Local vs. National: How Twitter Reflects News Coverage of Colin Kaepernick Protests

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LOCAL VS NATIONAL: HOW TWITTER REFLECTS NEWS COVERAGE OF COLIN KAEPERNICK PROTESTS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Mass Communication

in

The Department of Mass Communication

by

Jared Joseph
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Abstract

Local and national media dedicate different levels of coverage to issues depending on its relevancy to their audiences. This study uses news outlets’ social media activity to show that coverage discrepancies occurred with former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick’s National Anthem protest. Because his protest reached national headlines, Kaepernick suffered the same fate of many protesting athletes in the past. This study will show how national media carried his story to national headlines and framed his protest negatively. The findings show that local media were the least active among the three media levels, local, regional and national, in covering the Kaepernick protest, and national media provided the most political-protest coverage among. Additionally, the results show how media outlets with ties to sports entities may limit their independence, thus limiting their coverage.
Introduction/Purpose of the Study

This study compares local, regional and national coverage of Colin Kaepernick’s National Anthem protest. This study’s goal is to show how media coverage at all three levels differed for Kaepernick’s protest. Additionally, I seek to show how media’s protest coverage fueled online discussion and overall emotion for Kaepernick’s protest. This research is an important contribution to the field because local and national media have historically covered national events differently (Friedman & Wegner, 1986; Palmgreen & Clark, 1977; Hester & Gibson, 2007). Sports journalism is a field where reporters cover breaking sports news, such as injuries, trades and suspensions. However, sports reporters do not often deal with political controversy. Political conversations are not consistent elements of sports. Due to political rarity in sports, this paper will also explain why sports journalists are ill-equipped in handling political sports stories and the effects their coverage has on athletes. This research also shows how national media uses social media differently than local and regional. Different media outlets produce varying numbers of online content (Holcomb, Gross & Mitchell, 2011). Lastly, this paper will show how the relationship between sports leagues and media impacts both the coverage media perform and how media impact sports, such as policy change for image restoration.

To answer these questions, I use Crimson Hexagon, a social media analysis tool, to collect tweets from local, regional and national media, and I apply CTDA, critical technocultural discourse analysis, to interpret the meaning each media outlet’s tweets contain. Lastly, I apply a crosstab test and chi-square analysis to measure the amount of coverage each organization provided via Twitter dissemination and the significance the coverage provided.
Background

In 2016, while playing quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, Kaepernick took a knee to protest the pre-game *Star-Spangled Banner*. “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color,” Kaepernick said (Wyche, 2016). The public reacted negatively to Kaepernick’s protest. According to an *E-Poll Marketing Research* poll in September 2016, Kaepernick was the most disliked player in the NFL during that season (Rovell, 2016). Moreover, the same poll found that only six percent of participants disliked the quarterback in 2014 (Rovell, 2016). Regardless, Kaepernick continued his protest throughout the 2016 season. Players from several teams joined Kaepernick’s National Anthem protest. New England Patriots cornerback Devin McCourty and then-tight end Martellus Bennett raised their fists during the *Star-Spangled Banner*. Several players from the Miami Dolphins, including former running back Arian Foster, kneeled during the anthem, and the Seattle Seahawks locked arms as a sign of solidarity (Wire, 2016). Public criticism of the NFL players’ protests continued growing.

In September 2017, at a political rally in Alabama, President Donald Trump insulted the players. “Wouldn’t you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, ‘Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He’s fired. He’s fired!’” the president said (Graham, 2017). More players protested in response to this. However, Kaepernick remains at the center of this protest narrative. Kaepernick has not played for any NFL teams following the 2016 season. The NFL’s urge to protect its image in national headlines could be reason teams have not signed Kaepernick. In 2017, Kaepernick filed a grievance lawsuit against NFL owners for collusion (ESPN, 2017). Kaepernick’s lawsuit states “the NFL and
its owners have colluded to deprive Mr. Kaepernick of employment rights in retaliation for Mr. Kaepernick’s leadership and advocacy for equality and social justice and his bringing awareness to peculiar institutions still undermining racial equality in the United States” (ESPN, 2017).

However, NFL owners did not like President Trump’s stance on the matter. Miami Dolphins owner Stephen Ross did not like the president’s statements at the Alabama rally. “Our country needs unifying leadership right now, not more divisiveness. We need to seek to understand each other and have civil discourse instead of condemnation and sound bites” (Wattles, 2017). 49ers CEO Jed York called Trump’s comments “callous and offensive” (Wattles, 2017). However, according to Bleacher Report, the NFL fears the president; owners’ fear also includes boycotted games, drops in television ratings and decrease in product revenue (Freeman, 2018). The NFL’s motive to change its player conduct policy regarding the National Anthem could stem from this fear.

In May 28, 2018, NFL executives decided to change the player conduct policy concerning the National Anthem. The former policy stated players “should stand” for the anthem, but it never stated the players must; the league considered changing the policy at their fall owners’ meeting (Steinbuch, 2017). The new anthem rule states players must stand for the Star-Spangled Banner if they are on the field, but teams can stay inside locker rooms, if they so choose to (Rosenberg, 2018). The league could fine players who do not follow the new policy’s guidelines (i.e., kneeling during the Star-Spangled Banner).

I will go into more detail later in this study, but the NFL followed Denham’s (2004) guidelines on how a sports league responds to public criticism. National media outlets reported on the controversy of Kaepernick’s protest, reached wider audiences and built the agenda of
questionable patriotism in the NFL. Following the policy change, the president commented once again, saying players who protest “shouldn’t be in the country” (Rosenberg, 2018). The NFL changed its policy to satisfy its viewing audience, which is likely to be a middle-aged, upper-middle class, male Republican (Johnson, 2017). The league sought to satisfy its demographic, but the NFL didn’t become the center of controversy until national media grasped the protest’s narrative.

Literature shows that different levels of media frame stories differently. Friedman and Wenger (1986) looked at how local and national media covered Hurricane Alicia. Their study showed that local media covered the natural disaster more than three national outlets combined. Local media framed the story accurately, but national media coverage contained falsities. Friedman and Wegner’s study shows the discrepancy that local and national media have when covering a national event. In terms of this study, Kaepernick’s protest could have suffered the same because his protest became a national story. However, Kaepernick’s protests are not the first time an athlete used a sport as a political platform. His protest is also not the first to inevitably create negative consequences for the protesting athlete(s). Moreover, sports journalism could unintentionally be contributing to frames because they are in a journalistic dilemma, such as what stories sports reporters should and should not cover.
Literature Review

Gatekeeping in Sports

Gatekeeping is the idea that many messages are refined to several messages for audiences. “Simply put, gatekeeping is the process by which billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day” (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 1). Lewin (1947) introduced the gatekeeping concept and looked at different channels of food growers and consumers in the decision-making processes to theorize how families made decisions about what food to eat. Bien-Aimé & Hardin (2015) say White (1950) was the first scholar to use gatekeeping in mass communication, using a daily newspaper’s wire editor. White wanted to know how an editor selected stories from the various wire services. He wrote “It begins to appear... that in his position as ‘gatekeeper’ the newspaper editor sees to it... that the community shall hear as a fact only those events which the newsman, as the representative of his culture, believes to be true” (p. 390). Factors, such as institutions, influence a gatekeeper’s decision about information inclusion and exclusion. For example, a social media manager for a sports team likely will not post information criticizing a star player, even if the player’s performance was poor. Educational level, childhood experiences, race and sexual orientation are several additional factors that are part of an individual’s personal background that can influence a gatekeeper’s decision making (Bien-Aimé & Hardin, 2015). Audiences also impact decision making, and new technological developments have helped better understand audiences.

The rise of internet, social media and digital technologies has helped media better understand audience demographics and consumption patterns, but this information has not
always been readily available. Hardin (2005) launched the first survey to link gatekeeping and sports coverage. Hardin surveyed over 200 southeastern newspaper sports editors and found that sports editors were overwhelmingly white men. Hardin concluded that editors’ personal beliefs about women’s sports were a driving factor in their perceptions of audience interest. The editors assumed their feelings towards women’s sports were an accurate reflection of their consumers’ views. Hardin also found that about one-third of surveyed editors believed women were athletically inferior to men and that women were not as interested in sports as men. The editors’ beliefs about women lead to their sports sections’ lack of female sports coverage.

Additionally, scholars show the favoritism sports media have towards male-sports. Pedersen, Whisenant and Schneider (2003) present is the idea that female representation in newsrooms would lead to more female sports coverage. The authors say male dominance in the newsrooms impacts this news coverage “It should be acknowledged that the socialization of journalists influences content...it is no surprise that the male perspective dominates sports journalism” (Pedersen et al, 2003, p. 378). Weight and Cooper (2015) show an example of male-sports consuming majority of an outlet’s coverage.

Male sports are the most profitable sports leagues. The NBA has the highest average pay-per-player both in the country and overseas (Sporting News, 2016; Gaines, 2015), and the NBA is the fourth most profitable sports league. The NFL was the most profitable league in 2016, and male sports make up majority of the top five leagues revenue-wise (Kutz, 2016). Media have been the biggest contributor to sports leagues’ increased revenue. Media rights for single games or seasons are projected to be worth $20.6 billion in 2019 (Heitner, 2015). In short, media’s coverage and contracts with sports leagues have increased league monetary
gains. Weight and Cooper’s (2015) study is an example of how media favor male sports over female sports.

The authors analyzed five major newspapers to understand framing’s effects in the sports industry. Weight and Cooper performed a content analysis on the five papers’ front covers and headlines to identify the frames these media outlets established in collegiate sports. Weight and Cooper (2015) found that papers rarely listed sports articles on their front page. However, men’s sports dominated sports coverage. Ninety-seven percent of articles and 98 percent of words featuring sports were mostly football and men’s basketball (Weight & Cooper, 2015). Their finding shows that male sports’ images have always been at the forefront of media.

