

Print and Broadcast Connections of ESPN: An Investigation of the Alignment of Editorial Coverage in *ESPN The Magazine* with ESPN's Broadcasting Rights

Galen Clavio
Paul M. Pedersen

Introduction

Just over a decade ago, the Walt Disney Company purchased the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), one of the so-called “Big Four” television networks in the United States. With that acquisition in 1996, Disney assumed operational control over the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN)—the self-appointed ‘Worldwide Leader in Sports’—which was part of the ABC family of networks. The purchase of ABC and ESPN was not an unusual business strategy (vertical integration) for a corporation with the market power of Disney. Other examples in the previous ten years included General Electric’s purchase of NBC (1986) and Westinghouse’s acquisition of CBS (1995) (Welch, 2001). As Stotlar noted (2000), “From satellite services, cable channels, production facilities, sport teams, and content sources, these vertically integrated, divisionalized multinational corporations may well represent the future of sport” (p. 6). Although

vertical integration among media conglomerates and sport entities is not uncommon, the acquisition of ABC/ESPN appeared to point the way towards a new type of cross-promotion in the industries associated with sport and entertainment.

Disney’s acquisition of ABC/ESPN was not its only foray into the sports world. In 1993, the corporation had purchased an expansion team in the National Hockey League (NHL), naming it the Anaheim Mighty Ducks after a Disney-produced movie of the same name. The corporation also had begun to exert control over Major League Baseball’s (MLB) California Angels. This team—now known as the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim—had seen Disney’s founder, Walt Disney, on its board of directors until his death in 1966. After more than three decades of possessing only a minority ownership stake in the team, Disney acquired a controlling interest in the Angels in 1999, just four years after producing *Angels in the Outfield*, a sports movie which featured the team.

With Disney in control of both ABC and ESPN, it was assumed that the cross-promotional tie-ins between the parent corporation and the two television networks were bound to be exploited. "Disney has long subscribed to the ideal of 'synergy,' meaning that one Disney product is created, marketed and sold to enhance the profitability of another," noted one media commentator at the time (Goldberg, 1997). "The Angels will increase traffic near Disneyland. The Ducks were a movie, then a logo, before becoming an NHL team" (p. 1). Disney's cross-promotion extended into non-sports programming as early as 1998, highlighted by the situation comedy *Sports Night*, portraying a 24-hour sports network bearing a striking resemblance to ESPN and its flagship program SportsCenter (Bauder, 1999). An example of the continued use of cross-promotion activities is the use of ESPN SportsCenter personalities to inform viewers during telecasts that score alerts can be secured through the purchase of a Mobile ESPN phone. "The most important thing is that it doesn't interfere with our presentation of information, while at the same time it exposes a new outlet for fans to get sports news," stated one ESPN executive (Marchand, 2006, p. 11). Another ESPN executive, Chuck Pavano, listed as one of ESPN's priorities for 2006 the phrase, "Increase the value of the integrated ESPN and ABC Sports assets to advertisers" (Wailgum, 2006, p. 2). ESPN has also embraced its parent company's use of movies as a cross-promotional vehicle. When asked about the increasingly

large usage of the ESPN name in contemporary film, Chris LaPlaca, ESPN's senior vice-president of consumer communications, stated that "(W)e don't engage in this for monetary reasons. We engage in it to extend our brand" (Hibberd, 2004, p. 2).

When it was announced in 1997 that Disney, ESPN, and the Hearst Corporation would launch a joint-venture sports periodical entitled *ESPN The Magazine*, some media observers (Lieber, 1998; Wolfley, 1998) predicted that the magazine would be little more than another cross-promotional vehicle for the Disney properties, or at the very least, a rehashing of what was available on ESPN's cable channels (Whitmire, 1998). "(Y)our magazine is a TV show," mused Poniewozik (1998) in regards to ESPN, "the magazine quite literally looks like the cable channel on glossy paper, not only cross-referencing ESPN's programming but also picking up on the channel's visuals" (¶5). Among the cross-promotional ties between the magazine and the cable channel was the inclusion of SportsCenter personality Dan Patrick as a contributor to the magazine (Dougherty, 1999). Given the close visual ties between the magazine and its cable channel counterpart, it becomes important to investigate whether there is a true distinction between the two entities, or whether the magazine is truly nothing more than a vehicle for cross-promotion with the ESPN television property. This study examined the content of *ESPN The Magazine* as it relates to certain properties engaged in contractual

television agreements with ESPN and/or ABC. In particular, the examination involved an attempt to ascertain whether there are noticeable changes in the amount of coverage given to the properties as a result of those contractual agreements.

