LOCATING ONESELF AND TALKING PAST: Journalists' engagement with Pacific communities on Twitter

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Abstract
This article explores how journalists navigate the tensions between community engagement and professional detachment by tracing how journalists used Twitter during Tonga and Australia's inaugural rugby league test match in 2018. As a high-profile Pacific cultural and sporting event, it provides an opportunity to study how journalists engage with marginalised Pacific communities, and whether that engagement demonstrates the reciprocity needed to build relationships. More than 9000 tweets were analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods to reveal that media organisations and journalists tended more toward broadcasting than interactive approaches on Twitter. Practices differed between sub-groups, however: Individual journalists engaged in public discussion more than media organisations, and Pacific journalists engaged more than non-Pacific journalists. In fact, Pacific journalists' identity work–performed through specific discourses, including emojis–demonstrated a less detached journalism than did non-Pacific journalists, who appeared to talk past the Pacific communities in this Twitter public.

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Introduction

This study traces the ways in which media participated in hashtagged activity on Twitter during Tonga and Australia's first-ever rugby league test match, held in Aotearoa New Zealand, in late 2018. As a high-profile sporting and cultural moment, particularly for Pacific[1] communities who, in the New Zealand context, comprise the fourth largest ethnic group in New Zealand, the event provides a useful snapshot for examining how journalists are engaging with minority communities–and how they are adapting traditional practices to do so. As societies become more diverse , journalists are increasingly required to build and nurture relationships with minority communities, but that creates obvious tensions for journalists' professional norms of detachment and objectivity (Robinson and Culver, 2019). The ad hoc Twitter discussion that formed around the Mate Ma'a Tonga/Kangaroos test match provides an opportunity to examine not only how journalists are navigating those tensions, but also how they might be adapting traditional norms and practices on social media. This study finds that media users overall are not engaging in two-way conversation on Twitter as much as they might, with mainstream media organisations in particular tending to use the platform more for traditional broadcasting purposes than networking. By contrast, individual Pacific journalists appear to be embracing the personalised nature of the platform to make connections with Pacific publics.

Various scholars have already noted the ways in which Twitter tests journalism's professional norms, because its discourse is more conversational and the social nature of the network creates a more personal space (Houston et al., 2020), and because its technological affordances favour more personal content (Hedman, 2020). The hashtag discussion that is the

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[1] The collective term used to describe people who are from or who descend from South Pacific island nations.

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focus of this study poses an interesting test, partly because of its location within the blurred

personal/public Twitter space, and partly because it emerged in the context of sports

coverage, in which the norms of objectivity have previously been shown to be problematic

(Rowe, 2005; Boyle, Rowe and Whannel, 2009). The discussion also occurred at a significant

moment of international visibility for marginalised Pacific communities, during which

discourses of identity and belonging were brought to the fore (Ross, 2021). As such, it

provides a useful case study of how journalists—particularly Pacific journalists—navigate the

tensions between objectivity and practices of positionality in relation to personal and

collective belonging (Ross, 2017b), and how they might be using social media to build

relationships, especially with marginalised communities. Indeed, this study suggests that

Pacific journalists embrace more identity talk than non-Pacific journalists and media

organisations.

In the context of declining trust in the news (Newman et al., 2019), there are strong moral and

commercial arguments for relationship- and trust-building, and social media can play a role in

building the community connections that are necessary for trust. News media have embraced

engagement as a key strategy to strengthen audience loyalty and increase revenue (Krumsvik,

2018), with Nelson (2019) noting a proliferation of audience engagement tools and

engagement-focused jobs in newsrooms, while Neilson (2018) and Barnard (2014) noting

corresponding pressure on individual journalists to engage online. But the engagement

undertaken is arguably more transactional than the relational engagement needed to build "a

more genuine, collaborative, and sustainable relationship with an audience" (Min, 2020: p.8).

In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, an even deeper, more reciprocal engagement is needed

Locating oneself and talking past: Journalists' identity work and engagement on Twitter to build and nurture relationships with Indigenous Māori and ethnic minority Pacific communities (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018; Smith, 2013; Vaioleti, 2006).