All professional, and even collegiate, sports are businesses. Perhaps the reason the NFL, NBA and Boxing Commission felt necessary to alienate or condemn their athletes was because the image of their businesses was threatened. I will go into further detail later in this article, but the WNBA has been a politically active sports league, but its players are not publicly condemned. The male-dominating sports agenda could be a reason for this discrepancy, and to better understand male sports leagues’ reactions to political controversy, we must examine sports' impact on society, newsroom demographics and sports agenda-setting.

**Sports Reporter Demographics & Identity**

Lapchick (2018) provided race and gender demographics for over 75 websites and newspapers. The Associated Press Sports Editors Racial and Gender Report Card measured the changes media made in gender and racial hiring practices since 2014. According to the report, most sports department staff members remained white. For example, 85 percent for sports editors, 82 percent of reporters and 77 percent of copy editors/designers were white (p 2).
Additionally, males totaled even higher percentages for the same positions: 90 percent for sports editors, 83 percent for sports reporters and 83 percent for copy editors (p. 2). Although the sports’ staff demographics remains the same, women of color was a highlight for increase for sports editors, columnists and copy editors, but the number of women as sports reporters decreased (p. 2-3). Women as assistant sports editors had the highest increase from 9.8 percent to just under 31 percent (p. 3). However, if ESPN’s numbers are taken out of the study, all numbers drop considerably.

ESPN’s staff includes 51 of the 70 people of color who are assistant sports editors and 75 of the 89 women who were assistant sports editors (p. 3). Lapchick (2018) suggested the APSE use a rule like the Rooney Rule in the NFL, which demands NFL teams interview at least minority candidate for position openings (Reid, 2011). Lapchick’s theoretical “Wiley Rule” would require candidate pools include women and people of color, but John Cherwa, a special contributor to the L.A. Times, says many newspapers already use such a rule (Lapchick, 2018, p. 4). Regardless of demographics however, sports reporters often have to alter their identities to appease their employers.

Genovese (2015) also addresses the issue with minority representation in media, adding that local sports television has majority white anchors and reporters, 86 and 83 percent respectively. Research shows that despite good intentions, gatekeepers continue to provide racist coverage; for example, reporters’ races are used to distribute story assignments (Genovese, 2015, p. 57). African Americans cover minority issues, and White reporters have business and political coverage (Genovese, 2015). For sports coverage, sports media supervisors use reporters’ races to assign African Americans to cover “race-appropriate” sports;
delegating based on race can limit African Americans opportunities to cover more important stories and advance up the ranks (p. 57). Newsrooms also pressure Black journalists to cover African American stories to their specific newsroom standards without providing formal education. However, minorities also have the task of proving their racial backgrounds do not impact their job performance (Genovese, 2015).

Black anchors on television news broadcasts use the same perspective as White broadcasters when reporting news (Genovese, 2015). “Research shows that socialization within a given media organization has the potential to be very strong for minorities and force them to adapt to the White structure already in place” (p. 57). This issue occurs for reporters even in diverse newsrooms. This section details the impact a newsroom’s demographic makeup has on its minority reporters, even complicating a minority covering his or her own race. However, a sports’ staff demographics aren’t the only issue with covering sports. Sports cultural impact also affects media coverage.

**Sports in Society**

Sports are considered a safe space where viewers go to escape their everyday lives. Segrave (2000) argues sports are built on several factors, such as space, time and community. Sports offer a “cozy corner,” a world removed from normal, daily life (p. 62). Segrave (2000) wanted to discover the features sports have that allow them to be an escape, but Segrave wanted to reveal how sports are a cautionary tale coupled with collective obsession (p. 62). Segrave discussed many aspects related to my study. In community, sports combine both audiences and actors, athletes and spectators respectively, into institutionalized roles,
facilitating the idea of identity groups such as the “Dawg Pound” for the Cleveland Browns (p. 68).

Moreover, sports spectatorship offers audiences the opportunity to feel and see “through and behind” various diving demographics like politics, race, and religion. When these boundaries become nonexistent, the social grouping invokes a sense of commonality (p. 68). People openly weeping at the Olympics’ closing ceremony is an example of the kinship sports provide. In terms of order, sports bring a “temporary, limited perfection” because sports are orderly in nature, allowing people to lose perception of time and space because they are wrapped up in the “perfect” world (p. 69).

Additionally, Segrave (2000) highlighted the crucial area where sports are an escape: sports offer a medium for achievement. “Within its perfected yet restricted world, sport offers a scenario where people can fully use their energy without the demands realities impose on their existences” (p. 69). In John Updike’s Rabbit Run (1960), the main character Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom reminisced during his days of basketball to escape the complexities of adulthood (p. 70). Even casual players exude this euphoria. “There is something wonderfully simple and clear about getting off a shot, seeing it rise in the air, dip and slip cleanly through a net. Ah, I’ve thought, if only the rest of my life were this clean and simple!” American novelist Jay Neugeboren (1992, p. 64) stated in his chapter of Sports in America.

Segrave spoke about the purpose sports give individuals because of sports’ order. Sports’ rules clarify the purpose and objectives of each sport, and the rules offer the possibility of “unalienated action,” furthering the commonality spoken about earlier (p. 71). For these reasons, sports are an interesting place for political controversy to take place. Moreover, sports
journalism is much like the views Segrave mentioned. The field is considered an apolitical space, where its content is supposed to be value-neutral (Rowe, 2007). McChesney (1989) explained why sports media are inclined to report in an escape manner.

Advertising became a primary monetary source for newspapers in the 1920, jumping from 0.50 percent of newspaper revenue in 1890 to 75 percent in 1929 (p. 56). Newspapers’ abilities to generate revenue depended on paper’s ability to attract larger audiences, and advertising as a source of income caused several changes in newspaper coverage. Newspapers decreased their political and “hard news” coverage, became more dependent on the editorial process and decreased emphasis on partisanship (p. 56-57). Sports were a perfect fit for the changes newspapers made. Segrave (2000) detailed how sports are escapes from daily lives, and with the decrease in hard news coverage, newspapers placed more emphasis on “escapist and sensational flare” to attract the maximum amount of readers (McChesney, 1989, p. 56). Newspapers wanted to convey nonpartisanship through their coverage, but because advertising from other businesses supplied a large amount of income, each newspaper became a “conservative defender of the status quo” (McChesney, 1989, p. 57).

Newspapers needed to convey nonpartisanship because mass production required publications to offend as few people as possible (McChesney, 1989). Sports could help major newspaper companies because sports were “safe ideologically” and did not antagonize readers (p. 57). Sports coverage did not question social issues.

Instead sports coverage used a frivolous environment to offer the necessary spirit and excitement political conflict bred (McChesney, 1989). Sports writers glorified athletes as heroes and presented them as “larger-than-life” figures (p. 57), and sports sections contained color
and excitement. McChesney said it would have been difficult for an ordinary reader not to be a sports fan (p. 57), and publications recognized this. The editorial space for sports sections grew from 12 percent to 20, and 80 percent of all male readers were sports fans (McChesney, 1989). In fact, 25 percent of all newspaper at the time were sold just because of their sports sections (McChesney, 1989). In short, sports offered newspapers an avenue to satisfy both advertisers and their readers because sports were not controversial. Segrave (2000) and McChesney (1989) show both the escapist world that sports provide and the dependency newspapers have towards this fallacy. However, sports journalism fails to uphold the standards of the profession for more pressing reasons.

Oates and Pauly (2007) said that sports stories struggle with the journalistic burden of moral seriousness. Sports stories often are not on-the-scene disaster, war coverages or courtside testimonies (p. 336). Sports journalism routinely violates the ethical norms that judge the profession of journalism itself. Critics fault sports journalistic ethics because sports journalism has both blurred the lines of news and advertising and accepted promotional stunts (p. 336). Sports journalism’s most distinctive factor, from other forms of journalism, is its commitment to narrative invention. The buildup to every game is full of “insider’s gossip” and a self-conscious “storyline” for each event (Wenner, 1989). For example, leading up to the 2006 British Open, journalists filled outlets with anticipation storylines. How Tiger Woods would perform after his dad’s death and questions about Phil Mickelson’s bounce back in his first major since losing the Master’s are examples of anticipation storylines. (Oates & Pauly, 2007, p. 337). However, sports journalism is not value-neutral because media are the driving economic and cultural forces in sports.
Networks like FOX and NBC pay the NFL more than $1 billion annually to broadcast games (Bien-Aimé, Whiteside & Hardin 2016). This transaction leads to an “ascending spiral” of profit for sports (Rowe, 1999, p. 65). For example, after paying the NFL to broadcast the Super Bowl, NBC charged advertisers $4.4 million for 30-second spots in the championship game (Bien-Aimé et. al, 2016). This relationship strains sports journalism and could influence journalists to frame teams in specific ways. Sports journalists must have access to practices, games, players and so on to gather “scoops” and good quotes, but teams can ban journalists from teams’ media availabilities if they do not work within the limits each team dictates (Bien-Aimé et. al, 2016). Some reporters might avoid covering certain topics that would be controversial to professional sports and athletes to maintain team access (Bien-Aimé et. al, 2016).

Journalists must be independent to maintain their “fourth branch” role in government, critique powerful interests and remain loyal to news consumers (Bien-Aimé et. al, 2016). However, journalists are unaware of how far they can critique players and sports entities because the business ties between sports and media continue to increase. Sports have created a complicated scenario for sports journalism because of the profit construct currently in place. However, sports and sports journalism have also created a potentially troubling patriotic environment.

Jenkins (2013) investigated how sports media use “war speak” is used in its coverage and how armed forces use athletic traditions. Jenkins hypothesized that militarizing American sports events encourages coercive patriotism that is morally problematic. The San Diego Padres are an example of how ulterior motives fuel militaristic influence in sports. The Padres created
an-house Military Affairs Department and began wearing armed services colors, hosting reenlistment and retiring ceremonies and wearing military symbols (Jenkins, p. 249). However, these actions show the military’s true purpose for using the Padres. “It also creates an advertisement for the Armed Services by encouraging, through public fanfare, the glorification of military enlistment and service. Likewise, by offering discounts to those who appear at games in uniform, rather than just asking for military I.D., the Padres’ promotions work to enhance the visibility and celebration of military personnel” (Jenkins, p. 250). One Air Force public affairs officer confirmed that professional sporting events in Dallas, Texas, are effective recruitment areas because recruiters can create stations or distribute apparel if the Air Force provides an entertainment element (Jenkins, p. 250).

