How has the impact of sports media changed in the last decade? Debates abound. Sports media has expanded its presence in virtually every manner. More channels are devoted to its rendering, more Internet sites are dedicated to discussing it, Sabermetrics makes statistics an ever-increasing option for sports discussions in all mediated forms. Social media allows for breaking news to be disseminated in a manner in which an hour later it is considered “old” and no longer “breaking.” However, while some ratings and web traffic have gone up (Yahoo Sports has 55 million unique visitors per month), other ratings have dropped as a result of fragmentation. There is no longer one game or competition as an option each night; there are now dozens (see Hutchins & Rowe, 2009). Pulitzer Prize winner Thomas Friedman (2007) argues that the “world is flat,” and that is true in sports media as well. The option of streaming a live cricket match from India was not realistic at the turn of the century. It is now.

Although people have presumed that increased new media traffic results in less traditional media traffic, this amazingly hasn’t proven to be the case. Instead, the demand for sports media has proven to be elastic, with the rising tide of sports consumption seemingly lifting all boats. This chapter will explore the ever-changing world of sports media using four distinct lenses: (a) traditional, (b) new, (c) social, and (d) user generated. Of course, these areas inherently overlap, yet each brings unique insight into our understanding of how sports media impacts the manner in which we think about and interact with sport. The landscape is constantly
changing to the point that many are overwhelmed by all of the choices available. Yet, as Friedman (2007) argues about the changing global world as a whole, “The great challenge for our time will be to absorb these changes in ways that do not overwhelm people or leave them behind” (Friedman, 2007, p. 50). These four delineated areas have different constituencies embracing them, making them both distinct and new.

**SPORT AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA**

Make no mistake; traditional sports media is still driving the overall media bus. Consider the second half of 2012, in which sports telecasts (Summer Olympics and National Football League [NFL] football) represented 31 of the top 32 ratings on any channel in the United States. Also, the Super Bowl telecast still dwarfs all other ratings. The 2013 telecast of Super Bowl XLVII yielded 108.4 million viewers; in contrast, the top television drama, *NCIS*, averaged 21.5 million viewers (even after including DVR data) while the top comedy, *The Big Bang Theory*, averaged 18.5 million.

Also, consider the subscriber fees that each channel charges to a cable or satellite company; ESPN towers over all competition ($4.69 per month) with FOX Sports Net and the NFL Network also in the top five. These channels wield power because, for many viewers, they are “must have”
options. In fact, ESPN’s subscriber fee (just for the main channel) is roughly equivalent to the fees of TNT, TBS, USA, FX, TLC, Fox News, CNN, Discovery, and MTV—combined. Moreover, consider the fees dedicated to the offshoots with the ESPN suite of programming (highlighted in Figure 3.1), and you can get a sense of the portion of any cable or satellite bill devoted to ESPN programming.

First, regarding traditional print media outlets (mainly newspaper and magazines), sports media looks very different from that of even 10 to 15 years ago. There are far fewer “beat” reporters who travel with the team. Decades ago, these reporters could offer vital statistics and game recaps, but now those are handled by major broadcast sports news outlets. Beat reporters could also provide “outside the lines” stories to fans about their favorite players and their personalities, but now those are offered not only by other television outlets but also by the athletes themselves, via Twitter feeds and Facebook pages.

**Figure 3.1** ESPN’s Programming Suite

Source: The trademarks depicted above are the property of ESPN, Inc., and are displayed only for the purpose of illustrating the various branding of ESPN. Their use in no way indicates any relationship between ESPN, Inc., and SAGE Publications, Inc.
While some prominent newspapers, such as The Washington Times, have eliminated sports sections entirely, others are shortening them by eliminating box scores and other statistical aspects in which the Internet is more immediate, thorough, and accessible. Consequently, sports sections in newspapers have shifted to a greater percentage of coverage devoted to “color” commentary in which columnists dissect, interpret, and ponder future games and moves with proportionally less space devoted to game capsules and statistical recaps. Many newspapers then counter this more streamlined and informed opinion-based print offering with a more elaborate online offering that includes statistics and other minutiae about the games and competitions. Local newspapers are usually owned by larger conglomerates, making companies such as Gannett Company, Inc., able to offer the same statistical packages in virtually identical forms to a multitude of sources.