Drawn from a study that traces the ways in which different groups performed their 'publicness' on Twitter in relation to high-profile news event, this article examines how journalists are using Twitter to engage with marginalised communities online, and finds differences between media organisations and individual journalists, and between Pacific journalists and non-Pacific journalists. This article suggests that key mainstream media 'talked past' the Pacific publics in this dataset, and thereby missed the opportunity to better engage with minority Pacific communities. Indeed, the differing patterns of engagement identified in this study demonstrate diverse responses to the tension between norms of objectivity and the demands of ethnic minority communities (Robinson & Culver, 2019), and possible areas for improved journalistic practice in an era of increasingly socially mediated news.

Theorising journalists and Twitter

A lot has been written about journalists' use of Twitter and the ways in which the social media platform's use might entrench, adapt or transform traditional journalism practice. Some scholars have argued that the journalist-audience relationship is changing in the face of Twitter's participatory culture (Bruns, 2008; Hermida, 2010, 2013) and blurring of the personal and the public (Schmidt, 2014), and the drive for audience engagement across social media platforms in general (Nielson, 2018). Certainly, there is evidence that Twitter has opened up journalists' work to new practices. Early empirical work by Lasorsa et al. (2012) found journalists were offering opinion freely on Twitter, in what appeared to be a departure

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from professional norms and practices, and an adjustment to the norms and practices of

Twitter. Coddington, Molyneux and Lawrence (2014, cited in Houston et al., 2020: p. 616)

note that as journalists are becoming progressively more open to sharing personal information

on Twitter and blending fact-centred reporting with personal posts, humour, opinion, and

'lifecasting'. In an analysis of what journalists retweet, Molyneux (2015) found journalists

were retweeting only "a modicum of news", and more often retweeting a mix of opinion,

humour and personal branding in ways that challenge both organisational and objecivity

norms (Molyneux, 2015: p. 932).

While there is evidence that journalists' traditional practices of objectivity are becoming

transformed on social media, there is also evidence that journalists tend to 'normalise' their

use of social media to fit their professional routines, and their response to the interactive

potential of Twitter has been limited. In their study of US journalists, Molyneux, Holton and

Lewis (2018) found journalists spoke mostly to one another on social media. In a European

study, Larsson, Kalsnes and Christensen (2017: p.1153) found journalists interacted mainly

with each other, politicians and other 'elite' users, and ordinary users remained at the

periphery "limited (in large part) to simply using the hashtag or sending tweets to the

organizations–but seldom receiving response or retweets". Engaging with audiences was

neither particuarly strong nor widespread.

Neilson's (2018) interviews with New Zealand journalists hint at some of the reasons for this,

revealing that although journalists felt online engagement was necessary and beneficial, they

were reluctant to engage because of a lack of training, resources and time, and perceived risks

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to their professional identity. Some studies suggest journalists may be right to be concerned

about engaging and sharing more of themselves online, because of safety risks (Martin, 2018)

or because users can view it negatively (Houston et al., 2020), though Johnson (2020) has

found that tweeting personal information to provide a more 'human' self can lift a journalist's

credibility.

Such engagement is crucial for connecting with ethnic minority communities such as Pacific

communities, where culturally appropriate practice necessitates sharing one's own identity or

tu'ungavaeve[2]. Robinson and Culver's (2019) research with communities of colour found

community members want journalists to engage with them more; yet, journalists remain

committed, instead, to professional detachment. Likewise, Lough, Molyneux and Holton

(2018) found that audiences demand more connection via personal transparency, humour and

opinion, but journalists lean instead toward professional norms and expectations.

Research on the ways that cultural differences influence legacy journalistic work (Hallin and

Mancini, 2004; Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Hanusch, 2014) suggests that journalists may express

their personal and social identities differently, and thereby engage differently on social media

depending on their socio-cultural setting. For instance, research on Pacific journalism (Ross,

2017a, 2017b) reveals that journalists deploy multi-faceted practices of identity and

connection to establish their relationship with Pacific communities. That necessarily blurs

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[2] Literally 'place of standing' in Tongan (in other Pacific cultures, it is *yavu* or *timu) tu'ungavaeve* refers to one's central identity, and encompasses notions of space (connection to ancestral land), relationship (kinship, ancestry and social connections) and essence of being (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018).