Conceptual Framework

The framework for this analysis is situated within the theoretical concepts of agenda setting and hybrid messages (i.e., cross promotion). These theories were selected due to their relation to the unique position *ESPN The Magazine* occupies in the sport reporting landscape. Unlike *Sports Illustrated*, it is directly tied to a powerful sports television network which would benefit from agenda setting. An increase of coverage and hype for leagues with a television contract with ESPN would hypothetically increase interest in the leagues being televised. Hybrid messages, or cross-promotion, were selected due to the potential mixing of editorial and advertising content that *ESPN The Magazine* could be tempted to use when dealing with leagues in which it has a direct financial stake.

Agenda Setting Theory

The theory of agenda setting, or agenda building, centers around the advancement of certain issues, particularly those that do not otherwise intrude into our daily lives, by framing them in a manner that makes them attractive and interesting to the public (Denham,

2004). Agenda setting can occur at a variety of levels in the media, from the smallest local newspaper to the largest national media outlet (Denham, 2004; Weaver & Elliot, 1985). One of the most infamous historical examples of agenda setting occurred in the late 19th century, when American newspapers, led by those entities owned by William Randolph Hearst, engaged in a series of inflammatory reports from the Spanish colony of Cuba, in an attempt to move the public opinion towards war with Spain. This type of agenda setting gave rise to the term 'yellow journalism', denoting a method of reporting that exaggerates the news in order to attract readers and stir passions.

The establishment of a marketing agenda in the media is an area that has been covered in numerous academic works. Lang and Lang (1983), in their presentation of agenda-building theory, noted that the process often follows a pattern. In this pattern, the media highlight certain issues, and attempt to frame those issues in a manner that maximizes attention and interest, often by utilizing popular or publicly recognizable individuals. The relationship between ABC/ESPN and its contractual partners easily falls within this theoretical framework, due to the involvement of popular media outlets and popular sports figures.

The interaction of a constructed agenda with its intended audience is a major element of agenda-setting theory. In reviewing the potential effects of agenda setting on an audience, Carter, Stamm, and Heintz-Knowles (1992) ar-

gued that the agenda on its base level is, "a familiar tool of collective behavior, for a community to think together about matters of shared consequence" (p. 869). Furthermore, the scholars noted that the traditionally-held view of the media as a gatekeeper, or selective observer of events, does not necessarily apply to agenda setting theory; rather, that one should view the media as a surveillance agent, concentrating on functional elements.

Agenda setting is very much a time-sensitive endeavor by its nature. Maxwell (1992) stated that agenda setting is not as much about distributing opinions as it is with the distribution of ideas and issues, and that the issues which agenda setting attempts to distribute are of the here and now, rather than the was and were.

The principles of agenda setting can also be utilized regardless of the size or prominence of the media entity. Denham (2004) advanced the case that a national magazine such as *Sports Illustrated* can effectively build the news agenda for mainstream national newspapers by taking a particular angle on a story. The study's research involved an examination of mainstream newspaper reports that occurred in the wake of a *Sports Illustrated* story involving steroid use in Major League Baseball. Also examined were the changes in public policy that occurred as a result of these reports. Weaver and Elliot (1985) indicated that this type of press-led agenda building can and does occur even at the local level of journalism, particularly with the journalist focusing on controversy

and items that make a more interesting story.

Hybrid Messages

Hybrid messages enable organizations to enjoy the best of both worlds of commercial and editorial content, without many of the disadvantages of both. According to Balasubramanian (1994), the concept of hybrid messages relates to the blending of advertising and publicity to expose media audiences to product information. "Hybrid messages include all paid attempts to influence audiences for commercial benefit using communications that project a non-commercial character," noted Balasubramanian (1994) in a study of the theoretical rationales and practical implications of hybrid messages. The researcher added that, "under these circumstances, audiences are likely to be unaware of the commercial influence attempt and/or to process the content of such communications differently than they process commercial messages (p. 30).