**Theoretically Speaking: Framing**

First developed by sociologist Erving Goffman (1974), framing theory has been adopted by numerous communication scholars with an interest in news media. These scholars suggest that news media content creates a “frame” that shapes an audience’s interpretation of events, people, and ideas. Much like a picture frame, media frames are incomplete, depicting content only within the frame while ignoring what lies outside of it. Since Goffman’s introduction, communication scholars, especially Robert Entman (1993), have used frame analysis to study a wide range of current and political events. Scholars with a specific interest in sport have also turned to frame analysis to better understand the role of sports media in audience’s interpretations. In their study of Olympics coverage, Billings and Eastman (2003) discover patterns that shape viewers’ perceptions of individual and national identities. As they note, “What makes these results significant to society is that the potential impact of embedded biases about gender, ethnicity, and nationality goes beyond sports: Ways of thinking that are endemic to sports can frame unconscious thinking about racial and gender groups in nonathletic situations” (p. 582). Frames are not inherently negative; however, communication and sport research does point to possible concerns about what is featured and what is omitted in media content.

Regarding magazines, several mainstream magazines remain, with Sports Illustrated (circulation of 3.1 million in 2012) and ESPN: The Magazine (circulation of 2.1 million in 2012) leading the way. However, other prominent
magazines have moved into online-only formats, such as stalwart *The Sporting News* moving to a daily digital format in 2011. The mainstream magazines that remain rely on a hybrid model in which articles are tweeted and shared in various sources, with *ESPN: The Magazine* being paired with ESPN’s online “Insider” subscription as a way of offering print and digital synergy. Meanwhile, other niche magazines have smaller circulations yet provide a very specific demographic readership that can be optimal for advertisers. For instance, *Golf Digest* (circulation 1.6 million in 2012) clearly is a primary place for people with golf-related products and promotions to advertise, particularly since the readers are more likely to be upscale because of the inherent costs of being a golfer.

Sports newspapers and magazines are more likely than other forms of media to embrace traditional sports (such as baseball or boxing) ahead of newer, emerging sports (such as mixed martial arts or snowboarding). Some of these same traditions are also in place regarding issues of identity, with covers and stories disproportionately featuring men athletes. To wit, Weber and Carini (2013) found that women were more likely to be on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in the 1960s and ’70s than in later years; about half of the women on the covers of *Sports Illustrated* in recent years are not athletes but models for the magazine’s swimsuit issue. Still, print sports media is often a place in which long-form journalism can thrive, whether that is the 2004 *San Francisco Chronicle* investigation of the Bay Area Laboratory Co-operative (BALCO) scandal that led to the downfall of many prominent professional athletes or the 2013 *Sports Illustrated* story about
the National Basketball Association’s (NBA’s) Jason Collins becoming the first openly gay active male athlete in an American team sport.

Other forms of traditional sports media are changing as well. Sports radio has traditionally been recognized as the medium most likely to create parasocial relationships with fans, partly because the radio broadcasts of, say, 162 regular season baseball games made names like Vin Scully or Harry Caray virtual members of the family. Such broadcasts have existed since the 1920s yet have changed in many fundamental ways. For instance, radio broadcasts of live sports often were rendered on radio stations that were not purely sports but rather the “home of” a given team. News, music, or other formats were interspersed with these live broadcasts. Now, the sports radio station niche fills every hour of programming not only with live broadcasts but also with a heavy dose of analysis, speculation, and fan feedback. Sports radio stations have become commonplace (the first all-sports format, WFAN, started in 1987) with an emphasis on sports talk more than live-action renderings of games. Satellite radio now offers such renderings but also offers mainstream (such as ESPN or Mad Dog Radio) or specialized (fantasy sport radio or the National Hockey League [NHL] channel) talk and feature-based options for programming.