Locating oneself and talking past: Journalists' identity work and engagement on Twitter journalist/community and personal/collective identities—and problematises a distinction in the literature on journalists' uses of Twitter between personal branding and collective 'identity-building'. Practices of 'cheerleading' (Rowe, 2005; Boyle, Rowe and Whannel, 2009) and nation-building (Mauro, 2020) in sports journalism further blur the lines between personal and collective identification in different ways, as does the rise of athletes and some sports journalists as social media celebrities with personal/public personas (Mauro, 2020). There is evidence to suggest differences in the social media interactions of journalists in different nations (Bodrunova, Litvinenko and Blekanov, 2018; Lee, Kim and Kim, 2016) but there is, as yet, little research examining the link between cultural values, journalism and social media, particularly in the Pacific region. This study goes a small way to filling that gap by examining a hashtag public in the socio-cultural context of a high-profile Pacific sporting and cultural event to ask how are journalists engaging with marginalised Pacific communities on social media.

Pacific peoples in the New Zealand context

The Mate Ma'a Tonga/Kangaroos test match that is the backdrop to this study was significant for several reasons. It was the first-ever test match between Tonga, a tier-two rugby league nation, and Australia, the world champions, and represented a historic moment of recognition for a Pacific national team. The Tongan team was also riding a wave of popularity at the time, after becoming the first-ever tier-two team to beat a tier-one nation when it beat New Zealand to reach the semi-finals of the Rugby League World Cup a year earlier. Moreover, Pacific peoples comprise a substantial cohort within rugby and rugby league in Australia and New Zealand (Lakisa, Adair and Taylor, 2014), where athletes are a key focal point of Pacific

Locating oneself and talking past: Journalists' identity work and engagement on Twitter narratives of cultural pride, agency and communal *mana* or status (Teaiwa, 2016). As such, the Mate Ma'a Tonga/Kangaroos test carried great weight in Pacific communities in New Zealand, Tonga and Australia, and in diasporic populations in the United States and further afield; Tongan fans flew in from all over the world for the test and the Tongan King Tupou VI declared a public holiday in Tonga to mark the team's achievements (Hopgood, 2020).

The test match played to a sold-out crowd in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand, home to more than 240,000 Pacific peoples (Stats NZ, 2019a). With almost as many Tongans in Aotearoa New Zealand as there are in Tonga (Stats NZ, 2019b; Tonga Statistics Department, n.d.), the match was in many respects a 'home game' for the visiting Tongan team. Whole neighbourhoods were awash in a "sea of red" Tongan flags and banners in the weeks leading up to the test and, with Tongan supporters flying in from all over the world for the match, there was considerable media hype around the game and the Tongan supporters and community.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Tongans are part of a larger, diverse Pacific population that has grown to become the fourth largest ethnic group, behind Pākehā (European), Indigenous Māori and Asians[3]. Like migrant ethnic minorities elsewhere, Pacific peoples comprise one of Aotearoa's more vulnerable and marginalised groups, and the smaller 'other' to the more numerous and politically dominant Pākehā (New Zealand European) group. Their marginalised status is reflected in mainstream media, where there is usually little reflection of Pacific issues or Pacific peoples (Loto et al., 2006). A government stock-take (NZ on Air,

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[3] Pacific peoples in Aotearoa comprise different island groups (primarily Samoan, Cook Islands, Tongan, Niuean, Fijian and Tokelauan [Ministry for Pacific Peoples, n.d.]) with different ethnic, cultural, linguistic and geographic identities, and different colonial histories in relation to New Zealand.

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2012) of news coverage for Pacific audiences found minimal specific Pacific programming or storytelling, while research shows mainstream media have generally framed stories with dominant Pākehā discourses and sources. Loto et al.'s (2006) analysis of New Zealand print media found Pacific peoples were overwhelmingly framed as 'others' to the Pākehā majority's 'us', and in negative terms. Notably, where Pacific people were portrayed in positive terms, it was often in relation to sport. This is unlikely to be a unique representational problem for Pacific communities but reflects the dominant culture's relationship with ethnic minorities. These patterns of invisibility have contributed, however, to Pacific people's strong sense of alienation from mainstream news media, which they have described elsewhere (Ross, 2016, 2017a, 2017c) as untrustworthy and racist, demonstrating a clear need for journalists to do more to build trust with Pacific communities.

Methodology

This article is based on analysis of a collection of 9280 tweets from the two-week period of the Tongan rugby league team's visit to Aotearoa/New Zealand, from October 10, when the team arrived, to October 24, when they departed. All data was collected through Twitter's public filter API through searches for "Mate Ma'a Tonga" (the name of the Tongan team), "Tonga OR league", @tonganNRL, #MMT, #Tonga, and #rugbyleague, and is analysed using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Drawing on methods suggested by Bruns and Stieglitz (2013) and Bruns and Burgess (2012), it deployed a basic social network analysis to identify broad clusters of users and key participants in the Twitter dataset, as well as a series of metrics focused on user activity and visibility (via original tweets, @mentions, retweets and URL tweets, hashtags and media objects) to analyse and compare communicative

Locating oneself and talking past: Journalists' identity work and engagement on Twitter patterns[4]. In addition, tweet content was manually[5] analysed using an exploratory and iterative approach to textual analysis aimed simply at illuminating behaviour and capturing emergent patterns and forms of interaction between users (Mourao, 2015: p.1113).