Hybrid messages, particularly those involving product integration and popular media entertainment, have become so ubiquitous that media insiders predicted in 2004 that 75% of prime time network shows would contain some form of hybrid message over the next three to four years (Consoli, 2004). This blending of messages fits into the concept of cross-promotion and media boosterism. As mentioned in the introduction, an example of cross-promotion would be ABC airing a situation comedy

based upon the flagship program of another network in the Disney stable, in this case SportsCenter.

Cross-promotion is defined by Wood, Nelson, Cho, and Yaros (2004) as, "promoting programming content, products (e.g., transcripts, videos), or services (e.g. Websites, hotlines)...that benefit the news organization or its corporate owner" (p. 807). In their study of cross-promotion, they discovered that, "sports and intro/headlines stand out as ranking among the top five story types for both brand/company content and cross-promotion" (p. 817). Singer (2004) noted that media mergers and consolidation are causing concerns over a centralization of power in the media, and goes on to say that current issues range from cross-promotion between media entities to media entities actually creating and preparing stories designed to appear on multiple entities in tandem.

ESPN's own involvement in cross-promotion has extended past its traditional English-language brand. In discussing the launch of the ESPN Deportes Radio, the company's 24-hour Spanish-language radio network, Bachman (2005) noted that, "(T)he ESPN Deportes brand also includes a Web site...magazine...and mobile phone strategy, creating a five-pronged distribution platform for cross-promotion and advertising" (¶3).

The appearance of 'advertorials' in magazines indicates a manifestation of hybrid messages in the periodical realm. Advertorials can best be described as a quasi-news story, paid for by an advertiser, which is designed to not look like

an advertisement. These advertorials often make it challenging for readers to distinguish information that is editorial or commercial in nature. Cameron, Ju-Pak, and Kim (1996) stated that, "Editors use advertorials as attempting to achieve credibility by using third-party endorsement that mimics journalistic standards of objectivity" (p. 722). While there are guidelines set up by the American Society of Magazine Editors requiring labeling of these 'advertorials', Cameron et al. (1996) noted that, "such guidelines are being violated in numerous and crucial ways, reducing the visibility of advertorial labels and masking the distinguishing features that could signal advertorial content for readers (p. 729).

Furthermore, Cameron et al. (1996) noted that *Sports Illustrated*, the long-standing rival of the relatively nascent *ESPN The Magazine*, was one of the main offenders in terms of using advertorials, ranking in the top three of magazines they surveyed in most advertorials contributed. This indicates that the blurring of the line between editorial and advertising content is a very real issue in sports periodical journalism. Given the nature of hybrid messages and how they can potentially affect editorial content, it is important to consider advertorials when examining the interactions between a league and a media entity, particularly when there is a contractual agreement between them. For instance, *ESPN The Magazine* has been known to have articles that some might consider advertorials. Examples of this include an article from May of 2001, which was listed as having been authored by

NBA star Michael Jordan and writer Rick Telander, and an article from August of 2005, which had a combined authorship of writer Alyssa Roenick and extreme sports star Mat Hoffman.

Corporate sponsorship of sports, including the utilization of athletes as celebrity endorsers of products, is a popular phenomenon in the current business climate in America (Foster, Greyser, & Walsh, 2006). In their content analysis study of advertisements in *Sports Illustrated*, Jones and Schumann (2000) noted that the relative frequency of athletes as celebrity endorsers steadily grew, from a low of 2.12% of total advertisements in 1985 to a high of 9.54% a decade later. This rise indicates a trend by which athletes are increasingly seen as effective means of selling a product. When a media entity is keen on selling a sport itself, such as ESPN's perceived interest in selling the NBA's image to consumers, there is a built-in opportunity to use the athletes of this league to increase the visibility and attractiveness of the league. There is also the possibility of a news organization such as *ESPN The Magazine* using editorial content as a secondary source of advertisement.

