates - among others - in the context of social media “that audience members become so absorbed in media programming that they mentally transport themselves into media narratives” (Sanderson and Kassing 2011: 122).

4.4. The framework of online fan- athlete interactions

The community aspects of sports in the media provide a suitable approach to discuss the framework in which fans and athletes interact. In this context, Kassing and Sanderson (2012) focus on the concept of parasocial interaction (PSI) and outline current trends in the use of new media that function as bonding agents between athletes and fans. On the basis of a graphical illustration, the next section will examine the impact and contribution of those trends towards the building of a framework in which fans and athletes parasocially interact.

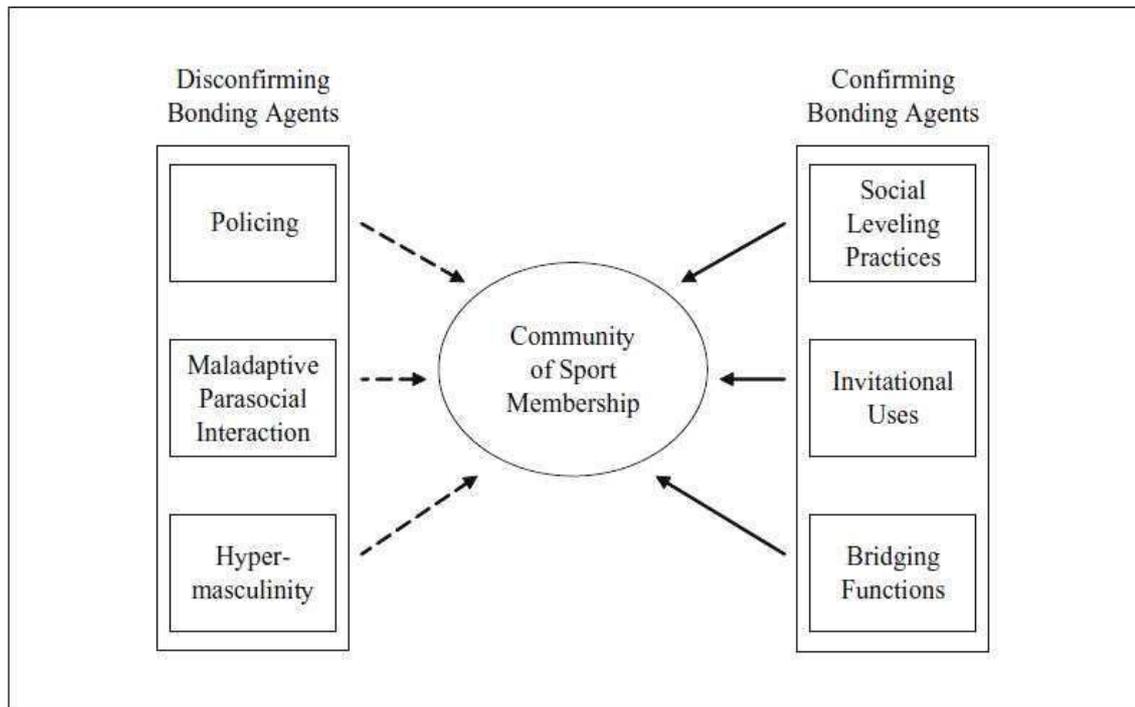


Figure 6: Trends in new media use (Kassing and Sanderson 2012: 2)

In their approach, Kassing and Sanderson (2012) distinguish between two different forms of bonding agents. On the one hand, they categorize three trends as confirming bonding agents that signal community membership. The confirming bonding agents are labelled as *social leveling practices*, *invitational uses* and *bridging functions* of new media. In this regard, *social leveling practices* refer to incidents, when “competing audiences come together to contest some identified force”, such as athletes in a given sport from different franchises who speak in unison about contract negotiations. This situation can also derive from fans “who have discovered that they can achieve much when they set aside their differences and rally via new media around a given cause” (Kassing and Sanderson 2012: 3).

The trend of *invitational uses* is one of the social media's key feature and describes the fact that “athletes and sports personalities are increasingly inviting feedback and interaction directly from fans” (Kassing and Sanderson 2012: 4). *Bridging functions*, the last trend in the category of confirming bonding agents is considered to overcome parasocial interactions and lead to actual social interactions between fans and athletes. In the light of charity events or marketing strategies, famous athletes facilitate fans the chance to actual meet and talk to them. Despite from organizational happenings, some events are initiated just by the athletes themselves and show how “new media have shifted decision-making about public appearances to athletes directly and the solicitation of such unscripted appearances to fans” (Kassing and Sanderson 2012: 6). In contrast to those three confirming bonding agents, some trends are characterized by excluding aspects concerning people's membership in the community of sports. Despite the assumption that new media have the capability to reduce group pressure and social divides between people, the concept of *policing behavior* refers to the aspect that social media can

act in a way that sanctions specific behaviors while rebuking others—and also works to make implicit rules of membership explicit. Policing via new media then serves a dual purpose, admonishing the individual while proselytizing to the masses. (Kassing and Sanderson 2012: 7)

This phenomenon can also be illustrated on the basis of the previously mentioned analysis of the cyclist's website Floyd Landis. The analysis of the written content by the users in that website's forum could reveal that users collectively “demonstrated that any unsupportive sentiment would be policed and that those posting should understand that the website was a place of support, not condemnation” (Kassing and Sanderson 2012: 8). Another approach of disconfirming bonding agents between fans and athletes is described as *maladaptive parasocial interaction* which is characterized by the manifestation of negative behaviour among fans towards an athlete.

Kassing and Sanderson outlined three factors that are responsible for the occurrence of *maladaptive parasocial interaction*:

First, with the anonymity that new media provides, fans can adopt nonidentifying usernames that reduces accountability for their commentary. Second, new media have become arguably the dominant gathering place for fans to discuss sports and interacting with like-minded individuals may fuel aggressive behavior. Third, fandom is a significant social identity component. Thus, when athletes or teams act in a manner that threatens fans' social identity, new media constitute a widely accessible and incredibly convenient means for those fans to respond. Consequently, fans have displayed a plethora of maladaptive PSI on different occasions. (Kassing and Sanderson 2012: 8)

Finally, the concept of *hypermasculinity* refers to the general assumption that “sport is a prominent site for the (re)production of masculinity, and one of the more troubling ways in which masculinity gets perpetuated involves insinuating that others are feminine and/or homosexual” (Kassing and Sanderson 2012: 9). For instance, certain comments of fans on new media platforms include intensive criticism, threats of physical harm and the publication of private details. Such comments reflect a behaviour “that would not easily be tolerated in other social contexts” (Kassing and Sanderson 2012: 9). In the context of those two forms of bonding agents between athletes and fans, Kassing and Sanderson focused on the trends of *invitational uses*, *bridging functions*, *maladaptive parasocial interaction* and *hypermasculinity* to develop a conceptual framework that illustrates the process from a mediated form of parasocial interaction to an actual form of social interaction. The following figure depicts what the authors refer to as “circumsocial (fan–athlete) interaction” (Kassing and Sanderson 2012: 11).

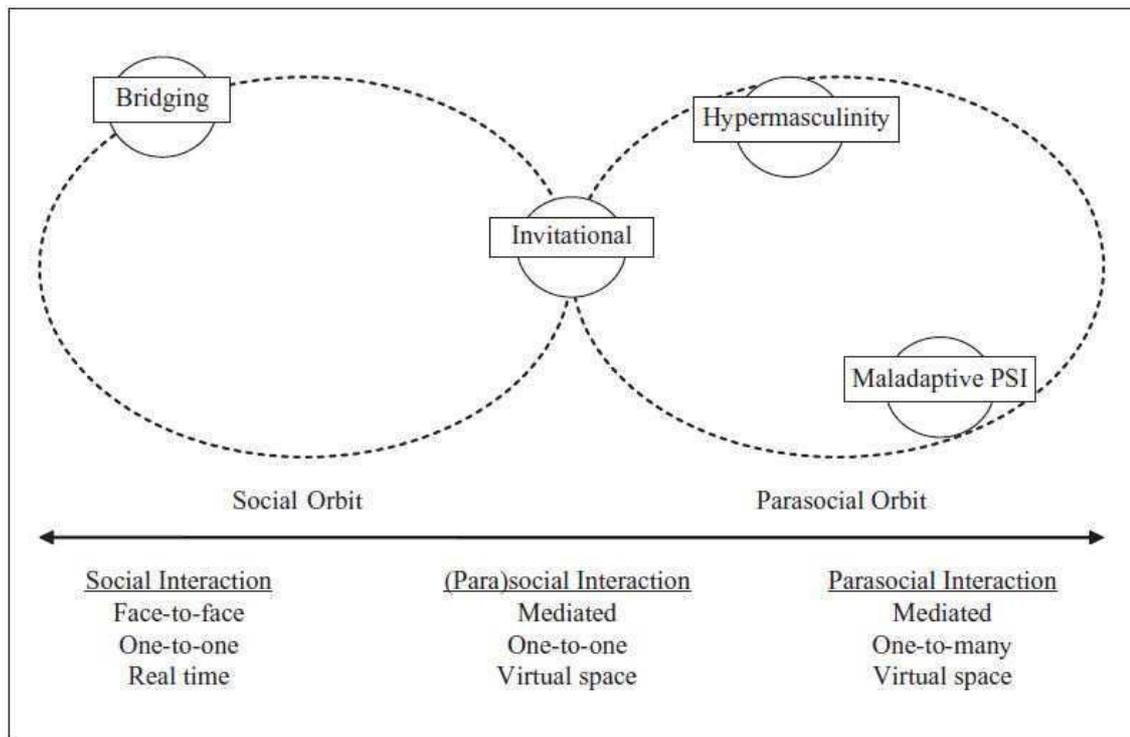


Figure 7: Circumsocial fan- athlete interaction (Kassing and Sanderson 2012: 11)

Based on the figure above, the parasocial orbit can be argued to be embedded in a virtual space formed by a mediated one-to-many communication and mostly characterized by the previously discussed concepts of *hypermasculinity* and *maladaptive parasocial interaction*. The only connection between the parasocial orbit and the social orbit is marked by the *invitation uses* aspect, which is still mediated and embedded in a virtual space but sometimes characterized by a one-to-one communication. This situation can occur “when a fan uses new media to disparage an athlete and the athlete in turn responds directly to that particular fan via new media” (Kassing and Sanderson 2012: 10).