Analysis was based on a simple coding of tweets based on primary syntax as either an original tweet, retweet or @mention, which may risk oversimplification but for the purposes of this study provides a reasonable indication of key patterns in the Twitter discussion. Twitter users were manually identified as media users, and as Pacific or non-Pacific media or journalists (see Table 1), based on their public profiles and news activity (Zelizer and Allen, 2010: p. 62). Of the #MMT hashtag community's 3755 users, 81 were identified as media organisations or journalists, mostly from Aotearoa and Australia but also from the wider Pacific and Europe. Of the 81 media users, a little over half (n=41) were sports media users. One in five (n=16) were identified as Pacific, though of these, only two (both journalists) were also sports specialists.

Table 1

Media users categorised by type

Media user by type	Example
Media Organisation: Non-Pacific	@7NewsSydney, Australian TV 7NEWS (Sydney newsroom)
Media Organisation: Pacific	@TheCoconetTV, Aotearoa-based Pacific web media
Individual Journalist: Non-Pacific	@BradWalterSport, NRL.com senior journalist, Brad Walter

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[4] As an observational study aimed at describing a 'found' dataset, this work draws on descriptive statistics to summarise the patterns observed, but does not draw on inferential statistics to generalise or extrapolate to a larger population (which would require a more deliberate and representative sample).

[5] Automated content analysis methods are unsuitable for understanding the cultural, contextual and linguistic complexity of tweets (Brantner and Pfeffer, 2018: p.89) or for analysing multilingual datasets such as this, which included tweets in English, Tongan and Samoan.

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Individual Journalist: Pacific	@The_KorOcle, Radio New Zealand Pacific correspondent, Koro Vaka'uta

The tweets collected are unlikely to represent all #MMT-related activity on Twitter (Brantner and Pfeffer, 2018: p. 82) – the data capture excludes private accounts and quote tweets (where original tweets are embedded in a retweet as a graphic), and will not have captured all of the follow-on and user-to-user conversations that 'hang off' hashtag or keyword tweets (Bruns and Burgess, 2011: p. 21). As such this dataset is understood as a fragment of the Twitter conversation, and the wider public conversation that is likely to have occurred off Twitter on talkback radio, media comment sections and other social media platforms. It is, nonetheless, suggestive of how users engaged on Twitter, and a useful snapshot for investigating not just how media engage in public conversations but also, given the prominence of Pacific users in this dataset, how they are engaging with marginalised ethnic communities. Though media organisations and journalists represent only a small group in the larger #MMT hashtag public, they were among the most visible users; for example, online Pacific outlet @TheCoconet.tv was the most retweeted of all users.

Though most of the tweets in the dataset were public in character–through their use of the #MMT hashtag (n=5343) and other hashtags, or as retweets (n=6270)–consideration has been given to the potential harm of using and re-publicising them (franzke, 2020) by de-identifying data for non-public or ordinary users. Those with a public profile, such as athletes, media and sports organisations remain identifiable. As a researcher who identifies as Pacific, I have also aimed to ground analysis as much as possible in the context of Pacific perspectives (Anae, 2010), and to generate knowledge and understanding not just *about* but also *for* Pacific

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peoples, by analysing media practices with a view to highlighting best practices for

connecting with and reporting for Pacific communities.

Findings

Analysis found three main clusters or publics orienting to the Mate Ma'a Tonga tour on

Twitter, including a sport-focused public and two Pacific publics that have been less

well-described in the literature (Ross, 2021).

Overall, discussion was reasonably distributed, drawing from all three of the main clusters

identified in the network, and the ratio of retweets and @replies was relatively high (77.5%

of all tweets), providing evidence that participants were actively responding to one another

and acting as a community in network terms (Bruns and Burgess, 2012).