In general, advertising ties closely in with cross-promotion, particularly in the area of competition between and within media groups for advertising revenue. Reid and King (2000) noted that certain types of media entities are better off to specifically focus their competitive positioning for advertisements on particular media delivery channels. For instance, cable television, which is the domain of

ESPN, would be best served focusing their marketplace positioning against broadcast TV, radio, and magazines. By having a major in-house media entity in the magazine realm, ESPN could ostensibly reduce the potential financial loss that might come from advertisers deciding to opt for magazine-based advertisements over cable television advertisements.

Journalistic cheerleading, or boosterism, is often cited as a concern when examining the relationship between sports and the media that cover them (Lowes, 1999). Sports journalists, particularly those tied to television, are often criticized for not taking a more neutral approach in their coverage of sports. Anderson (2001), in a comparative analysis of newspaper coverage of Major League Baseball labor strife in the 19th and 20th centuries, claimed that both those who criticize the media for compliance with sport management, and those who support the media's role as a cheerleading entity, are being too simplistic in their approach. Anderson's analysis indicates that there was no consistent media approach to this topic, and that there was a wide variety of both cheerleaders and critics of Major League Baseball management's policies in regards to labor issues during these time periods.

The question of whether fans and consumers want a non-cheerleading media corps, particularly in sports, is one that bears asking. Although the standard practice in many journalism schools across the country is to encourage reporters to dig for 'the truth' in the

name of journalism, some studies have indicated that the public desire for hard-hitting investigative reporting is by no means universal. For instance, Weaver and Daniels (1992), through an analysis of nationwide and local polls, discovered that support for investigative reporting in general was higher in the city of Chicago than it was nationwide, and speculated that this may be due to the people of that area having been conditioned to such techniques. This question extends to sports, as noted by Lowes (1999), who stated that, "(I)n the sports press, there is little room for news that doesn't promote the industry" (p. 99). The author went on to mention that the central focus of the sport media is the promotion of consumption by the public, and articles that are critical or un-supportive do not support an atmosphere of consumption.

Regardless of the editorial bent of a media source's content, there is evidence to suggest that consistent amounts of information on particular topics will cause individuals to form stronger opinions. Drew and Weaver (1990), in a study which measured media attention and exposure, noted that those who paid more attention to stories were more likely to hold strong opinions, regardless of whether the issue was local or national.

Media boosterism also plays a role in cross-promotion, under the hypothesis that a media entity might be less inclined to apply hard or negative journalistic tactics to an entity that it has a vested financial interest in (Lee & Hwang, 2004). The expectation of jour-

nalists, however, is the exact opposite; in their examination of the effects of the merger of Time and Warner (now the parent companies of *ESPN The Magazine* rival *Sports Illustrated*) on the content of *Time* magazine, Lee and Hwang (2004) noted that the expectation of journalists is that they will be, "serving the interest of the audience rather than the parent corporations of their news organizations" (p. 189).

As noted above, a review of literature on the subjects above reveals how the mass media can set agendas, how the lines of advertising and publicity can and have been blurred, and how media boosterism can play a role in the way items are covered by the press. This can be seen in the studies that have focused on Major League Baseball (Anderson, 2001; Denham, 2004) and media entities (Drew & Weaver, 1990; Lee & Hwang, 2004). Compared to many other subjects, the scholarly attention given to the media's coverage of cross-promotion is relatively recent and limited in scope. However, as noted in the above review of literature, this study breaks new ground because it concentrates on the interaction between two media entities in different media channels that exist under the same corporate umbrella, and how the print media side of that interaction utilizes editorial content to promote particular leagues.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine if the type and amount of coverage given to these leagues was significantly higher or lower based upon whether the leagues had a television contract with the ESPN/ABC family of

television networks. In an effort to determine the existence or nonexistence of preference or bias towards leagues with television contracts, this study analyzed the type and amount of coverage given to the National Basketball Association (NBA), the Arena Football League (AFL), and Triple Crown Racing. By examining the coverage given to these three leagues during periods where they both had and did not have a television contract with *ESPN The Magazine's* parent company, any obvious biases or preferences should be made clear.