Meanwhile, televised sports continue to shape the media landscape. While virtually every other genre of programming is being challenged by other cable outlets (TNT, USA, FX), premium channels (HBO, Starz, Showtime), or streaming service (Hulu, Netflix, Amazon), the inventory for premium sports remains relatively constant. For instance, the NFL is more
popular than ever, yet there are just 16 regular season games for each NFL team that are available to broadcast, leading to expanded coverage of other aspects of the game, from multiday draft coverage to live reports from the rookie combine. While 29% of all television was watched via a time-shifting device (i.e., digital video recorders, etc.) in 2012, just 4% of sports programming was watched in a time-shifted manner, presumably because the liveness of the game makes the need to know the outcome much more immediate than determining what happens within a given plotline of a primetime drama.

Beyond the aforementioned highest of all television ratings within team sports, networks are finding the appetite for televised live offerings to be seemingly insatiable. For instance, college football used to be predominantly a Saturday afternoon phenomenon; now, multiple broadcast networks (ABC and FOX) show highly ranked teams in primetime, joining a plethora of cable outlets that offer direct counterprogramming and yet draw reasonable ratings that ultimately yield a profit. Moreover, even some sports are considered a “loss leader” for networks, as being the “home of” a sport or specific team can make a seemingly small channel nonetheless “essential” for fans of a given sport. The 2013 creation of Fox Sports One appears to, at least at the onset, not be a direct assault on ESPN as much as an attempt to secure niche markets in sports, such as racing and mixed martial arts, to ensure that virtually any cable or satellite provider would need to purchase it as a part of their packages or fear the wrath of sports fans seeking those sports. Other channels, such as CBS/Turner-based TruTV used coverage of 2011’s National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA’s) March Madness as an opportunity for millions of sports fans to look up the channel number and then view promotions for its other non-sports-based programming, resulting in record overall ratings in the first quarter of 2011 containing basketball telecasts.

SPORT AND NEW MEDIA

The web traffic for many sports websites is truly astounding, particularly in instances where the website is either a niche industry or a relatively new offering. People are likely not surprised that ESPN.com has considerable web traffic (38.2 million unique monthly users), yet this is not one area of the sports media nexus in which ESPN dominates all forms of competition. Main broadcast entities, such as FOX Sports (38.6 million unique users) and CBS Sports (15.9 million unique viewers), are major players in this corner of the media universe. Moreover, ancillary components of main networks nonetheless receive heavy traffic; NBC Universal,
for instance, owns Rotoworld, a popular fantasy sport web service that exceeded one billion pages viewed in 2012.

The lines between traditional media and new media are now frequently blurred, with mainstream sports journalists and personalities having a presence in a multitude of formats and platforms. A new problem has arisen in which sports organizations have a difficult time determining who constitutes a sports journalist as opposed to a mere fan with a website, an issue that requires substantial discernment when offering media credentials (Holton, 2012). The current standard seems to be to widen the credentialed standards, with the results being record numbers of “media” in attendance; 2013 Southeastern Conference (SEC) “Media Days” had a record attendance of 1,239 journalism professionals.

Sports websites have become one-stop shopping for the modern sports fan, with a single site not only offering information on the present game but also offering archives to the past, complex matrices for understanding statistical trends, prediction models for future sports events, and game formats that run the gamut from fantasy football to daily leagues and contests, such as ESPN’s Streak for the Cash. A particularly noteworthy model comes from Yahoo Sports, a large entity that garners 55 million unique visitors each month. Yahoo opted for an approach that involved free gaming, comprehensive advice, and timely scoring features with a goal of cross-pollination with other parts of the Yahoo digital universe.
Chapter 3: Sports Media

Entering the equation as well are blogs, or alternative news sites, such as Deadspin, which breaks news quite frequently (such the 2012 story in which Notre Dame linebacker Manti Te’o’s girlfriend was revealed as fictional) yet does so often on stories that could be deemed more salacious than newsworthy. The result is a bifurcated system in which print media may not draw the number of readers it did yet is more respected than many forms of online media. In the 1970s and 1980s, print media was often jokingly called the “toy department” of news; now, traditional sports media is relatively more respected than its online colleagues (see Whiteside, Yu, & Hardin, 2012).

