

Social Media in Sports: How Popularity Status Affects a Baseball team's Twitter Strategy

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract:

As the influence of social media continues to grow, professional sports teams have been paying more attention to their marketing strategies through their social media channels. However, a study with straightforward comparisons of sports-related social media content is uncommon. This thesis aims to add to the media studies literature by comparing and contrasting the Twitter accounts of three Major League Baseball (MLB) teams, the San Diego Padres, the St. Louis Cardinals, and the New York Yankees. Each team represents a popularity stature in the MLB.

The study collects one month's worth of tweets posted by each of the three accounts. Each tweet is categorized based on whether it's an in-game highlight or not. The form of the content embedded in the tweet is also recorded. Categories include text-only still-based graphics and motion-based graphics. Ultimately, the study analyzes the benefits and deficiencies of the social media strategy implemented by each team. Readers will also get an idea of the most common social media practices and what content fans tend to engage in.

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

With social media gaining influence in people's daily lives, it is no secret that professional sports teams are investing more in social media marketing. As an extension of the team itself, the official team account becomes an effective tool to let fans build an online community, with the team account as the nucleus of the community. Especially during CoVID-19, when virtual engagement becomes the primary way to socialize, teams rely more on their social media accounts to communicate with fans for promotions and marketing purposes.

I am one of the few beneficiaries of this phenomenon. I was hired as a Twitter content manager for Taiwan's CPBL (Chinese Professional Baseball League) at the start of the 2020 season. One of my main tasks is to grow the outreach of the CPBL Twitter account and get CPBL content onto as many devices as possible. This is a common task among social media producers and one that can be achieved in various ways via different social media strategies. A short search on baseball Twitter would show how each Major League Baseball (MLB) team has a slightly different tone on their official account. Additionally, the number of engagements on each team is different, and the differences are closely correlated with the gap in the number of followers. Bigger teams with more followers tend to have more engagements than smaller teams. However, it is the smaller teams like the San Diego Padres and the Colorado Rockies that are more likely to appear as trending accounts than others. Smaller teams tend to have more creative content on social media to attract attention from non-followers.

Although various studies have been done on the rise of social media in sports and the changes in fan behavior due to social media, a straightforward comparison of social media strategies between sports teams is uncommon. With social media being a new medium for

franchises to showcase their identity, each varies in their social media strategies, and it is unknown whether one is more effective than others. Additionally, certain social media practices may be more appropriate for each team's identity. However, studies on social media practices in sports and how each team customizes their Twitter strategy to accommodate their identity are rare.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to compare three Twitter accounts of MLB teams and examine whether a team's popularity stature affects their social media strategy. The thesis will analyze the Twitter accounts of the San Diego Padres, the St. Louis Cardinals, and the New York Yankees. This thesis is set out to answer the research question, how does the popularity of a Major League Baseball team affect its practices on Twitter.

Literature Review

As the influence of social media continues to rise worldwide, sports fans have changed their habits when they're tuning in to sporting events, pushing sports teams to turn their attention to platforms like Twitter to market and engage with their fanbase. Much research has been conducted to examine how social media is being utilized in sports. In 2013, Gibbs, O'Reilly, and Brunette's research articulated how Twitter has allowed a new method of marketing for professional sports teams. One of Twitter's key advantages is its instantaneity. They write, "We note that Twitter is used to share information faster than other forms of media to engage fans." (Gibbs et al. 204) To take advantage of this feature, Canadian Football League (CFL) teams tweet live game updates almost 40% of the time. (Gibbs et al. 207) Additionally, the research also finds social media being a good platform for unconventional content, writing "teams attempt

to provide fans with behind-the-scenes content that is not normally available to fans.” (Gibbs et al., 20)

Ultimately, Gibbs, O’Reilly, and Brunette conclude the CFL teams “achieved fan engagement through Twitter as the first place to communicate news about the team, linking fans to other content and communicating live game updates with a behind-the-scenes look at the game.” With these social media practices established as early as 2013, one should expect the Padres, Cardinals, and the Yankees to follow similar trends in the present. How fans would engage with this content after it becomes common practice will be interesting to explore.

Social media also allows the team to enhance its connection with its fans. Williams, Chinn, and Suleiman find that the sense of community drives the fandom for sports fans, and teams should use social media as the catalyst to widen the fanbase. Their journal entry suggests the team identification is an integral part of sports fandom, writing, “The psychological connection of fans to a team allow a person to see the team as an extension of himself/herself ... Perceived connectedness has also been found to impact the individual’s involvement and investment within the group.” (Williams et al., 42) They also point out that the fans who “consume online content develop significantly stronger affiliations with the team and, in turn, are more likely to attend sporting events.” (Williams et al., 42) The results of the study recommend social media managers to create more personalized content. Using Twitter as the main platform in their research, the team finds Twitter “gives fans instant access to breaking news and access to conversations on insider information or behind-the-scenes activity, which can increase fan involvement, strengthen associations and allow closer connections to the team.” (Williams et al., 46) Most importantly, platforms like Twitter empowers fans to engage with the team and share their content. Since fans are likely eager to show their loyalty and fandom towards their team,

this empowerment can significantly propel the amount of social media engagement and build a stronger connection between the team and their fans.

As the studies point out, there are multiple benefits for a sports team to have a highly engaged social media account. Smith, Pegoraro, and Cruikshank find fans' high involvement in social media during the game produces a similar level of enjoyment as watching the game surrounded by friends, family, and members of their inner circle, writing "That virtual social interaction may be fulfilling the emotional need of enjoyment that they may not otherwise derive when watching the game alone" (Smith et al., 105). Teams can join the inner circle and create higher levels of enjoyment by directly engaging with their fans. Most importantly, as Clavio and Frederick point out in their studies, social media is an inexpensive method to market the team. Their study finds that the recognition factor is more important than the monetary factor, stating fans are more willing to engage "if their loyalty and dedication is rewarded in more non-tangible ways." (Clavio, 88) Similarly, Williams, Chinn, and Sulieman suggest that sports teams should "modify their Twitter activity to become by using a more personalized approach to meet the needs of specific groups of followers" (Williams et al., 46) As more sports teams establish their social media presence, a more unique and personalized approach not only can drive fan interactions online, but it can help the franchise stand out from the rest.

The Los Angeles Kings (L.A. Kings) operates one of the most successful social media accounts in sports, and Cole Armstrong et al. depicts why and how the National Hockey League (NHL) team is able to differentiate itself from the rest of sports. Armstrong et al. identify a key element to the Kings' success on Twitter, writing, "Rather than maintaining measured distance from the social media masses (i.e., fans, media, and other organizations), the Kings inserted themselves directly into their virtual community" (Armstrong et al., 2) Furthermore, the article

argues that the L.A. Kings' social media strategy suggests that the platforms serve "as a space for a brand or organization to be *real*, just as its consumers or fans are." (Armstrong et al., 2)

Armstrong, Delia, and Giardina point out that authenticity is an essential component of social media management. By personifying the Twitter account, the L.A. Kings created a relatable and easily engaging account that brings significant attention, despite being in a noisy digital world.

"The most successful organizations in the social media space appear to focus less on their promotional bottom line and more on being active, relatable, and truthful – all in effort to facilitate a community-like environment where organizations and consumers seamlessly exist."

(6)

Armstrong, Delia, and Giardina raise the examples of one of the Kings' most famous tweets, the "Vancouver Tweet." After the Kings' Game 1 upset versus the Vancouver Canucks, the Kings account posted the tweet, "To everyone in Canada outside of B.C., you're welcome." (@LAKings) Armstrong cites the tweet as a symbol of L.A. King's social media philosophy, writing "it becomes clear that he believes that the role of the official Twitter feed of a sports team has the opportunity to be more than simply a place for updates, scores, and directly relevant team information." (Armstrong et al. 10) Furthermore, by creating a personality in the account, the L.A. Kings attracted more engagement and interactions from fans. The Kings sees social media as a window to communicate and interact with their fanbase, as well as obtain a personality for the team brand. The human touch opens the door for "a new culture of fandom that is shifting the fan from strictly voyeuristic role to that of a participant or coproducer" (Armstrong et al., 12) which, as stated in studies mentioned above, is a vital situation to recognize as the nature of the platform empower the fans to be the initiator.

Additionally, the Kings promote and retweet content from non-officially affiliated blog sites. Armstrong et al. believe that, by essentially giving them a blessing, the team actively encourages fans to create team-related content. The article mentions, “By giving active consumers such as the author of *The Royal Half Blog*, creative authority the Kings are able to bridge the gap between consumers and the sports organization within the L.A. King brand community.” (Armstrong et al., 14)

Another key component to the Kings’ dynamic social media presence is their status quo within the Los Angeles community. The journal cites an interview with the Kings’ social media manager Dewayne Hankins in the article, writing, “if we’re going to do this, we’re going to go all in. Be different. Be unique. In L.A., you can do that. We’re the little brother of the other four or five teams here, so we gotta do something to be entertaining. If you’re a different team, you can’t do this. The Lakers can’t. Not to the extent that we can.” (Hankins in Armstrong et al., 9) Hankins identifies that, for a team like the Kings who needs unconventional marketing methods to be in the spotlight, they are able to go outside the box on their social media platform. Whereas, for a team like the L.A. Lakers, their social media strategy can be compromised by the prominence of their brand. The same transition to focus more on social media is monumental for the content producers and the readers, in this case, the fans.