Much of the activity of media-related accounts (media organisations and individual

journalists) was centred around news events (such as the Mate Ma'a Tonga team's welcome

on October 10, the team's public fan day on October 17 and the actual test match on the

20th), suggesting more broadcast-like, breaking news coverage, especially when set against

the Pacific publics, for whom the sporting event was a low-boil matter of discussion between

news events. There were few print journalists evident in the sample; most of the media

organisations and journalists tweeting around the #MMT tour were broadcast- or web-based,

which may suggest a continued reluctance among print journalists to embrace Twitter (Schulz

and Sheffer, 2010: p. 236).

More broadcasting than interaction

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The media organisations and journalists who did tweet in relation to the Mate Ma'a Tonga event appeared to use Twitter more for information dissemination than interaction with audiences or community members, indicating that journalists were adapting or 'normalising' Twitter to their traditional practice (Singer, 2005). Media-related accounts had a lower ratio of retweets to tweets than the overall Twitter population captured in the sample, and a much higher ratio of information-sharing URL tweets (Figure 1). Closer analysis of tweet content revealed they were often promoting news work or 'marketing the news' (Tandoc and Vos, 2015). As well as tweeting URL links and teasers to point to their work elsewhere, media organisations and individual journalists boosted content by mass-broadcasting tweets across related accounts, retweeting or @replying to their own tweets, and cross-promoting tweets by journalists in their own newsrooms. For example, of 29 tweets captured from @NRL.com, one of the most active media users in the sample, four tweets linked to its own stories, and the other 25 were promotional retweets of its individual journalists' work. In this way, media users, especially newsrooms, used Twitter largely as a redistribution platform, and functioned more as broadcasters than as participants in a two-way conversation (Hermida, 2013).

[Insert Figure 1]

Figure 1: User activity patterns for media organisations, individual journalists and all other non-media users.

Just as other research has noted differences between media users, such as between employed and freelance journalists (Brems et al., 2017), differences were found here between media organisations and individual journalists, and between Pacific and non-Pacific media users. Individual journalists engaged a little more in discussion, tweeting proportionately more @replies than did media organisations (see Figure 1). That appears to echo Bruns' (2012)

Locating oneself and talking past: Journalists' identity work and engagement on Twitter research on the #auspol public, which found individual journalists were more prominent in discussion than newsrooms. Closer analysis, though, suggests that for some engagement was narrowly focused. More than a quarter of journalists' @replies (28%) responded to other journalists or newsrooms in their media bubble, and 63% of retweets were of other media accounts, rather than citizens, suggesting the presence of strong homophilous networks between journalists, particularly the sports journalists (Hanusch and Nölleke, 2019). Notably, Pacific journalists appeared to interact less in a bubble with other journalists. The number of individual Pacific journalists captured in this sample is small (n=8) so patterns can only be suggestive, but all eight Pacific journalists @replied ordinary users (rather than fellow journalists or newsrooms), and retweeted media firms or journalists almost half as often as other journalists (only 36% of their retweets were of other journalists or media). The weaker journalistic homophily among Pacific journalists may indicate the ways in which they are more embedded in the communities on which they report (Ross, 2017a, 2017b), or how they are positioned differently as a minority group within the media ecosystem (Ross, 2017a). The Pacific journalists' practice is interesting, too, given several were from the same organisations; previous studies have shown that journalists mostly interact with journalists who belong to the same media organisation or news beat. Either way, the contrast in their practice with non-Pacific journalists is noteworthy.

Overall, media-related accounts generally employed a more broadcasting, as opposed to interactive, approach on Twitter, and appeared to position themselves on the periphery of public discussion, either by using hashtags that were not in common use or by using no hashtag at all. By examining media users' original tweets (which, because of their more deliberative nature, reveal more about how users choose to connect to public discussion or to

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help others discover them), this study found only 58% of media organisations used hashtags

in their tweets (Figure 2), which appears to run counter to a mission of engagement. Again,

the tweeting behaviour of individual journalists differed. Individual journalists (79%) were

more likely to use hashtags, and were also more likely to use the #MMT and

#MateMaaTonga hashtags that were widely used by the Pacific publics in this sample.

[Insert Figure 2]

Figure 2: Hashtag use by media organisations and individual journalists (original tweets).