Willingham (2017) offered additional support showing professional sports leagues and armed forces operating with ulterior motives. The Department of Defense spent $6.8 million for “paid patriotism” from 2012 to 2015. The DoD paid 50 professional teams between the NFL, NBA, MLB and other professional leagues (Willingham, 2017). In exchange, teams created displays of national pride: surprise military homecomings, reenlistments and flag presentations, even though many professional teams already performed these actions (Willingham, 2017). To be fair, Army Major Dave Eastburn said the DoD didn’t request athletes be present for the national anthem but paying for patriotic acts that were already performed across national platforms shows an awareness of professional sports’ influential platforms. Both Jenkins examples provide some understanding as to why many league owners might not approve of Kaepernick’s protest. The sporting rituals help increase recruiting, and the military ceremonies that league organizers allow create more visibility and public support (Jenkins, 2013).
In media, sportscasters use metaphors to perpetuate the presence of war. Media call professional teams’ draft rooms war rooms, say that defenses “terrorize” quarterbacks and call homeruns “bombs;” Bob Knight, Texas Tech basketball head coach, has been called “the General.” (Jenkins, 255). These examples show how media make professional sports more than just games or matches. Media cross cultural lines to give sports more meaning. The military uses sports to increasing recruiting efforts and create public unison (Jenkins, 2013). Additionally, when sportscasters use war metaphors to describe sports, the metaphors downplay war’s seriousness and help sell enlistment through “leisure-time competition” rhetoric, which could undermine armed forces (Jenkins, 2013). Literature so far has shown the back and forth impacts sports and media have with one another, but Rowe (1994) shows how the two areas have intertwined. Furthermore, Rowe also touches on the war-sports relationship.

National governments have invested in sports and sports broadcasting because sports effectively contribute to nation building, despite demographic dividers like gender, ethnicity or religion (Rowe, 1994). Sports are like war in the sense they allow citizens an opportunity to develop a “collective consciousness” (p. 22). Sports have been called the nonviolent substitution for war. “The competitive bodily exertions of people in the highly regulated form that we call ‘sports’ have come to serve as symbolic representations of a non-violent, non-military form of competition between states” (p. 22). Sports have been symbolic representations of war without the shooting, and this perspective is associated with Orwell’s (1992) statement of sports as a “benign diversion.” Orwell says that international sporting, like the Olympics, leads to “orgies of hatred.”
Colombian footballer Andres Escobar’s death is an example of sports farce of non-violent interaction. An enraged fan killed him outside a bar after Escobar scored in his own team’s goal before losing the World Cup finals (Rowe, 1994). Escobar’s death shows the consequences of this heightened emotion. Media also grew into a large entity of social, cultural, political and economic importance (Rowe, 1994), and because sports have become impactful in each of the areas the two areas began to meld. Media created the space for sports to both reach and serve world-wide audiences; doing so transforms sports culture through multiple ways: sound, discussion, perception and so on (p. 24). Sports are historically a cultural and political influencer. Adolf Hitler tried to use the 1936 Berlin Olympics to assert Aryan supremacy (Rowe, 1994).

The above literature in this section explains how sports journalism norms have developed and why covering political protests may be an issue for sports journalists. Oates and Pauly’s (2007) study is an example of sports journalism fails to uphold the general standards of the journalistic profession, and Jenkins’ readings provide context for why the league would blackball Kaepernick. The NFL cannot effectively display patriotism if one of its players was doing something the public felt was unpatriotic. However, because media made sports like war, NFL fans, who are commonly Republicans, would take issue with any controversial acts involving something as patriotic as the Star-Spangled Banner. Media also have historically impacted public salience and public thought. This also occurs in sports media.

**Agenda-Setting in Sports**

Agenda-setting means events and issues media view as the most important will be the most important to the public as well (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The NFL regularly deals with
and uses agenda-setting, specifically second-level agenda-setting. Second-level agenda setting is "the transmission of attribute salience" (McCombs et. al, 1997). The amount of coverage media dedicate to attributes is an important factor in topic salience. Seltzer and Dittmore (2009) looked at how the NFL dealt with carriage disputes over its channel NFL Network. When the league schedules games for primetime slots, it is conveying that these are the most important games to watch, talk about, etc. Fortunato (2008) studied the NFL’s programming schedule. He found that the NFL’s decision to place games on its own network provided the league a “communication vehicle to promote its own agenda as well as an asset that fans desire,” which would increase the network’s long-term profitability (p. 40). Fortunato has worked to see how professional sports organizations use their scheduling to set their own agendas.

Sports entities contribute to agenda-setting, but journalists at the network level, such as ESPN reporters, also set agendas. Bien-Aimé, Whiteside and Hardin (2016) discussed how agenda-setting occurs in sports media. Agenda-setting can occur at every level of media. They said that sports media companies are agenda-setters locally, nationally and internationally. The more journalists cover an issue will impact how important the public views that issue. Media’s repetitive nature plays a huge role in agenda-setting because the “redundancy in the media messages received by the public” solidifies the news’s importance (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014, p. 790). When Major League Baseball players Barry Bonds and Sammy Sosa were breaking homerun records, journalists were not questioning if players were using performance-enhancing drugs (Denham, 2004). However, after Sports Illustrated’s Tom Verducci wrote a 2002 story about steroids, the national discussion about MLB players changed because
Verducci’s story brought an unknown issue to the forefront of professional baseball. Denham (2004) explains how the agenda-setting process occurred in Sports Illustrated. Denham (2004) talked about how impactful the media can be in causing sports leagues to change their policies:

Mainstream journalists reported on a provocative cover story in a prominent magazine, citing the sources and the sources’ contention within the magazine story, reaching a broader audience of readers, contribute to the building of a broad public agenda. Policy-makers act on the agenda based on the need to address not only the issues affecting their own sensibilities but also the issues their constituents consider important. (Denham, 2004, p. 54).

Ray Rice’s incident was an example of what Denham (2004) outlined. After TMZ’s video showing Rice assaulting his then-fiancé reached the public, the Baltimore Ravens released the running back, and the NFL suspended Rice. Rice’s first suspension was two games before the NFL adjusted the suspension to indefinitely (Glenza, 2014). Rice then won an appeal and became eligible for reinstatement, although the Ravens did not sign him back to their team (Hanzus, 2014). Between both the league’s initial and adjusted punishment on Rice, the NFL changed its personal player conduct policy. The new policy states an initial six-game suspension without pay for the first offense, and a second offense results in a lifetime ban (Sharp, 2014).

This domestic violence case had all the signs Denham (2004) spoke about. Mainstream media reported on a provocative story. Multiple outlets reached broader publics. The issue became a public agenda; a Marist Poll study provided evidence of that agenda’s growth. Rice’s domestic violence was one of many highlighted cases that showed NFL players domestic violence. The 2014 Marist Poll found that the public believed domestic violence was the biggest
issue across sports. Policy-makers had to make a change to one of their policies to address the
issue.

Denham (2004,2014) and Frederick, Burch and Blazka (2015) have found that
prominence affects agenda-setting. Journalists paid close attention to their competitors and
reported the same stories they observed (Denham, 2014). Denham (2014) also found that print
and broadcast media began reporting on drug usage in the horse racing industry, but more
outlets began reporting after The New York Times’ began covering the topic. Outlets cited The
Times’ stories about drug use, and these competing outlets also used The Times’ frames for
their own stories (Denham, 2014).

However, nontraditional media are also impacting agendas in journalism. TMZ’s video
mentioned earlier is an example of the “increasingly porous boundaries that structure digitally
mediated social connections” (Hutchins, 2012, p. 125; Brinson, 2014; Deitsch, 2014). TMZ’s
video caused the Rice to escalate from nonexistence to a leading story on mainstream sports
media (Fatsis, 2014). Agenda-setting has impacted the NFL through media headlines, but the
theory affects the league two ways.

Agenda-setting in business communication has often centered around the corporation
heads. Gaines-Ross (1999) found that CEOs can correlate to 45 percent of a firm’s reputation. In
this scenario, the CEO is an attribute, and the business is an object. The attributes have a bigger
impact on the object’s public approval than does the object itself. If an owner approved or
disapproved of his team kneeling for the National Anthem, that would have an impact on the
audience or fan base. Dallas Cowboys’ owner Jerry Jones disapproved protesting the Star-
Spangled Banner, and his actions caused a protest outside AT&T Stadium. Three hundred
people stood outside the Cowboys’ stadium and took a knee across the street from AT&T Stadium. The protest leader, Dr. Frederick Douglas Haynes, III, said it was ironic Jones made his team stand for the anthem because of the anthem’s third stanza regarding slaves (Stevenson, 2017). Agenda-setting could have occurred in the NFL in business communication when NFL teams blackballed Kaepernick. The New York Boxing Commission did the same with Muhammad Ali when he refused to be drafted to war. The boxing commission said his actions were bad for the sport’s image (The Guardian, 2013).

**Protests Across Sports**

Many protesting athletes could not resume their careers in prominent sports following their protests. The athletes’ respective sports leagues either punished them immediately following their protests, or teams “Blackballed” the protesting athlete, leaving the person unsigned to a team. Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf’s protest is a story parallel to Kaepernick’s.