As Clavio and Frederick point out, fans can be involved in “direct communication with players and teams, direct communication with other sports fans, direct communication with journalists and media members, and the creation of user-generated content” (Clavio and Frederick 87) Platforms like Twitter encourage fans to create content for their teams and help them identify themselves in the community. Additionally, Clavio and Frederick coin the term “locational social media,” which allows fans to check in on events for discounts and promotions;

This behavior requires more action from the consumers part of the interaction since they would need to do more than a couple of gestures on their phones. Their research suggests that fans tend to engage and create content on social media to show their passion for their teams. The psychological fulfillment of feeling they belong to a community is the key to fans using social media. (Clavio, 88) In the same article, Clavio and Frederick encourage sports teams to recognize fans' behaviors on social media, thus rewarding their supporters for their display of fandom.

Smith, Pegoraro, and Cruikshank emphasize the transition to the two-screen setup as one of the key transformations of sports consumption due to the rise of social media. They make the observation that social media opens the door for synchronous content consumption on two media platforms, one on the T.V. and one on your phone, as they write, "multitasking with online content (as a secondary task) while watching television (as a primary task) Is one of the most common media multitasking combinations." (Smith et al., 97) Their research also points out that sports consumption isn't just about getting closure by knowing the result of the game, but the emotional rollercoaster during the game. They write, "for a sports viewer, the thrill may not always be in the victory, but may sometimes be in the chase. As sports viewers begin to adopt second-screen habits into their viewing, they engage in an interactive experience with a mass audience." (Smith, 104). During the game, fans can provide live updates to their community and live-tweet their instant reaction to the game. Additionally, for fans that are not watching the live broadcast but want to know the latest scores, social media content offers instantaneous updates on the game. In return, the team can drive the conversation and encourage fan engagements by uploading instant highlights of the game. For fans that are watching the game, instantaneous video highlights offer a way to watch their favorite plays as many times as they can, whereas

most plays get replayed one time on the T.V. broadcast. Ultimately, Smith's study finds that fans' Twitter usage is directly correlated to their enjoyment, writing "what was found across both conditions was as the level of Twitter use decreases, so too does enjoyment." (Smith, 104)

Overall, the social media literature provides an understanding of what to expect during the analysis. Teams are likely to exploit Twitter's instantaneity and provide live game updates, which would also encourage the dual-screen culture. Additionally, social media admins might implement targeted content to increase engagement among its fans, who are desperate to showcase their loyalty to the team. The L.A. Kings are an example of this social media practice, where the social media admins set out to build an identity for the team on Twitter with creative posts and retweeting content produced by fans. The L.A. Kings case study also mentions their "little brother" (Hankins in Armstrong et al., 9) stature allows the social media team to operate with less burden and be more creative on Twitter.

Chapter 2: Research Method

Social Media Accounts Examined

I documented a month's worth of tweets from three Major League Baseball teams to achieve a more comparable analysis of how specific teams use social media to promote deeper engagement with their fans. The three teams are the New York Yankees, the St. Louis Cardinals, and the San Diego Padres. The three teams have a drastically different status in terms of their popularity. The Yankees are a nationally prominent team and one of the most profitable brands in sports. The St. Louis Cardinals are a popular regional brand in the Midwest. Although they don't have the same stature as the Yankees, the Cardinals regularly have one of the highest fan attendances in the MLB. The Padres, being the youngest team of the three, reside in a relatively

smaller market and are one of the least popular teams in the league. By choosing three teams with different popularity and marketability, the thesis also evaluates how a team like the Padres may have a different social media strategy than the Yankees.

Data Collection

The analysis was done in two parts, quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. For the quantitative analysis, data was collected from each tweet posted in the month of August 2020 by the three social media accounts. Information of each tweet was collected, including the number of likes and retweets, the date which the tweet was published, whether it only had texts or incorporate still-based or motion-based graphics, and whether the tweet was an in-game highlight or non-in-game highlight. The categorization of in-game and non-in-game highlight was based on whether the tweet is posted in-between the lineup graphic and the postgame box score. Tweets posted in-between and include game-related content were considered in-game tweets. Tweets not posted during a game were considered non-in-game tweets. The links of each tweet were collected for references during the qualitative analysis portion.

After the primary data collection, an effectiveness rating was calculated for each tweet based on the number of engagements it garnered. The formula is designed specifically for this thesis. As a social media admin, likes and retweets are two of the most important statistics to determine how the supporters react to the content. Likes and retweets also allow the post to gain a wider outreach since both actions allow the tweet to show up in the users' friends' timeline. Adding the number of likes and retweets is an effective way of measuring the success of a tweet. One main difference between the two engagements is that retweets guarantee the original post to show up on the users' timeline. Therefore, the effectiveness rating weights retweets 50% more

than likes. However, a tweet's engagement is largely affected by the number of followers the account already has. Although a creative social media strategy can increase the number of followers, more factors are involved for a sports team. Sports fans are mostly loyal to the team, but not the social media account. Therefore, a team with a rich history and a popular brand may have a large number of followers, despite mediocre content. Whereas a smaller team may have a wildly creative social media strategy, but due to the lack of success on the field, it has a small number of followers. To effectively compare social media strategies and minimize the factors not controlled by the Twitter admins, the number of engagements is divided by the number of followers of the account. This allows the thesis to compare each social media account on a pound-for-pound basis. Ultimately, the formula of the Effectiveness Rating is $(\text{Likes} + 1.5 * \text{Retweets}) \div \text{no. of followers of the account}$.

After the effectiveness rating was calculated, we conducted a quantitative analysis. To examine the habits of each social media team, a breakdown of how often the account post in-game and non-in-game tweets and how often they incorporate still-based or motion-based graphics was conducted. A cross-comparison of the effectiveness rating of each category was also coordinated to measure whether each form performs better than others. Due to a distinct and apparent trend, I also went back to record whether the tweet is announced as the result of a game and whether it announced a win or a loss. The average effectiveness ratings of those categories were also compared to measure the influence of on-the-field products on the content.

Qualitative analysis

After the quantitative analysis, the two most effective tweets, according to the effectiveness rating, were picked from each social media account and analyzed separately.

During the process, the language of the caption, the usage of photos and graphics, and what occasion the tweets referred to were all analyzed. This helps determine the identity and style of the social media account and identify which features contribute to the success of the tweets.

Chapter 3: Data Analysis

Padres Team Introduction

The San Diego Padres are a Major League Baseball (MLB) team located in San Diego. The Padres entered the MLB in 1969 as part of a four-team expansion and tied for the fourth-youngest franchise in the league. (Expansion of 1969) Although the Padres are the only team in the San Diego market since the Chargers relocated in 2017, the Padres have one of the lowest MLB attendance records. According to Baseball-Reference, the Padres are ranked 10th out of 15 teams in the National League in attendance, averaging 29,585 in attendance per game in the 2019 season. By contrast, the L.A. Dodgers had the highest attendance in the National League, averaging 49,066 fans per game. In the 11 out of the last 12 seasons, excluding the attendance-less 2020 season, the Padres were ranked 10th or lower in the National League. (San Diego Padres Attendance, Stadiums, and Park Factors) Additionally, in its fifty-one-year history, the Padres have only made the World Series twice, losing in both appearances. The Padres are one of the seven teams that have never lifted the Commissioner's Trophy. The Padres' lack of success on the field historically is a significant factor in their low popularity status.

However, the Padres gained a considerable amount of excitement before the 2020 season. After committing a significant amount of money to key free agents like Eric Hosmer and Manny Machado in the last two offseason, along with the excitement around the highly touted prospect Fernando Tatis Jr., the San Diego Padres were attracting attention from fans and the media. In

Sports Illustrated's article previewing the Padres' 2020 season, the article sums up their expectation. It writes, "The Padres have some of the most exciting young talents in baseball, with more on the way, but they can't catch L.A. (Dodgers) and Arizona (Diamondbacks)." (Staff, SI MLB. "San Diego Padres Season Preview: The Wait 'Til Next Year Continues.") The Padres also had the 11th highest payroll in the MLB in 2020 (MLB 2020 Payroll Tracker), an improvement from 24th in 2019. (MLB 2019 Payroll Tracker) As a team lacking a strong traditional fanbase, the Padres' social media team seemed to be keen to exploit the newfound energy surrounding the team.

Quantitative Analysis

During the month of August, the Padres' Twitter account sent 440 tweets, the most out of the three teams examined in this thesis, as shown in *Figure 1*. Over two-thirds (71%) of the tweets from the Padres' account are in-game highlights. These tweets include instantaneous game updates through video highlights by a Padre. The Padres have the highest percentage of in-game highlights among the three teams. These in-game highlights are more effective than their counterparts. On average, the in-game highlights receive a 3.51 in the effectiveness rating versus 3.27 for the non-in-game tweets. Additionally, a larger proportion of the non-in-game tweets have an effectiveness rating of less than 2, with 63% of the posts below that threshold versus just 49% from the in-game highlights. There's also a significant number of in-game tweets having an effectiveness rating above 5, many of which are highlight clips when the Padres are leading in the game. To take advantage of this, the Padres sent an average of 10.3 in-game highlights tweets per contest, also the most out of the three teams.