This specific situation can finally lead to a social orbit where actual social interaction can take place. Those actual social interactions that can be characterized by a one-to-one/ face-to-face communication are derived from the *bridging* functions of social media when athletes engage to meet fans physically in real time. The chart illustrates the process how social media platforms can facilitate the way in which fans can actually meet their idols instead of just receiving information about them.

Chapter Five: Research Design and Methodology

The following chapter outlines the research design and methods utilized in this study in order to identify the way in which a selection of athletes used the social media network *Twitter*. The collected data consisted of *Twitter* messages by athletes and was analysed by means of a content analysis which was interpretive in nature.

5.1. Research Question

The study aims to provide perspectives that could answer the following research question:

“How did the sample of ten athletes use the social media network *Twitter* as a platform to communicate during the Olympic Games 2012 in London?”

5.2. Aim of Research

The aim of this research is to investigate the role of the microblogging service *Twitter* and the manner in which it was utilized by analysing a sample of ten Olympic athlete *Twitter* users during the Olympic Games 2012 in London.

5.3. Objectives

- 1) To identify the various ways in which *Twitter*- messaging in English was used by the selected athletes to communicate with the public during the Olympic Games 2012 in London.
- 2) To identify the primary purpose of *Twitter* for the sample of 10 athletes during the Olympic Games 2012 in London.
- 3) To examine the impact of *Twitter* on discourses and decisions made during the 2012 Olympic Games.
- 4) To discuss the future role of *Twitter* as evident from the sampled athletes during worldwide sports events like the Olympic Games 2012 in London.

5.4. Timeframe

The timeframe in which the data was collected spanned 30 days; from 20 July to 19 August 2012. The timespan of one week around the Olympic Games was chosen to include the preliminary occurrences before the games, as well as the post-happening after the event. The decision to chose an extended timeframe beyond the official timespan of the event is based on the empirically observed nature of news coverage during such sporting events. In contrast to the actual physical performances of the athletes, media reporting commences far in advance, including the provision of background information, evaluations of initial performance levels of the athletes or even scandals that occurred prior to the event.

As the media and athletes tend to evaluate the particular performances and happenings around such an event, it was chosen to add one week after the Olympic Games into the timeframe of collecting data.

5.5. Methodology and Data

In order to determine the use of social media by the selected athletes during the Olympic Games 2012 in London, a content analysis was conducted on *Twitter* messages. In general, “the content analysis is a method for describing the meaning of qualitative material in a systematic way” (Schreier 2012: 1). In this research context, the method is used to interpret written data and extract meanings that are attributed to certain words. It is presumed that meaning is a construct that is not inherent in a text, and is actively built by the recipients. In the light of the huge amount of available material, it is useful to focus on certain aspects to specify the angle from which the researcher examines the data. Although Schreier states that the qualitative content analysis “does not give you a holistic overview of your material” (Schreier 2012: 4), the method “reduces your material by limiting your analysis to relevant aspects of the material” (Schreier 2012: 9). As previously indicated, the content analysis conducted in this research is interpretative in nature and aims to examine particular meanings. In this context, it is necessary to understand that

in different situations, the idea of 'the correct' meaning of any piece of data loses its appeal. Qualitative researchers are comfortable with the idea that there can be multiple meanings, multiple interpretations, and that theses can shift over time and across different people. (Schreier 2012: 20)

In order to summarize the interpretative nature of a qualitative research, Schreier concludes, “It deals with symbolic material that requires interpretation; different interpretations of the same material can be valid; and it deals with research questions exploring personal or social meanings” (Schreier 2012: 21). The collected data was drawn from a sample of 10 athletes who competed in different disciplines during the Olympic Games 2012 in London. The athletes were chosen on the basis of their popularity on *Twitter*, as most of them garnered more than one million mentions during the actual competition from 27 July to 12 August. This number refers to the athletes' *tweets*, as well as *retweets* or *tweets* from other users. The sample of this research is displayed in the following table and only includes *tweets* from the selected athletes. The number of total *tweets* in the table refers to the timeframe from 20 July to 19 August.

Name	Twitter- Name	Tweets (with pictures)	Tweets (in total)
Usain Bolt	@usainbolt	47	85
Michael Phelps	@MichaelPhelps	24	147
Tom Daley	@TomDaley1994	53	180
Ryan Lochte	@ryanlochte	19	87
Candace Parker	@Candace_Parker	28	196
Caroline Wozniacki	@CaroWozniacki	1	33
Yohan Blake	@YohanBlake	2	17
Lee Chong Wei	@Lee_C_Wei	8	79
LeBron James	@KingJames	37	51
Alexander Raisman	@Aly_Raisman	44	164
-	-	<u>264</u>	<u>1042</u>

Table 2: Total Tweets and Tweets with pictures of sample

In the context of collecting data, the sample only consists of *tweets* that directly appeared on the timeline of the analysed athletes' *Twitter* profiles. Furthermore, the number of photos only refers to the uploaded illustrations that were embedded in *tweets* and visible on the athlete's profile. In order to facilitate the analysis of the material and provide an overview of the data, an image of all *tweets* was saved through the used web browser (See Appendix A). The data was individually analysed and no additional software was used to prepare the figures in the presented tables.

5.6. Delimitations of the Study

The present research is limited to the analysis of direct statements (*tweets*) of the sample and does not examine any responses towards those statements. Although some theoretical approaches touch on other social online networks like *Facebook*, the empirical part of this research does not include any data of social online networks besides *Twitter*. Furthermore, the study can merely provide evidence during the timeframe from 20 July to 19 August and does not cover any statements about the impact of the athlete's *Twitter* activity on the ongoing career after the selected timeframe. Furthermore, the research findings of this study have to be considered in context of the Olympic Games 2012 in London and are only partially suitable to provide general evidences about communication patterns of athletes on *Twitter*.

Chapter Six: Research findings

The media coverage about the Olympic Games 2012 in London often labeled the event as “Socialympics” (Gilbert 2012) and “the first truly digital Games” (Gilbert 2012). In view of the numerous figures on *Twitter* that dealt with the Olympics, this description inheres a significant sense of validity. During the event, about 150 million “Olympic *tweets*” were sent through the network and made *Twitter* to the most important social media platform during the competition. In fact, “the opening ceremony inspired 9,66 million *tweets*, and the first 24 hours of the games saw more *tweets* than the entirety of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing” (Ong 2012). The closing ceremony, including a performance of the British music group 'Spice Girls', gained with 116,000 *tweets* per minute the biggest *Twitter*- moment during the Games. Nevertheless, some competitions generated an incredible volume of conversations on the microblogging service. Given that not every particular discipline during the Olympic Games gains the same attention, some competitions like the final 100 metre run attract more viewers or *tweter* than others. In this context, the chart below displays the most-followed competitions, measured by *tweets* per minute (TPM).

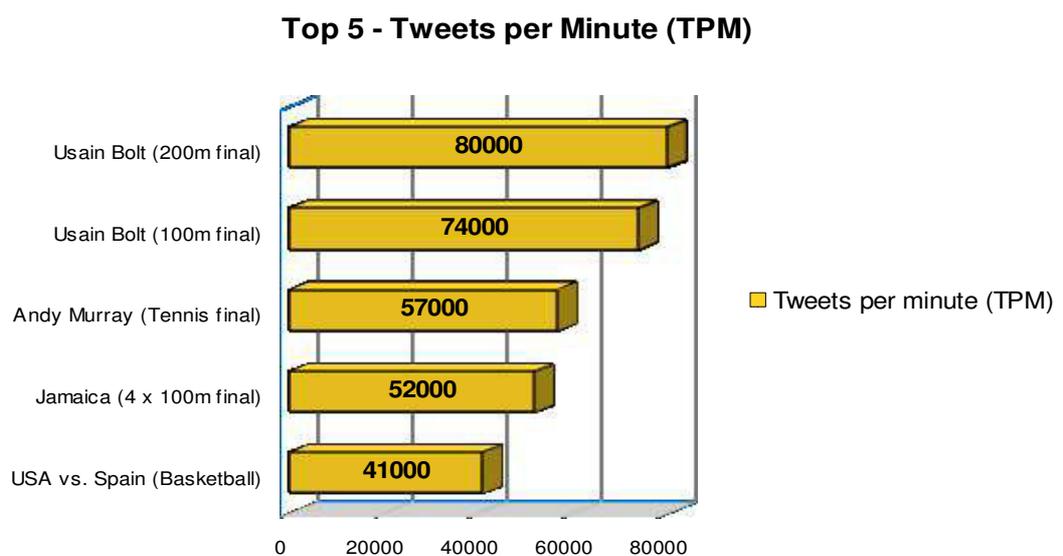


Figure 8: Top 5 – Tweets per Minute (TPM) during the Olympics 2012 in London
(Numbers based on Twitter UK Blog 2012)

