Sports-Talk Radio in the Digital Age: A Case Study of Tim & Sid on Sportsnet 590 The Fan

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One of the emergent trends within professional sports has been the acquisition of sports properties by mass media conglomerates. Particularly in the case of team ownership, media firms have pursued sports franchises to vertically integrate and converge with their other corporate holdings (Gerrard, 2004; Stoddart, 1997). This integration has increased access to markets and sponsors for media firms, enabling new revenue streams and accelerating the firms’ overall profitability (Whitson, 1998). Fundamentally, sports franchise ownership allows the media to control the delivery of the product in addition to owning the product itself, securing content rights in a highly competitive marketplace. Indeed, several scholars have noted this phenomenon and its existence in the sports/media complex (e.g., Lefever, 2012, Maguire, 2011; Wenner, 1998) and the resultant global mass media oligopoly (Andrews, 2003; Law, Harvey, & Kemp, 2002). Yet, despite the rise of major global media empires into sport (e.g., Disney, News Corp, and AOL/Time Warner), there has been one prominent example of a sport landscape which has resisted transnational media conglomerates in favour of intranational ones: Canada.

Though the process of globalization has been conducive to mass media empires actively seeking to purchase sports teams and other related businesses (e.g., stadiums, specialty broadcast channels), the Canadian media is one that has remained relatively unscathed by global competition. That is not to say there has not been any influence by the global mass media oligopoly at all. In fact, Harvey and Law (2005) documented how several of the corporate holdings of the Canadian media are partly owned by global players (i.e., Disney and News Corp). But as the landscape has been constructed (via Canadian telecommunication policy) and evolved over time, sports entities have largely remained in the hands of domestic firms or the Canadian mass media oligopoly. While Harvey and Law (2005) suggested that there were six powerhouses in the Canadian media, in the context of sport, Scherer and Harvey (2013) identified two dominant empires in the digital era: Bell Canada Enterprises (BCE) and Rogers (Communications). Both BCE and Rogers have maintained a vast network of television, mobile/cellular, print, and radio distribution outlets and, like the global mass media oligopoly, have followed a similar trajectory as their global media conglomerate counterparts and have incorporated sports properties into their holdings.

Though “sport has become the bread and butter of big conglomerates” (Harvey & St-Germain, 1998, p. 107), developing content to air in Canada can be tedious and cost ineffective (Grant & Wood, 2004). The two powerhouses, BCE and Rogers, have not only begun their foray into sports franchise ownership, but have secured broadcast rights to the professional leagues in which their teams play in. Moreover, both firms have developed or acquired several platforms that are sport specific, such as The Sports Network (TSN) and Rogers Sportsnet (RSN) television stations (Scherer & Whitson, 2009) to air their sport content. The major problem for these media giants is the lack of content to disseminate across their platforms. Major sporting events, including those involving professional sports franchises, air in prime-time and future events are often shown in prime-time segments (Eastman, Newton, & Pack, 1996). In light of this, broadcasters (i.e., BCE and Rogers) must look for content alternatives to air on their various sport outlets during periods where live sporting events are not taking place. In this regard, the two broadcasters recently started sports-talk radio that broadcast the shows on multiple platforms (e.g., TV, Radio, and Twitter).

The purpose of the proposed research is, therefore, to examine one of the aforementioned content alternatives in the Canadian sport/media discourse, specifically the emergence of sports-talk radio and its simultaneous broadcasting (or “simulcasting”) on multiple platforms. Initially constructed in the 1980s (Dempsey, 2006; Nylund, 2007), sports-talk radio bears a format that is cost effective for broadcasters and has become quite rampant in the last decade (Mariscal, 1999). Indeed, Ghosh (1999) contended that in the United States alone, there are over 250 all-sports radio stations with talk radio formats. Previous research on sports-talk radio has mainly focused on masculinity and the predominantly male audience it boasts (e.g., Bland, 2006; Darnell & Wilson, 2006; Dempsey, 2008, 2006; Dempsey, Guilfoir, Raffel & Utsler, 2008; Lipschultz & Hilt, 2006; Nylund, 2007). However, with the “coolness” that has been injected into sports-talk television in recent years (Farred, 2000, p. 113), there is the potential to manipulate sports-
talk radio to adopt a witty and urbane format such that it is suitable for television audiences (and World Wide Web users as well).

The proposed research utilizes a case study method with a purposive sampling technique. Indeed, one particular case of sports-talk radio manipulated for multiple platforms simultaneously is the Tim & Sid program airing on Rogers outlets in Canada. The three-hour long program features commentary from the two co-hosts (i.e., Tim Micallef and Sid Seixiero) on major developments in the sporting world, in addition to interviews with current professional athletes and analysts. Why this particular program was selected was due to the fact that, based on initial researcher observations, the format seems to adhere to the witty banter that many sports-talk shows have adopted (Farred, 2000). Moreover, Tim & Sid appear to represent sports-talk radio in the digital age given their usage of social media (i.e., Twitter) during live broadcasts.

Given the purpose of the research and the literature on the sport/media complex and sports-talk radio, the proposed research seeks to address the following research questions:

RQ1 – On what media does the Tim & Sid program broadcast on?

RQ2a – Does the dissemination of Tim & Sid on multiple platforms lead to a distortion of the radio broadcast experience?

RQ2b – Does the Tim & Sid’s content differ from medium to medium?

RQ3 – What type of format is present on Tim & Sid and how does that compare to existent literature on sports-talk radio?

In order to answer the research questions, the proposed research calls for an observational protocol (Creswell, 2013) of the case in question. Both researchers will examine the Tim & Sid show for one business week (as the show airs Monday through Friday) totalling 15 hours of content, and the program will be observed in both its radio and television formats. Both researchers will compile and compare field notes after data analysis has taken place individually. In addition to the observational protocol, the research team will also code tweets from the @timandsid username and the hashtag #timandsid. Analyzing the content of @timandsid and #timandsid during this 15 hour period will provide greater insight as to how the show presents information and what that information is. By producing this research, the intent is to extend the literature on sports-talk radio and illuminate the issue of simulcasting and multi-platform broadcasting. As the sport/media complex grows, firms are seeking greater convergence of their properties. As such it is important to document how simulcasting as a process works and the implications for broadcasters and the audience alike.