<i>Effectiveness</i>	<i>In-Game</i>	<i>Non-In-Game</i>
0.00-0.99	12.22%	31.78%
1.00-1.99	37.30%	31.01%
2.00-2.99	15.76%	13.95%
3.00-3.99	9.32%	10.85%
4.00-4.99	7.07%	2.33%
5.00-9.99	13.50%	6.98%
10.00+	4.82%	3.10%
Average	3.51	3.27

Table 1 - Distribution of the Tweet's Effectiveness Rating between In-Game Tweets and Non-In-Game Tweets by the Padres

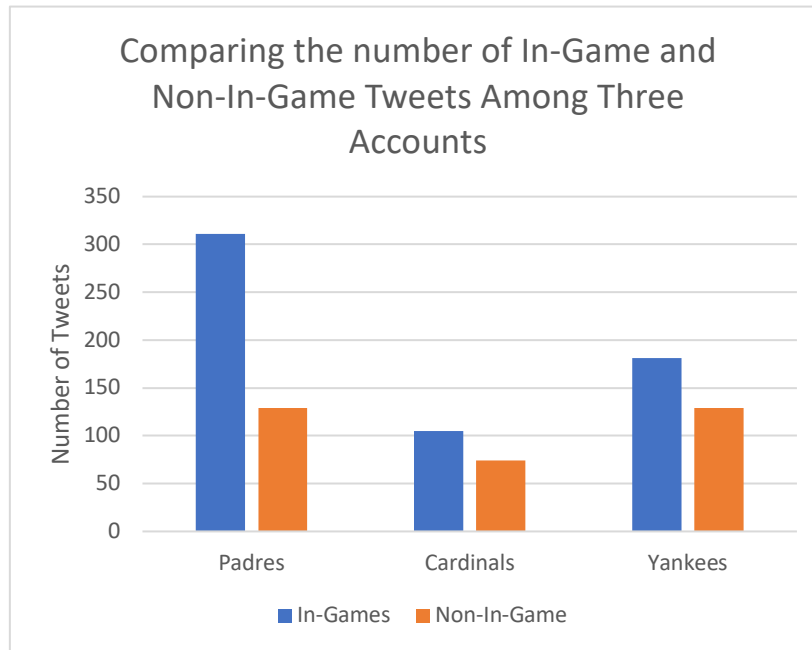


Figure 1 – Comparison of number of In-Game and Non-In-Game Tweets between the Padres, Cardinals and the Yankees.

The Padres Twitter team also sent more posts with videos and motion graphics than text-based and tweets with stills. Around 63% of all the Padres' tweets embedded videos or GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format). Whereas around one-third of tweets were attached with still-based media like photos or graphics, and around 6% of tweets only contained texts. However, still-based tweets perform the best on average, receiving a 3.90 effectiveness rating. On average, still-based tweets perform better based on the effectiveness rating, as shown in *Figure 2*. However, this can be attributed to a still-based tweet receiving a rating of 123, the highest rating among all Tweets recorded in this project, and 84 points higher than the 2nd best still-based tweet. After disregarding the outlier, still-based tweets have an average rating of 3.03, which is lower than both text-based and motion-graphics-based tweets.

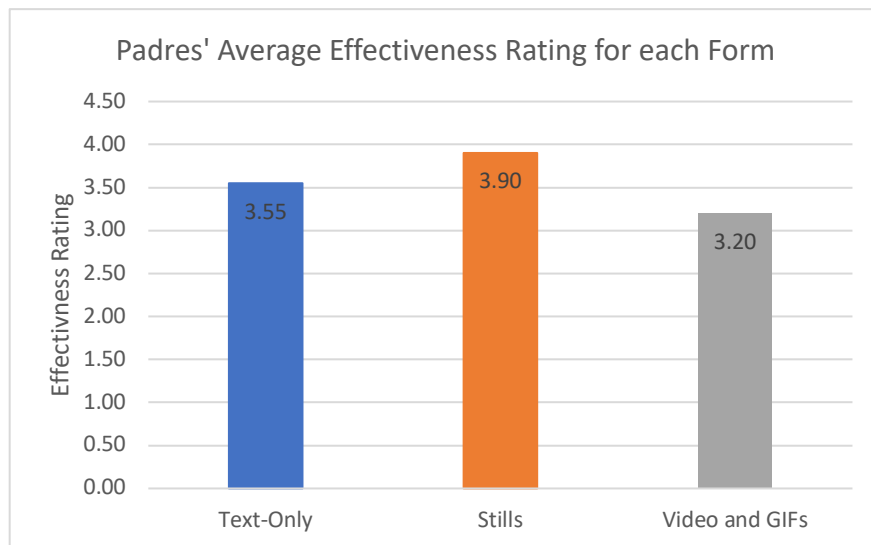


Figure 2 - Comparison of Average Effectiveness Rating for Each Form of Tweets

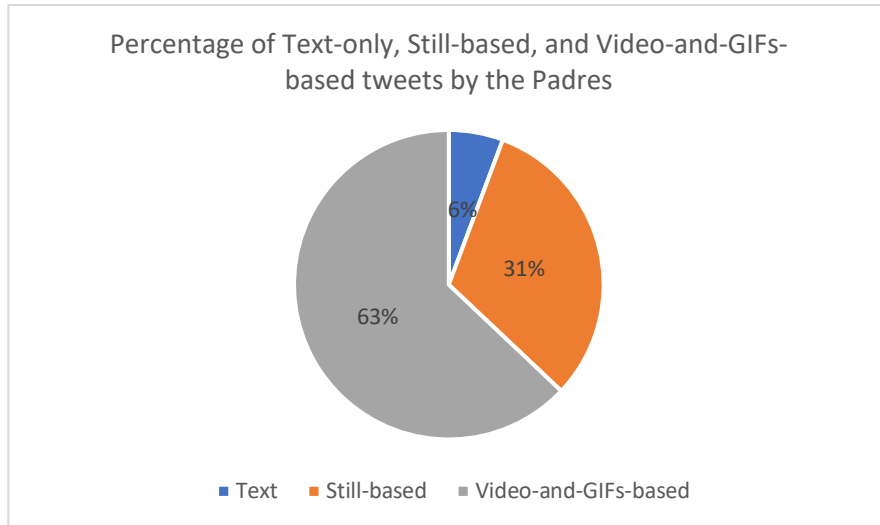


Figure 3 - Comparison of the Number of Tweets by each form.

Yet, there's a larger portion of tweets with videos and GIFs that received an effectiveness rating of higher than 1.99. Around 48% of motion-based tweets have a rating higher than that threshold, versus around 45% for still-based tweets. These two statistics are much higher than the overall average. Among all of the tweets analyzed in this tweet, just 35% of posts received a rating higher than 1.99. For text-based tweets, the vast majority of those having a rating of less than 1.99, with just 7 out of the 25 tweets receiving a higher rating than that threshold. Some of the more successful text-based tweets include statements from the team regarding game postponement due to CoVID-19 protocols.

Lastly, the team's performance on the field has a significant impact on the amount of fan engagement on a tweet. Figure 4 shows the difference in the effective rating among tweets informing the supporters of the game results. Tweets about wins are more than six times more effective, according to the effectiveness rating, than tweets about losses. This shows that the performance of a tweet by a professional baseball team's Twitter account may be out of the

control of the social media team. The product on the field, especially the game results, remains a powerful force in determining the amount of fan engagement on social media content.

<i>Effectiveness</i>	<i>Text-Only</i>	<i>Stills</i>	<i>Video and GIFs</i>
0.00-0.99	32.00%	21.74%	14.80%
1.00-1.99	40.00%	32.61%	36.82%
2.00-2.99	0.00%	16.67%	15.52%
3.00-3.99	4.00%	12.32%	9.03%
4.00-4.99	0.00%	5.07%	6.50%
5,99+	24.00%	11.59%	17.33%
<i>Average</i>	3.55	3.90	3.20

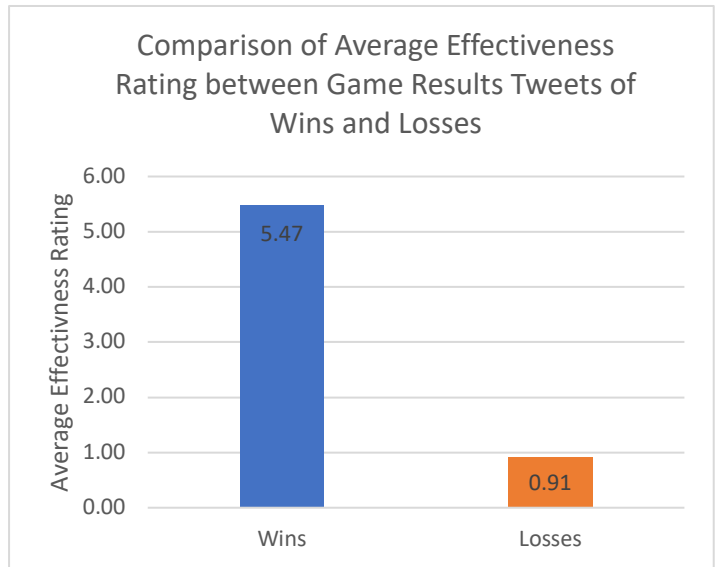


Figure 4 - Comparison of effectiveness Rating when the Padres win and lose

Table 2 - Distribution of the Effectives Rating between Tweets of Each Form

Qualitative Analysis

According to the effectiveness rating, the two most successful tweets from the Padres account received ratings of 123.4 and 56.1. Although the two tweets differ in their form, the theme they're referring to is similar. During a 7-game span between August 17th and 23rd, the Padres won seven straight games against the Texas Rangers and the Houston Astros. As I mentioned above, tweets regarding victories perform much better than those referring to losses, and the two most successful tweets were posted during this span.