Nevertheless, the impact of *Twitter* on the Olympics not only produced records and euphoria. In China, the microblogging service caused a “*tweet* drama when a tech luminary posted the personal information of a US swimming coach in response to comments by the coach that a record-breaking Chinese swimmer may have used performance-enhancing drugs” (Ong 2012). Another incident that displays what impact *Twitter* can have on decisions concerning the Olympic Games happened to athlete Voula Papachristou. Just a few days before the opening ceremony, the “Greek triple jumper has been expelled from the Olympics after she posted a racist joke on *Twitter*” (Faulkner and McDermott 2012). After the athlete also revealed her sympathies for a political right-wing party on the social network, Papachristou apologized in a *tweet* but was finally disqualified from taking part in the games. Isidoris Kouvelos, head of Greece's Olympic mission, pointed out that Papachristou's statement contradicts the Olympic ideal and “added that all Greek athletes would now be banned from “expressing personal opinions on Twitter until the games were over” (Faulkner and McDermott 2012).

This example clearly shows what consequences an athlete's statement on *Twitter* can have on decisions made by the own association. In a broader sense, it becomes apparent how certain *tweets* can result in restrictive and sanctioning consequences of decisions regarding global sport events such as the Olympic Games. With reference to the contextual framework of *tweets* in chapter 3 of this work, the embedding of the athlete's *tweet* in the Olympic context was responsible for the dimension of consequences made by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Due to the imminent involvement of Papachristou as an Olympic athlete into the games, her statement was irrevocably linked to policies of the IOC and could not be treated detached from them. In order to evaluate and prevent such *tweets* from the Greek athlete, the IOC published a document titled “IOC Social Media, Blogging and Internet guidelines for participants and other accredited persons at the London 2012 Olympic Games”.

Those guidelines were established to encourage and support “athletes and other accredited persons at the Olympic Games to take part in 'social media' and to post, blog and *tweet* their experiences” (IOC 2011). Furthermore, the Olympic committee advises the athletes to respect the Olympic Charter and states that

tweets must be in a first- person, diary-type format and should not be in the role of a journalist - i.e. they must not report on competition or comment on the activities of other participants or accredited persons, or disclose any information which is confidential or private in relation to any other person or organisation. (IOC 2011)

Nevertheless, the IOC reserves the right to amend the listed social media guidelines in the document and states that “the IOC Executive Board shall be the final authority with respect to the interpretation and implementation of these Guidelines” (IOC 2011). In the following sections of the research findings, the IOC social media guidelines will be consulted to evaluate the particular observations that were made from the data.

6.1. Description of the analysed material

Based on the method of a content analysis, the material was segmented in different categories according to the particular athlete's intention to communicate on *Twitter*. The different categories that were developed to analyse the material are displayed in the chart below and discussed in the following section.

Athlete	Self- presentation	Twitter- communication	Fan- communication	Corporate communication	Private disclosures
Usain Bolt	54,12	22,18	11,76	9,41	3,53
Michael Phelps	42,86	53,74	0,68	1,36	1,36
Tom Daley	72,33	23,89	2,22	0,56	1,11
Ryan Lochte	83,9	4,60	6,90	2,30	2,30
Alexandra Raisman	59,76	39,02	1,22	0,00	0,00
LeBron James	88,24	5,88	0,00	0,00	5,88
Yohan Blake	82,35	11,76	5,88	0,00	0,00
Lee Chong Wei	60,76	31,65	7,59	0,00	0,00
Candace Parker	33,16	65,31	0,51	0,00	1,02
Caroline Wozniacki	87,88	6,06	6,06	0,00	0,00
<u>Total:</u>	<u>66,54</u>	<u>26,41</u>	<u>4,82</u>	<u>1,63</u>	<u>1,52</u>

Table 3: Overview about percentages of analysed categories

Every *tweet* from a particular athlete was analysed separately in the chosen timeframe. After categorizing every *tweet*, the table above displays the percentages of *tweets* in a certain category in relation to all *tweets* by an athlete. Furthermore, table 3 shows the percentage of every category in relation to all *tweets* by the athletes. The criteria for a *tweet* to become part of a certain category are as follows: The category of self- presentation is based on the discussed approach of Goffman (1971) and involves *tweets*, which refer to a visible or written presentation of the athlete in certain contexts. Those *tweets* involve pictures of the athlete after training, at the opening ceremony or just statements about recent happenings around the athlete. The category of fan-communication describes *tweets* that are directly addressed to the fan community and usually involve expressions of loyalty and support. These *tweets* usually involve the word 'fan' or 'support' and are exclusively addressed to potential fans of an athlete. In contrast to fan- communication, the category of *Twitter*- communication include statements of athletes that are addressed to other users of *Twitter*. Those statements usually refer to *retweets* and sometimes involve other famous athletes who are active on the microblogging service.

In order to analyse how many *tweets* include advertising of certain products or refer to sponsors of the athlete, the category of corporate communication was used. The last category of private disclosure was developed to assess how many *tweets* reveal private, intimate details or personal attitudes of the athlete. This category was included, as it is assumed that athletes are more likely to publish such information on *Twitter*, rather than in traditional media sources like newspapers or magazines. Those statements usually involve family members but can also be referred to individual opinions. The figures in the chart below display the percentages of every category in relation to the total number of *tweets* by all athletes.

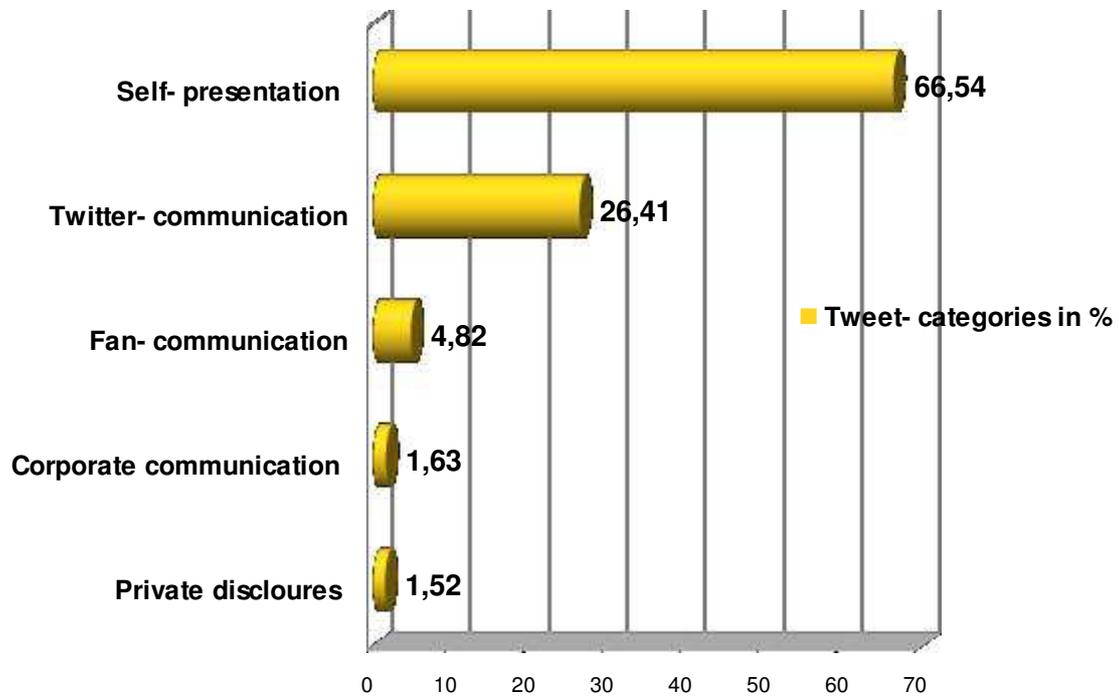


Figure 9: Percentages of Tweet- categories

As already displayed in table 3, a lot of *tweets* include pictures that are embedded on the athletes' profile. In fact, every fourth *tweet* of the athletes involve a picture to illustrate certain happenings or highlight a particular statement. In this context, the analysis could reveal that in every category of the analysed *tweets*, the athletes made use of pictures to express themselves.

