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Exploring ways in which social networkers contribute to online groups: A case study of one Facebook group's discussion of Australian broadcaster Channel 9 during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games
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Abstract

The advent of the Internet has allowed consumers more opportunities to communicate than ever before. The emergence of the Internet has decreased the gate-keeping role of the media in that Internet users can interact with media outlets and other users in real time. This study breaks ground in the analysis of media messages as one Facebook group is studied to uncover how Internet users virtually protested media outlets on social networking Web sites.

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Introduction

The World Wide Web has transformed the way in which media companies, sport organizations, and consumers interact. For example, the traditional mediated sport product was once confined within the boundaries of programming, formatting, audience interest, and contractual agreements (Mahan and McDaniel, 2006). Historically communication was typically one-way, disconnecting the consumer from the sport and media entities (Mahan and McDaniel, 2006). The emergence of the 'Internet era' however has allowed sport organizations and consumers to bypass the traditional 'gate-keeping' role the mass media once had (Arsenault and Castells, 2008; Mahan and McDaniel, 2006). In addition, the recent advent of social networking sites (SNSs) has provided a new interactive platform for communication and continuous accessibility between the consumer and sport product (Meân, *et al.*, 2010).

The concept of SNSs has existed for many years. These sites have attracted millions of users (boyd and Ellison, 2007) and are often used for social activities (Bumgarner, 2007). A common element among most SNSs is the creation and maintenance of social networks; cyber communities which enable individuals with common interest to connect across time and space (boyd, 2006; boyd and Ellison, 2007; Bumgarner, 2007). To uncover how SNS users formed a community, this study analyzed a Facebook group titled *Eddie McGuire is ruining the 2010 Winter Olympics Coverage*, which received mainstream media coverage in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Quinn, 2010). This group was formed in a reaction to the perceived poor coverage of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games by Channel 9 in Australia. The aims of this study were to (a) explore how SNS users form and contribute to an online community in the absence of a 'gate-keeper'; and, (b) investigate the personal opinion comments posted by Facebook users on a group's discussion board, identify the root of the discussion, and analyze how members contribute and align with/protest against the group's beliefs.

Literature review

Media production

The establishment and survival of commercial television media enterprise is rooted in the financial support of advertisers and sponsors. As such, media companies seek to generate as large an audience as possible in order to 'on-sell' viewers to advertisers and sponsors. To capture the audience, the media embed multiple storylines with many stories into the sporting telecast to create interest for all viewers (Chalip, 1992). One such example is the 'multiple narratives' approach, characterized by the presentation of several different, concurrent stories within a single broadcast (Chalip, 1992); a characteristic prevalent within the current investigation. Through the inclusion of multiple storylines, a broadcast can be salient to and attract the greatest number of viewers.

The appeal of a storyline is dependant on the 'life' given to it by the producers and broadcasters. In a review of the storylines created by two British broadcasters (BBC and ITV) during the 1990 football World Cup, Tudor (1992) explained that once a story has been constructed, announcers and producers have "a considerable investment in its continued survival" [1]. Furthermore, for the sake of audience interest, the producers and directors must create coherent storylines that viewers could easily follow and ensure the announcers do not deviate from the frame or script and sustain them "for as long as possible" [2].

The creation of a storyline is an aspect of media production that was found to be prevalent in The Sports Network's (TSN) broadcasting of the Canada Cup of Soccer (CCS) (Silk, 1999). Silk explained that the main philosophical stance of the production team during the CCS was to create a storyline prior to each telecast and integrate it into each game. The producers attempted to create an exciting and entertaining broadcast, with the entertainment factor often thought to be the most important element in broadcasting this football tournament (Silk, 1999). In a more recent example, Schultz (2005) examined the media attention surrounding the catsuit worn by Serena Williams during the 2002 U.S. Open tennis tournament. The frame of much of the coverage surrounded "the visibility of her physique the outfit provided" [3].

Social networking sites

A social networking site is a "Web-based service which allows individuals to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system." [4] SNSs provide an online medium for communication between users who have a public connection with one another.

Since the advent of the first SNSs in the late 1990s, such as SixDegrees.com, LiveJournal, and BlackPlanet, there have been a plethora of SNSs created (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Some SNSs have been limited to and had success with non-English speaking countries (e.g., Hyves in The Netherlands) while others break all linguistic barriers and have a global reach (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). At present, one of the most popular and far reaching SNS is Facebook (Kushin and Kitchener, 2009). Facebook is a SNS that connects individuals and groups from all over the globe who are able to communicate with one another via public forums, instant conversations, and e-mail (Barnes, 2006). Facebook was launched in February 2004 (Bumgarner, 2007) as a Harvard University student-only SNS (Cassidy, 2006), and slowly expanded to other universities and colleges both in the United States and elsewhere (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Facebook now has over 800 million active users (Facebook, 2011), of whom half log in daily (Digital Buzz Blog, 2011; Facebook, 2011; Kissmetrics marketing blog, 2011).