Born Chris Jackson, the former LSU point guard converted from Christianity to the Nation of Islam in 1991, and Jackson changed his named to Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf (Maisonet, 2014). Abdul-Rauf played for the Denver Nuggets in the 1995-96 season after the team drafted him third overall in the National Basketball Association’s 1990 draft. At the beginning of the 1996 season, the former LSU guard started protesting the National Anthem. Like Kaepernick, Abdul-Rauf said he would not stand for the American flag because it is “a symbol of oppression, of tyranny” (Times, 2013). However, unlike Kaepernick, Abdul-Rauf’s protest did not draw immediate national attention. Kaepernick’s protest reached national headlines in August 2016, the beginning of the NFL season, but Abdul-Rauf protested quietly for more than half of the 1996 NBA season. For perspective, an NBA season begins in late October, and Abdul-Rauf did
not reach national headlines until March 1996. A local paper mentioned Abdul-Rauf’s protest in a small blurb, but the following day, media requests for Abdul-Rauf tripled (Maisonet, 2014). The spike in media attention highlighted how important local and national media found Abdul-Rauf’s story. Within two weeks, the NBA suspended Abdul-Rauf and fined him $31,000, the per game portion of his NBA contract (Hodges, 1996). Escalated media coverage could have caused the NBA to suspend Abdul-Rauf to avoid fan outrage because public opinion is an economic factor in sports (Koenig, 1998, p. 400). If fans refused to go to games or buy apparel because they disagreed with Abdul-Rauf’s actions, the NBA would lose money (Koenig, 1998).

The key difference between Kaepernick’s protest and Abdul-Rauf’s, based on the two sports leagues, is that the NBA has a rule stating players must stand for the National Anthem, but the NFL didn’t have such a rule until the change in 2018. The NBA and Abdul-Rauf, unlike the NFL and Kaepernick, found a middle ground, two days after his suspension. Abdul-Rauf said he would "offer a prayer, my own prayer for those who are suffering--Muslim, Caucasian, African American and Asian or whoever is in that position, whoever is having trouble. That is what I cry out for" (Hodges, 1996). However, just like Kaepernick, Abdul-Rauf had difficulty continuing his playing career.

During the 1996 season, Abdul-Rauf tied his career high 19.2 points-per-game, and he averaged a career-high 6.8 assists-per-game as well (ESPN, n.d.). Abdul-Rauf performed career highs while playing a career low 57 games (ESPN, n.d.). Missing the final month of the NBA regular season because of a sprained left foot contributed to his career low games (AP, 1996). However, his numbers lead the Nuggets in both scoring and assists (AP, 1996). During the 1996 offseason, however, the Denver Nuggets traded the protesting point guard to the Sacramento
The Los Angeles Times’ article (1996) suggests Nuggets’ head coach Bernie Bickerstaff didn’t trade Abdul-Rauf because of his injury and late protest at a conscious level. “I don’t know about the subconscious, but we saw an opportunity and Sacramento had interest,” Bickerstaff said (AP, 1996). Additionally, the L.A. Times (1996) article stated, “Bickerstaff said Abdul-Rauf’s suspension and late-season foot injury subconsciously may have played a part in the trade, but it was not the reason for shipping him west.” In terms of talent recognition, Kings General Manager Geoff Petrie said Abdul-Rauf was “one of the most explosive scorers in the NBA,” at the time of the trade (AP, 1996).

The key parallel between Abdul-Rauf and Kaepernick was the punishment each suffered. Teams did not sign either athlete after their protests. Kaepernick’s story reached headlines at the start of the NFL season, thrusting him to national headlines throughout the 2016 NFL season. However, Abdul-Rauf’s story was an example of how a professional sports organization reacts to negative, national attention. Abdul-Rauf went over half an NBA season without national scrutiny until March, and the NBA disciplined him immediately. Muhammad Ali and Olympians Tommie Smith and John Carlos also suffered because of their protests becoming national headlines.

On April 28, 1967, Ali refused being drafted into the U.S. Army, saying he was a conscientious objector (Hlavaty, 2017). Ali cited religious reasons, but after his refusal, the New York Boxing Commission stripped him of his heavyweight title (History, n.d.). The Boxing Commission said Ali’s draft refusal was detrimental to the sport (The Guardian, 2013). The commission perhaps sought to protect its image from national headlines. Initially, on June 20,
1967, the boxing commission gave Ali a three-year ban, alongside his five-year prison sentence and $10,000 fine (History, n.d.). Ali would resume boxing, however. On June 20, 1971, in Clay v. United States (1971), the Supreme Court reversed the ruling, and Ali’s appeal was successful. Ali, like Abdul-Rauf, performed a political action and used religious reasoning.

In 1968, Olympians Smith and Carlos performed a Black power salute during the 1968 Olympics’ medal ceremony. According to The Washington Post (2017), Smith and Carlos used the medal ceremony to protest many issues. Before mounting the podium, the two former Olympic sprinters removed shoes to protest poverty, wore beads and scarfs to protest lynching, and, during the anthem, raised their fists while lowering their heads (Brown, 2017). Carlos also wore a black t-shirt over his Olympic uniform to “reflect the shame I felt that my country was traveling at snail's pace towards something that should be obvious to all people of good will” (Brown, 2017). The two athletes were ordered to leave the stadium after their protest, and the U.S. track team suspended them from the organization (Brown, 2017).

The main difference between Ali’s story and the Olympians’ is that Ali returned to compete in his sport. After Ali won his appeal with the Supreme Court, he returned to the boxing ring on October 26, 1970, defeating Jerry Quarry (Keating, 2010) and continuing to box for another 11 years. Smith and Carlos had to move on from track. However, the Women’s National Basketball Association presents a different case for its athletes.

WNBA players have been active protesters, and the WNBA has fined its players when they violate policies. However, they don’t reach negative, national headlines often. The WNBA fined the New York Liberty, Phoenix Mercury and Indiana Fever $5,000 each and $500 per player for wearing black warm-up shirts following a police-involved deadly shooting. The WNBA
fined them because the league has a uniform policy against players wearing the black shirts they wore during warm-ups (Vasilogambros, 2016). Regardless, the WNBA has been a politically active sport. Aside from wearing Black Lives Matter shirts, the Seattle Storm partnered with Planned Parenthood (Megdal, 2017).

The Minnesota Lynx locked arms during the National Anthem in game one of the 2017 WNBA Finals (Nelson, 2017). The Washington Mystics declined an invitation to the White House (Steinberg, 2017). The lack of public ridicule makes the WNBA’s case unique, but the low television ratings is a reason for lack of public ridicule. In fact, The Times (2016) published an article speaking about the women’s association’s lack of popularity. The WNBA has increased in popularity since the 2016 and 2017 seasons, but they still are not at the forefront of media coverage. Additionally, no players are singled out, condemned and/or punished, as has been the case for athletes of the male sports discussed earlier. Protests must gain national media’s attention for public backlash to occur, but none of WNBA’s efforts have resulted as such.

**Protests & Media Relations**

A protest is an important way for citizens to present their claims and voice their concerns (Lee, 2014). However, protesters can only achieve their desired outcomes if mass media cover and portray protesters’ messages correctly (Lee, 2014). Positive and continual coverage can validate and spread protesters’ messages, which in turn helps protesters gain public support and influence government officials (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). However, media have a history of negatively portraying and delegitimizing protests, and scholars have noticed. Past research revealed a relationship between media coverage and social protest called a “protest paradigm.” The protest paradigm is a “set of news coverage patterns that
typifies mainstream media coverage” (McLeod, 2007). Media coverage often belittles protesters and prevents them from being active players in the political field (McLeod, 2007). The protest paradigm is also the result of reporter bias, news outlet influence, medium restriction and so on (McLeod, p. 186).

Several characteristics make up this paradigm: news frames, public opinion, delegitimization and demonization are several of McLeod’s (2007) listed factors. Demonization and public opinion relate to this study. McLeod says demonization is when media coverage includes potential threats and negative consequences from protests. In an extreme case, such as protests-turned-riots, media coverage often covers violence, property damage and loss of community resources, such as law enforcement (McLeod, p. 187). With public opinion, reporters often generalize the public’s thought, but media also pay attention to protesters’ appearances and behavior to highlight differences from social norms, such as Kaepernick wearing an Ali shirt to Levi Stadium (SI Wire, 2016).

Common news frames are “riot” and “carnival,” and delegitimization occurs when media do not sufficiently explain the meaning and context of protest actions (McLeod, 2007). Arpan et. al (2006) state parallels to McLeod’s (2007) words about the protest paradigm. Arpan et. al (2006) say the continuous use of journalistic norms in the protest paradigm could cause an “availability heuristic” about protesters. Simply, viewers with previous exposure to violent protest media would lead viewers to believe all protests are violent and deviant (Arpan et. al, 2006). Moreover, media frame protests differently based on the demographics of the protestors. Lopez (2016) showed how media outlets gave different attention to protests when the activists were White compared to Black.
During the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge protest in Oregon, armed militia threatened to use violence for a policy change regarding publicly managed land (Lopez, 2016). Ammon and Ryan Bundy, two brothers who were of the armed militia in Oregon, said they did not want to hurt anyone, but “they would not rule out violence if police tried to remove them” (Lopez, 2016). However, media did not highlight the violent nature of the Oregon protest. “Peaceful protest in Oregon rancher arson case followed by building takeover at national wildlife refuge” read the Associated Press’s tweet, and the New York Times only had the story as a sidebar on its frontpage the day after the protest began (Lopez, 2016). When the protests are majority Black people, such as the Black Lives Matter protest, where most protests are peaceful, the narrative changes. Media blamed the BLM protest for a rise in crime and violence in 2015, and pundits/media personalities have called both BLM protestors and police shooting victims thugs (Lopez, 2016). Media coverage for protests changes not just for African American protestors, but minorities as whole receive different coverage.

Wolfsfeld, Avraham and Aburaiya (2000) examined how the Hebrew Press in Israel covered an annual Arabian minority protest. The authors discovered that the Hebrew Press used the days leading up to the Land Day protest to exaggerate threats the protest poses. Wolfsfeld et. al (2000) said media use a “law and order” frame and position themselves in a social order stance (p. 116). Considering the Land Day protests, only two years out of the then 20-year-old protest had violent outbursts accompanying the protests, and eight of the remaining ten years had isolated incidents (p. 119).