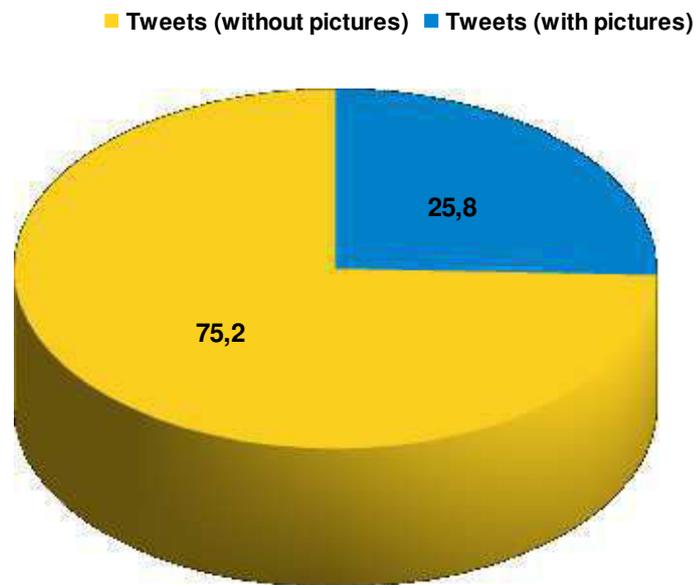


Figure 10: Tweets with pictures and Tweets without pictures, by percentage

6.2. Self – presentation

As displayed in the previous chart, the prevailing use of *Twitter* by athletes during the Olympic Games in London refers to *tweets* that involve aspects of self- presentation. Most of those *tweets* describe an everyday experience of the athlete during the competition. Furthermore, some *tweets* can include references to team mates, coaches, celebrities or other particular events involving the athlete. A typical *tweet* that is labelled with aspects of self- presentation was posted by Michael Phelps on his first day of competition. “*Not pleased with my race tonight at all... But tom is a new day! And a new race!!*” (@MichaelPhelps on 28 July 2012). Other *tweets* from Usain Bolt simply describe recent events between his competitions

“*On my way to the village*” (@usainbolt on 26 July 2012), preparation for the medal ceremony “*Getting ready for medal ceremony. Big up the barber Maurice Smith*” (@usainbolt on 6 August 2012) or meetings with other famous athletes. On 10 August, Usain Bolt posted a picture of himself with former tennis player John McEnroe stating: “*Talking to John McEnroe today for NBC*” (@usainnbolt on 10 August 2012). Another popular aspect of the athlete's self- presentation on *Twitter* are statement that refer to popular persons outside the sport event.

On 1 August, Michael Phelps *tweets*: “*Just got a pretty cool phone call on the way to the pool from Mr. President @BrackObama !!! #USA*” (@MichaelPhelps on 1 August 2012). For the American Olympic athletes, president Barack Obama plays a crucial role in terms of self-representation and national identity, as the following sections will reveal. Besides references on *Twitter* to other celebrities or persons of high societal status, some athletes dedicated a range of *tweets* to theirs coaches and team mates. After winning three Olympic medals, Alexandra Raisman states: “*Mihai & Sylvie the best coaches in the world!!! Love them so much!*” (@Aly_Raisman on 12 August 2012). Usain Bolt also dedicated several *tweets* to his coach Glen Mills like “*Big yohan and warren my training team mates we say jam all the way. Big up the man behind the sense coach glen mills the genius*” (@usainbolt on 9 August 2012) and on the same day again “*A lot of thanks goes out to the greatest coach ever. “Glen Mills” Really blessed the day the heavenly Father brought you in my life*” (@usainbolt on 9 August 2012).

Team mate and trainings partner Yohan Blake also refers to his coach as an influential person in his life and *tweets*: “*Coach Mills for national hero!! Usain is a legend but our coach is a HERO!!*” (@YohanBlake on 9 August 2012). Other athletes like the Malaysian badminton player Lee Chong Wei, extensively used *Twitter* to market on his biography titled “*Dare to be a Champion*”. Several times, the athlete published information about his book and used the social online network as part of his self- promotion. On 29 July, he

tweets: “My book is officially launched in uk on Wednesday @YCSports #DateToBeChampion pre order tomorrow advancedrackets.com @bwfmedia”
 (@Lee_C_Wei on 29 July 2012).

6.3. Twitter – communication

The following discussion about the category of *Twitter*- communication predominantly refers to *retweets* from other athletes, celebrities or friends. The intensity of *Twitter*-communication among the analysed athletes ranges in a broad spectrum. While some athletes like LeBron James use *Twitter* almost exceptionally for communication patterns of self- presentation, some athletes like Candace Parker frequently use the microblogging service to communicate with other members of the network. As in the context of self- presentation, meetings between athletes during the Olympic Games form a recurrent aspect of their communication habits on *Twitter*. On 6 August, Candace Parker *tweets* on Usain Bolt's profile, showing a picture of them and wishing the athlete all the best for the next competitions: “@usainbolt: amazing show. Thanks for the picture at opening ceremonies as well! goodluck in 200 and relays.” (@Candace_Parker on 6 August 2012). A lot of communication between athletes and celebrities on *Twitter* include simple replies to congratulations. On 7 August, Alexandra Raisman reacted to a *tweet* by actresses Jessica Alba and states: “@jessicalba: thank you so much!! You are one of my favorite actresses! :)” (@Aly_Raisman on 7 August 2012). As in the discussion about self- presentation, American president Barack Obama is also involved in direct communication patterns with regard to the athletes. On 1 August, Raisman reacted to congratulatory remarks from the president and replied: @Barack Obama: So nice of you to talk to all of us!!! So honored to be able to speak to you on the phone! Thank you for everything! :)” (@Aly_Raisman on 1 August 2012).

On the same day, Alexandra Raisman replied to a *tweet* of the American singer Lady Gaga: “*Thank you @ladygaga I am glad you watched us! We listen to your music everyday here in London! You are so awesome!!*” (@Aly_Raisman on 1 August 2012). As well as Alexandra Raisman, the American swimmer Michael Phelps is very dedicated to answer every congratulatory message from other *Twitter* users. On 31 July, Phelps replies to the American snowboard champion Shaun White and *tweets*: “*Thanks buddy! RT @Shaun_White: Congrats @MichaelPhelps! Just watched him win his 19th medal. Hanging with this ... tmi.me/uwTmA*” (@MichaelPhelps on 31 July 2012). One of the most popular *tweets* that even gained media attention beyond *Twitter* involves Michael Phelps and the American president Barack Obama. On 1 August, the president stated: “*Congrats to Michael Phelps for breaking the all- time Olympic medal record. You've made your country proud. - bo*” (@BarackObama on 1 August 2012). Just a few hours later, Phelps replied to Obama: “*Thank you Mr. President!! It's an honor representing the #USA !! The best country in the world!! RT @BarackObama: ... tmi.me/ux7k2*” (@MichaelPhelps on 1 August 2012).

The *Twitter*-conversation between the athlete and Obama gained such attention that several online news reported about the happening. On CBS News, an article reported about several interactions between the president and American athletes at the Olympic Games and states that Obama “had praise for all the American athletes competing in London and their athletic ability” (Caldwell 2012). Another article on ABC News also reported on the issue and highlighted the fact that Obama's *tweet* was “signed '-bo' to denote it was him and not a member of his reelection campaign” (Stableford 2012). The conversation between the American president and Olympic swimmer illustrates the impact of *Twitter* in several dimensions. Firstly, it displays the involvement of people in the online social network from a broad range of social status, positions and occupations. Furthermore, it is assumed that famous people communicate among each other on *Twitter* with the aim to make the

conversation visible and public. In the context of Obama, public congratulations towards athletes on the social online network are intended to generate publicity and strengthen aspects of national identity. On the other hand, it could be shown that public conversations among celebrities on *Twitter* have an impact on the media coverage. In view of the huge media coverage about events on the microblogging service, it is assumed that several media networks consider *Twitter* as such an important medium that it appears more and more on their agenda. While Michael Phelps and president Obama are able to gain free publicity, the media is provided with the framework for a potential news story. The particular conversation turns out to be a win- win – situation for all three involved parties; the athlete, the president and the external media production company. In another example, Michael Phelps replies to a user who intentionally highlights the fact to be just a fan and no celebrity: “*Thanks!! RT @schwab55: @MichaelPhelps I'm not a celebrity, but good work man!*” (@MichaelPhelps on 2 August 2012). Although a huge amount of such replies just consist of a few words by the American swimmer, his ambition to reply to every congratulation message on his *Twitter* profile distinct him from most of the other athletes.

6.4. Fan – communication

As outlined in chapter 4.4 and with regard to the Olympic Games 2012 in London, the framework of interaction between athletes and fans is considered to be one of the most important and unique features of *Twitter*. The intensity and frequency of *tweets* with the aim to appeal fans turned out to be quite diverse. Most of the statements in this category involve words of thanks and support. In this context, some athletes also included evaluations of the own performance or even apologies. On 2 August, tennis player Caroline Wozniacki *tweets*: “*Thank you for all the support! Serena was too strong today! Next time!*” (@CaroWozniacki on 2 August). In a statement of Malaysian athlete Lee Chong Wei, the *tweet* also refers to the defeat in the final competition: “*@Yahoo_MY thank you*

everyone I'm sorry I could not get gold" (@Lee_C_Wei on 5 August 2012). In a *tweet* from Ryan Lochte, the athlete highlights the importance of his fans for his own motivation and states: *"I have THE BEST fans. Thank u guys for all the support. It's one of the reason I keep going!"* (@ryanlochte on 29 July). English diver Tom Daley combines his words of thanks to the fans with providing information about his *follower* statistics on *Twitter*: *"1 million followers :) Thank you so much everyone :) love you all xx"* (@TomDaley1994 on 3 August).