In addition to increased sociability, the Internet and SNSs foster the connection between media and the sport fan via Internet-mediated communities (IMC). IMCs are "groups of people who share interests and, during some time, make use of the same Internet tools to exchange information with each other regarding shared interests" [5]. Some IMC platforms may include chat rooms and message boards to promote participatory prospects for fans in ways that traditional media cannot (Mahan and McDaniel, 2006). For example, the once popular radio call-in shows enabled fans to have a voice about pop culture topics; however this was limited by geography, show length and format. The internet circumvents this limitation and provides a global communication medium. Fans can now communicate with their favorite sporting entity, athlete, and/or other sport fans. Furthermore, as Booth (2010) highlights, this interactivity enables Internet and SNS users to simultaneously foster discussion and create meaning during their use on SNS in ways which were not possible five years ago. Accordingly, today's media has never been more "personalized, individualized, and made pleasurable to use" [6].

Although not new, there has been a recent surge in the volume of research analyzing the quantity and quality of information users post on SNSs. For example, Lack, *et al.* (2009) examined the use of social networking by undergraduate psychology students ($N=199$) and found that 62 percent had existing Facebook accounts. Of these, 73 percent were publically visible Facebook profiles (*i.e.*, online 'space' used to promote oneself). Furthermore, the authors found that 27 percent of all students profiles had "questionable" content publicly visible, such as photos of alcohol use, drug use, and overt sexuality. It appears the rise in popularity of SNSs is

mirrored by an increased prevalence of 'inappropriate' content (Lack, *et al.*, 2009). In another study, Bumgarner (2007) noted that SNSs operate as a cyber alternative to traditional social "gatherings" or activities (e.g., group meetings) and foster 'gossip' amongst its users, most of whom are between the ages of 18 and 24 years.

A group communication function within Facebook provides users with a new method of engaging in unedited debate. For example, fans from a wide geographical spread are able to organize, mobilize, and voice their support or displeasure with specific sporting or media entities via online discourse (Kushin and Kitchener, 2009). Furthermore, the absence of a "gate-keeper" provides individuals with the opportunity to post un-edited, user-generated content relating to social, political, or sporting issues. Meân, *et al.* (2010) further the discussion on social media by indicating that this medium has a more active participation among its users, which blurs "the traditional distinction between direct and indirect consumption" [7].

In their study on political discussion on the Facebook group's function, Kushin and Kitchener (2009) found that the majority of users participating in a Facebook group's discussion aligned with the group. The Facebook group under examination discussed "U.S. policies regarding torture and was formed in response and opposition to the U.S. Military Commission Act passed by Congress in October 2006" [8]. They found that 73 percent of all users aligned with the group and seven of the top-10 posters also supported the group's premise. Furthermore, it was found that users from many countries participated in the online discussion of torture, which supported Kushin and Kitchener's argument that "chat and forum participation enhances the sources of information available both to the participants and to their off-line communities" [9]. Thus, users of this Facebook group were subject to a wide variety of discussion.

Theoretical framework

A study focusing on how users utilized a Facebook group has its theoretical underpinnings in framing. Framing is a "process by which a communication source constructed and defined a social or political issue for its audience" [10]. Framing studies seek to uncover how people or institutions, such as the media, attempt to influence others through a "process of culling a few elements of a perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" [11]. Therefore, Internet users employ Gitlin's (1980) tri-classification of framing processes when posting on a Web site. First, users choose topics (selection) of interest. Second, they discuss these topics (emphasis), and last, users determine what is not discussed on Internet Web sites (exclusion). For example, Ward and Ostrom (2006) analyzed 40 Web sites devoted to negative word of mouth (NWOM), which were created to enable consumers to post public complaints about companies, such as Wal-Mart and Best Buy. They found that complaint sites were overwhelmingly created as costumers were frustrated by the treatment they received from one of the 40 companies and the majority of posts affirmed the crux of the sites' establishment.

In their review of complaints Web sites, Ward and Ostrom (2006) suggest that there are six characteristics of NWOM sites that consumers use to garner support for their grievances. Of these six, one is apt to this study; that is, consumers "encourage other consumers to perceive themselves as a group, united in their opposition" [12]. Further, Internet users utilize complaint sites in an attempt to create a community of dissatisfaction, where other users will also post (generally) like-minded ideas fostering discussion and the creation of a mob mentality (Kushin and Kitchener, 2009).