Based on the results of the previous research into agenda setting theory and hybrid messages, the following research questions were developed for this study:

1. Did the nature of the coverage provided to the leagues by *ESPN The Magazine* differ significantly depending on the television contract status of the leagues in question?
2. Did the length, placement, and number of photographs per article differ significantly depending on the television contract status of the leagues in question?
3. Did the size, placement, and number of photographs differ significantly depending on the television contract status of the leagues in question?

Method

The methodology for this study was a content analysis of articles and photographs appearing in the national, general-interest sports publication, *ESPN The Magazine*. This publication was

selected for three primary reasons. First, the potential reach of *ESPN The Magazine*, with its name so closely associated with the popular cable sports network ESPN (Magenheimer, 1998), was one such factor. Second, the potential for the magazine to be used as a cross-promotional vehicle in tandem with its television partners made it a unique candidate for such analysis. Finally, *ESPN The Magazine* is one of the fastest-growing publications in the magazine segment of the sport industry (Goldberg, 2005). In only its ninth year of publication, it has a circulation of 1.83 million. This gives it the second highest circulation in sport. The first, *Sports Illustrated*, started in 1955 and has a circulation of 3.24 million (Bernstein, 2005).

Content analysis is used for this examination in order to effectively analyze the coverage of the leagues studied and their relationships, if any, with company-held broadcast rights. The content analytic method—a systematic and replicable examination of communication symbols—can be used to analyze any communication (i.e., books, periodicals, newspapers, television broadcasts). It is an unobtrusive (i.e., no effect on the subject being studied) and a non-reactive (i.e., communication has already occurred) research method. After choosing content analysis as the most appropriate methodology for this study, a pilot study was conducted. This pilot study served a dual purpose, effectively training the coders in the usage of content analysis while simultaneously testing the codebook protocols used.

This content analysis included an examination of every issue (N=203) published of *ESPN The Magazine* from its inception in March of 1998 through the final issue published in December of 2005. The articles and photographs across these 203 issues that fit the study's codebook and protocol provided the overall data for this study. All articles, cover photographs, and photographs attached to articles that dealt with three selected leagues (NBA, AFL, and Triple Crown Racing) were coded. These leagues were selected for two main reasons. First, the three leagues were unique among all sports leagues in that they each had either started or ended a television contract with the ESPN/ABC family of networks during the time available in the sample of *ESPN The Magazine* issues available. Also, each league had at least a two-year period during that time frame where they were both in a contract and not in a contract with ESPN/ABC. Furthermore, the three leagues represented a cross-section of consumer sports leagues in the United States, with a 'major' league (NBA), an emerging 'minor' league (AFL), and a 'niche' league (Triple Crown Racing). These factors combined to make all three leagues highly applicable to this study, which is an analysis of cross-promotion and agenda setting in the sports media.

Due to the study's aim of examining the effects of business partnerships on the editorial written and photographic coverage, the content analysis sought to focus on two separate time periods; namely, a set time period where the

leagues in question did not have a television contract with ESPN and/or ABC, and a set time period where the leagues in question did have a television contract with ESPN and/or ABC. The time periods selected were each of a length of two years. In order to avoid the possibility of alterations in coverage due to a contract between the league(s) and ESPN/ABC either beginning or ending, the time periods in question were chosen to be at least six months removed from the official start or end date of the contract. For the AFL, the tested period for when a television contract existed was from January 10, 2000 to December 24, 2001, and the tested period for which no contract existed went from January 6, 2003 to December 20, 2004. For Triple Crown Racing, the tested period for when there was a contract in existence went from May 4, 1998 to April 17, 2000, and the tested period for which no contract existed went from May 14, 2001 to April 28, 2003. For the NBA, the tested period for which no contract existed went from August 26, 1999 to August 20, 2001, and the tested period for when there was a contract in existence went from September 2, 2002 to August 30, 2004.

The articles, cover photographs, and inside photographs included with league-specific articles were coded based on league, the existence of a contract with ESPN/ABC, whether the league appears on the cover of that particular issue, the starting page of the article, total length of article, and the number of pictures attached to the story.

Measures

The study involved an analysis of the written (e.g., feature articles) and photographic areas (e.g., cover photographs; photographs included with articles) of sports and leagues included in *ESPN The Magazine* (N=203) over the prescribed time (1998-2005). For the written material examined, the unit of analysis was the article. For the photographic material, the unit of analysis was the photograph (Note: Please contact the authors for a copy of the codebook, coding protocol, and coding sheets).