As the most discussed athlete of the games, Usain Bolt also intensively addressed to his fans to thank them for their support. On 5 August, he *tweets*: *"Thanks to all the fans for supporting and believing. You have been a part of the journey.. 'To the World Me Say'"* (@usainbolt on 5 August 2012). After his win of the 200m finals, Bolt again refers to his fan community and states: *"Thanks to all my real fans and people who believe in me. I am now a living legend that's for sure"* (Twitter on 9 August). An additional approach of the Jamaican athlete concerning his ambitions towards fan- communication refers to the use of pictures. On 27 July, Bolt *tweets* *"Heading to the opening ceremony had to stop for a pic with the fans say.ly/aTC3R36"* (@usainbolt on 27 July) showing him in front of a enthusiastic crowd of people. In another picture that appeared on Bolt's *Twitter* account, the athlete is shown signing pictures and giving autographs to a bunch of young fans. His comment on the picture includes the words *"Always about the fans ... instagr.am/p/OZjDOWlcX1/"* (@usainbolt on 16 August). Like Usain Bolt, the American artistic gymnast Alexandra Raisman used an illustration to highlight her affiliation to the fans. A picture from 17 August shows the athlete sitting behind a table and receiving a bouquet of flowers from a young girl. Raisman comments on the picture by stating: *"Endless love and support.... Thank you instagr.am/p/Ob4NA-PuZD/"* (@Aly_Raisman on 17 August). Although there was found to be less fan- communication by the athletes than expected, one incident can be traced back to the concept of parasocial and social orbits explained in chapter 4. During his Olympic competitions, American swimmer Ryan Lochte

initiated the opportunity to meet him in London and *tweets*: “*I'm going to invite 1 fan who is in London to an event on Aug 7 check out my agent's twitter @eswright or my Facebook later to get info*” (@ryanlochte on 5 August 2012).

In addition, his website also markets on the meeting and states that his team is “hosting a very special event that Ryan Lochte will be part of. He is going to invite 1 lucky fan to attend the event. In order to be considered please send an email to us at info@wrighteas.com with a message consisting of 11 sentences or less stating why you are Lochte Nation's biggest fan” (ryanlochte.com 2012). Furthermore, the website points out that “the fan who is chosen to attend the event must be willing to have their email published on Ryan Lochte’s website and allow their image to be used on ryanlochte.com and social media” (ryanlochte.com 2012). With reference to the theoretical framework of interactions between fans and athletes in chapter 4, the *tweet* by Lochte can be considered as an aspect of *invitational uses*.

In fact, the statement marks the crucial connection between the parasocial orbit of *Twitter* and the social orbit of actual face- to face communication. Just a couple of days later, the American swimmer came up with another special event that enables his fans to meet him. On 11 August, he writes: “*LOCHTE Nation! If I hit 1 million followers b4 I land on US soil tomorrow I'll pick a random follower to fly out for a photo and lunch RETWEET*” (@ryanlochte on 11 August 2012). In both cases, the athlete uses the context of fan meetings to improve his influential appearance on *Twitter* and generate publicity. Based on the announcement that during both events photos would be taken and published, the purpose and context of these meetings is considered to be a fruitful social media publicity strategy. In this context, *Twitter* functions as a medium to extend the public awareness of the athlete behind the background of a fan meeting.

6.5. Corporate communication

In recent years, social media networks turned out to be an increasingly lucrative platform for advertising and public relation events. In this context, a common strategy is to use popular personalities as testimonial to market certain products or services. In view of the huge dimensions of the Olympic Games in the media, the following section will examine in which way athletes used patterns of corporate communication on *Twitter*. In order to evaluate the particular *tweets*, this section will refer to the previously mentioned IOC social media, blogging and internet guidelines. In chapter 8 of this document, the International Olympic Committee developed the following guidelines about advertising and sponsorship during the Olympic Games:

Participants and other accredited persons are not permitted to promote any brand, product or service within a posting, blog or tweet or otherwise on any social media platforms or on any websites. Participants and other accredited persons must not enter into any exclusive commercial agreement with any company with respect to their postings, blogs or tweets on any social media platforms or on any websites, unless they have obtained the prior written approval of their relevant NOC. Sponsorship around any Olympic content (including, without limitation, any features, results and still pictures) is not permitted, unless authorised by the IOC. In accordance with Rule 40 (formerly 41) of the Olympic Charter, no competitor, coach, or official who participates in the Olympic Games may allow his person, name, picture or sports performances to be used for advertising purposes except as permitted by the IOC Executive Board. (IOC Social Media, Blogging and Internet Guidelines 2011)

In response to the IOC guidelines, “members of the American athletics team have launched a protest against strict corporate sponsorship rules which prevent competitors promoting non- official brands during the Olympic Games” (Shergold 2012). Several athletes spoke out against 'Rule 40' of the above guidelines which forbids them to promote their sponsor who pays for most of their equipment and training facilities concerning the Olympic

competitions. The decisions of the IOC is based on the intention “to protect the exclusivity of companies such as Adidas, McDonalds and BMW, who have paid more than £609m towards the Games, and say there would be no Olympics without big-money sponsors” (Shergold 2012). The list of partners for the Olympic Games 2012 in London can be found on the official website¹. Despite the strict guidelines of the International Olympic Committee, several athletes used *Twitter* as a platform for advertising and corporate communication. On 5 August, American athlete Ryan Lochte refers to the company Gillette and tweets: “Thanks to @Gillette for everything. One of the best sponsors I could have ever had and the best razor in the world” (@ryanlochte on 5 August). Two day later, the athlete uploaded a picture of a personal razor by the company and states: “U gotta hand it to @Gillette for getting me my own personally gold plated and diamond encrusted razor. #jeah.pic.twitter.com/dYxcq54k” (@ryanlochte on 7 August). In another example, Usain Bolt posted a picture of his shoes and commented: “Ppl u av been asking... Here are Puma spikes that gave us Gold” (@usainbolt on 16 August 2012). Due to the fact that the Olympic Games 2012 officially ended on 12 August, this *tweet* did not infringe the guidelines of the IOC.

Nevertheless, the picture and reference to Bolt's sponsor Puma can be considered as evidence for patterns of corporate communication on *Twitter*. Another example of *tweets* concerning corporate communication on *Twitter* within the timespan of the Olympic Games can be traced back to 16 August. On this particular day, the Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt posted another picture of himself in which he is drinking from a bottle. In his *tweet*, Bolt reveals the company's name and states: “Gatorade always does the trick after a training session” (@usainbolt on 16 August 2012). On 2 August, the athlete posted another picture of a bottle of the company Gatorade which he placed next to a particular PlayStation game titled “Call of Duty – Modern Warfare 3” and wrote: “Cod WM3 time

1 <http://www.london2012.com/about-us/the-people-delivering-the-games/olympic-partners/> [accessed 22 November 2012]

instagr.am/p/N04BZbocd_/” (@usainbolt on 2 August 2012). Based on the reoccurrence of Gatorade in his *tweets*, it is assumed that Usain Bolt intentionally posted and prepared these pictures in order to market the company's products. In the context of corporate communication, Michael Phelps is another example for athletes who followed the IOC guidelines during the Olympics but started to market regular sponsors soon after the games. On 17 August, the smiling American swimmer can be seen in front of a huge advertising poster for breakfast cereals of the brand Wheaties. In this *tweet*, Phelps wrote: “*Pretty cool to be on the @wheaties box for the second time!*” *super pumped!! Check out the box!! lockerz.com/s/235481790*” (@MichaelPhelps on 17 August 2012). On the same day, the athlete publishes a picture of his new advertising project and *tweets*: “*Cool new #lv ad!! Check it out!!lockerz.com/s/235602702*” (@MichaelPhelps on 17 August 2012). The fact that Michael Phelps did not post any content of corporate communication during the Olympic Games but only soon afterwards, can be traced back to the acceptance of the IOC guidelines, and this represents the majority of the competing athletes. Despite some exceptions, most of the athletes followed the social media policy of the International Olympic Committee in order to avoid restrictive consequences.

6.6. Private disclosures

The following section examines the extent to which the analysed athletes revealed private information on the social online network. In this context, the athletes are considered as celebrities which shall be defined as an “ever-changing performative practice” that involves “ongoing maintenance of a fan base, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona” (Marwick 2011: 140). As already indicated above in section 3.3., Marwick suggests that “celebrity practice involves presenting a seemingly authentic, intimate image of self while meeting fan expectations and maintaining important relationships” (Marwick 2011: 140).

Furthermore, it is suggested that celebrities who engage with fans instead of just publishing publicity information are regarded as more authentic. The findings of this category suggest that most of the athletes used pictures or statements about family members as the prevailing tactic to generate a sense of intimacy on *Twitter*. On 6 August, Tom Daley posted a picture of his grandparents and *tweets*: “*ME with my grandma and granddad :) instagr.am/p/N-n5YMr-g9/*” (@TomDaley1994 on 6 August 2012). Some athletes like Usain Bolt also referred to their parents but did not post any accompanying pictures on their profiles. On 9 August, Bolt states: “*To my mom and dad you all made this possible .. Infinite love for u both*” (@usainbolt on 9 August 2012). On the same day, the Jamaican sprinter also *tweets* “*I want to thank GOD for everything he as done for me cause without him none of this wouldn't be possible.*” (@usainbolt on 9 August 2012) and reveals his stance towards religious beliefs. Another *tweet* that included family members of the athletes was posted on 5 August by Michael Phelps.