A recent example of this cyber group forum was seen during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. The Winter Olympics is a quadrennial event in which athletes from around the globe compete in a variety of sports. This global event was televised in Australia by the free to air broadcaster Channel 9. The evening program was hosted by Australian television personality and former Channel 9 CEO Eddie McGuire. During the coverage, a Facebook group titled *Eddie McGuire is ruining the 2010 Winter Olympics Coverage* was created. The backbone of this group was a common dissatisfaction of the commenting and interviewing style of Eddie McGuire and the general broadcast coverage of the games provided by Channel 9.

Research aims

The aim of this study was to explore the protest framing comments posted by Facebook users on a group's discussion board. This was guided by the following research questions:

1. What impact does the absence of a 'gate-keeper' have on the content and direction of the user's comments?
2. What are the common, founding discussion points driving the group's existence?
3. How do members contribute to the 'roll-over' of discussions?

Methodology

A fundamental research method of cultural anthropology is ethnography. This is a strategy of inquiry that seeks to answer central questions concerning the ways of life of living human beings.

The goal is to capture the meaning of a phenomenon via the expression and view of participants acting and responding in a natural environment, and to re-tell the credible, rigorous and authentic story within context of individual's reality (Creswell, 2009; Fetterman, 2010).

Traditionally, such stories have been captured via verbal and written responses depicted through interviews, common media sources, and journals (Creswell, 2009). Recently however, this method has evolved in sequence with technology developments to include electronic sources of interactive communication (*i.e.*, social networking sites). From a researches perspective, SNSs provide "vast stores of multimedia material regarding even the most marginal social movements or groups" [13], providing the ethnographer with wealth of opportunity to observe the communication of and interactions between individuals within a natural 'digital' field setting (Murthy, 2008).

This study used this digital ethnography approach to analyse the social interactions and discourse within the Facebook group entitled *Eddie McGuire is ruining the 2010 Winter Olympics Coverage*. This group was formed in response to a common dissatisfaction of the coverage provided by Channel 9 in Australia of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games held in Vancouver, Canada, providing a digital platform for interactive communication between members to share and express ideas on a common interest.

To understand these digital interactions, a textual analysis of the Facebook group's comments was conducted. Textual analysis is a method of gathering and analyzing written information about how other human beings make sense of the world (McKee, 2003). This technique can be used to formulate educated guesses at the most likely interpretation that might be made from the discourse (McKee, 2003).

The analysis was conducted on all publically visible comments posted between 16 February and 9 March 2010. These were downloaded and saved on 9 March 2010. The data was collection on this date as it was one week following the conclusion of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, enabling members to contribute summary or concluding remarks regarding television coverage.

In total, 814 pages of comments within the Facebook group were used for analysis purposes. This included all primary posts (a discrete expression of a user's opinion that was made independent of hitherto comments) and secondary comments (comments made in relation to, or that added to, a primary post). Due to the public nature of Facebook with members able to post and delete their own comments, or leave the group (resulting in deletion of that former members comments), several comments may have been deleted before the data collection date. Therefore, only comments which were publically visible on the data collection date were analyzed.

Once collected, an initial analysis (using grounded theory) was conducted on 20 percent of the pages by three individual coders to identify and quantify the salient themes present within the data set. This satisfies the needs of textual analysis, which must incorporate "objectivity, system, and generality" [14] to maximize reliability and validity. This preliminary analysis netted 42 themes. To establish operational definitions, a round table discussion was held by the research team. As a result of this meeting, many themes were combined within more broad categories based on belongingness. This provided a manageable number ($N=17$) of themes (see [Table 1](#)). This process ensured that the efficiency of coding would be maximized whilst maintaining a high degree of representation. Any theme were a unanimous decision was not achieved was omitted from the analysis.

Following the compilation of these categories, the data set was coded by two of the authors. Each coder was provided with a half of the data set and was required to record the frequency of each theme. Only primary posts or secondary comments were included in the analysis. In addition, any comments that did not fit the definition of the theme, or were not related to the Winter Olympics Coverage, were excluded from the analysis.

To determine inter-coder reliability, 15 percent of the data was randomly selected and coded by the third researcher. The percentage of agreement was then determined using Cohen's (1960) Kappa. Inter-coder reliability exceeded 83 percent which indicates an acceptable level of reliability (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006). This suggests that the taxonomy and definitions of each theme used in the analysis were adequately defined and saturated the data of the Facebook group member's comments.

Following the completion of the coding process, the research team met once again to discuss representational value of the original 17 themes. This process was to ensure all themes and operational definitions provided an accurate snapshot of the dataset. As a result, all authors unanimously agreed on the value of the themes, and no alterations to operational definitions were made.