However, the authors’ findings show media frame their stories about Land Day protests exclusively for the Jewish majority and link the protest to current terrorist incidents (p. 122).
Wolfsfeld et. al (2000) also found that media treated the Arabian minority the same as other countries treated other minorities. Arabians receive little coverage, and most of their coverage is negative. For example, the media produced 106 stories about Arabs between four years, and 70 percent of those stories were in a “disorder” category (p. 121-22). This adds to literature showing the media frame Black people in the United States in a negative manner, and media frame protests for minorities negatively and with more attention than a White or majority protest. However, none of the WNBA protests have suffered this fate. Even so, many protests that receive negative media portrayals are likely to have radical tactics (Lee, 2014).

By nature, the WNBA would not have a default negative portrayal. Each story shows prominent athletes using their professional platforms to take a political stand, and the athlete inevitably suffered punishment when their story reached national headlines, which threatened the image of each respective sport. The only case where this didn’t occur was with the WNBA. Abdul-Rauf’s story, started out local, but once national media became aware, the athletes’ protests came to the forefront of the national attention. This study aims to show national media covered Kaepernick’s protest more than local media. Therefore, it is appropriate to show how national and local media cover issues differently. Again, local media only felt Abdul-Rauf’s protest was worth a small blurb, but national media took his anthem protest to the forefront of sports coverage. Local and national media do not cover issues in the same manner.

**Local Media vs. National Media**

Local media must frame their stories for local audiences because local audiences are local media’s main audience. A 2012 Pew Research Center study found 72 percent of Americans closely follow their local media outlets for their local information. Thirty-nine percent of
participants said losing their local newspaper would impact their media consumption (Pew, 2012). Audiences feel local media are more trustworthy than national media. According to a Videa poll (2017), 62 percent of participants trusted local media more than national media because they believe local media have less bias without a national agenda, and the public’s beliefs were accurate. In terms of coverage, local media has shown its accuracy in coverage compared to national media when a national event is within a local community.

Friedman and Wegner’s (1986) study showed the difference between local and national media. In their study, The Houston Post published 160 stories about the natural disaster within 16 days, and the publication produced more than two stories per day about the disaster on their front page (Friedman & Wenger, 1986). Moreover, 70 percent of The Houston Post’s stories did not reference any myths, and most stories mentioning myths opposed the false narratives (Friedman & Wenger, 1986). The Houston Post sought to ignore these “disaster myths.” Panic, looting, martial law and massive evacuation are several disaster myths Friedman and Wegner searched for in their experiment (p. 33). In their study, national media had much less coverage. Over eight days, The New York Times, Washington Post and USA Today published a combined 32 stories, and all three publications’ articles referenced 35 public “misconceptions” (Friedman & Wegner 1986). The New York Times was the only paper that dispelled any myths, and The Times only did so twice in their 13 stories (Friedman & Wegner, 1986).

Friedman and Wegner’s study shows the discrepancy that local and national have when covering a national event that impacts a local community. This case shows the detail local media provide when covering a story pertinent to local audiences. The local Houston paper
omitting and dispelling disaster myths was a different frame from national media coverage. 

Freidman and Wegner’s study was just one example of the local and national media discrepancy. Media coverage becomes more important when considering the impact media have on public thought.

In Toledo, Ohio, Palmgreen and Clarke (1977) conducted a study for agenda-setting. Respondents listed issues local and national issues important to them. Palmgreen and Clarke found that national media were better agenda-setters than local media. Palmgreen and Clarke sent 400 residents a questionnaire, and each household had either the local or the national survey (p. 441). The surveys asked respondents to identify issues on either the local or the national level, and respondents listed less national issues than local issues, 55 national issues compared to and 33 local issues. Their results imply that national media were better at setting the public’s agenda. The public’s national agenda was centered around less issues than was the local agenda. Furthermore, 58 percent of the issues respondents listed had at least 187 newspaper and television stories covering the issues two weeks before the authors began interviews. Conversely, 57 percent of the local issues respondents had no more than sixteen stories (p. 443). Simply put, national media provided much content for a few topics, but local media provided much content for many topics. Respondents were aware of multiple issues, but national media created a more concise agenda than local media did. Literature also shows how local and national media have impacted public salience, but for some issues, media have had different agendas at the local and national level.

Hester and Gibson (2007) studied how media set different agendas at the local and national levels for same-sex marriage during the 2004 presidential election cycle. They
hypothesized that media coverage at the national level would set the public’s national agenda and national coverage would predict public salience. Their findings showed the strong relationship media and public agenda had at the national levels. During the same week and following week of national media coverage, nearly 42 percent of the Yahoo! Buzz Index’s variance was for gay marriage (p. 309). Hester and Gibson also predicted although local and national coverage would relatively be the same, local and national media coverage would differ in areas where the public considered the issue to be national. Chicago and Atlanta are two cities where the authors found that the correlation between national and local media was high, but Atlanta had a smaller correlation because same-sex marriage was considered a local issue (p. 313).

Hester and Gibson’s (2007) results showed the difference local and national media had with their agenda-setting patterns, but local media was more influential in Chicago than Atlanta (p. 314). Hester and Gibson believed multiple factors influenced issue salience, such as the proximity of the issue to the city, but in both cities, local and national media combined were better predictors of issue salience than alone. When Hester and Gibson accounted for local media in the salience model, the issue more than doubled in explained variance in Atlanta, at 17 percent, than in Chicago, at eight percent (Hester & Gibson, 2002). Hester and Gibson’s finding supported their theory that local media had a stronger agenda-setting influence in an area where the issue was local, such as Atlanta, instead of Chicago, a national area.

Hester and Gibson’s study displayed many parallels my study will seek to find. Rather than same-sex marriage and focus on public salience, I will examine the media itself. However, I will look at local and national media outlets to determine how much information about
Kaepernick’s protest they published via social media, but the way news outlets have used social media to distribute information is a key component.

**Regional Media**

Regional media is the intermediate level between local and national level-media with various meanings to define it. McGonagle and van Eijk (2014) say regional media includes multiple forms of media, such as print and broadcast, that operate at various, sub-national levels. Regional media differ from national media because regional media create communicative, public spaces to discuss regional issues (McGonagle & van Eijk, 2014).

Additionally, regional media is necessary for people of diverse backgrounds, different religions or cultures, to understand one another. “The shared nature of the communicative space created by regional media also facilitates intercultural dialogue, understanding and tolerance and thus contribute to the pre-emption and countering of hate speech” (p. 6). However, national media can undermine regional media as an area of discourse when marginalizing regional identities and languages because regional media’s relationship with communities they serve to tend to be “closer, stronger and more representative” than similar relationships between communities and national media (p. 5). National media do not go as in-depth as regional media in defining regional identities in terms of linguistics and religion (McGonagle & van Eijk, 2014).

Ewart (2000) says similar statements involving regional media. “Regional media play a central role in constructing and cementing the identity culture of communities and their publics” (p. 1). Moreover, the author states regional media create “consensus narratives” to tell readers who they are and how they should experience events, and regional media is the “glue”
that brings people into a “social collective or media public” (p. 2). Regional media present majority group’s value and characteristics to create this public binding (Ewart, 2000). However, Ewart showed the errors regional media have when portraying public regions. Although central Queensland, Australia, has a working-class history, regional media continually portrayed the region as a rural area (Ewart, 2000). “It might be argued that through the promotion of such values, the Morning Bulletin and other media outlets are responsible for keeping the city in its small-town state, removed from the metropolitan city and the presumed negative values of city-life” (p. 3-4). Journalists projected a public with a high moral compass although there was little, if any, evidence the public held itself to a high moral code (Ewart, 2000).

Fredriksson, Tiainen and Hanning (2014) present another angle of regional media impact on public thought. The authors sought to discover if regional news in Sweden linked public knowledge of a patient’s right policy and public attitudes about guaranteed time off (Fredriksson et. al, 2014). They used a national telephone survey, media coverage and official waiting-time statistics. The authors found that regional media covered the waiting-time guarantee 7,000 times in nearly 400 different online media sources (p. 2735). Additionally, 16 of the top 20 broadcast media sources were regional or local (p. 2735-6), but the media coverage varied greatly between regions. However, the high media coverage numbers regionally no correlation with levels of awareness about waiting-time policies (p. 2737). However, regional media coverage did impact positive and negative attitudes about the waiting time policy; the average media coverage per region was 39, but regional coverage ranged from 8 to 77 (Fredriksson et. al, 2014, p. 2736-7). The Pew Research Center (1998) launched a pilot
study to discover what biases the press have through framing, and their studies show the most straightforward news comes from local/regional outlets.

Pew’s Journalism and Media staff performed a study between national and local/regional newspapers. The authors categorized local and regional media as daily newspapers with significant circulation in large metropolitans, and national media were daily newspapers with national and foreign desks (p. 14). Their study showed that local and regional papers framed their stories differently than national papers. Local papers’ front pages carried more direct coverage based on news event facts, but national papers’ results showed more “interpretive” front page articles (Pew, 1998, p. 6). Local media were two times as likely as national papers to deliver straightforward news, but national media were more likely to give “explanatory narratives frames” to look at the larger trend (p. 6). Explanatory frames were frames attempting to show how stories fit into larger trends or historical context (p. 2). Collectively however, 30 percent of all sampled front pages were combative, “building stories around conflict...revealing wrongdoing or injustice (p. 5). This finding lead Pew to conclude that conflict was the most common way press framed their stories; straightforward news was only half the amount of combative news in this study (p. 5). However, this study launched in 1998, and now media use social media to disseminate their stories. Social media posts, such as tweets on Twitter, can be the headlines of stories. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how media use Twitter to spread stories, updates and breaking news.

**How Media Use Twitter**

Twitter is a platform that allows users to post 280-character posts on its website or mobile app. “Tweets” are available to followers who subscribed to a user’s account (Lenhart &
Profile users can use instant message e-mails and various other methods to deliver tweets to followers (Armstrong & Gao, 2009). Users send and view tweets on their mobile devices (Palser, 2009). Twitter was launched in July 2006, and has been a popular worldwide platform, averaging 330 million active users (Statista, 2018). Twitter’s wide audience has been a prime area for information distribution, and the news industry has discovered this. In October 2007, media outlets like The Los Angeles Times used Twitter to release urgent information about the California wildfires (Palser, 2009). Updates and breaking news tweets have allowed media to give consumers necessary information as they react in a crisis; this allowed media outlets to fulfill their public duties (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001).