His statement “*Taylor and I hanging out today!! lockerz.com/s/231520411*” (@MichaelPhelps on 5 August 2012) shows a picture of the American athlete and his daughter. The young girl is holding an Olympic medal of the athlete and both family members are smiling into the camera. This private moment of the family is a significant example for performed intimacy which is considered to be an “illusion of backstage” (Marwick 2011: 140) to strengthen the fan's feelings of affiliation towards the athlete. In a picture of 15 people who are standing in front of the American national flag, the swimmer Ryan Lochte also refers to his family and *tweets*: “*Being with my family is the best part of my life. Today I got to kick back and have fun with the people I love most pic.twitter.com/q6UrnaZk*” (@ryanlochte on 4 August 2012). In his retrospective evaluation of the Olympic Games, the athlete states: *Out of everything that happened these Olympics. My favorite was having my family here to support me. Unconditional love.#Jeah*” (@ryanlochte on 12 August 2012). The American basketball player Candace Parker announced the visit of her family on 29 July, “*Headed to practice. Then my Loves*

*get in later super hyped!!!! Can't wait for family time.... @SheldenWilliams and @princesslailaa '*muah*' (@Candace_Parker on 29 July 2012) and one day later posted a picture with two of her family members stating: "My LOVES made it to London! *heaven* instagr.am/p/Nrm7y4u31D/" (@Candace_Parker on 30 July 2012). In addition to *Twitter* content and references about family members, the athlete also posted a picture of herself at a very young age. The illustration looks like an old portrait from a family album and is commented with the words: "lockerz.com/s/235301945 #TBT Me before a daddy/daughter date with @LarryParker43 My mom kept me looking ... m.tmi.me/vuxha" (@Candace_Parker on 17 August 2012). Although private disclosures on *Twitter* only make up 1,52 % of the analysed data, some of the findings reveal significant attempts to generate aspects of performed intimacy. In this context, the depiction of family members has been revealed as the prevailing means to disclose private affairs in order to generate or strengthen the fan's affiliation towards an athlete.*

6.7. National Identity

An additional aspect of the way *Twitter* was used during the Olympic Games refers to the fact that a lot of athletes communicated a sense of national identity. As the Olympics is a sporting event where a large number of different nationalities participate and compete against each other, some athletes used *Twitter* to express their affiliation to the particular home country. Especially the Olympic ceremony plays a crucial role concerning the representation and constitution of discourses around national identity. Theorists of Olympic studies consider the games as "key sites in the discursive construction of nation and their ceremonies as major representations that constitute discourses of national identity" (Traganou 2010: 237).

In this context, Stuart Hall (1992) developed the term of 'narrative of nation' which refers to “a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals which stand for or represent the shared experiences, sorrows, triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation” (Stuart Hall 1992, cited in Traganou 2010: 237). On the day of the Olympic ceremony, Usain Bolt *tweets* “*Jamaica Jamaica*” (@usainbolt on 27 July 2012) and attached a picture showing him with the Jamaican national flag walking in front of his team mates. A couple of days later, Bolt refers again to his home country and *tweets*: “*To Jamaica the land of birth... Greatest country ever... it's a greatest joy to represent the people of my home land*” (@usainbolt on 9 August 2012).

With reference to Stuart Hall's 'narrative of nation', the national flag at the Olympic ceremony is considered to be one of the most popular and important symbols to represent shared experiences and meanings of a nation. In this context, the representation of the Olympic Games itself is characterized by a huge impact of symbols, rituals and experiences. Among others, the five Olympic rings, emblems, flags, medals or anthems all represent a set of different meanings and were developed to constitute a range of shared experiences. Another example for the flag as a symbol to represent senses of national identity was expressed by the America basketball player LeBron James who posted a picture showing him with the American flag after the final game and the words: “*Love my country!! #USA #GOLD*” (@KingJames on 12 August 2012). A different approach towards the representation of national identity on *Twitter* was followed by Michael Phelps. As already mentioned in the section about *Twitter*- communication, on 1 August, the American swimmer replies to the congratulations of president Barack Obama and exultantly refers to his country by stating: “*Thank you Mr. President!! It's an honor representing the #USA !! The best country in the world!! RT @BarackObama: ... tmi.me/ux7k2*” (@MichaelPhelps on 1 August 2012). In view of the inter-state competitions during the Olympics, the winning of as many disciplines as possible is considered to be “a catalyst for national pride” (Dzankic 2012).

In this regard, the sporting event reinforces several aspects on an international level: “1) The differentiation of a certain country's identity from other competitors, and 2) the unity of community internally, which is achieved through the symbols of the state; 3) the sense of national success at the international arena, which is domestically seen as a trade- off for poor political and economic performance” (Dzankic 2012).

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Numbers and figures about the use of *Twitter* during the competitions highlight the impact of social online networks and constitute the Olympics as the most connected games so far. In this context, the microblogging service *Twitter* turned out to be the most recognized and discussed platform in the field of social media. Based on the analysis of chapter six, it is credible to assert that the online network has a significant impact on the organisation, competing athletes and media coverage of the Olympic Games 2012 in London. The research revealed how *Twitter* took influence on the regulative framework, progress and even decisions about the participation of athletes made by the International Olympic Committee. In this context, a *Twitter* analysis about communication patterns of selected athletes marked the focal point of the research.

The findings of a content analysis revealed that patterns of self-presentation gained the most recognition from athletes during the Olympic Games 2012 in London. In this regard, the element of pictures could be examined further as an integral part of *tweets* posted by the analysed sample. Although the scope of internal communication with other users of the social online network turned out to be dependent on the ambition of a particular athlete, the findings illustrate some serious efforts to come to contact with other athletes, celebrities or members of *Twitter*. Several studies about the use of *Twitter* by famous athletes or celebrities have shown that the platform enables fans to experience actual social interaction with their idols. In this context, the social online network can be utilized to break through the virtual space of a parasocial orbit (Kassing and Sanderson 2012) and facilitate the possibility of face-to-face communication. Despite the fact that most athletes in this research study predominantly used *Twitter* to express their appreciation for the fan's support, the microblogging service disclosed attempts to overcome the physical separation of virtuality between athletes and fans.

The analysed *tweets* of American swimmer Ryan Lochte inhere an example of actual social interaction that derived from *Twitter* during the Olympic Games 2012 in London. In this context, the online social network provides a bridging function between fans and athletes. Nevertheless, such *tweets* remain an exception and displays the rare conditions for fans to meet a popular athlete. The reasons for the lack of parasocial communication patterns during the Olympic Games can be referred to the exceptional framework conditions of the event. On the one hand, the regulative framework of the IOC illustrated the importance for athletes to adjust their communicational behaviour at all levels, including extensive fan-communication. On the other hand, the Olympic Games represent by far the most important competition for an athlete and requires an unconditional focus on the athletic aspect of the event. Due to the importance of the Olympic Games, most of the athletes did not pay close attention to potential aspects of parasocial communication with their fans. In order to verify these assumptions, it is be necessary to compare the findings of this research with similar studies in the future that are conducted regardless of the Olympic Games.

In recent years, social online networks have turned out to be a suitable platform for corporate communication patterns with the aim of addressing promotional content to various stakeholders in the public. Despite the numerous opportunities of *Twitter* to communicate such content, the Olympics Games 2012 in London represented “unnatural conditions” for purposes of corporate communication. Due to restrictive policies of the International Olympic Committee, the competing athletes were constrained to use *Twitter* in a limited frame. The publication of several guidelines (IOC 2011) aimed to regulate the athlete's communication on *Twitter* in order to avoid additional advertising besides the official sponsors of the Olympics. The IOC's decision to grant official sponsors the predominant publicity in the media resulted in discussions about the restriction of communication patterns on *Twitter*. Although several athletes disagreed with those policies, the research findings could not identify major efforts to bypass the restrictions.

In fact, the acceptance of the IOC's regulations suggest several implications about corporate communication on *Twitter* during the Olympic Games. In general, the decision of the IOC to publish such regulations not only shows the economic impact of sponsors on the Olympics but also how the committee considered the impact of *Twitter* on the games. Apparently, the social online network has become such a powerful platform that certain organizational structures had to find a way to stem the potential influence of *Twitter* on the running of the competitions. In view of the financial input of sponsors during the event, the research findings of this study implicate that athletes during the Olympic Games 2012 in London exercised self-restriction as agreed. Due to the dependence of athletes on contracts with sponsors who finance equipment and training facilities, they are less likely to publish content of corporate communication that could jeopardize their participation in the competitions. On the other hand, most of the athletes analysed have profitable contracts with major sponsors and are not forced in any way to represent a certain company during the Olympic Games. In fact, the analysed sample represents an example of athletes who receive enough financial support - detached from the Olympic Games - to be able to interrupt their functioning as a testimonial during the time of such an event.

While one in this field could argue that such restrictions are threatening the anarchic framework of the whole internet and compromise the freedom of speech, the following discussion intends to debilitate those conjectures and provide further implications about the use of *Twitter* by athletes. The conclusions about the IOC's social media guidelines and consequences on patterns of corporate communication by athletes displayed their dependence and self- restrictive practice during the Olympic Games 2012 in London. Considering the dismissal of the Greek triple jumper Voula-Papachristou after her racist *tweet* (Faulkner and McDermott 2012), it is hardly surprising that the findings of this study could not reveal substantial indications concerning the disclosure of private or even scandalous content on *Twitter* during the analysed timeframe.