The tweet that received the highest effectiveness rating of 123.4 was posted on August 23rd, shortly after San Diego swept the Astros, completing their 7-game sweep against teams from the state of Texas. The tweet consists of four graphics, therefore categorized as a still-based tweet, and does not include any caption. The four graphics act as a four-panel featuring Spongebob Squarepants and Patrick, characters in the animated series *Spongebob Squarepants*. (@Padres, *Twitter*) The tweet cleverly twists a short dialogue within the series to fit the Padres' week-long sweep of Texas teams. Spongebob presents himself shapeshifting into the geographical shape of the state of Texas to Patrick. Patrick then questions what Spongebob is, asking, "uh... Swept?" After Spongebob reveals that he is the shape of Texas, Patrick then asks, "what's the difference?" And it is presumed that the two characters share a laugh. The tweet is met with an abundance of engagements, with mostly positive reactions from fans. Most replies and quote tweets praise the mastermind behind the tweet. Some even stated that the post converted them into Padres supporters.

In many ways, this post differs from many other tweets that are analyzed in this thesis. Firstly, this post does not have any caption besides the subtitles in the graphic. Conventionally, captions allow the social media manager to contextualize the content to give an update on the game or create satire and humor with more generic materials. However, the Padres account decided not to provide any context. One reason for that may be the graphics are quite straightforward. It tells the reader that the Padres are on a hot streak and have swept an opponent from Texas. Additionally, the humor is natural for Padres fans, especially if they have been following the team and understand the recent hot streak. For fans who don't get the material due

to the lack of content, the tweet paves the way for them to research and discover the Padres' latest hot streak.

Another significant feature of this post is its reference to meme culture. Kara Rogers writes that memes “often take the form of pictures, videos, or other media containing cultural information that ... have been deliberately altered by individuals.” (Rogers) In the case of this Padres tweet, they use dialogue from the *SpongeBob SquarePants* cartoon and alters the detail to make it fit their situation. The reference to meme culture is also rare among tweets analyzed in this thesis. Most graphics and stills display the box score or a player's performance in a game, and they're designed and created by the teams. The stills in this tweet, however, have no resemblance to the Padres and their color scheme. Overall, this tweet contains the clever alteration to the original meme, in which Patrick asked “stupid” instead of “swept,” the lack of captions to maximize the humor of content, and the reference to a successful week for the team. These elements allow this post to have the highest amount of engagement among all tweets analyzed in this thesis.

The second most successful tweet by the Padres, according to the effectiveness ranking, was posted on August 20th, shortly after Padres' historic offensive stretch. During a 4-game span between August 17th and August 20th, the Padres hit a grand slam in each game, becoming the first team to hit a grand slam in 4 straight games. (Cassavell) To commemorate the record-breaking stretch, the Padres changed their profile name to “Slam Diego.” (@Padres, “Had to do it to ‘em.”) The phrase incorporating “grand slam” and “San Diego” was first dubbed by the Padres home broadcaster Don Orsillo when Eric Hosmer hit the grand slam in the fourth consecutive game to break the record. And shortly after the home run, the Padres changed their profile name in the middle of the game.

The tweet contains the screen-recorded video of the account admin going into the profile page and changing the name to “Slam Diego.” The video is seven seconds long and has no sound. It also incorporated the caption “Had to do it to ‘em.” The lack of sound in the video is another example of the lack of clues given to explain they are changing the profile name or what the phrase “Slam Diego” means. The main reason for this could be the popularity of the phrase. Shortly after the Padres changed their profile name, Fox Sports San Diego, the regional network carrying Padres’ games, also changed their profile name to “Fox Sports San (Slam) Diego.” (Randhawa) Additionally, the phrase “quickly made its way onto merch celebrating the Southern California team.” (Keyser)

This tweet refers to the historically successful stretch of games for the Padres. And, based on trends shown in the data analysis, the success of the team is a major factor in the high engagement numbers of this tweet. However, this tweet has a number of differentiating traits compared to others. Firstly, this tweet illustrates a more permanent effect on this account than other tweets. The video in the post depicts the long-lasting name change of the profile. Although they did change it back to their proper name, this is the only occurrence where a tweet depicts a permanent alteration among the tweets analyze in this thesis. The unexpected surprise to make a significant change could be one of the main causes of the tremendous response. The name change also extends the lifetime of the phrase. Rather than “Slam Diego” being viral for one news cycle, the name change allows a constant reminder of the grand-slam streak. Since the engagement numbers were collected months after this tweet was posted, the long-term impact of the name change could also be attributed to the success of this tweet.

The caption and the long-term impact of this tweet aren’t the only differences between this tweet and the others. As mentioned above, the video nor the caption provides any context to

explain the name change. The post also does not report any game updates or has any game footage. More importantly, the tweet does not incorporate any hashtags, a popular and common way to attract more attention. Without these extra contents and a unique and simplistic approach to create the video, the Padres' social media team was able to minimize distractions to this tweet and let the audience focus on the video itself to maximize the humor of the post.

Overall, a closer look at some of the most engaged tweets from the Padres reveals that the Twitter team is successful at using a more non-traditional method to promote their baseball team on social media. With a historical stretch of on-the-field success at their disposal, the social media team successfully upgraded the hype and brought it to the national audience, despite the lack of popularity for the franchise traditionally. Some of the key methods to achieve this include utilizing popular memes and minimizing distractions by using the minimal amount of captions to let the content "breathe."

St. Louis Cardinals

Team Introduction

The St. Louis Cardinals are an MLB team located in St. Louis, Missouri. The Cardinals are one of the oldest franchises in America. The team first joined the National League in 1892 as the "St. Louis Browns." (not to be confused with the American League team under the same name) In 1903, the second National Agreement was formed, where the National League and the American League would coordinate play and establish the World Series. Over the 129 seasons, the Cardinals franchise has competed in the National League. They've won 23 National League Championships and 11 World Series Championships over that span, which is ranked 2nd in the MLB. The storied and successful history of the Cardinals can be reflected through its attendance

records. According to the Baseball-Reference, the Cardinals had the 2nd most attendance in the 2019 season, welcoming in 41,602 fans into the stadium per game, which is only lower than the L.A. Dodgers. Furthermore, the Cardinals had the 2nd highest attendance in each of the last seven years, neglecting the attendance-less 2020 season. (St. Louis Cardinals Attendance, Stadiums, and Park Factors)

After a quiet offseason, the Cardinals did not gain as much momentum as the Padres and the Yankees coming into the 2020 season. They were projected to be in the middle of the pack. With the franchise making limited moves in the offseason, including losing contributors like Marcell Ozuna, *Sports Illustrated* projected the Cardinals to finish 3rd in the N.L. Central Division. The season preview article expects "the Cardinals will be just good enough to stay in the playoff hunt. Unfortunately for them, they'll be joined by at least two of their division rivals." (Staff, SI MLB. "Cardinals' Don't Look Good Enough to Emerge in N.L. Central.") Although the Cardinals have one of the strongest fanbases in America, the social media team is tasked to promote a team with lower expectations than its tradition indicates.

Quantitative Analysis

Compared to the other two teams, the Cardinals sent the least number of tweets. During the month of August 2020, the Cardinals posted 179 tweets, about half as many as the Padres and the Yankees. This is likely mostly a result of multiple game postponements due to CoVID-19 protocols. The Cardinals did not play a game in August until the 14th. In the first two weeks of the month, the Cardinals' Twitter account posted 14 tweets, mostly to announce team statements regarding games being rescheduled due to CoVID-19 protocols. However, their tweets present a comparable trend to the other two teams.

The Cardinals' social media team seems to have a different approach in terms of posting in-game and non-in-game tweets than the Padres. In the month of August, 59% of the Cardinals' tweets are game-related, which is 12% lower than the Padres and similar to the Yankees. On average, the Cardinals' in-game tweets have an effectiveness rating of 1.66, 0.21 points lower than non-in-game tweets. The distribution table shows a similar trend. Around three-quarters of in-game tweets have an effectiveness rating of below 2, compared to around 70% for non-in-game tweets. The sharp contrast in the lower proportion of in-game tweets by the Cardinals can be attributed to the team's results. Although this is not certain, as I report in the section above, a team's tweeting habits appear to be connected with the on-the-field results. In August, the Cardinals won 11 games. The Padres, on the other hand, won 16 games. With social media teams typically only share the teams' highlights, the Cardinals potentially had less in-game material to post, resulting in those tweets being less effective.