In an attempt to discover if the sports magazine's editorial coverage of certain leagues differed significantly due to the presence (or absence) of a television contract between the magazine's parent company and the leagues in question, eight measures for each article and seven measures for each photograph were developed and coded. The coders first identified themselves on the coding sheets, to verify that the data recorded was independently observed (1, 2, 3, or 4). Next, the league (e.g., NBA, AFL, Triple Crown Racing) being covered or photographed was recorded. The date (month, day, and year) in which the article or photograph was published was then noted. The coders then recorded whether or not the covered league had an established contract with ESPN/ABC. The location (page number) and length (measured by page counts for articles and three pre-determined sizes for photographs) of the article or photograph were noted as well as whether or not the league received coverage on the

cover page. For articles, the coders determined whether or not a photograph (or photographs) accompanied the article.

In order to maintain a level of consistency in coding from magazine issue to magazine issue, a set of criteria were established to determine which articles qualified for coding. In order to be coded, an article had to appear on the first page of that issue's table of contents, and that article had to have its own byline. In addition, due to the prevalence of special sections in the magazine and the observed variations in those special sections from issue to issue, criteria were set to normalize the number of articles that those special sections would yield. A 'special section' article could only be included in the coding if it was the first article in the table of contents in that special section, unless the first article in that special section was also the cover story. In that case, the next article in the section was coded, and all others in that section were not coded.

Coders

In order to effectively code this study, four separate trained coders were utilized. Each of the coders had an effective level of training (three doctoral students in sport management and an adult with a communications degree), and each worked independently. According to Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998), a content analysis can use one, two, or several coders, depending on temporal and monetary issues.

These individuals coded the 203 issues of *ESPN The Magazine* published from March of 1998 through December of 2005. For this study, the four coders first examined the same 42 magazines, which were chosen by random selection and which represented 21% of the total sample. This initial coding was done in order to test intercoder reliability, which is further explained in the section on reliability below. In addition to the selected variables, coders were also expected to properly identify which magazine issues fell within the pre-selected timeframe for this study.

After the completion of the intercoder reliability section, the remaining 161 issues (for a total of 203 issues) were randomly divided into four separate groups, with three coders given 40 issues each and the fourth coder given 41 issues. In total, three of the coders analyzed a total of 82 issues (42 intercoder reliability issues plus the 40 individual issues) and one coder analyzed a total of 83 issues (42 intercoder reliability issues plus 41 individual issues).

Reliability

Reliability in content analysis determines how consistently the coders make decisions on the data they encounter. In content analysis, overall reliability hinges on intercoder reliability, because it determines if the coders are independently measuring the variables in a consistent manner. As noted by Riffe et al. (1998, p. 54), "Reliability requires that different coders applying the same classification rules to the same content

will assign the same numbers." Intercoder reliability tests in a content analysis study should measure that consistency, both in terms of a simple agreement figure and in terms of a statistic (i.e., Scott's Pi) which takes into consideration the element of chance agreement.

To effectively test reliability in content analysis, the researcher must have an overlap of data (normally a minimum of 10%) where the project coders have coded the same information. The first stage of reliability requires that the researcher look for a simple percentage agreement, which can be determined by tabulating the number of times the coders have coded the data the same way. This percentage can either be the result of accurate coding or nothing more than agreement by chance. The second stage in assessing reliability takes out agreement by chance alone, and involves turning the percentage of agreement into a coefficient of reliability. One may accomplish this by utilizing the Pi statistic, created by Scott (1955) and expanded upon by Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999). Scott's Pi is an index of reliability that takes into account that some coding agreement occurs strictly by chance and not necessarily by proper coding. The coefficient arrived at through Scott's Pi is the representation of a comparison of the frequency of agreements found to those that one would expect to occur by chance alone.