With regard to the dependence on sponsoring contracts, most of the athletes who *tweeted* content that was considered as private, tend to present themselves as paragons of a family man. As already mentioned, it is assumed that athletes are intrinsically coerced to adjust their communication patterns on *Twitter* due to their contractual agreements and framework of policies by the International Olympic Committee. With reference to Foucault, the online social network inheres significant characteristics of the panopticon, outlined in section 3.5. Due to the regulative framework of the IOC, the athletes are trapped in a constant feeling of observation which results in self-regulative behaviour. Based on the Foucauldian perspective, the power of *Twitter* is characterized by a complete dominance about the athletes without any need to remind them of. In addition to this theoretical approach of power within the online social network, the dismissal of triple jumper Papachristou illustrated that the regulative framework around *Twitter* actually worked. The consequential sanctions against the Greek athlete strengthened the efforts of other athletes to adjust their communicational behaviour according to the regulations of the IOC.

Although the disclosure of intimate details plays a crucial role in the field of tabloid journalism, the findings reveal that athletes did not use the *Twitter* platform to present principal content concerning personal affairs. In this context, the analysis could also disarm Kassing and Sanderson's argument of hypermasculinity. Although *Twitter* provides a suitable communication framework for the presence of hypermasculinity, there were no evidences found that could be referred to the (re)production of masculinity. With reference to Kassing and Sanderson's concept of maladaptive parasocial interaction, the relation between fans and athletes on *Twitter* could not reveal any signs of aggressive or harsh criticism towards the athletes. In fact, the analysis could show that all athletes used *Twitter* in order to maintain a harmonic communication practice with their fans. The linkage of athletes to various stakeholders and particular policies during the Olympic Games resulted in self-restriction and responsible behaviour towards the divulgement of certain insights in

order to ensure a career as an athlete. Nevertheless, the communicative framework of *Twitter* also enables the disclosure of insights to contribute positive effects to the Olympics. Considering the investigative potential of the network to reveal cases of doping or other misleading offences, *Twitter* inheres the potential to ensure the athletic character of the Olympic Games. Finally, it can be concluded that *Twitter* does not play a crucial role in the field of media production about the progress of particular competitions during the Olympic Games 2012 in London. For the following reasons, the social online network contributed relevant information about particular athletes which resulted in certain consequences during the games, the prevailing character of *Twitter* for the production of media coverage remains in the role of an assistance. On the one hand, the network does not incorporate relevant features to provide substantial coverage and on the other hand, it does not even insist on adopting these aspects. In view of ongoing modifications and increasing influence of social online networks in the field of sports media, it is assumed that *Twitter* will remain an influential communication platform in future years.

In general, the IOC's guidelines (IOC 2011) about the use of *Twitter* present a suitable framework of policies without jeopardizing the freedom of speech in the online environment. However these guidelines are going to change, the International Olympic Committee and other organizational structures concerning the Olympic Games have to balance economic interests and the best conditions for athletic competitions. The Olympic spirit of the games shall remain the first priority in order to warrant the event to be characterized by excitement, athletic equity and interculturally shared experiences. With reference to other sport events of a scale similar to the Olympics, the findings of this research attest *Twitter* to have had positive effects on the run of the games. The social online network enabled fans to gain and share more insights about their idols.

On the other hand, the analysis suggests *Twitter* to be a suitable tool for athletes who used the network with similar communication patterns without compromising the Olympic spirit of the games. Nevertheless, constant modifications of *Twitter* or other social online networks and their involvement in various sport events besides the Olympic Games, require further research in order to elaborate on the particular communication patterns of athletes.

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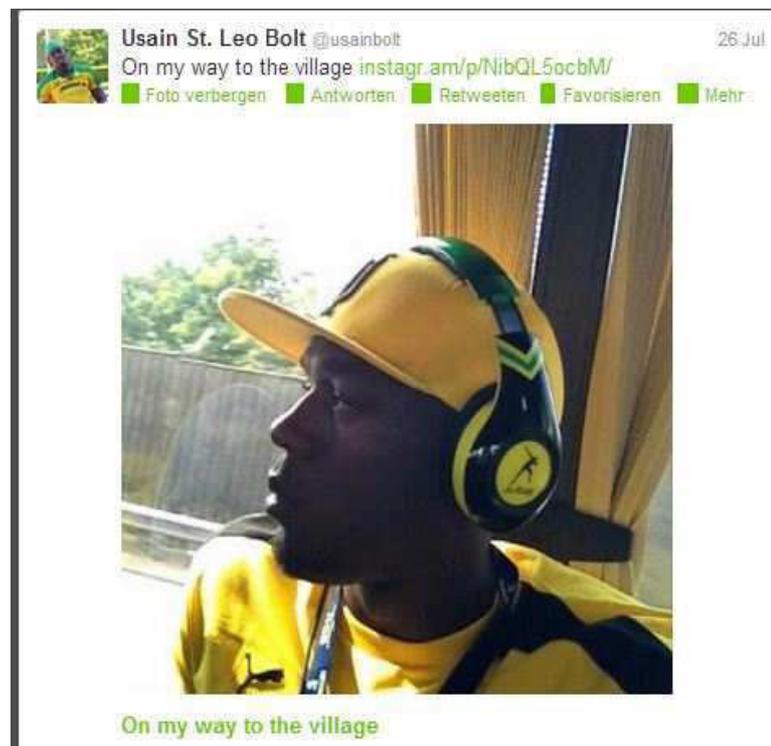
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III Appendices

Appendix A: List of Tweets cited in the research (Sorted by date in ascending order)

1)



2)

Usain St. Leo Bolt @usainbolt 27 Jul
Jamaica Jamaica say.ly/rwn3R97
Foto verbergen Antworten Retweeten Favorisieren Mehr



© 2012 Usain Bolt whosay

Usain Bolt's photo "Jamaica Jamaica"
Jamaica Jamaica

1.156 RETWEETS 309 FAVORITES

This tweet features a photograph of Usain Bolt in a yellow and black tracksuit, running while holding the Jamaican flag. The photo is watermarked with 'whosay' and '© 2012 Usain Bolt'. The tweet text includes the user's name, handle, date, and a link to the photo. Below the photo, there are statistics for retweets and favorites, along with a row of small profile pictures of users who interacted with the tweet.

3)

Usain St. Leo Bolt @usainbolt 27 Jul
Heading to the opening ceremony had to stop for a pic with the fans say.ly/aTC3R36
Foto verbergen Antworten Retweeten Favorisieren Mehr



© 2012 Usain Bolt whosay

Usain Bolt's photo "Heading to the opening ceremo..."
Von Usain St. Leo Bolt @usainbolt
Heading to the opening ceremony had to stop for a pic with the fans
WhoSay @WhoSay · Folgen

769 RETWEETS 161 FAVORITES

This tweet features a photograph of Usain Bolt in a yellow and black tracksuit, posing for a photo with a group of fans. The photo is watermarked with 'whosay' and '© 2012 Usain Bolt'. The tweet text includes the user's name, handle, date, and a link to the photo. Below the photo, there are statistics for retweets and favorites, along with a row of small profile pictures of users who interacted with the tweet.

4)



5)



6)



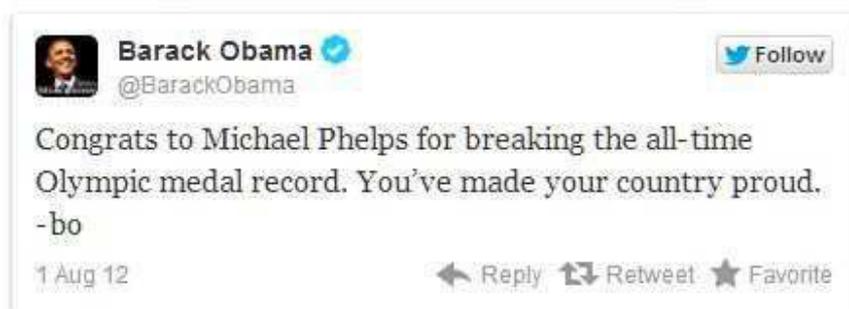
7)



8)



9)



10)



11)



12)



13)



14)

 **Usain St. Leo Bolt** @usainbolt 2 Aug
Cod WM3 time [instagr.am/p/N04BZbocd_/](https://www.instagram.com/p/N04BZbocd_/)
Foto verbergen Antworten Retweeten Favorisieren Mehr



Cod WM3 time

 Instagram @instagram · Folgen

1.341 RETWEETS	414 FAVORITES	
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15)

 **Michael Phelps** @MichaelPhelps 2 Aug
Thanks!! RT @schwab55: @MichaelPhelps I'm not a celebrity, but good work man!
Schließen Antworten Retweeten Favorisieren Mehr

87 RETWEETS	135 FAVORITES	
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5:40 AM - 2 Aug 12 · Details

16)



Caroline Wozniacki @CaroWozniacki 2 Aug
Thank you for all the support! Serena was too strong today! Next time!
Öffnen

17)



Tom Daley @TomDaley1994 3 Aug
1 million followers :) Thank you so much everyone :) love you all xx
Öffnen

18)