<i>Effectiveness</i>	<i>Game</i>	<i>Non-Game</i>
<i>0.00-0.99</i>	42.86%	47.30%
<i>1.00-1.99</i>	32.38%	22.97%
<i>2.00-2.99</i>	9.52%	8.11%
<i>3.00-3.99</i>	3.81%	10.81%
<i>4.00-4.99</i>	5.71%	4.05%
<i>5,99+</i>	5.71%	6.76%
<i>Average</i>	1.66	1.87

Table 3 - Distribution of the Tweet's Effectiveness Rating between In-Game Tweets and Non-In-Game Tweets by the Cardinals

The Cardinals social media team also uses more still-based content by a significant margin. 60% of the Cardinals' tweets in August incorporated still-based graphics, whereas just 35% of them embedded motion-based content, like videos or GIFs, as shown in *Figure 5*.

The high number of still-based tweets can be attributed to 2 factors. In the first 14 days of the month, with the lack of games, the Cardinals Twitter team posted still-based graphics daily to keep the account and the fanbase active. Some of those content include happy birthday posts of current players and past Cardinals legends, incorporating the photo of the player featured. Additionally, the Cardinals post profile pictures of newly promoted players making their debut in the Major Leagues.

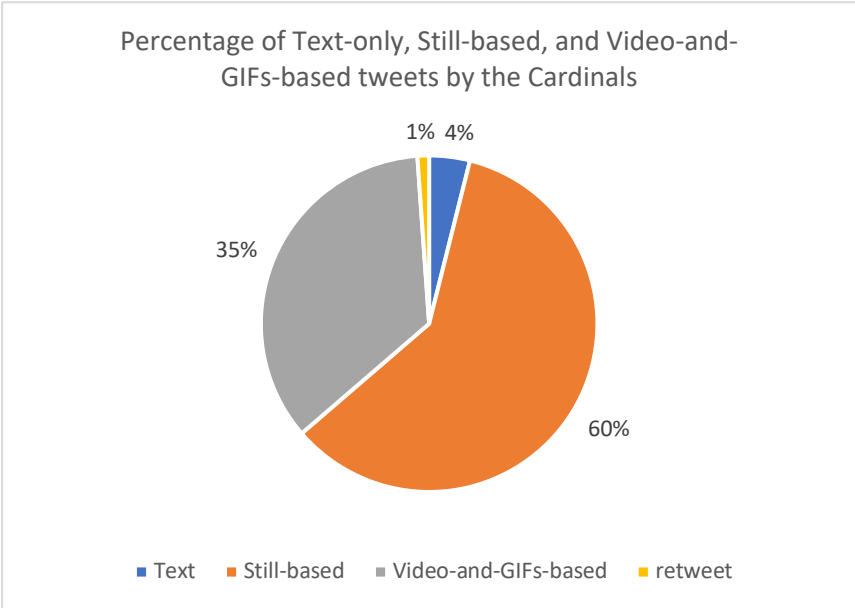


Figure 5 - Comparison of the Number of Tweets by each form.

However, still-based graphics have the lowest effectiveness rating among the categories of text-only and motion-based tweets. On average, still-based tweets have an effective rating of 1.30, lower than 1.76 for text-only tweets and 1.65 for tweets with videos and GIFs. This is largely due to the significant proportion of still-based tweets with a low rating. As shown in *Table 3*, almost half of the tweets with still-based graphics have an effectiveness rating lower

than 1, which is 10% lower than motion-based tweets. Although 57% of text-only tweets have a rating of lower than 1, a deeper analysis finds that 24 still-based tweets have a rating that is lower than 0.5, which accounts for 22% of all still-based tweets, versus just one text-only tweet falling below that threshold. Interestingly, although 4 of the five tweets with the highest rating incorporated still-based graphics, they did not help lift the category over text-only and tweets with motion-based graphics. This can be attributed to game result tweets.

<i>Effectiveness Rating</i>	<i>Text-Only</i>	<i>Stills</i>	<i>Video and GIFs</i>
<i>0.00-0.99</i>	57.14%	48.60%	38.10%
<i>1.00-1.99</i>	28.57%	26.17%	33.33%
<i>2.00-2.99</i>	0.00%	3.74%	17.46%
<i>3.00-3.99</i>	14.29%	6.54%	6.35%
<i>4.00-4.99</i>	0.00%	6.54%	3.17%
<i>5,99+</i>	0.00%	12.16%	1.35%
<i>Average</i>	1.76	1.30	1.65

Table 4 - Distribution of the Effectiveness Rating between Tweets of Each Form

Just like the Padres, the Cardinals also share the results of games on their Twitter. Similarly, the tweets announcing a victory perform exponentially better than tweets about a loss. In the Cardinals' case, tweets informing a win is almost 15 times more effective, with the tweets about losses averaging just 0.31 in the effectiveness rating. The Cardinals account incorporates still-based graphics with tweets announcing a loss, causing the average rating of still-based tweets to decrease as well.

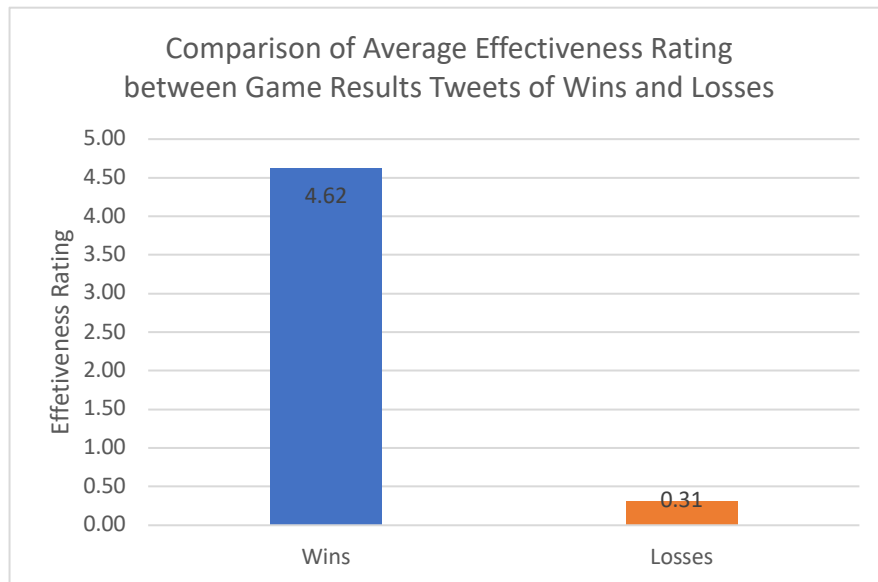


Figure 6 - Comparison of effectiveness Rating when the Cardinals win and lose

Qualitative Analysis

The two most successful tweets on the Cardinals account, according to the effectiveness rating, received scores of 10.3 and 9.5. Both of these tweets celebrate significant milestones that were accomplished by Cardinals players. The tweet with the highest rating was posted on August 30th. During the game, 17-year veteran Yadier Molina played in his 2000th game, all with the St. Louis Cardinals. To celebrate the occasion, the Cardinals Twitter account tweeted a photo of Molina in his full catcher’s gear. The tweet includes the caption “2,000 @MLB games. Every. Single. One. With the #STLCards” (@Cardinals, “2,000 @MLB games.”)

The success of the tweet can be largely attributed to the significance of the milestone and the popularity of Yadier Molina. Molina is widely considered as one of the greatest players in Cardinals franchise history. Loyalty and longevity are significant parts of his legacy. In 2018, Molina broke the record for most games played as a catcher for one team (Trezza), and he continues to break similar records. These are important factors of Molina’s popularity within the highly devoted St. Louis fanbase. Additionally, according to the MLB.com database, only two

players have played more games for the Cardinals than Yadier Molina, which speaks to the significance of the milestone recognized in the tweet. Similar to the highest-rated Padres tweets, the rationale behind this tweet is to celebrate a historic accomplishment. However, the significance of the milestone itself is the primary source of fan engagements, which is different from the highly effective tweets from the Padres.

In contrast to the Padres social media team, the Cardinals account uses a safer approach. The tweet does not make references to memes or make connections to popular cultures. Instead, the photo incorporated with the tweet shows a body shot of Yadier Molina without any graphic effects. With a relatively simplistic photo, the caption becomes the main storyteller of the tweet, which differs from the Padres tweets analyzed above. The caption also presents a more sensible approach. The admin uses a full stop after each word on the second line, a popular method on social media to emphasize each word and the gravity of the entire sentence. Other than that, the caption is standard and does not make the tweet pop out like the Padres' tweets. One evidence for that is its engagement numbers. Although this post has the highest effectiveness rating among the Cardinals' tweets, the number of likes and retweets is drastically lower than the Padres' most successful tweets. From the photo to the caption, the tweet doesn't stand out from other baseball tweets on a timeline. The tweet relies on Yadier Molina's popularity within the Cardinals' fanbase but does not attract fans outside of the Cardinals' sphere to interact with the tweet. This is unlike the Padres' account, which utilized meme culture to help increase the spread of their hot stretch.