SPORT AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a concept that most people think they know, and they can list examples of platforms that meet the classification, but rarely do they have a specific definition. For our purposes, social media will refer to the digital communities in which creating and sharing content is done within given networks—whether that involves friends (Facebook), followers (Twitter), or hybrids in between. It is also important to know what websites and applications we are referencing and their relative use. Duggan (2013) studied such usage for Pew Research, with rates reported in Table 3.1.

Several facts can be gleaned from this table and the layers of data uncovered by Pew. First, there is no social media outlet comparable to Facebook. All others are seeking to occupy segments of the market, with Facebook four times higher than any other social media presence. Second, different social media offerings skew wildly demographically: Blacks are almost twice as likely to use Twitter as Whites; women are 5 times more likely to have used Pinterest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Outlet</th>
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<th>Especially Popular Among</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Adults, ages 18–29; Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Adults, ages 18–29; Blacks; Urban</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Adults, &lt; 50; Whites; Women; College Educated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Adults, ages 18–29; Blacks, Latinos; Urban</td>
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<td>Tumblr</td>
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<td>Adults, ages 18–29</td>
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Interview: Jimmy Sanderson, Assistant Professor, Clemson University

Q: What forms of social media seem to be particularly embedded in how we engage in sport?

A: Twitter is clearly the king of sports engagement. It’s the place sports fans go for the most current news as well as to interact with sports media members, sports figures, athletes, and other sports fans. Twitter has changed sports. ESPN now integrates tweets into SportsCenter; most networks display the Twitter handle of their broadcasters. For sports fans, the possibilities for engagement are tremendous.

Q: Some within the sports media industry are reluctant to participate in social media. Why?

A: This appears to come from two sources: (a) lack of understanding of social media, (b) reticence to give up control of information. Can bad things happen on social media? Yes. But bad things can happen in all areas of life. Sports fans like the personal connection social media affords, and sports media members using social media effectively give themselves a tremendous strategic advantage over their competitors.

Q: What are some of the positive ways you have seen social media used in sport?

A: Athletes and sports figures display more of their personality than we ever have seen through traditional broadcasts, providing opportunities for fans to identify them. Along those lines, athletes can counteract perceived negative media framing, conveying their own message and generating support from fans simultaneously. Additionally, athletes actually meet up with fans. My favorite example occurred during the NBA lockout. Kevin Durant tweeted he was bored, so some Oklahoma State students told him to come play flag football with them—and he showed up!

Q: Has social media democratized communication and sport?

A: I’m not convinced that it’s fully democratized communication and sport, but some evidence suggests that possibility. A lot of sports safety advocates use Twitter to get their message out, and I’m not sure they would have been able to do so as effectively prior to social media. Social media also provides an avenue for dissent,

(Continued)
which manifested during the recent NFL, NBA, and NHL lockouts. Traditionally, labor disputes would have been framed in particular ways by the mainstream media, but through social media, the players were able to disseminate their own messages, adding to the public discourse around these labor impasses.

**Q:** How would you counter a claim that social media is a fad?

**A:** Social media is here to stay. The platforms might change, but the benefits are too great for it to ever go away. The ability for athletes to be active media producers and for fans to engage and connect with athletes and sports figures is too beneficial.

**Q:** What do you see as potential future permutations of social media in sport?

**A:** I am interested to see how assertive athletes become with social media. It’s one thing to counteract media reports, but I think we might see the day where an athlete, via social media, broadcasts her or his own press conference and takes questions from fans, rather than reporters. Another thing I am watching is how sports organizations handle a player’s social media content, particularly as it relates to identity expression. When an athlete expresses political commentary (such as then Boston Bruins goalie Tim Thomas putting on Facebook that he was not going to attend the White House visit with the team because of his dissatisfaction with the government), does a team discipline them or not? Finally, I think the hateful and inflammatory expressions from fans bears watching. There have been instances in Europe where fans were arrested for online messages; it will be interesting to see if death threats and similar messages bring the same result in the United States.