Ryan Lochte @ryanlochte 4 Aug
Being with my family is the best part of my life. Today I got to kick back and have fun with the people I love most
pic.twitter.com/q6UrnaZk
Foto verbergen Antworten Retweeten Favorisieren Mehr



19)



20)



21)



22)



23)

Michael Phelps @MichaelPhelps 5 Aug
Taylor and I hanging out today!! lockerz.com/s/231520411
Foto verbergen Antworten Retweeten Favorisieren Mehr



Lockerz Dieses Medium melden

3.110 RETWEETS 6.425 FAVORITES

8:49 AM - 5 Aug 12 - Details

24)

 **Candace Parker** @Candace_Parker 6 Aug
[@usainbolt](https://twitter.com/usainbolt) amazing show. Thanks for the picture at opening ceremonies as well! goodluck in 200 and relays.
pic.twitter.com/7vAskYBH
Foto verbergen Antworten Retweeten Favorisieren Mehr

25)

 **Tom Daley** @TomDaley1994 6 Aug

Me with my grandma and grandad :) [instagr.am/p/N-n5YMr-g9/](https://www.instagram.com/p/N-n5YMr-g9/)

[Foto verbergen](#) [Antworten](#) [Retweeten](#) [Favorisieren](#) [Mehr](#)



Me with my grandma and grandad :)

 Instagram @instagram · Folgen

The image shows a tweet from Tom Daley (@TomDaley1994) dated August 6th. The tweet features a photograph of Tom Daley standing between his grandmother and grandfather. They are all smiling and appear to be at a party or celebration, with Union Jack bunting visible in the background. The tweet includes a link to the Instagram post and several interaction options: 'Foto verbergen', 'Antworten', 'Retweeten', 'Favorisieren', and 'Mehr'. Below the photo, there is a caption 'Me with my grandma and grandad :)' and a link to the Instagram post.

26)

 **Candace Parker** @Candace_Parker Follow

@usainbolt amazing show. Thanks for the picture at opening ceremonies as well! goodluck in 200 and relays.
pic.twitter.com/7vAskYBH

Reply Retweet Favorite More



27 RETWEETS 17 FAVORITES

1:24 PM · 8 Aug.12 · Embed this Tweet Flag media

27)

 **Alexandra Raisman** @Aly_Raisman 7 Aug

@jessicaalba thank you so much!! You are one of my favorite actresses! :)

Gespräch zeigen

28)



29)



30)



31)



Usain St. Leo Bolt @usainbolt 9 Aug
To my mom and dad you all made this possible.. Infinite love for u both

Öffnen  Antworten  Retweeten  Favorisieren  Mehr

32)



Usain St. Leo Bolt @usainbolt 9 Aug
Thanks to all my real fans and people who believe in me. I am now a living legend that's for sure.

Öffnen

33)



Usain St. Leo Bolt @usainbolt 9 Aug
A lot a thanks goes out to the greatest coach ever. "Glen Mills"
Really blessed the day the heavenly Father brought you in my life

Öffnen

34)



Usain St. Leo Bolt @usainbolt 9 Aug
To Jamaica the land of birth... Greatest country ever.. it's a greatest joy to represent the people of my home land

Öffnen

35)

 **Usain St. Leo Bolt** @usainbolt 10 Aug

Talking to John McEnroe today for NBC say.ly/HGn3X4g



© 2012 WHOSAY.COM whosay

Usain Bolt's photo "Talking to John McEnroe today..."
Von Usain St. Leo Bolt @usainbolt

36)

 **Ryan Lochte** @ryanlochte 11 Aug

LOCHTE NATION! If I hit 1 million followers b4 I land on US soil tomorrow I'll pick a random follower to fly out for a photo & lunch
RETWEET

[Öffnen](#)  [Antworten](#)  [Retweeten](#)  [Favorisieren](#)  [Mehr](#)

37)

Alexandra Raisman @Aly_Raisman 12 Aug
Mihai & Sylvie the best coaches in the world!! Love them so much!
[instagr.am/p/00WyRBPuVq/](https://www.instagram.com/p/00WyRBPuVq/)
Hide photo Reply Retweet Favorite More



Instagram @instagram · Follow

222 RETWEETS 695 FAVORITES

1:16 PM · 12 Aug 12 · Details Flag media

38)

LeBron James @KingJames Follow

Love my country!! #USA #GOLD
[instagr.am/p/OPPyLMiTH-/](https://www.instagram.com/p/OPPyLMiTH-/)
Reply Retweet Favorite More



Instagram Flag this media

4,006 RETWEETS 1,717 FAVORITES

3:33 PM · 12 Aug 12 · Embed this Tweet

39)

 **Ryan Lochte** @ryanlochte 12 Aug
Out of everything that happened these Olympics. My favorite was having my family there to support me. Unconditional love. #Jeah
[Öffnen](#) [Antworten](#) [Retweeten](#) [Favorisieren](#) [Mehr](#)

40)

 **Usain St. Leo Bolt** @usainbolt 16 Aug
Ppl u av been asking... Here are Puma spikes that gave us Gold
[instagr.am/p/OZMCFJocY8/](https://www.instagram.com/p/OZMCFJocY8/)
[Foto verbergen](#) [Antworten](#) [Retweeten](#) [Favorisieren](#) [Mehr](#)



Ppl u av been asking... Here are Puma spikes that gave us Gold

 **Instagram** @instagram · Folgen

769 RETWEETS	433 FAVORITES	
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8:13 AM · 16-Aug-12 · Details Medium melden

41)

Usain St. Leo Bolt @usainbolt 16 Aug
Always about the fans... [instagr.am/p/OZjDQwlcX1/](https://www.instagram.com/p/OZjDQwlcX1/)
Foto verbergen Antworten Retweeten Favorisieren Mehr



Always about the fans...

Instagram @instagram · Folgen

583 RETWEETS 447 FAVORITES

A screenshot of a tweet from Usain Bolt. The tweet text is "Always about the fans..." followed by an Instagram link. Below the text are icons for "Foto verbergen", "Antworten", "Retweeten", "Favorisieren", and "Mehr". The main image shows Usain Bolt in a white shirt signing autographs for fans behind a metal barrier. Below the image is the caption "Always about the fans..." and the Instagram logo with the handle "@instagram · Folgen". At the bottom, it shows "583 RETWEETS" and "447 FAVORITES" with a row of profile pictures of users who interacted with the tweet.

42)

Usain St. Leo Bolt @usainbolt 16 Aug
Gatorade always does the trick after a training session
[instagr.am/p/OZLg-ulcYj/](https://www.instagram.com/p/OZLg-ulcYj/)
Foto verbergen Antworten Retweeten Favorisieren Mehr



Gatorade always does the trick after a training session

Instagram @instagram · Folgen

479 RETWEETS 270 FAVORITES

A screenshot of a tweet from Usain Bolt. The tweet text is "Gatorade always does the trick after a training session" followed by an Instagram link. Below the text are icons for "Foto verbergen", "Antworten", "Retweeten", "Favorisieren", and "Mehr". The main image shows Usain Bolt in a dark jacket drinking from a Gatorade bottle and pointing towards the camera. Below the image is the caption "Gatorade always does the trick after a training session" and the Instagram logo with the handle "@instagram · Folgen". At the bottom, it shows "479 RETWEETS" and "270 FAVORITES" with a row of profile pictures of users who interacted with the tweet.

43)

Alexandra Raisman @Aly_Raisman 17 Aug
Endless love and support... Thank you  [instagr.am/p/Ob4Na-PuZD/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Ob4Na-PuZD/)
 Hide photo  Reply  Retweet  Favorite  More



Endless love and support... Thank you 

 Instagram @instagram · Follow

250 RETWEETS 891 FAVORITES 

44)

Michael Phelps @MichaelPhelps 17 Aug
Cool new #lv ad!! Check it out!!! lockerz.com/s/235602702
 Foto verbergen  Antworten  Retweeten  Favorisieren  Mehr



The advertisement is a commercial for Louis Vuitton, featuring a woman and a man sitting on a sofa. The man is holding a small dog. The advertisement is for Louis Vuitton.

LOUIS VUITTON

 Lockerz Dieses Medium melden

988 RETWEETS 1.146 FAVORITES 

11:49 AM - 17 Aug 12 - Details

45)

Candace Parker @Candace_Parker 17 Aug
lockerz.com/s/235301945=TBT Me before a daddy/daughter date with @LarryParker43 My mom kept me looking ... m.tmi.me/vuxha
Hide photo Reply Retweet Favorite More



Lockerz Flag this media

8 RETWEETS 12 FAVORITES

1:05 AM - 17 Aug 12 Details

46)

Michael Phelps @MichaelPhelps 17 Aug
Pretty cool to be on the @wheaties box for the second time! super pumped!! Check out the box!! lockerz.com/s/235481790
Foto verbergen Antworten Retweeten Favorisieren Mehr



Lockerz Dieses Medium melden

1.569 RETWEETS 2.311 FAVORITES

47)

 **Barack Obama** @BarackObama 29 Oct

Why are you voting for President Obama? Share your story:
OFA.BO/FtQB9t, pic.twitter.com/kwhNANA2

[Hide photo](#) [Reply](#) [Retweet](#) [Favorite](#) [More](#)

1,411 RETWEETS	747 FAVORITES	
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9:06 PM - 29 Oct 12 - [Details](#) [Flag media](#)