Cardinals Twitter's practical approach is reflected in their second most successful tweet as well. On August 24th, former Cardinal Albert Pujols drove in his 2,087th run in his career. That allowed Pujols to surpass Alex Rodriguez in the all-time RBI (run batted in) list. As of the

time of the writing, Pujols has the third most career RBI in the MLB. (Bollinger) On the same day, the MLB account tweeted a still graphic to celebrate the milestone, and the Cardinals account quote-tweeted the post, adding “Congratulations to the all-time greats, @PujolsFive.” (@Cardinals, “*Congratulations to one of the all-time greats*”)

Quote-tweeting is uncommon among the tweets analyzed in this thesis. Out of the 929 tweets documented, only 5 were quote-tweets, and only 2 of them were by the Cardinals. The reason for a quote-tweet for this post is evident. Albert Pujols played for the Los Angeles Angels when he reached the 2,087 RBI plateau. However, Pujols’s best years were with the St. Louis Cardinals. He spent the first 11 years of his career in St. Louis, where he had the highest level of production, including winning two World Series and all three Most Valuable Player awards. This allows Pujols to be one of the most popular and successful Cardinal. (Baseball-Reference) The replies of the Cardinals’ tweet also indicate that Pujols is well-liked among the St. Louis fanbase, as many of the comments vow for Pujols to return to St. Louis.

Knowing Albert Pujols is a fan favorite among Cardinals supporters and the significance of this milestone, the Cardinals account managers decide to honor Albert Pujols with the quote tweet. The quote tweet does not have extra graphics or videos, and it includes a customary caption to celebrate a historic milestone. However, like the choice to quote-tweet, these decisions may be the most appropriate considering Pujols is not an active player on the Cardinals. Although it is not possible to know if the Cardinals would’ve gotten more engagement if they made a separate graphic or video, based on the replies of this tweet, Pujols’s popularity allows this tweet to be the 2nd most successful tweet among those analyzed in this thesis, according to the effectiveness rating.

Overall, the two most effective tweets show a more conservative approach by the Cardinals account, compared to the Padres. With these tweets all celebrating historical achievements, the Cardinals used a generic photo of Yadier Molina with a modest caption. The milestone itself becomes the main driver of the post, rather than the Padres' tweets which incorporated meme culture to help the spread of the tweet. The 2nd tweet showcases the history of the franchise by sharing the historic milestone accomplished by a former Cardinal. While the quote tweet without extra graphics or videos remains consistent with their conservative approach, it is also the most appropriate method since Albert Pujols no longer plays for the team.

New York Yankees

The New York Yankees are an MLB team located in New York City. The Yankees are one of the most popular and valuable sports teams in the U.S. *Forbes* estimated the value of the Yankees to be \$5 billion, the 2nd most valuable sports franchise in the world. (Forbes) Since joining the American League in 1903, the franchise has won 40 American League Pennants and 27 World Series Championships, both of which are MLB records. Their popularity is reflected in its attendance numbers, ranked 1st in attendance per game in the American League in 15 of the last 17 seasons, neglecting the 2020 season. (NYY Attendance)

Coming into the 2020 season, the Yankees had high excitement and expectations. After reaching the postseason in four of the previous five seasons, the Yankees showed their championship aspirations by signing Gerrit Cole to a "record-shatter" contract, totaling \$324 million. As Hoch writes on MLB.com, Cole is expected to be "the finishing piece in order to secure not only a 28th World Series championship, but also a few more rings in the years to follow." (Hoch) *Sports Illustrated* quoted Joe Sheehan in its Yankees 2020 preview, writing, "the

Yankees are better positioned than they have been in years to win title number 28." (Staff, SI MLB. "Why Yankees Are Good Enough to Win It All.") The expectations are also reflected in the team's payroll, with the Yankees having the most expensive payroll in the MLB in the 2020 season. (MLB 2020 Payroll Tracker)

Quantitative Analysis

Compared to the other two teams, the Yankees Twitter account seems to be more similar to the Cardinals in the usage of in-game and non-in-game-related tweets. Among the 310 tweets the Yankees account posted in the month of August, 58% are in-game highlights, similar to the Padres.

However, unlike the Cardinals, the Yankees' in-game tweets perform better than non-in-game tweets, according to the effectiveness rating. As shown in *Table 5*, 84% of non-in-game tweets have a rating lower than 2, versus 73% for in-game tweets. Furthermore, 14% of in-game tweets have a rating that's higher than 3, versus 4.7% of non-in-game tweets perform higher than 3.

<i>Effectiveness Rating</i>	<i>In-Game</i>	<i>Non-In-Game</i>
<i>0.00-0.99</i>	42.54%	64.34%
<i>1.00-1.99</i>	30.39%	19.38%
<i>2.00-2.99</i>	12.71%	11.63%
<i>3.00-3.99</i>	7.18%	3.10%
<i>4.00-4.99</i>	4.97%	0.78%
<i>5,99+</i>	2.21%	0.78%
<i>Average</i>	1.63	1.04

Table 5 - Distribution of the Tweet's Effectiveness Rating between In-Game Tweets and Non-In-Game Tweets by the Yankees

The Yankees account, however, shares similar habits with the Padres as well. Just like the team on the West Coast, over half of the tweets posted by the Yankees are embedded with motion-based graphics, accounting for 57% of all tweets. Whereas text-only and still-based tweets only represent 16% and 26%, respectively. One notable reason for this is how effective tweets with Videos and Gifs are for the Yankees. On average, tweets with motion-based graphics have an effectiveness rating of 1.74, significantly higher 0.64 for text-only tweets and 1.12 for tweets with still-based graphics. Additionally, as seen in *Table 6*, 64% of tweets with videos and GIFs have an effective rating of 1 or above, much higher than the other two categories as well.

<i>Effectiveness Rating</i>	<i>Text-Only</i>	<i>Stills</i>	<i>Videos and GIFs</i>
<i>0.00-0.99</i>	90.20%	60.76%	35.59%
<i>1.00-1.99</i>	7.84%	24.05%	31.64%
<i>2.00-2.99</i>	0.00%	7.59%	18.08%
<i>3.00-3.99</i>	1.96%	6.33%	6.21%
<i>4.00-4.99</i>	0.00%	1.27%	5.65%
<i>5,99+</i>	0.00%	0.00%	2.82%
<i>Average</i>	0.64	1.12	1.74

Table 6 - Distribution of the Effectives Rating between Tweets of Each Form

But the Yankees' text-only tweets have some of the lowest effectiveness ratings of any categories calculated for this project. These posts have the lowest average rating of 0.64. Also, more than 90 percent of the text-only tweets fall below 1 point in the rating. This is due to several important reasons. Firstly, differing from the other two accounts analyzed in this thesis, the Yankees announce the losing results in text-only tweets, whereas winning tweets incorporate a celebratory GIF. The Yankees followed the same trend of tweets announcing losses, which averages a 0.62 rating, performing much less effectively than tweets announcing victories, which

averages a 3.85 rating. Additionally, Yankees' tweets overall perform less effectively than the Cardinals and the Padres. This is despite attracting more likes and retweets than both of the other accounts. To achieve a fairer comparison, the effectiveness rating finds the proportion of the number of engagements to the number of followers the account already has. Therefore, although the Yankees have the most engagements compared to the Padres and the Cardinals, the increase is not enough to be proportional with the difference in the number of followers.

<i>Average per tweet</i>	<i>Padres</i>	<i>Cardinals</i>	<i>Yankees</i>
<i>Likes</i>	1266	1872	3935
<i>Retweets</i>	177	203	593
<i>Effectiveness Rating</i>	3.44	1.75	1.39
<i>Total Followers</i>	445,226	1,246,810	3,477,156

Table 7 - Distribution of the Effectiveness Rating between Tweets of Each Team

Qualitative Analysis

The most successful tweets received effective ratings of 14.5 and 8.3. Overall, the number of engagements received by these two tweets is slightly lower than the two Padres tweets. However, factoring in the vast number of followers, the two tweets by the Yankees are ranked third and sixth, respectively, among the top tweets by the three teams. Opposite to the top tweets posted by the Padres and the Cardinals, these two Yankees tweets were published on the same day, referring to the same game. Additionally, both of these tweets are in-game highlights, also different from the other two teams.

The most engaged tweet by the Yankees was posted on August 2nd. The post embedded a video of Aaron Judge, a Yankees outfielder, hitting a go-ahead home run in the bottom of the 9th inning. The home run would ultimately allow the Yankees to finish the weekend sweep over

their archrival, the Boston Red Sox. The admin did not add special effects to the video clip. The clip starts before the pitch was thrown and ends when Judge crosses home plate. The tweet also includes the caption: “Send flames emojis. #AllRise” (@Yankees, Send flame emojis. [#AllRise](#))

The content itself is a significant factor in the success of this tweet. Firstly, as mentioned above, one of the reasons why the Yankees have the lowest effectiveness rating is its significant portion of followers who don’t engage with their tweets. However, the Yankees-Red Sox rivalry is widely regarded as one of the best in sports. A victory over the archrival can attract many of the casual fans that don’t normally interact with the account to interact with the post. The dramatic go-ahead home run in the last few innings of the game adds to the sensation for a fan, creating more excitement among the fanbase and attracting more engagement to the tweet. Additionally, the home run hitter is Aaron Judge, widely regarded as the face of the New York Yankees since his rookie season in 2017. (Rivera) Judge’s stardom adds to the drama of the play, attracting more fans to react to the post. However, the social media team also played their role to elevate the success of the tweet.