Table 1: Definitions and an example from the discourse of how each of the 17 themes was used for analysis purposes.

Theme	Definition	Description
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1	Non-expert	Comments directed toward the lack of content-knowledge or poor anchor 'skill'	"He [EM] is completely clueless about the winter sports."
2	Other offerings	Comments highlighting alternative viewing options (other than the Channel 9 broadcast) of the Winter Olympics	"Just watch Foxtel, then no Eddie or Mick."
3	Prejudice	Comments drawing attention to the discriminatory nature of the broadcasters remarks	"Bone the homophobic, sexist, ignorant cretin!!!"
4	Devil's advocate	An argument in opposition to the common beliefs of the groups	"Lighten the hell up. How many of you are still tuning in to just see what else you can reply to this Facebook page ...?"
5	Entertainment	Comments relating to the entertainment value of the broadcast	"Yes he cocks interviews up, but that's the fun in watching it."
6	Jokes	Jokes or sarcastic comment in relation to the broadcasting team or coverage	"What's black, white, and red all over? Eddie McGuire at the MCG on a Saturday."
7	Future viewing	Comments indicating the future viewing habits of the poster	"He [EM] is the very reason I don't watch it."
8	Other Facebook groups	Comments alerting members to other Facebook groups whether related or unrelated to the current group	"Join the Johnny Weir fan page and voice your embarrassment on behalf of Australia."
9	Lack of tolerance	Members describing their disgust, anger and/or unhappiness at the broadcast team and/or coverage	"I love watching the Winter Olympics but cannot stand Eddie as host."
10	Back peddle	Comments on broadcasting teams attempt to disassociate with broadcast	"Last night's attempt to take the edge of that nastiness was just an

		discourse	insult!"
11	Biased coverage	Commenting on the distribution of broadcast time given to all sports	"Why are they showing last night's men's skating AGAIN? I hate these repeats."
12	Negative focus	Broadcasters pessimistic nature and superficial comments (e.g., money or endorsements) relating to a performer or a performance	"Why does he [EM] keep talking about the money the athletes could/do earn? Who cares?"
13	Schedule (C9)	The relationship between the members expectations and actual coverage, and the appropriateness of the programme structure	"How can anyone justify this ridiculous programming? Kids can't watch during school or late at night ..."
14	Overplay Australian events	Comments on the emphasis given to Australian events and athletes compared to other sporting nations	"Hours of crap re-runs of Aussies coming 50th in cross country and doing crap luge runs ..."
15	History	Comments relating to previous Olympic coverage, events and/or athletes	"[Network] Sevens coverage was premium compared to the sh[**] offered by [Network] Nine this year!"
16	Contentment	Members expressing satisfaction with the broadcasting and programming	"Tough luck, there are many of us that utterly love the figure skating so I say play more!"
17	Australia Rules Football	The perceived Australian football culture within the broadcast coverage	"Channel 9 seems to think everything is the footy show ..."

Results

Quantitative results

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of each theme. In total 5,501 comments were coded within the constraints of the 17 defined themes. Of these, 3,669 (66.70 percent) were primary

posts and 1,832 (33.30 percent) were secondary comments, which are characterized through comments on another's comment. Overall, the most commonly occurring themes were non-expert (16.51 percent of the total dataset), biased coverage (14.80 percent), prejudice (13.07 percent), lack of tolerance (11.18 percent), other offerings (8.73 percent), and Australian Rules Football (7.31 percent). Cumulatively these six themes accounted for 71.59 percent of the total data set. Of the remaining 11 themes (28.41 percent), no theme alone was present on more than 5.44 percent, with the least occurring theme, history, only representing 0.82 percent of the data set. As Table 2 shows, there is a wide variation in the number of comments attributable to each of the 17 themes. In regards to research question 1, which queried whether the absence of a gate-keeper would impact how Facebook users, who joined the group, communicated with one another. As mentioned, there six main discussion topics that consumers discussed which received the bulk of all coded commentary.

The primary comments represent a group member's discrete expression of opinion independent of hitherto comments. When considering the primary posts alone, the six most commonly discussed themes were: Non-expert (17.88 percent), biased coverage (14.72 percent), prejudice (14.45 percent), lack of tolerance (12.40 percent), other offerings (7.36 percent), and Australian Rules Football (7.18 percent). A similar trend was observed in the secondary comments, with non-expert (13.76 percent) biased coverage (14.96 percent), prejudice (10.32 percent), lack of tolerance (8.73 percent), other offerings (11.46%), and Australian Rules Football (7.70 percent). This was to be expected as these comments revolve around the main discussion points presented within the associated primary comment.