Twitter has been an efficient place for previewing and publishing work, breaking news, connecting with reporters and resources (Farhi, 2009). Newsrooms recognized this and began using social media. News organizations push their story and headlines as web copy to the Twitter stream (Palser, 2009) News outlets continued using Twitter to update breaking news, suggestions for stories or questions and updates that do not require users to visit another page (Palser, 2009). Additionally, newsrooms section off their departments with their own Twitter accounts, such as @nytimesphoto, and reporters of publication also brand themselves on Twitter as the same, like @nyt Dave Winer (Tenore, 2007).

Schultz and Sheffer (2010) looked at what changes Twitter is causing in sports journalism news. The majority age range of Twitter users is from 35 years old to 49 years old; this age range is similar to the age of heavy sports fans (Gantz & Wenner, 1991). Twitter’s popularity among fans, athletes and sports media is another factor, and this popularity could “change the athlete/fan interaction forever” (Gregory, 2009, p. 24). In 2009, Shaquille O’Neal
had nearly two million Twitter followers. Now he has 15.2 million followers on Twitter. The NBA Twitter site had 600,000 followers in 2006; NBA now has 27.6 million. Chris Bosh’s 2009 words were accurate. “We’re hitting (Twitter) hard. You can put up what you’re doing, or if you have question, you’d be surprised how much people now” (Feschuk 2009). Sanderson and Kassing (2014) talked about how Twitter changed the parasocial interactions (PSI), allowing users to become advice-givers. However, Twitter has been responsible for more charged dialogue. A dozen NFL teams have placed restriction on social media use during open practices at training camps, even though fans don’t have restrictions at the same time (Shultz & Sheffer, 2010).

ESPN also recognizes the impact Twitter has on the profession. ESPN created a Twitter guide for its staff as part of its “Guidelines to Social Networking;” the guideline suggested ESPN reporters use the same rules for tweeting that they do for writing articles (Hiestand, 2009).

However, the news industry has found value in social networking sites for the better part of the last decade. The *Project for Excellence in Journalism* (2009a) found social media sites were necessary for media to spread news. *The Tallahassee Democrat* used social media to reach younger readers about a case involving the murder of a police informant (Thompson, 2009). Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser and Howes (2009) discovered that social networking sites could help build agendas because social media sites were becoming journalists’ resources for discovering sources and stories. Social media platforms like Twitter have challenged newsroom values. Gans (2004) defined news content values and topical values. Enduring values are those that affect what stories are newsworthy, and these values are present over longs time periods (p. 41). Technological developments such as Twitter have challenged these values because they are challenging journalistic industry norms. *The Online News Association* found that most online
over half of online journalists said the internet is “changing fundamental values of journalism,” including loosened standards and stricter time deadlines (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009). The Pew Research Center (2011) conducted a content analysis to show how media outlets have used Twitter.

Holcomb, Gross and Mitchell (2011) looked at 13 major news organizations and broke down where media outlets’ tweets redirect users to. They examined more than 3,600 tweets over the course of a week. They found that outlets used Twitter to distribute their own information. Ninety-three of the 13 outlets’ tweets linked to their own site; just six percent linked to other news sites; and only one percent linked to non-news sites (Holcomb, Gross & Mitchell, 2011). The organizations’ news agendas matched their tweets is a key finding. Four out of the top five news stories on legacy outlets were the same on their Twitter feeds (Holcomb et. al, 2011). Moreover, tweets per company varied. On average, Pew’s study found that the 13 outlets posted 33 tweets a day, but the number ranged from close to 100 tweets a day to fewer than ten. Additionally, the outlets averaged 41 different organizational feeds they offered, but The Washington Post topped the list with 98 feeds or channels, while The Daily Caller only had a single Twitter feed. Media outlets used Twitter to further their own agendas and distribute information. According to this Pew study, when media published tweets they direct users to their own content majority of the time. Armstrong and Gao (2010) performed a content analysis as well to show how the news industry used Twitter as a content dissemination tool bring media consumers to their local feeds.

The authors looked at nine news organizations across a four-month timeframe to discover how links, headlines and individuals were put into a Twitter’s former 140-character
limit. Additionally, Armstrong and Gao differentiated between how local, regional and national media formed their tweets. They chose media outlets who had active Twitter accounts since 2009 and each organization’s coverage and circulation were at different levels (national, regional and local) (p. 224). Armstrong and Gao conducted a chi-square analysis, and the results showed that 23 percent of news organizations’ tweets linked to multimedia presentations with video; the main difference between newspapers and television tweets is TV stations tended to have more multi-media content than newspapers (p. 227). Armstrong and Gao also examined the relationship between tweets and headlines. Newspapers had more identical phrasing in their tweets and headlines to their tweets, and media at the regional level posted tweets similar to their headlines more often than did national media. Additionally, in terms of proximity difference, national media tweeted crime news the least, whereas regional media did the most, and newspapers and TV stations only had a significant difference when reporting crime. TV news tweeted crime nearly 38 percent of the time, but newspapers only did so about 20 percent of the time (p. 227).

Additionally, Schultz and Sheffer (2010) state how Twitter is changing the newsroom. Twitter is an ideal platform for headline service and reporting stories media often ignore. “We brand ourselves the breaking news station, so if we have breaking news or a difficult weather situation, we use Twitter to push page views,” said KSHB news director Peggy Phillip (Petner, 2009). Journalists use Twitter to promote their own work, and the journalists’ brands are an advantage to the stations.

“When a station can tap into the individual brands within the organization, it can strengthen the collective organization’s brand” (Petner, 2009). Additionally, Twitter helps news
organizations spread their stories. “The power of Twitter is when people start spreading stories for you. We’re catching on now that everyone on staff is a brand, and we have to market that,” said *Journal-World* online editor Jonathan Kealing (Schultz & Sheffer, 2009, p. 229). Schultz and Sheffer’s sent out surveys to sports journalists in the United States and cross referenced their list to assure the surveyed journalists had Twitter accounts for professional media reasons (p. 232). In their study, Schultz and Sheffer (2010) found that very little change occurred in journalistic perception because of Twitter, but different groups user Twitter differently. Older journalists, 40-years-old and older, used Twitter to promote their own work, but younger journalists had two different reasons for using Twitter. One, young journalists used it for breaking news, and two, they used it to express their personal opinions. Moreover, younger journalists felt Twitter made them better sports journalists (p. 234).

Literature shows that local and national media differ when using social media, but it also addresses how social media impacted legacy media’s reporting, such as pushing agendas. Timely tweets relative to an outlet’s own content have become a norm. Most of the outlets’ tweets link back to their own website, furthering an outlet’s agenda. Newspapers and television stations use Twitter similarly, and proximity doesn’t impact the biggest issues. Perhaps the reason national media tweet crime the least is because local crimes have not reached national headlines on a regular basis. However, national media have had a stronger impact when setting agendas, and their influence could be a reason professional sports made their athletes suffer for protesting.
Social Media and Sports

Sanderson and Kassing (2014) explored what impact new media have on fan-athlete interactions. Previously, Horton and Wohl (1956) suggested that over time, and due to repeated exposure, viewers would develop intimate, one-sided bonds with media personalities. However, Hutchins (2012) found that Twitter has a great capacity to create parasocial interactions, which slightly reveal the real person a celebrity persona hides. Hutchins (2012) also added that that tweets “build a sense of ‘common experience’ between athletes and their followers, be they fans, observers or dedicated tweeters, and this repetitive communication can momentarily erase the cultural distance between athletes and fans” (p. 242). This communication is something journalists have noticed. Deadspin founder Will Leitch said he founded his company to give fans a voice, but fans did not help. However, Twitter, team message boards and athletes controlled the narrative, and fans have a greater understanding of all sports issues (Leitch, 2011). “In the past, sports issues were filtered through the eyes of elderly white men in mustard-stained ties … Now I am the filter; fans are the filter” (Leitch, 2011:27). New media enable athletes to disclose information and foster these PSIs with fans, leading to new types of interactions.

The emphatic interaction, for example, occurs when fans mobilize to support an idolized sports figure (Sanderson & Kassing, 2014). When Lance Armstrong sent out a tweet confessing to steroid usage and after losing his victories, fans tweeted back “LOVE THIS!!!” and “YOU STILL WON THOSE!!,” but some Twitter users did call Armstrong out for his steroid usage (Sanderson & Kassing, 2014, p. 252). Emphatic interactions manifest behaviorally, but they are also relevant in affective responses (Gleich, 1997). These responses can be destructive or constructive. Fans
offer advice, but the interactions can be critical and quickly turn offensive (Sanders & Kassing, 2014). Advice giving is another interaction. New media allow fans to reverse roles in a PSI because fans give advice rather than seek it (Kassing & Sanderson 2009).

In the 2009 study, Kassing and Sanderson discovered that fans offered Landis information about the remaining stages of his race. Additionally, people posted on their blogs trying to help Dallas Mavericks’ owner Mark Cuban prolong his time on Dancing with the Stars. Sanderson (2008) found a critical example when fans critiqued Curt Schilling. Fans said Schilling was inconsistent with Christianity and needed to better his physical, mental and emotional self. Advice being both helpful and critical is an example of the span of emphatic interaction and the possibility that it can become ugly and hurtful (Sanderson & Kassing, 2014).
Hypotheses & Research Questions

The Pew Research Center’s (1998) study showed how national media covered stories in a thematic sense, attempting to pull stories in to a bigger picture narrative, and regional and local media reported stories in straightforward fashion. Additionally, Palmgreen and Clarke’s (1977) agenda-setting study found that national media were better agenda-setters than local media, and because second-level agenda-setting states that the more coverage an attribute has, the more salient the topic becomes, media must provide more coverage to create this narrative. Additionally, Kaepernick’s protest has a split of negative public opinion. Media are prone to create stories in combative frames (Pew, 1998) and negatively frame protests (McLeod, 2007). Lastly, factoring in how the press use social media to push their own agendas (Holcomb et. al, 2011) and how media of different proximities, local, regional or national, use social media (Holcomb et. al, 2011), I propose the following hypotheses:

• H1: National media provided more online continuous coverage of Kaepernick’s protest than regional media.