The caption is a classic example of memetic writing, where the message is concise and incorporates a hashtag. Rather than actually sending emoticons of flames, the message actually calls for action from the audience. This allows for more engagement to the tweet, allowing the post to spread more widely on social media. As of the time of writing, the tweet has garnered over 1,200 replies, by far the most among the six tweets analyzed qualitatively.

Furthermore, the hashtag incorporated also helps with the spread of the post. According to Twitter, hashtags help the users to categorize tweets and “allows users to easily follow topics they’re interested in” (How to use Hashtags) In this case, the Yankees incorporated the hashtag “#AllRise.” The hashtag refers to Aaron Judge as it plays a pun between Judge’s name and the

public official. By utilizing this hashtag, Aaron Judge fans who follow the #AllRise hashtag can more easily find this tweet. Hashtags, though, is a widely used method to increase the spread of a tweet. This tweet shows Yankees social media team uses relatively conventional methods on social media to promote its content. In this case, the dramatic nature of the home run against the archrival, the immense fanbase, and the timely messages suited for social media conventions help this tweet to be one of the most interacted posts analyzed in this thesis.

Similar trends can be traced in their second most engaged tweet. This post was also published on the same day as the tweet analyzed above. Just 8 minutes after the Yankees tweeted about the Aaron Judge homerun, they also published the game results graphic to announce their victory over the Red Sox. This tweet incorporates a GIF, with a clip of Gio Urshela, a Yankees infielder, sending an air-kiss to someone not shown in the clip. Next to the Urshela clip is the final score of the game. The caption of the tweet writes “Sweep Dreams” with the waving and broom emoticons (@Yankees, Sweep Dreams)

This tweet further proves the influence of the content and what it’s referring to on the success of a tweet, rather than the additional features added by the social media team. Throughout the month of August, the Yankees tweeted 15 graphics announcing a victory, with very similar graphics with this tweet. However, this is the most successful game-winning tweet by the Yankees by a significant margin. Additionally, the top three rated game-winning tweets all referred to victories over the Red Sox. This further shows the significance of the Yankee-Red Sox rivalry and the immense effects the content has on the success of a tweet.

Nonetheless, the Yankees account did customize the content to fit the Twitter platform. The GIF incorporated in this tweet features a short clip taken from the game on August 2nd. This differs from the other two teams. The Padres posts the same bell-ringing motion graphic when

the team wins a game, with the results shown through the captions. Although the Cardinals also customize the game-winning graphic for each game, they use still-based graphics when they announce their victories. Compared to the other two teams, the Yankees' game-winning tweet has the highest production value since it contains a motion-graphic customized for each game. However, out of the three teams, the Yankees' game-winning graphic receives the lowest effectiveness rating on average.

The caption of the tweet follows the trend of using relatively conventional social media methods. Using the similar wordplay as the Padres' account in the Sponge Bob tweet analyzed above, the Yankees substitutes the phrase "sweet dreams" with "sweep dreams," declaring the sweep of the series against an archrival. Besides just alluding to the end of the 3-game stretch, with the series ending on a Sunday night, the caption also marks the end of a week. Wordplays and puns are not uncommon on social media, as showcased by the Aaron Judge hashtag and the phrase "Slam Diego" used by the Padres.

Overall, the Yankees account uses relatively conventional social media methods to promote its content. With its immense fanbase, the tweets garner a high number of engagements by its supporters. However, compared to the Padres utilizing memes and creative ways to refer to pop culture, the Yankees' tweets receive a lower effectiveness rating as its increase in engagement is low compared to its high number of followers.

Overall Comparison

The one common trait between the three accounts is that the success of the post is predicated on celebratory occasions. In the case of the Padres, they celebrated their record-breaking grand-slam streak and their 7-game sweep of the Texas Rangers and the Houston

Astros. For the Cardinals, they honor two historic milestones accomplished by two of the most popular and significant players in their history. The most successful Yankees tweets are predicated upon the weekend sweep of their archrival the Boston Red Sox and the stardom of Aaron Judge.

Additionally, each team announces the results of each game. The game result tweets allow the fairest method to compare each team's social media philosophy and style. As mentioned above in each data analysis section, tweets announcing the wins outperform tweets announcing losses. The trend remains consistent for each account. However, each team has different methods in announcing their results.

When announcing losses, the Padres post a graphic with the box score and a photo taken during the game. The tweets also do not include any captions, as the graphic itself provides much of the information. The Cardinals post a photo taken during the game and include the final score of the game with a caption. Out of the three teams, the Yankees' tweets announcing losses have the least production value, tweeting text-only posts with the final score of the game.

For posts announcing wins, though, the Yankees' tweets have the highest production value. As mentioned in the Yankees chapter, their game-winning tweets consist of a GIF with the final score and a short clip of the game. The tweets also include a caption of a phrase that captures the emotions of the win. For example, in the tweet analyzed in the Yankees chapter, they used "Sweep Dreams" (@Yankees) to make reference to the series sweep. The Cardinals upload a still graphic with a photo taken from the game and a lower third graphic displaying the final score of the game. Each of the Cardinals' game-winning tweets has the same caption "#THATSAWINNER" with three clapping emoticons. The Padres use the same bell-ringing

video when the team wins. The caption displays the final score of the game, with various Padres-related hashtags, including #Padres, #PadresWin, and #FriarFaithful.

Regardless of the method, the average rating among tweets announcing game results follows a similar trend to the average rating of tweets overall. As shown in *Figure 7*, the Padres have the most success with their game result tweets, gaining the highest rating for tweets announcing both wins and losses. For game-winning tweets, the Cardinals have the second-highest average rating, and the Yankees' tweets perform least successfully compared to the other two accounts. When the tweets announce losses, though, Yankees' tweets perform better than the Cardinals.

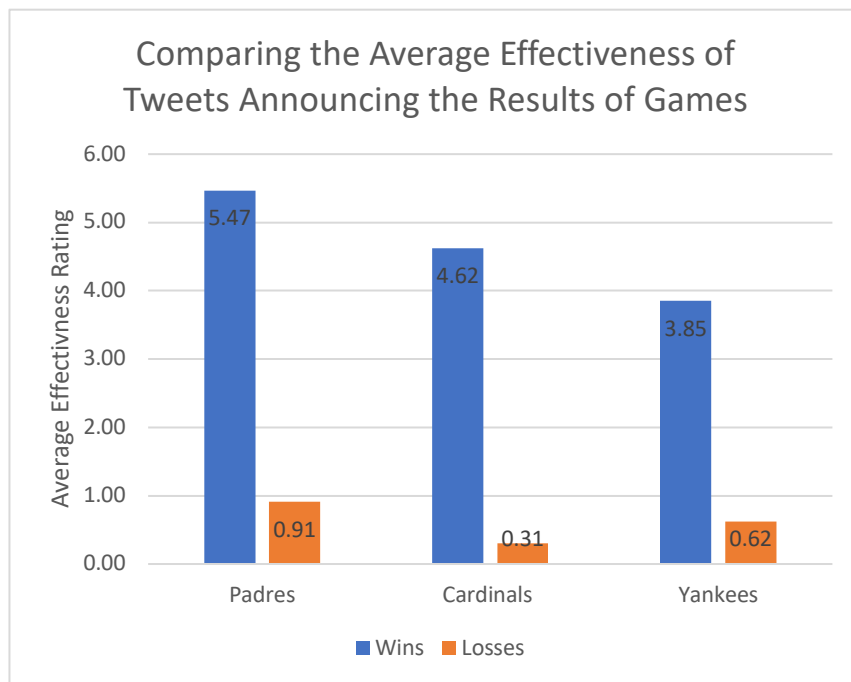


Figure 7: Comparison of the Average Effectiveness Rating of Game Result Tweets among the three accounts.

The production value has little effect on the effectiveness of the tweet can be attributed to the type of information these tweets are advertising. When a fan sees a game result tweet, which

team wins and the score is the most important part of the tweet, regardless of how it is presented on the screen. These posts are unlike tweets that promote exciting plays like go-ahead home runs or historical milestones, in which the soundtrack or the camera angles used can affect how the audience views the tweet. However, for tweets announcing game results, fans are reading to find the numbers of the score. Fans may not decide to interact with the tweet based on the additional features around the box score. Despite the commonalities between the average ratings received by tweets overall and average ratings received by the game results tweets, there is one outlier between the two. As shown in *Figure 5*, Yankees' tweets announcing losses perform better than the Cardinals' tweets of the same sort, despite the Yankees having low ratings in general.

Yankees' game result tweets present a negative relationship between the production value and the spread of the tweet. Compared to the other two accounts, their tweets announcing victories have the highest production value but have the lowest rating. In contrast, their game-losing tweets have the lowest production value but do not have the lowest ratings. One main reason for this could be the team expectations. Since the Yankees fanbase is anticipating a championship, a regular-season victory may not be as significant for the supporters. However, a regular-season loss could attract more engagement as fans react to the tweet. Another factor to consider is that the New York media and fans are more critical to its teams, which may cause more negative reactions to losses than other markets.