Research question 2 aimed to uncover what would be the common discussion points of the Facebook group. As shown in the results, the top six discussed topics were: Non-expert, biased coverage, prejudice, lack of tolerance, other offerings, and Australian Rules Football. On a practical level, it is not surprising that consumers were utilizing an anti-Eddie McGuire and anti-Channel 9 Facebook group to indicate their unhappiness with the coverage of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. The top six discussed themes are outlined in detail in the following section with examples from the transcription sheets.

In regards to research question 3, which sought to uncover how group members contributed to discussions, it was found that approximately one-third of all coded comments were comments on another group member's posts. This finding indicates that users were both posting their opinions about Eddie McGuire and the coverage of the Olympic Games on Channel 9 and also discussing these posts with other group members. Furthermore, it was found that the top six discussed themes were also the most in regards to both primary posts and comments on the posts (described as secondary comments in this study). Thus, there was consistent usage of the top six themes by members of this Facebook group.

Table 2: Frequencies of the occurrence of the 17 identified themes.

	Theme	All posts		Primary posts		Secondary comments	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	Non-expert	908	16.51	656	17.88	252	13.76
2	Other offerings	480	8.73	270	7.36	210	11.46
3	Prejudice	719	13.07	530	14.45	189	10.32
4	Devil's advocate	158	2.87	56	1.53	102	5.57
5	Entertainment	16	0.29	12	0.33	4	0.22
6	Jokes	299	5.44	178	4.85	121	6.60
7	Future viewing	214	3.89	164	4.47	50	2.73
8	Other Facebook groups	143	2.60	106	2.89	37	2.02
9	Lack of tolerance	615	11.18	455	12.40	160	8.73
10	Back peddle	279	5.07	157	4.28	122	6.66
11	Biased coverage	814	14.80	540	14.72	274	14.96
12	Negative focus	109	1.98	77	2.10	32	1.75
13	Schedule (C9)	178	3.24	123	3.35	55	3.00

14	Overplay Australian events	60	1.09	40	1.09	20	1.09
15	History	45	0.82	27	0.74	18	0.98
16	Contentment	62	1.13	17	0.46	45	2.46
17	Australia Rules Football	402	7.31	261	7.18	141	7.70
	Total	5,501		3,669		1,832	

For analysis purposes, the six main themes will now be discussed in detail. For the preservation of the member's identity, pseudonyms will be used when presenting examples from the data.

Qualitative results

Non-expert

This theme encompassed comments relating to the presentation style, skill, and knowledge of the anchors (chiefly Eddie McGuire) used in Channel 9's television coverage. In large, comments of this nature were used to highlight the lack of understanding and poor explanations of sporting events covered during the broadcast. In addition, members also made comparisons to, or suggested the name of other 'expert' presenters who may have been more suitable for the role. For example:

[RB] "This man [Eddie McGuire] is an absolute pea brain ... most awkward interview in the world."

[FL] "This guy [Eddie McGuire] has no idea of interview technique or even basic methods of developing rapport."

[JK] "What does he [Eddie McGuire] know about winter sports? All the research in the world can't hide his ignorance."

[IH] "Phil Liggett [commentator for Alpine skiing events] what a legend. Pity he couldn't have been the man (to commentate the rest of the games)."

In the first two examples, the user's comment on the presenters interviewing style and proficiency during a dialogue with an Australian athlete, insinuating the presenter does not possess the skill necessary for an insightful interview. In the third, the user highlights the lack of context-specific expertise used within the coverage, and the poor explanation provided during the commentary of the sport, highlighting the irrelevance and/or lack of an insightful contribution to the broadcast. The final example shows the group discussing alternative sports personalities on the broadcast that would have been more suitable for the lead commentator role that Eddie McGuire.

Biased coverage

Biased coverage was characterized by comments which related to the distribution of broadcast time given to all sports. Many users commented on the over-representation of snowboarding and figure skating, and lack of variety shown within the schedule. In addition, these comments were typically associated with the perceived poor coverage of the Winter Olympics due to "ridiculous" scheduling of programs throughout the day. For example:

[AF] "This coverage is abominable. Every two years the world stops and watches the best athletes in the world take centre stage. Please let us watch!"

[ES] "Please can we have more actual winter Olympics and less commentary tripe! I waited all morning for the ice dancing which was finally on for about four minutes at midday."

[AD] "They showed the highlights to the games including our two gold medalists, but Dale Begg-Smith never got a look in [silver medal winner in Moguls]."

[NR] "Apparently silver isn't good enough for highlights and accolades according to Channel 9."