All of these trends are relevant to sports because of the relative scope and audience each provides. Most scholarly work has been focused on Twitter because of its structure: It is uniquely designed to facilitate breaking news and is considerably more likely to have athletes, teams, and sports organizations using it to relay information to fans (Hutchins & Mikosza, 2010). Such studies have revealed a degree of kinship people feel when they “follow” an athlete, finding that social media fulfills a part of fandom that was otherwise partitioned. When interacting online, people change perceptions of their heroes, showing emotions like empathy (Sanderson, 2008) and kinship (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, Pederson, & Burch, 2014) during the engagement. Athletes seem to generally welcome this form of communication, with Browning and
Sanderson (2012) noting that college athletes engage with fans, even when such engagement is negative or overly critical. Social media seems to be a hobby for many professional athletes, as discussing sport-related topics is less likely to occur than interacting with other fans or facilitating a dialogue about other divergent topics that are nonsport related (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010). The opportunity to potentially engage with prominent athletes appears to be a major reason that people choose to follow a given athlete. As Frederick, Lim, Clavio, and Walsh (2012) note, “The ‘social world’ is heightened because the potential for one-on-one interaction between the media persona (i.e., the athlete) and the media user (i.e., the fan) is a distinct possibility” (p. 496).

Indeed, social media is something that athletes and fans seem to engage in either in spare time or when witnessing a live sporting event (either in person or via television). With sport media increasingly becoming mobile (Goggin, 2013), fans and athletes find they need to quickly learn the rules of social media engagement or risk the crisis-laden fallout. There is power in websites such as Twitter, some of which can be dangerous to the overall livelihood of the sports media complex. As a result, teams such as the Cincinnati Bengals have banned their players from using Twitter, fearing more negative impact than positive (Associated Press, 2012).

Case Study: Watch What You Say

Prior to the start of the 2010 North Carolina Tar Heels’ football season, one of their star defensive players, Marvin Austin, was dismissed from the team for violating NCAA regulations related to receipt of inappropriate benefits. While such cases have become common place in NCAA athletics, the circumstances that led to the dismissal emerged as a result of a suspicious Twitter feed where Austin discussed the outcomes of a lavish shopping spree just following a post about the financial shortcomings of being a college athlete. Media speculation about the post resulted in an NCAA investigation that resulted in sanctions on the Tar Heels football program. Soon after the incident, the athlete handbook at the University of North Carolina was revised to specify that “each team must identify at least one coach or administrator who is responsible for having access to and regularly monitoring the content of team members’ social networking sites and postings” and that “the athletics department also reserves the right to have other staff members monitor athletes’ posts” (Wolverton, 2012, para. 4).

(Continued)
Colleges and universities around the country are faced with a growing need to manage the impact that inappropriate athletes' behavior on social media can have on their public image. As the need has increased, many institutions have begun to monitor their athletes' social media posting by hiring companies or utilizing software that flags what they consider to be inappropriate words or slang expressions. For instance, the University of Louisville flags and has subsequently banned 406 words in their athletes' posts, with a similar number being flagged by the University of Kentucky (Wolverton, 2012). Some of the words include the following:

- Agent
- Cheat sheet
- Gay
- BYOB
- Jeremiah Weed
- Alcohol
- Doobie
- Payoff
- Gozangas
- GNOC
- Benjamins
- Fight
- Rape
- Porn
- Drunk Driving

Institutions that fear inappropriate behavior on behalf of sport agents have also added the names of the 300 most prominent agents to demonstrate to the NCAA that they are taking the appropriate measures to monitor their athletes' behavior.

1. Should an institution have the right to restrict what an athlete posts on social media?
2. Is there a first amendment issue here with the steps that are being taken by a number of these high profile Division I programs?
3. Would these institutions be better served by better educating their athletes about the impact posting on social media websites can have for both them and the institution?

Arguing within the context of student-athlete social media use, Browning and Sanderson (2012) claim that “Twitter's rise has been accompanied by what appears, at least anecdotally, to be a hypercritical society in which people seem to feel empowered to send very demeaning or condemning messages to student-athletes” (p. 516). Athletes sometimes find their self-expression on Twitter can lead to controversy and threats, as was the case when several prominent athletes expressed their opinions on the Trayvon Martin decision in 2013.