• H2: Regional media provided more online continuous coverage of Kaepernick’s protest than local media.

Additionally, because media have framed stories differently based on their proximity and sports media’s relationship with leagues, I seek to answer the following questions:

• RQ1: What emotions do different levels of media use to frame their Kaepernick coverage?

• RQ2: What sentiment do different levels of media use to frame Kaepernick coverage?

• RQ3: Do media outlets with TV contracts cover sports differently from outlets without programming contracts?
Data & Method

Crimson Hexagon (CH) is a social media analysis tool that has access to all Twitter accounts (Hitlin, 2013; Hopkins & King, 2010; Pew, 2012). Academic researchers use CH to examine frames and other message elements in various forms of new media, such as tweets and news stories (McGregor, 2014). CH also has a function called Sentiment Analysis I will use to measure media’s emotional frames per tweet. “Sentiment analysis is the measure of positive language and negative language” (CH, 2018). CH’s analysis attempts to understand what people think and how they feel about a topic, but manual, human measurement is the most accurate way to determine this sentiment (CH, 2018).

Therefore, I incorporated critical technocultural discourse analysis to examine the symbolic meaning within Kaepernick-coverage tweets to determine the emotions and sentiments media imply. CTDA is used to interpret the meaning and meaning-making process within digital spaces during public discourse (Williams & Gonlin, 2017). Researchers can use CTDA when conducting online analysis of Twitter conversations, and the technique has been used to understand representations and social constructions of race on blogs (Williams & Gonlin, 2017, p. 991). Nakamura (2006) and Brock (2012) argue that internet researchers should consider the user’s social construction of race, gender, etc. and the platform’s social construction and constraints. Williams and Gonlin (2017) argue a step further than the principles Nakamura and Brock highlighted. Williams and Gonlin say the same principles used when understanding technology may be used to understand audiences’ interaction with television media during online discussions (p. 992).
To properly conduct this study for each media level, I gathered tweets from the *Los Angeles Times Sports*, *Sporting Green*, *ESPN NFL* and *Yahoo Sports*’ Twitter accounts and compare each account’s tweets to one another. For clarification, the *San Francisco Chronicle* did not have a 49ers specific Twitter account. *Sporting Green* provides a Twitter account named @SportingGreenSF, which produces content relative to all Bay Area sports teams. *ESPN* calls itself the “worldwide leader in sports” and is the most visited sports website (Alexa, 2018; Similar Web, 2017). However, ESPN covers every sport, as the name suggests, so for more data relative to this study, I used *ESPN NFL’s* Twitter handle @ESPNNFL. *Yahoo Sports*, however, is in the top three with *ESPN* in online traffic, and top of the list Ebiz’s (2018) website, which uses Alexa’s global traffic rankings (Alexa, 2018; Similar Web, 2017).

Although *Yahoo Sports* reflects similar umbrella coverage for sport, their NFL specific Twitter handle is not active. Therefore, I used @YahooSports rather than @YahooSportsNFL. For clarification, *ESPN* does have an NFL-specific Twitter account, but the both @ESPN and @ESPNNFL present relatively the same coverage and tweets. Two national outlets are needed because *ESPN* has a television contract with the NFL, and at the time of Kaepernick’s protest, *Yahoo Sports* had not yet broadcast any NFL games.

Additionally, *ESPN* has a larger Twitter audience with over two million followers compared to *Yahoo Sports* with 419,000 followers. Because of this discrepancy in online audiences, I examined each outlet individually to measure their impact. The *Los Angeles Times* covers the regional media because it operates at a sub-national level (McGonagle & van Eijk, 2014). For comparison, @LATimesSports has 39,000 Twitter followers. The timeframe for the tweets is between August 2016 and January 2017 to cover the preseason, which was the start
of Kaepernick’s protest, all 16 games of the 2016 NFL regular season, and just before the Super Bowl. I used social monitors to track each media outlet’s Twitter activity to observe how the sampled media shared stories online. The 49ers did not make the playoffs in 2016, so using February data was not needed.

**Coding**

After gathering this information, I performed a series of crosstabs and chi-square tests to analyze CH’s results. A chi square test measures the possible association between two nominal variables (Lund, 2018). Chi-square tests are appropriate when variables are either nominal or ordinal and contain two or more “categorical, independent groups” (Lund, 2018). In this study, I use *Coverage, Proximity, Emotions* and *Category* as nominal variables for comparison. *Game, Political* and *Between* make up the category for *Coverage*. To create these categories, I combined CH’s raw data with CTDA and literature that shows different media patterns per media level and how press use social media to push their agendas.

*Game* coverage includes in-game updates and statistics, post-game comments relative to the competition completed and previews or pressers with information for upcoming games. *Political* suggests the tweets are discussing Kaepernick’s activist actions rather than his athletic ones, such as his donations or recent comments about protest reactions. *Between* refers to a tweet that includes the previous two categories, displaying information about athletics and activism. *Proximity* will categorize the area each outlet covers from local to regional and national. *Emotion* and *Category*, sentiment in CH, are part of CH’s Sentiment Analysis. The chart below shows examples of each emotion.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotions</th>
<th>Anger</th>
<th>Disgust</th>
<th>Fear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yahoo Sports @newsports</td>
<td>Yahoo Sports @newsports</td>
<td>Yahoo Sports @newsports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on Colin Kaepernick’s anthem posted, “It’s dumb and disrespectful.”</td>
<td>Chicago area mattress salesman wants customers to wipe feet on Kaepernick jersey.</td>
<td>Rodney Harrison apologizes for comments on Colin Kaepernick but still leaves troubling questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L.A. Times Sports @latimesnews</td>
<td>Yahoo Sports @newsports</td>
<td>Yahoo Sports @newsports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colin Kaepernick fires back after ESPN’s Tirad, differs with protests by Anthem</td>
<td>Roger Goodell’s thoughts on Kaepernick waiver between support and disappointment.</td>
<td>How big are the consequences if the 49ers cut Colin Kaepernick? @CharlesRobinson looks at his on-field performance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joy</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Surprise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L.A. Times Sports @latimesnews</td>
<td>NFL on ESPN @ESPNNFL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chris Paul on J.J. Redick podcast, “The things that Colin Kaepernick are doing are amazing”</td>
<td>Touchdown #NFC!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NFL on ESPN @ESPNNFL</td>
<td>Colin Kaepernick finds Terrell Smith for a 53-yard score.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colin Kaepernick reached out to Jeremy Lane to offer thanks after Lane also sat during national anthem last week. es.pn2c7s6rQ</td>
<td>Patriots thump Bengals in Brady’s home debut. Bills rout Kaepernick-led 49ers. lat.ms2c3001UJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L.A. Times Sports @latimesnews</td>
<td>NFL on ESPN @ESPNNFL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NFL on ESPN @ESPNNFL</td>
<td>Colin Kaepernick has been named starting QB. We discuss this and more on NFL Insiders right NOW on ESPN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Hypotheses – H1

H1 stated national media would provide more online, continuous coverage of Kaepernick’s protest than regional media. Table 1 below shows the results for a Proximity-Coverage crosstab, and Table 2 shows the results for the Author-Coverage crosstab. The sampled tweets include 162 total tweets, 140 for national outlets and 22 for regional outlets. Of the 140 national media tweets, 96 tweets were classified as Political. For regional media, 18 tweets of the 22 tweets were in the Political category. Regional media did not publish any tweets that fell in the Between category, but national media published nine tweets in this section. National media produced 96 political tweets to regional media’s 18. Although the chi-square analysis for Proximity and Coverage was statistically insignificant, $X^2 (2, N = 162) = 0.32, p > 0.05$, the chi-square for Author and Coverage was $X^2 (4, N = 162) = 0.00, p < 0.05$. Therefore, H1 is supported.

Table 1. Proximity Coverage Crosstabs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coverage</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>between</th>
<th>game</th>
<th>political</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proximity</td>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Author Coverage Crosstabs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coverage</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>between</th>
<th>game</th>
<th>political</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td></td>
<td>@ESPNNFL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>@latimessports</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>@YahooSports</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypotheses – H2

H2 stated regional media would provide more online, continuous coverage than local media for Kaepernick’s protest. Regional media produced 18 Political tweets, but local media did not publish any tweets. The Author-Coverage chi-square’s statistical significance is important here because both regional and local media had one Twitter account to represent them in this study. Therefore, H2 is supported.

Research Questions – RQ1

RQ1 asked what emotions different levels of media use to frame their Kaepernick coverage. Table 3 shows the crosstab for Proximity and Emotion. This chi-square shows national media and regional media had majority Neutral emotions. Eighty-four of national media’s 140 tweets were Neutral, and 13 of regional media’s 22 tweets also classified as Neutral, although this measure is not statistically significant, $X^2 (5, N = 162) = 0.18, p > 0.05$. Table 4 shows the results for a Coverage and Emotion crosstab, which indicates majority Neutral tweets as well. Twenty-seven of the 39 Game tweets were Neutral, and 66 of the 114 Political tweets were Neutral. This chi-square presented statistical significance between the two variables, $X^2 (10, N = 162) = 0.00, p < 0.05$. Therefore, national and regional media typically framed their Kaepernick coverage in Neutral frames, but emotions are more impactful depending on the coverage.
Table 3. Proximity Emotion Crosstabs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Anger</th>
<th>Disgust</th>
<th>Fear</th>
<th>Joy</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Surprise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proximity</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Coverage Emotion Crosstabs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Anger</th>
<th>Disgust</th>
<th>Fear</th>
<th>Joy</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Surprise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coverage</td>
<td>between</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>game</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>political</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows the results for a crosstab between Proximity and Category, and the results show locational similarities. National media were majority Neutral, 72 out of 140 tweets for national media classified as Neutral, but their negative coverage totaled 44 tweets compared to 24 positive tweets nationally. Regional media provided a split between Neutral and Negative

Research Questions – RQ2

RQ2 asked what sentiment different levels of media use to frame Kaepernick coverage.