[NW] "How can they be happy that this broadcast is so inaccessible ... if you take on a property like this you owe it to the audience and the property itself to do it justice? There is no way that [Channel] 9 has done that."

This theme was used by the group members to voice their opinion of the poor and biased coverage of the winter Olympics by Channel 9. The group members stress their desire for more sports coverage, and how the scheduling of events makes the broadcast inaccessible for the major of the target audiences. Furthermore, the directorial direction is discussed, with athletes who were highlighted as not media friendly, being excluded from highlight packages and panel discussions.

Prejudice

The theme of prejudice analyzed Facebook users' opinion that Eddie McGuire and other Channel 9 interviewers exhibited prejudice and discrimination during discussions and comments on-air. Most of the posts under this theme were related to an event in which one of the presenters made insular remarks regarding a performer's attire and sexuality. In response, many users expressed disgust, sighting the homophobic and bigoted nature of these opinions. For example,

[HG] "Crass and vulgar, homophobic and bigoted, but I bet Channel 9 doesn't have the guts to sack him."

[MB] "Arrogant, over rated megalomaniac."

[KB] "Is anyone really surprised that Eddie McGuire stoops to making B#@!\$%!*t homophobic comments about someone who actually has some sort of talent, isn't that what people with no talent do?"

These examples highlight the users' dissatisfaction with the comments made by the presenter, mainly Eddie McGuire during the Channel 9 coverage. Many users expressed how such comments contributed to the feeling of embarrassment and shame that Channel 9's coverage brought to them as Australian viewers.

Lack of tolerance

This theme was defined as the disgust, anger and/or unhappiness at the broadcast team and/or coverage. The comments relating to this theme typically presented the members disgust and anger at the commentary style of Eddie McGuire, however they also voiced opinions relating to the coverage of the Olympic Games. The examples below highlight the lack of tolerance of the audience towards the broadcast coverage of the Olympic Games. For example,

[LS] "Eddie ruined my favourite moment of the games."

[TR] "I hate these two [Eddie McGuire and Mick Malloy, who is an Australian comedian] on the coverage"

[FA] "Give us a break from the red eyed boring interviews by Eddie everywhere."

[NK] "Disappointing to hear him doing the aerals and ski cross ... didn't let the expert skier get a word in for the ski cross."

[GS] "I am going to boycott the companies that sponsored the Channel 9 telecast ... It might make them think a little harder about who they give their money too next time."

These examples highlight the underlying anger with the commentary team and broadcast coverage of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. This theme was used by group members to showcase their anger and disgust with those involved with the coverage. Furthermore, the extent to which the broadcast has ruined their winter Olympics experience. The comments highlight that not only Eddie McGuire ruined the experience, but the manner in which the non-expert opinion was not enabled by the Channel 9 direction.

Other offerings

In response to the dissatisfaction of Channel 9's broadcast of the Winter Olympics, numerous users posted comments that made reference to alternative viewing options. In general, these posts highlighted and summarized the difference in program content and structure of different television networks (e.g., Foxtel, Australian subscription television provider) compared to Channel 9, usually in a positive light. The focus of these comments was usually directed at the different sports broadcasted, the schedule of events throughout the day and night, and the expertise and professionalism of the other presenters. For example,

[PM] "He [Eddie McGuire] is why I brought the Foxtel package!!"

[KL] "How about SBS, then we might actually hear about OTHER [original emphasis] countries instead of insular activities."

[MJ] "[I am] enjoying the great live coverage and full replays of whole events on Foxtel."

In these examples, the group members highlight the positive aspect of alternative options, and in doing this, were implicitly critical of Channel 9's broadcast. Interestingly, the nature of these comments appears to elicit the feeling that 'the grass is greener on the other side'. This can be seen in the response of other members who express a desire to have access to alternative channels. Some even go to the length of subscribing to pay TV, and post their satisfaction at the change. This highlights the strength of social media to influence consumer feeling and choice.

Australian Rules Football

Australian Rules football is one of the main football codes within Australia. From 2012, each Australian Football League (AFL) game will be broadcast live on television throughout Australia. To accompany the broadcast of games, several different panel shows relating to Australian Rules football are also broadcasted. During these shows commentators, some ex-players and coaches provide expert opinions and comments on the game in generally a light-hearted or comedic manner. Channel 9 broadcasts a weekly show about the AFL titled: *The Footy Show*. During analysis, reference to the AFL and these panel shows was apparent, with this theme defined as the perceived Australian football culture within the broadcast footage. For example,

[NC] "Has anyone told him [Eddie McGuire] this is not the footy show, but it's the Winter Olympics?"

[LP] "Because they are ignorant pricks, usually found in the footy dressing room."

[RB] "Please Channel 9 rid your commentary team of the Footy show types that focus on gutter controversy."