There were sharper differences in the hashtag practices of Pacific versus non-Pacific media

users. Where *all* Pacific journalists and Pacific media organisations used the prevailing

#MMT/MateMaaTonga hashtags to engage in public discussion, only 31% of non-Pacific

journalists and 19% of non-Pacific media organisations used them (instead, they used no

hashtag or a variety of less durable hashtags). The low uptake of #MMT by mainstream

media shows a distinct lack of engagement given the hashtag was trending on Twitter during

the Tongan team's visit, was the leading hashtag among Pacific users, and was a more

durable hashtag than other hashtags media used to flag the team's visit and test match. In

such ways, non-Pacific media and journalists do not appear to have been using Twitter to

interact or engage with citizens as much as the platform's affordances allow.

Objectivity norms vs identity work

There is evidence here, too, of differences in media users' navigation of the tension between

professional norms of objectivity and neutrality and Twitter's social norms of sharing

personal information and opinion. Pacific media users were less detached and tended to share

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more personal information; among non-Pacific journalists, there was less evidence of the

personal content than the literature would suggest (Hedman, 2020; Houston et al., 2020). For

instance, NRL.com journalist Brad Walter, one of the most active media users in the dataset,

posted 48 tweets over the #MMT fortnight, of which nearly half (n=22) were original tweets.

All but two of these original tweets were self-promotions for his NRL.com stories and, rather

than being conversational or personal in tone, followed a templated format of a grab quote

from his story, the teams' (and, often, NRL.com) Twitter handles, and the story's URL link.

> "The boys done well last year and deserved a shot at No.1, the Australian team, so to
> get to play them is not only huge for us as a team but huge for us as a country."
> @nrlcom @tonganrl @kangaroos
> https://nrl.com/news/2018/10/11/tonga-fans-repeat-world-cup-scenes-as-team-arrives-
> in-auckland-for-historic-test-against-kangaroos/

Walter's tweets were more like traditional one-way broadcasting (actuality grabs) than

networked conversation. Though he @mentions his employer, NRL.com, as well as the two

test teams, @tongaNRL and @Kangaroos, it does not appear to be an attempt to engage in

conversation. Rather, the hailing of these accounts appears to be more about pegging

identities in the narrative to talk *about* (rather than to) them, by using Twitter handles in

much the same way as a hashtag. This was typical of the sport-focused cluster, where users

used @replies more like #hashtags in their commentary. Notably, Brad Walter neither names

nor @mentions the Pacific players he quotes in his stories (at least some of whom were on

Twitter), which is curiously out of step with Twitter conventions, and a missed opportunity to

network with both the sporting identities he quoted and the communities who followed them.

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In contrast, individual Pacific journalists were less constrained by professional formats: their tweets were more relaxed and conversational in tone, less obviously promoted their own or their employer's coverage, and included some opinion (usually evaluative statements about what they were observing).

> "#MMT fans singing their team to a try! Amazing _@Mtuilaepataylor, Samoan journalist for New Zealand state radio RNZ's Pacific unit.

> "20 points down at halftime but the party goes on. 😂#happytobehere #mmt" _@MattManukiaTVNZ, Tongan journalist for New Zealand state TV channel TVNZ's sports unit.

> "Taking daughter to @SilverFernsNZ game tonight and @tongaNRL Mate Ma'a Tonga game on Saturday. I asked if she was confused...her answer: "Nope...its just about booing Aussies!" 😂 #proud #KiwiIslanders"_@The_KorOcle, Tongan journalist for New Zealand state radio RNZ's Pacific unit.

Their tweets arguably did as much identity work as news work, positioning authors in relation to Tongan, Pacific and New Zealand identities, usually through authors' discourse and forms of address. For example, when reporting on the Mate Ma'a Tonga team's welcome on October 10 @TheCoconet.TV addressed the Tongan team and supporters variously as the "Tongan community", "MMT boys" and "T-Gang", demonstrating forms of address that range from the impersonal and non-aligned, to forms that establish an insider's connection to particular identities and communities (Ross, 2017a).

Notably, Pacific journalists and media users also used hashtags in more personal ways, as tools of emphasis to express emotional responses (such as #proudtonga) or in ways that addressed an identity community, such as #himi391 and #Sipitau. By using hashtags to curate identity and mark their relationship to specific communities in this way, Pacific media users demonstrate an embrace of Twitter's affordances that clearly departs from traditional journalistic norms of detachment and neutrality. Non-Pacific media users, by contrast, tended to use hashtags to label the test match as conversation topic, or to tag their newsrooms in the

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discussion, e.g. #7News, #bigsportsbrekky, #SkySports (where Pacific journalists did not tag

their newsrooms at all).