It is worthy to point out that, although the Yankees have a low effectiveness rating, the account receives the most engagement from its followers. Among all tweets analyzed in this project, the Yankees receive over 4,500 engagements on average. That is more than triple the average engagement for the Padres and more than double for the Cardinals. Overall, the Yankees

account garner a large number of interactions with fans. However, due to the nature of the effectiveness rating, the vast fanbase becomes a disadvantage in our comparison.

	<i>Padres</i>	<i>Cardinals</i>	<i>Yankees</i>
<i>Average Engagement per tweet (Likes + Retweets)</i>	1443	2075	4528
<i>Average Effectiveness Rating per tweet</i>	3.44	1.75	1.39

Table 7 - Comparing the average engagement per tweet among the three teams

Discussion

Overall, the identity of each Twitter account can be seen through the qualitative analysis of their most successful tweets. The Padres Twitter account, with a smaller fan base, goes outside the box and incorporates elements of popular culture to promote its historical achievements. The Cardinals have a more conservative and practical approach, relying on their large fanbase to engage with the tweets themselves. The Yankees account is the balance between the other two accounts. Their admins use various social media techniques, with fun wordplay and timely puns. Though compared to the Padres, the Yankees account uses more conventional methods.

Tasked with promoting a relatively young franchise and a smaller fanbase, the Padres’ social media team successfully appeal to a wider audience with their out-of-the-box strategies. The Padres’ tweets perform the best out of the three accounts on average, according to the effectiveness rating. Some of their most successful tweets reveal that the Padres social media team is adept at incorporating memes and making references to popular culture. This allows their tweets to gain more engagements, especially factoring in their lower number of followers

compared to the other two teams. The Padres account presents a good example for teams and leagues with smaller fanbases to market their product on social media platforms.

With a strong and loyal fanbase, the Cardinals have a more conservative approach. This can be seen through their tweets honoring Yadier Molina and Albert Pujols's historical milestones. In their celebratory tweets of these achievements, the Cardinal uses modest captions and graphics with little extravagant features. This allows the content itself to be the main attraction for engagement. Additionally, in the case of their most engaged tweets, their success relies upon their fans recognizing the history and success of two seasoned veterans in the league. With more engagement than the Padres, on the whole, this approach fits the Cardinals' status very well. However, their low effectiveness rating shows that their tweets may not reach the timeline of non-Cardinal fans. But, with loyal supporters at the back already, that may not be their primary goal.

The Yankees Twitter team uses more conventional social media techniques. Compared to the Cardinals, some of the Yankees' content contain higher production value—for example, the tweets announcing wins. The Yankees incorporate motion-based graphics with short clips from the respective games. However, the higher production value doesn't translate to more effective tweets, as the Yankees receive the lowest effectiveness ratings on average among the three teams. This could be due to the fact that a larger fanbase leads to a larger proportion of casual fans who don't follow every game. Or the high expectations of Yankees in 2020, causing the fans to consider regular-season games are less important. Yet, many of these factors are out of the control of the social media team.

Despite the differences in approach between the three teams, the analysis shows many commonalities. One of the most significant commonalities is the importance of the on-field

product compared to the success of the content. The dramatic difference in engagements between game-winning tweets and game-losing tweets is a clear example. On average, among all game result tweets analyzed in this thesis, tweets announcing wins outperform the counterpart by more than nine times. Additionally, the top two most successful tweets from each account are celebratory tweets, where a historical record is broken, or the team sweeps their nemesis.

Comparing the Padres and the Yankees Social Media Approach

The comparison between the Padres and the Yankees' social media approach is an interesting one. As mentioned above, although both teams are vastly different in terms of their history and the size of their fanbase, both draw more similarities for their approach on Twitter. Both teams consistently refer to common social media practices and create an identity more suitable to social media, and one that's more similar to the success of the L.A. Kings in Armstrong, Delia, and Giardina's work. However, as the qualitative analysis of their best tweets suggests that the Padres social media team takes another step forward. The creativity to step outside of the box and appeal to meme culture and create innovative content are the primary reasons for their success relative to the Yankees, based on the comparison of effectiveness rating to the Yankees.

It is important to note that the Padres' account had significant and worthy accomplishments to promote than the Yankees. Additional to the vast number of followers the Yankees already have, it is more challenging for the Yankees' social media team to replicate the same level of ratings compared to the Padres. Yet, the substantial gap between the Padres' ratings and the Yankees' is still significant nonetheless, even with the Yankees having a more social-media friendly approach.

The differences show that conventional social media methods can allow an account to be relatively successful. It is sufficient to give a sports team a voice on social media and have a presence to interact with fans. However, if one is expecting to promote and reach users outside of the traditional sphere of influence, vastly creative innovation is needed.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Implications

This thesis project provides a straightforward comparison between the social media strategy of three major league sports teams. With many academic journals focusing on the change in fan behavior or the economics of marketing on social media, this thesis offers a direct comparison of different social media strategies. This project also indicates the latest trends on Sports Twitter and the most effective ways to garner attention among sports fans. The three teams were deliberately picked to represent each popularity stature. Therefore, this thesis also allows the reader to compare how each team prioritizes their marketing strategy on social media and see whether their stature is a factor in determining the strategy. Overall, it is clear that the on-field product remains one of the most significant factors in the number of engagements a tweet could garner. This proves that sports fans remain loyal to their team on the field rather than the social media account.

The same trend appears when one is comparing production value and engagements. The thesis shows that a tweet's production value does not correlate with the number of engagements the tweet will receive. Although packaging the content to make it more consumable for social media is encouraged, the project shows a diminishing return of interactions when the production value gets to a certain point. Although this project cannot specify where the start of the

diminishing return is, it is clear that when the basic goals like accessibility are achieved, the extra production value is much less efficient in garnering attention.

For sports executives, this project further proves that fielding a competitive team is the most effective way to gain attention. If the team performs below expectations, the social media admins remain relatively powerless, and engagements are likely to be low. However, when there's exciting content on the field, the marketing team's creativity can become a significant driver for engagements. References to popular culture or internet memes are encouraged for a high level of outreach. Ultimately, as shown between the Padres' and the Yankees' tweets, a simple modification of a popular meme can perform better than a sophisticated GIF.

Limitations

A number of limitations should be recognized in this thesis. Firstly, due to the inefficiency of documenting the data for each tweet by hand, the range of tweets analyzed in this thesis is limited to a one-month span. Ideally, analyzing the tweets throughout the entire regular season can present a more accurate picture of each team's social media identity. Additionally, widening the scope to multiple seasons could be helpful since it helps neglect the impact of CoVID-19 on each teams' marketing strategy. More importantly, that will prevent one team from having dramatically less content to analyze than others due to CoVID-19 cancellations. CoVID-19 is also a factor not considered in this thesis. With MLB games limiting attendance throughout the season, social media becomes one of the few methods to communicate with fans and retain them. This thesis does not factor in CoVID-19 and whether that forced teams to be more active on Twitter. For example, the Yankees could not rely on traditional marketing methods to gain

attention. Rather, they may have been forced to produce more social media content than previous seasons to keep their fans' attention.

In order to have a clearer understanding of each team's identity on Twitter, a more qualitative analysis could be done. Rather than picking the tweets with the highest ratings, average and lower-rated posts can be analyzed. Additionally, the three social media accounts analyzed in this thesis may be insufficient to represent the entire landscape of MLB Twitter. Adding more teams for each stature can test whether the correlation between club popularity and social media approach is consistent.

Future Research

In addition to resolving the limitation of small sample size, as listed above, directions of future research are limitless. Possibilities include analyzing social media behavior across different platforms, examining what tools each platform provides to the user and how the social media teams customize their content for each website. Also, a comparison between a team from different sport can be interesting as well. With the fans of each of the four major sport categorized slightly differently in terms of demographics, it will be interesting to see how each league and their teams approach social media as a marketing platform. A geographical comparison could also be interesting. For example, it could be useful to compare the language used on social media between West Coast and Southern teams. Furthermore, the same idea can be extended beyond North America. Comparing social media conventions between North American sports and European leagues would be interesting. Such comparison could extend to how social media is used differently in different cultures and whether one platform is more popular in one country than the other. Another possibility is to analyze social media behavior

before and after the CoVID-19 epidemic. With the rise of virtual interactions due to the global pandemic, it will be interesting to see if the teams invest more in digital marketing and enhance their social media presence.

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Biography

Daniel (Cheng-Ying) Shih was born in Taipei, Taiwan on June 27th, 1999. He spent the first 18 years of his life in East Asia. In 2017, Daniel moved to Austin, Texas for undergraduate studies at the University of Texas at Austin, pursuing degrees in Radio-Television-Film and Plan II Honors. At college, Mr. Shih was the executive producer at the Sports Department of Texas Student Television for two years and became the Sports Director. In 2020, Daniel was hired to manage the Twitter account of the Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL) in Taiwan. He's responsible for producing English content to promote Taiwanese baseball on Twitter. Mr. Shih will continue pursuing a career in sports media.