[OS] "Overall the problem is we have footy commentators commentating (sic) the Olympics."

[EB] "What do you expect? It's just the footy show on ice."

These examples highlight the underlying Australian football culture within the Olympics broadcast. Reference is made to the type of presenters that are used on the football panel shows, and it is believed this presentation format has been replicated, in a bad manner for the Olympic broadcast coverage. The group members highlight their disgust and anger at the perceived use of Australian football references and commentating style not appropriate for coverage of the Olympic Games.

Discussion

This study identified how one Facebook group's members harnessed the Internet to provide their opinion of the broadcasting of a global mega-event, the 2010 Winter Olympics. Further, results of this study confirmed the findings of Kushin and Kitchener (2009), who found that group members will align with the overall aim of the group; in this case, an overall displeasure with the manner Australian broadcaster Channel 9 telecasted the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. In addition, this study uncovered how social media Web sites enable consumers to interact with one another no matter where they are located, as these sites break geographic barriers.

As previously mentioned, the Internet has altered the ways in which the media, sports organizations, athletes, and consumers interact (Meân, *et al.*, 2010). The creation of SNSs has afforded Internet users with more opportunities to connect with other consumers. Further, SNSs enable Internet users to communicate with each other and provide their opinions about current popular culture topics. This study found that there were 17 themes within the discussion board of the Facebook group *Eddie McGuire is ruining the 2010 Winter Olympics Coverage*. Further, 15 of the themes were discussing negative aspects of the Channel 9 broadcasts. Only one theme, contentment, indicated satisfaction in the broadcasting of Channel 9.

The advent and proliferation of both the Internet and SNSs has created more opportunities for consumers to interact with businesses, sport organizations and athletes, and other consumers. As shown in this study, Facebook users harnessed the capabilities of the Internet to voice their opinions about the way in which Channel 9 broadcasted the 2010 Winter Olympic Games and the interviewing style of Eddie McGuire (Quinn, 2010). Further, users harnessed Facebook's capabilities to be social with other users, with the Facebook group in this study providing the platform for users to discuss their views and opinions of Channel 9's Olympic coverage. This study extends Ward and Ostrom's (2006) maxim that "consumer complaining is changing from a private to a public phenomenon" [15]. Moreover, the analyzed Facebook group was created by

users to facilitate protest framing of Channel 9's coverage of the 2010 Winter Olympics (Ward and Ostrom, 2006), which attracted more than 11,000 other users to join this group and generated 5,501 total comments.

This study analyzed the framing of discourse of one Facebook group's users, which found that individuals have a negative opinion of the 2010 Winter Olympics Games coverage that was broadcast on Channel 9. Ward and Ostrom (2006) suggested that consumers will encourage other consumers to view themselves as part of a NWOM community based on a common dissatisfaction with a company. In this study, members of the analyzed Facebook group highlighted a connection that most of the users shared, which was a general dissatisfaction in the reporting style of Channel 9 and its anchor host, Eddie McGuire. Overall, users typically framed their comments in a negative manner and other users suggested that a sense of community was building between members of this cyber-community.

Results of this study confirm and extend Bumgarner's (2007) findings that Facebook is predominately used for social interactions. In this study, there were 5,501 coded comments, of which approximately two-thirds were primary posts and the remainder was secondary comments. Thus, users of this Facebook group were voicing their opinions on Channel 9's coverage of the Olympics Games while also discussing or contributing to others user's comments. Thus, Web sites with group functionalities are able to be harnessed by Internet users to discuss current events with others. Further, the gate-keeping role of mainstream media is bypassed enabling social media and social networking sites to replace talk-back radio as there is no editor or filter to screen out comments or to set a frame by producers and/or editors.

Despite the potential for SNSs to provide a platform for debate between groups of opposing individuals, it is apparent that Facebook groups are fairly homogenous as the majority of the group's users generally support the group's overall aim (Kushin and Kitchener, 2009). In this study, 15 of the 17 themes showed a general dissatisfaction with the interviewing style of Channel 9's evening host: Eddie McGuire. Further, over 71 percent of all coded posts were attributable to six themes, which were: Non-expert, biased coverage, prejudice, lack of tolerance, other offerings, and Australian Rules Football. Each of these six themes is linked to the crux of the creation of this Facebook group, which was based on Facebook users' unhappiness with the coverage of Channel 9. Moreover, the top six commented categories were also the same as the posts, further indicating that users' opinions were in line with the main discussion point of this Facebook group. In contrast, only four percent of all post (2.87 percent Devil's advocate and 1.13 percent Contentment) were in opposition to the group's overall aim and supported or liked the interviewing style of Eddie McGuire.