Nonetheless, social media can have a ripple effect on society as a whole, as evidenced when journalist Guy Adams offered many critical tweets about NBC's
taped coverage of the 2012 Olympics and found himself temporarily suspended from Twitter because of the large ramifications and discussions that ensued, particularly with the “hashtag” #nbcfail (Pilkington, 2012). While sports organizations and associations attempt to sort out their policies regarding social media use and ramifications, all seemingly realize that it must be incorporated into the overall media landscape that is offered. Most sports personalities have Twitter hashtags included in online graphics; virtually any major sports team has a Facebook page that one can “like” and receive a continual feed of information.

The newest entrant into the social media universe is the currently overwhelmingly female Pinterest, for which teams are working to find ways to make a viable outlet for promoting all sorts of aspects of sports culture and fandom. Moreover, as more males join Pinterest

A Matter of Ethics: Foster’s Hammy

Social media has become so ubiquitous, it is difficult to recall that not so long ago no one had heard of Facebook or Twitter. Although millions now use these platforms, the generally accepted practices for appropriate communication through social media are still being negotiated. How much self-disclosure on Facebook is too much? Is it OK to join that controversial group on Reddit? Will your picture really be deleted from Snapchat? Just as you are making these decisions, so too are athletes and other figures from the world of sports.

There are almost too many examples from recent years of athletes who have shared foolish or insensitive comments through social media, and it should be obvious that racist or homophobic language isn’t ethical. More interesting for our purposes here,
(Continued)
then, are the moments that are less clear. For example, in 2011, Arian Foster, Pro Bowl running back for the Houston Texans, posted an MRI image of his injured hamstring to Twitter. This may seem innocuous, but the NFL has strict rules about disclosing information about injuries. Foster’s tweet, then, was a violation of league policy. So even though fans may have felt more informed or as if they had a stronger relationship to a popular player, the Texans and the NFL felt as though Foster had breached an important protocol.

It is clear that social media is only going to grow in influence, so it is crucial to develop some shared sense of how best to communicate in this relatively new medium. Clearly, Foster’s tweet wasn’t offensive, but officials considered it inappropriate. Do you agree? If you were Foster, how would you have handled criticism of the tweet? To what extent do you think an employer should be able to control an employee’s social media content?

(still in its relative infancy) sports teams are vying to lead the migration. As Laird (2012) writes:

The Giants have a section dedicated to their supporters’ hearty tailgating culture. The Portland Trail Blazers have boards that collect team-themed wallpapers and photos of pets in Blazers gear. Most teams have boards displaying memorabilia and clothing for sale elsewhere online. Because Pinterest isn’t a dialogue-heavy network and allows users to follow either a brand as a whole or just specific boards, teams are able to focus on particular niches of fandom. They’re also able to share things that wouldn’t be as feasible on Facebook or Twitter (para. 8–9).

Recent evidence may suggest some burn out on social media, or at least that some usage may be leveling off. Evidence shown from Sporting News Media Group (2013) reveals new trends in social media use in sport, highlighted in Figure 3.2.

Some additional trends were uncovered in the same report, including that

- Facebook was the number 1 option of people who used social media to follow sport,
- football is the most followed social media sport,
4% believe second-screen consumption will have the biggest impact on the way sports are consumed in the immediate coming years,
29% of all sports fans watch online via a personal computer (PC),
23% of all sports fans consume sports through an Internet-enabled mobile device.

Whatever the future of social media holds, it appears the various outlets offer not only new ways of sharing information but also new manners of interaction with fans that previously were considered as attainable only from people with the highest of economic and social class power. As Sanderson (2011) notes, “it’s a whole new ballgame” (p. 1).