Table 5
coverage. Both categories totaled nine each, meaning 18 out of 22 tweets for regional media were either Neutral or Negative, and only four tweets were Positive. No statistical significance occurred however, $X^2 (2, N = 162) = 0.62, p > 0.05$. Therefore, national and regional media provided mostly Neutral Kaepernick coverage, but regional media were more likely to tweet their stories with either Negative sentiment.

Table 5. Proximity * Category Crosstabs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proximity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Questions – RQ3**

*RQ3* asked if media outlets with TV contracts cover sports differently from outlets without programming contracts. Table 2’s results for the Author-Category crosstab show that *ESPN NFL* produced more *Game* coverage, 23 tweets, than *Yahoo Sports* and the *L.A. Times* combined, 12 and four respectively. With *Political* coverage, *ESPN NFL* produced 19 tweets, which is only one more than the *L.A. Times’* 18 *Political* tweets. *Yahoo Sports* produced 77 political tweets. Therefore, outlets with media-sports league contracts provide more game-based coverage than media without contracts.
Discussion & Conclusion

The data in this study revealed several consistencies that literature showed about media levels and media coverage of minorities and protests. First, national media successfully painted over regional media’s narrative, just as McGonagle and van Eijk (2014) mentioned. However, it was through a different method. McGonagle and van Eijk say that national media do not go as in-depth as regional media, but the data shows that Yahoo Sports produced the most online coverage in this study, even publishing tweets for Kaepernick’s clothing. Regardless, national media did control Kaepernick’s narrative.

Second, Bien-Aimé et. al (2016) stated that reporters are unaware of how far they can go when working for an outlet that has a contract with a sports league. Regional media’s Kaepernick-coverage was mostly political, and the L.A. Times nearly matched ESPN NFL’s political coverage. Yahoo and the NFL didn’t have a broadcasting contract until December 2017 (Battaglio, 2017). Yahoo Sports had no reason to avoid covering the protest, which could explain the considerable difference in Yahoo Sports and ESPN’s protest coverage. Yahoo maintained itself as a fourth branch because they remained independent during the tested time frame. Lastly, overall coverage was majority neutral, but national outlets were responsible for over four times as much negative content than regional media was. This is consistent with the idea that media cover protests negatively (McLeod, 2007).

In a larger context, my findings support the claim sports reporters are continuing a trend of negatively portraying Black athletes (Carvahlo, 2014; Hurst, 2015). Political coverage made up the majority of all negative coverage in this study. Although over half of the political coverage was neutral, media still focused on a publicly disapproved topic (Casteel, 2017;
Clement & Guskin, 2018). My findings help confirm one of Fisher’s (2008) results: athletes feel media focus on negative topics the most. After factoring in Kaepernick’s low approval numbers (Marist, 2014) and the fact that media are prone to negatively frame both protests (McLeod, 2007) and Black athletes (Hurst, 2015), it is clear sports reporters are guilty of both tendencies.

Otherwise, why would media create content for something as minuscule as Kaepernick wearing a Muhammad Ali shirt to the 49ers stadium other than to make headlines such as “bold statement” (Kerr-Dineen, 2016) What purpose does that serve if Kaepernick is not protesting the national anthem? I argue no purpose would exist, and media would not have covered it. The very creation of this content is negative in nature, and national media used many opportunities to post controversial updates about Kaepernick as possible. Media filled their newsfeeds with topics such as this to continue a negative conversation. Going forward, however, this coverage could worsen.

Yahoo Sports and ESPN’s coverage show a dilemma for sports media. Yahoo Sports’ is proof of media pushing an agenda on a negative topic with their large coverage numbers compared to ESPN and the L.A. Times. However, Yahoo Sports were free to do so. ESPN may not have been. It is fact that protesters need proper media coverage to spread their messages (Lee, 2014), but ESPN’s contract with the NFL could have hindered the online coverage ESPN may have provided. Perhaps the NFL did not want the “World Wide Leader in Sports” spreading Kaepernick’s message, and that could create a problem for future protesting minorities in the NFL. The four major broadcasting networks, NBC, FOX, ABC and CBS, all broadcast NFL content, in addition to ESPN and newly added Yahoo Sports for postseason games (Battaglio, 2017).
If one national outlet that had a broadcasting contract with the NFL only produced regional-level coverage, what will happen to Yahoo Sports’ coverage for future controversies? Adequate coverage could diminish as the NFL spreads its game across all broadcasting networks. Network contracts are one reason sports journalists can be ill-equipped to cover political controversies. Journalistic freedom can come into question because the restriction sports leagues can enforce, and due to the monetary relationship between media and sports, media coverage cannot be true to its form. The issue may not be that sports reporters have not dealt with political controversies often. Rather, networks may not want their reporters creating this content and straining relationships with sports leagues.

Lastly, the data shows Yahoo Sports was the only outlet willing to change the sports world from an escapist one to the actual world filled with conflict and division. Neither the L.A. Times nor ESPN NFL attempted to provide any level of coverage remotely close to Yahoo Sports’ numbers. Segrave (2000) spoke about how media used sports as a “cozy corner,” and the nonconflicting nature of sports was the perfect platform for media to maximize their income (McChesney, 1989). This part of literature combined with my findings supports my thought that Yahoo Sports’ freedom from the NFL during the protest allowed them to provide in-depth coverage. ESPN choose to keep most of their Kaepernick coverage football-related. The World-Wide Leader in Sports wanted to keep the sports world in its cozy corner.

However, that corner is dissipating because many athletes are bringing political matters into their daily dialogue with media relations. Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James regularly speaks on political issues, as have members of the Seattle Seahawks and Philadelphia Eagles, but even through this dialogue, the word “division” can be found (Owens, 2018).
Additionally, *ESPN*, as the leader of sports coverage, suffers from overexposure, and Segrave (2000) notes that overexposure to sports can cause viewers to lose the detachment that it provides (p. 75). Sports are currently in a state where they do not provide viewers the ability to detach themselves from the real world. Many major sports athletes are discussing social justice, and National Anthem discussion continues within the NFL. The NFL recently told Cowboys’ owner Jerry Jones to no longer discuss the matter (Reyes, 2018). The conversation about issues beyond sports within sports is a growing one that both sports leagues and media outlets cannot restrain, especially with issues like the NFLPA’s grievance file against the NFL for the new anthem policy (Belson, 2018). In short, Segrave (2000) was right. “Sports cannot serve as an escape from life because it is a simplistic and artificial construction grounded in the theme of youths and most adults endure a life of moral ambiguity, emotional complexity, and troublesome involvements (p. 76). That complex life is beginning to leak into the escape world sports continues to advertise itself as.
Limitations

In this study, I was only able to compile adequate data from two levels of media and only three news sources. Without a more active local outlet, this study may not show the results it intends to. Additionally, the refined data sets only account for the outlets themselves, and the tweets rarely included posts from outlet-specific reporters. Not all outlets tweet out the stories their individual reporters publish online, and the data specified the outlets’ Twitter handles only. Originally, Yahoo Sports’ NFL account was slated to be used in this study, but after refining its sample, only 22 tweets appeared. None of those tweets were Kaepernick-related and, therefore, unusable for this study. Also, the data cannot account for each media level in its entirety. Using another regional paper such as the New York Times could yield different results than what the L.A. Times presented, and Bleacher Report could present different data than what Yahoo Sports provided.

Additionally, more outlets per proximity are necessary for a broader analysis, especially at the national level. The fact that each major television network broadcasts NFL games is reason enough to analyze how these outlets produce content regarding topics such as athletes protesting. Moreover, comparing web-based national outlets, like SB Nation or Bleacher Report, to these national outlets may show a shift in online coverage and objectivity. Lastly, coding for these tweets does not represent every individual interpretation despite using CTDA to consider each tweet’s attempted symbolism and content through headlines and pullout quotes. This study also does not prove that sports journalist are ill-equipped to cover controversial political topics, although ESPN NFL’s lack thereof compared to Yahoo Sports may hint at it.
Note to Sports Media Managers

Based on the information both my study and previous literature provide, minority representation in newsrooms must increase. Covering a topic such as a protesting, minority athlete requires diversity in the newsroom because media maintain a tendency to negatively categorize African Americans and protestors. However, newsrooms must also allow their minority reporters true equal opportunity regarding assignments, so minority reporters have more experience covering these issues and their qualifications go unquestioned.

When it comes to covering a protest in the sports realm, however, media must find a balance as to not saturate sports sections with political coverage but with enough to properly serve protests. ESPN has one of the most diverse newsrooms, according to the APSE, but their online content from their main Twitter handles showed lack of coverage compared to Yahoo Sports. The current cultural climax calls for heightened political coverage, and national outlets must tell these stories to give protests the necessary coverage they need. The issue in coverage would lie in overexposure because, regardless of the specificity, an athlete in a major sports league protesting is both a sports and a news issue. Avoiding overexposure would help keep some form of the cozy corner sports was while bringing to light what these professional leagues are transitioning into: platforms for public figures to voice their concerns.

Alexa. (2018). The top 500 sites on the web The sites in the top sites lists are ordered by their 1 month Alexa traffic rank. The 1 month rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors and pageviews over the past month. The site with the highest combination of visitors and pageviews is ranked #1. Retrieved July 20, 2018, from https://www.alexa.com/topsites/category/Sports


Farhi, P. (2009). The Twitter explosion: whether they are reporting about it, finding sources on it or urging viewers, listeners and readers to follow them on it, journalists just can’t seem to get enough of the social networking service. Just how effective is it as a journalism tool? *American journalism review, 31*(3), 26-32.


Friedman, B., & Wenger, D. (1986). Local and national media coverage of disaster: A content analysis of the print media’s treatment of disaster myths.


Vita

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