Pacific and non-Pacific media users' diverged most in their use of emojis, with Pacific

journalists and media organisations using emojis as emphatic codes that expressed emotion

(e.g. face with tears of joy, grinning face, red heart) and signified personal identity or

belonging to a Pacific community (e.g. brown-skinned flexed bicep or hands joined in prayer,

or palm trees). It was a very different use of visual discourse to that of non-Pacific media

users, fewer of whom used emojis and, when they did, used them mostly as labels–to identify

the two teams and the test match through the use of the Tongan and Australian flag emojis or

to characterise content they were linking to (e.g film cameras to link to video, speech bubbles

to link to audio or eye emojis to direct users to "Watch this"). @katiebrownaus's tweets in the

lead-up to the test match were typical of this use of emojis as content labels.

> Mate Ma'a Tongan fans go nuts for their heroes!! 🇹🇴 @tongaNRL #MMT
> 🎥 https://t.co/CJ5FLrftd5 https://t.co/SdzErHOCoi_ @katiebrownaus, sports
> journalist, NRL.com

Pacific media users' distinct use of emojis likely hints at age-related differences (Pacific

communities have a much younger age structure than majority populations), and different

cultural practices and contexts. Pacific grassroots users in the #MMT dataset were heavy

users of emoji, often using them to signify Pacific identity and connection (Ross, 2021), and

though Pacific media users were more constrained than grassroots users, their emoji use

nonetheless indicated a more culturally inflected discourse and preparedness to be more

'oneself' on Twitter.

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Pacific media users' practices might be seen as a hybrid of journalism and identity practices (Papoutsaki and Strickland, 2008; Ross, 2017a). They did not break entirely with professional norms and, mostly, tweeted news 'from the scene' like other media. But they did so in a way that leaned closer in tone and address to the tweets of ordinary Pacific users, and which, possibly, did more to establish connections with Pacific communities. The relatively small number of Pacific journalists and media had much higher visibility in the Mate Ma'a Tonga Twitter discussion than larger, longer-established and high-profile mainstream media. The most retweeted user in the sample, for example, was TheCoconet.tv, a New Zealand-based Pacific website, which, at the time, had less than 4,000 Twitter followers. The next most retweeted media organisation was Australia's Channel 9 television programme Wide World of Sport (@wwos), which had 258,698 followers but only 106 retweets, compared with @TheCoconet.tv's 490. The contrast may suggest how more identity-driven practices, despite a small following, can translate into more effective engagement on Twitter.

Discussion

Analysis of the Twitter activity around the historic Mate Ma'a Tonga/Kangaroos test match provides further evidence of the ways in which media have 'normalised' Twitter into existing routines and practices (Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton, 2012; Van Hove, Asdourian and Bourgeois, 2018). Despite the fact that interaction, participation and connectivity between journalists and audiences is a key feature of Twitter (Hanusch and Bruns, 2017), in this sample, media users, particularly mainstream media organisations, tended to use Twitter more as a distribution channel for stories. Media users interacted mostly to retweet each others' content, and seldom in two-way communication. Indeed, the media in this study were not engaging with the wider #MMT public nearly as much as Twitter's platform allows–nor, it

Locating oneself and talking past: Journalists' identity work and engagement on Twitter appears, as much as scholars argue is needed to connect with ethnic minority communities (Robinson and Culver, 2019).

The fact that media organisations were more likely than individual journalists to use Twitter as a broadcasting rather than networking tool may demonstrate the uneasy fit of news organisations, as conglomerate 'selves', with Twitter's preferences for more personal subjectivities and interaction. That tensions begs further research. If the way we imagine the audience affects how we tweet (Marwick and boyd, 2010: p. 124), does the way we imagine the *newsroom persona* affect how media organisations tweet and audiences respond? Does the depersonalized anonymity of a media organisations's brand act as a constraint on Twitter engagement and, therefore, potential trust-building with social media communities?

From this study, it was evident that, in general, media users' tweeting practices were governed more by journalistic norms than is evident in some studies (e.g. Brems et al., 2017). However, there is evidence here to suggest that Pacific media users were less constrained by norms of detachment and more likely to enact a personal identity in their tweets. Through their use of signifying hashtags and visual discourse, Pacific journalists appeared to embrace identity talk to position themselves relative to Pacific Twitter publics. In some respects, this may reflect the situated cultural practices of Pacific peoples in New Zealand and Pacific spaces, where one establishes connection to others by locating one's own identity through locative concepts of *tu'ungava'e*/*turangawaewae* (literally, one's place to stand) and *whakawhanaungatanga* (establishing relationship)[6] (Ross, 2017a, 2017b). In cultural terms,

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[6] *Tu'ungava'e* and *turangawaewae* are the Tongan and Māori words for the Polynesian concept of foundational place and social connection. *Whakawhanaungatanga* (Māori) is the process of establishing the meaningful relationships that provide people with a sense of belonging and membership within a collective.