**SPORT AND USER-GENERATED MEDIA**

While much of the streaming video and other online traffic is devoted to mainstream sports highlights, the user-generated media industry (predominantly YouTube but including other formats, such as Vimeo and Buzzfeed) also generates large audiences for things that could best be

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**Figure 3.2** Percentage of People Using Social Media to Follow Teams, Leagues, and Players Online

Off the Beaten Path: Mixed Martial Arts

The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) considers itself the fastest-growing sports organization in the world. It is indeed the premier organization in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) and its executives, Frank Fertitta, Lorenzo Fertitta, and president Dana White, have revolutionized the sport. Under White’s leadership, the organization that was bought in 2001 for $2 million was estimated at over $1 billion by Forbes seven years later (Forbes, 2008). In 2011, White announced the first-ever social media incentive program for athletes. The organization now sets aside $240,000 annually to award quarterly bonuses to fighters who have the largest increase in Twitter followers, the largest percentage increase in followers, and send the most creative tweets. The UFC partners with Digital Royalty, a social media brand management company, on this initiative. Digital Royalty provided social media training to over 300 fighters to assist the organization in fully embracing this new communication tool thus increasing fan engagement. The UFC also successfully broke into mainstream media with a seven-year broadcast agreement with FOX Sports Media Group. According to Simply Measured, a social media analytics firm, the UFC’s forward-thinking social media strategy has contributed to its rapid growth (Simply Measured, 2012). The organization has nearly 10 million Facebook fans, over 900,000 Twitter followers, and offers a multiplatform package available to over one billion homes worldwide, in over 149 countries, and in 19 different languages.

deemed as on the outskirts of sport. For instance, Austrian daredevil Felix Baumgartner’s “Red Bull Jump” from outer space was viewed by over 35 million people in its first 9 months on YouTube, a noteworthy feat when taking in the comparison that not a single one of President Barack Obama’s speeches has generated nearly as many views even over the course of many years of access.

The world of user-generated media is quite vast. YouTube alone has 800 million unique visitors per month, more than 10% of the entire world population. A total of 4 billion hours of video are viewed on YouTube in a given month. While exact figures are difficult to determine regarding the percentage of views that are dedicated specifically to sports media, both the depth and breadth of videos are impressive. Some are created and uploaded by media professionals, but the
majority are created (or repurposed) by people outside the sports media complex. Want to see the biggest bloopers of the past month in sports combined and then set to music by The White Stripes? Someone's done it. Want to see people throughout society in Tim Tebow's famous “Tebowing” pose? So do millions of others, as evidenced by the high number of views.

However, there is much more offered online that could best be classified as user-generated sports media. Vimeo has especially avid creators and followers of extreme sports. Meanwhile, outlets like Buzzfeed have matrices to detect viral content from any source, not just establishments inside sports media but anyone with a blog post or video that receives strong upticks in audience interest.

Some sites straddle the lines between social media and user-generated media. Tumblr is a microblogging site allowing people to attach tags to pictures and other content, with sports being one of the most popular tags on the site. Vine allows people to create 6-second videos to be viewed in a continual loop, perfect for attaching that extreme highlight (good or bad) and then manipulating it for full effect in some form or another. Many of these sites have developed sports components, creating things like Internet memes that, while fun, also convey some form of potentially persuasive message to other sports fans and beyond. For instance, a popular meme in 2012 was of “Smoking Jay Cutler,” placing the Chicago Bears quarterback in a variety of other circumstances with the same apathetic look—confirming an image many fans have of him as aloof or undedicated to winning championships. Another popular meme in 2012 was “McKayla’s Not Impressed,” created from a look American gymnast McKayla Maroney donned after failing to win the gold at the London Olympics in her specialty event, the vault. Maroney’s infamous pose was then “Photoshopped” at other historic events, such as the moon landing or the release of the iPhone 5, providing an opportunity to fuse sporting attitudes into other aspects of culture in the process.
CONCLUSION

Much of the future of sports media will align with the rest of media evolution, with the key words being “integration” and “convergence.” Some new formats have not yet proven to be successful—at least in current form—such as ESPN’s 3D programming, which was discontinued in June 2013 because of limited viewer adoption. Yet more formats abound, including 4K Ultra high definition (HD) along with the widespread growth of streaming Internet television. The future appears to be enconced in the merging of media platforms more than the elimination of them, whether that is more radio on the Internet, more social media within a television broadcast, or more print weekly magazines in tablet daily form. Sports entities seem poised to take advantage of such convergence, still finding a fan appetite for sports that is insatiable.

REFERENCES


**SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READING**