The lack of a large sample of comments conflicting the group's overall aim reinforces previous findings which state that Internet communities, such as Facebook groups, offer like-minded individuals the opportunity to discuss issues of interest, while separating them from non-like-minded individuals (Brundidge, 2006). Therefore, as participation in a Facebook group requires the person to become a member of that group, individuals who do not support the overall aim of the group are not likely to join such a group. As a result, any individual who does not conform to the overall aim of a certain group has the ability to form a new group and stimulate discussion with other like-minded individuals (Kushin and Kitchener, 2009). As this investigation only aimed to analyse the content within one Facebook group, comparison of other Facebook groups in opposition to the aim of the group under analyse was not conducted. Further research may investigate common themes and membership between groups with conflicting perspectives of an argument.

The interaction of individuals in online groups has been a focus of recent literature exploring the potential for bullying within online discussion forums and groups. It is believed that the anonymity of users within online forums may contribute to individuals acting in an uncivil manner compared to face-to-face communication as they are not held personally accountable for their actions and/or statements (Chisholm, 2006; Suler, 2004). One method thought to reduce the incidence of online bullying within discussion forums and groups was to increase personal information consequently reducing the feeling of anonymity (Kushin and Kitchener, 2009). This has been somewhat achieved via the group function in Facebook, whereby each group member's comments are linked to their individual profiles that potentially contain their full name, personal photographs, and their current location (Kushin and Kitchener, 2009). To investigate the effect of availability of personal information within a Facebook group discussion, Kushin and Kitchener (2009) found 30 percent of posts made by members of a political opinion group reflected uncivil communication towards other group members. This indicates that despite likeminded individuals within a Facebook group there is still an incidence of bullying or uncivil behaviour between group members. In the current study, with uncivil behaviour not being identified as a key theme within the analysis however it should be noted that the identification and quantifying of bullying or uncivil behaviour within the group was not within the scope of the current study. Therefore further investigation is required to fully comprehend how online groups may alter individuals perceptions of civil interactions within an online environment compared to face-to-face interactions.

Implications, limitations, and future research

Implications for this study are twofold. Firstly, this study sheds light on how Internet users utilize a social networking site to “virtually protest” current events. The results demonstrate that individuals are looking beyond recreational use and harnessing the capabilities of social network sites to express themselves and engage others in issues they care about (Kushin and Kitchener, 2009). Secondly, this study highlights the loss of the gate-keeping role the media once had and the relatively unregulated nature of the Internet as a communication medium (Arsenault and Castells, 2008; Mahan and McDaniel, 2006). The emergence of World Wide Web has afforded users greater control over the information posted on social network sites, diminishing the mediating role that a producer or editor formally had.

This study, which focused on one Facebook group’s members’ opinion of the telecasting of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, had several limitations. Selecting other Facebook groups from other national broadcasters may have generated different results. Examining the opinions of other sporting events telecast on Channel 9, such as the National Rugby League finals or the Rugby World Cup may have generated different results, as audience members’ opinions may be different. Further, this study analyzed one Facebook group, one of many Facebook groups, over a specific time period. Social networks are constantly evolving and changing, thus, results in future studies may not mimic the results of this study. Moreover, Facebook is constantly changing the way users interact with the site, such as the interface change to Timeline. This change, and others, impacts how SNS consumers interact with these social sites.

To address these limitations, it is suggested that researchers examine SNS users across a variety of media, such as Twitter, Facebook, Hyves, and Google Plus to uncover how users utilities these sites to voice their opinions about current events. Further, research is suggested to uncover how the media attempt to direct consumers to use media created Facebook groups or hashtags in the case of Twitter to share their opinions about media programming. 

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Notes

1. Tudor, 1992, p. 396.
2. Tudor, 1992, p. 395.
3. Schultz, 2005, p. 338.
4. boyd and Ellison, 2007, p. 211.
5. Bellini and Vargas, 2003, p. 5.
6. Booth, 2010, p. 2.
7. Meân, *et al.*, 2010, p. 1,593.
8. Kushin and Kitchener, 2009, para. 29.
9. Kushin and Kitchener, 2009, para. 66.
10. Nelson, *et al.*, 1997, p. 221.
11. Entman, 2007, p. 164.
12. Ward and Ostrom, 2006, p. 220.
13. Murthy, 2008, p. 845.

14. Holsti, 1969, p. 3.

15. Ward and Ostrom, 2006, p. 220.

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Exploring ways in which social networkers contribute to online groups: A case study of one Facebook group's discussion of Australian broadcaster Channel 9 during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games

by Olan Kees Martin Scott, Ryan Bradshaw, and Paul Larkin

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