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Pacific journalists must do more to locate 'where they are standing' when they speak to these publics. Such cultural imperatives may help to explain why the identity practices of Pacific journalists' in this study appear to run counter to other journalists, as well as findings elsewhere that journalists who have not been on Twitter long are usually less likely to engage in individual branding and personal information-sharing (Molyneux, Holton and Lewis, 2018). Pacific media users in this sample had been on Twitter, on average, less than six years at the time of the Mate Ma'a Tonga tour yet were sharing *more* compared with non-Pacific media accounts, which were more than eight years old on average. The variance suggests a need to further broaden our study of journalism practice; we can learn more by listening in poorly studied corners of professional practice like this, than going over well-trodden ground.

Interestingly, though Pacific journalists presented a more personal self in their talk on Twitter, they did so in a way that hints at the constraining effects of the structural features of Pacific media, which sit at the margins in New Zealand's and Australia's mediascapes. Pacific journalists did not tend to express as much opinion or humour as has been identified in other research (e.g., Molyneux, Holton and Lewis, 2018), and their language in relation to grassroots Pacific users in this sample was relatively neutral. Like other journalists from non-dominant or marginalised groups, Pacific journalists face pressure to conform even more strictly to professional standards to counter the criticism that they are more community advocate than journalist (Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach, 2011). In addition, because of the relatively small size of ethnic-specific audiences, many of the Pacific media captured in this sample necessarily serve a pan-Pacific audience (Ross, 2017a), which requires a careful,

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and more neutral, positioning to avoid favouring one ethnic group over another (as was

evident in how Pacific media tended to talk about 'the' Tongan team, rather than 'our' team).

The different visual discourses practised by Pacific media users in this sample further

suggests we need to know more about 'how' journalists address and engage different publics

on Twitter. Pacific journalists and newsrooms used emojis in ways that mirrored the Pacific

publics they were talking to, while non-Pacific media's emoji use was out of sync with

Pacific publics' discourse. The small size of the Pacific media sample in this exploratory

study may limit the generalisability of the pattern identified here, but there is enough to

suggest cultural differences in media Twitter practices that warrants further research. Much of

the research on journalists' use of Twitter thus far has relied on text-based analysis, but the

differing use of emojis here begs comparative research via more visually-focused methods of

analysis.

Last but not least, there is also enough here to suggest that mainstream media could be doing

more to engage with ethnic minority publics. Instead, as this study demonstrates, they appear

to be *talking past* Pacific publics. Less than a third of non-Pacific journalists and a fifth of

non-Pacific media organisations used the hashtag most used by Pacific communities during

the Mate Ma'a Tonga visit and test match (#MMT). Instead, they tended to resort to a

grab-bag of hashtags to connect to Twitter discussion. That may indicate the extent to which

many imagined they were talking to an etablished sport community and/or fan base, for

whom the hashtag was considered redundant, but that would seem to be at odds with the

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prominence of Pacific peoples in New Zealand and Australia's rugby sporting codes, where

they make up a disproportionate number of the player base[7] and, presumably, fan base.

It is surprising, in an era when media are desperately in search of new audiences (and

revenue), that more effort was not made to tap into the Pacific sporting community. Given

how hard it has proved for mainstream media to engage with ethnic minority communities

(Ross, 2016, 2017a), it would appear to be a missed opportunity to use the common ground

of sport as a gateway to more meaningful engagement with Pacific communities. Instead, key

mainstream media, talked about rather than with Pacific players, and talked past Pacific fans

by failing to use the hashtags and discourses that were in use within Pacific communities.

Rather than capitalising on the potential of social media to build relationships with Pacific

communities, there is evidence here of an enduring gap between mainstream media and the

ethnic minority groups on whom they report, suggesting more work needs to be done, by

media and media scholars alike, to find ways of better engaging minority and marginalised

communities.

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[7] Pacific peoples comprise only 1 percent of the total population in Australia, yet Pacific players make up 42 percent of all professional contracts in the National Rugby League (NRL) (Hawkes, 2018).

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