The coding for the present study was done by the same coders who coded the data in the pilot study. In an effort to assess intercoder reliability, 42 issues

(21% of the 203 issues) were randomly selected, in order to provide a reasonable size for a data overlap (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999; Riffe et al., 1998). The same 42 issues were independently coded by the study's four coders. An examination of the issues in this sample that fit the requirements of the codebook protocol produced a total of 22 articles and 144 photos. The 22 articles were 20.4% of the total articles (108) coded for this study. The 144 photographs were 20.5% of the total photographs (703).

Next, the variables for the two units of analysis (article and photograph) were examined for agreement. Following that

step, the variables were, through the use of Scott's Pi, corrected for chance agreement between coders (Table 1). The agreement between the coders in the overlap area resulted in percentages that ranged from 89.9 to 92.0 with articles, and from 85.2 to 89.5 with photographs. The last step of the intercoder reliability testing process was the use of the expanded Scott's Pi formula (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999), in order to calculate the probability of chance agreement between two coders. These scores also ranged from .883 to .920 with articles, and from .846 to .894 with photographs.

Table 1
Reliability Percentages and Corrections for Chance Agreement

Variable	Percentage of Agreement	Scott's Pi
Articles		
Coder	92.0	.919
League	92.0	.920
Date	92.0	.920
Contract	89.8	.883
Cover	92.0	.909
Page	90.9	.909
Length	89.8	.898
Size	85.2	.846
Photographs		
Coder	89.4	.892
League	89.4	.879
Date	89.4	.894
Contract	89.4	.879
Cover	89.5	.880
Page	88.5	.885
Size	85.2	.846

An acceptable level for reliability agreement is around 80% (Riffe et al., 1998). The standard number for corrections for chance agreement is around .70. According to Riffe et al, (1998, p. 131), content analysis research "with reliability assessment below .70 becomes hard to interpret and the method of dubious value to replicate." This study had very high numbers (mostly in the middle 90s) relating to percentage of agreement and correction for chance agreement. These numbers are understandable, because most of the material coded for this study was manifest content in nature (i.e., location, length, league, date). Furthermore, the inter-coder reliability percentages and numbers for this study confirm that the four coders had become thoroughly familiar with the coding protocol and codebook by the time this study was conducted. Overall, the observations were very consistent, and it is reasonable to state that the protocol definitions and procedures were accurately applied.

Data Analysis

Through the use of the content analytic method, six subsets of magazine issues were coded from the sample of *ESPN The Magazine* issues (N=203) available. The subsets of issues were determined by first ascertaining the date that a television contract was announced to have either been started or terminated between the ESPN/ABC family of television networks and the three leagues (NBA, AFL, Triple Crown Racing) in question. Once the date of

contract announcement/termination was established, a period of time equal to six months was added or subtracted. This was done in order to purify the sample, by taking into account the chance of coverage potentially being increased or decreased due to an impending change in contract status. For each of the three leagues, two subsets of issues were selected; one subset occupied a time period where no television contract existed between the league and the ESPN/ABC family of networks, and one subset occupied a time period where a television contract did exist between the two parties.

Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 13.0 [SPSS], descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation tables, frequency distribution tables, and regression analyses were used to tabulate, describe, and summarize the parameters of the data that was collected (Stempel, Weaver, & Wilhoit, 2003). The frequency of amount (size and number), subject (league), status (contract), and type (location, length, number of photographs, location of photographs) of coverage devoted to each of the three leagues were tabulated and reported for the written coverage, while the frequency of amount (size and number), subject (league), status (contract), and type (location of photograph) were tabulated and reported for the photographic coverage.

Statistical analysis was utilized to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the way that the selected leagues were covered in *ESPN The Magazine* between the time periods

indicated, using several variables for said analysis. The gathered data was dispersed between nominal, interval, and ratio-level data. For the most basic level of analysis, a Chi Square test was adopted to compare the distributions from the obtained data. Owing to the size of the sample, a significance level of .05 was used to designate statistical significance.

In addition to Chi Square, certain variables were analyzed using Kendall's Tau-B and Gamma, two ordinal-by-ordinal statistics. In the event that both of these measures yielded a statistically significant value, the value from Kendall's Tau-B was used, due to the more conservative nature of its calculations (Stempel et al., 2003). Finally, three separate regression analyses were performed, using length of story, recoded length of story, and recoded photographs as the dependent variables. The regression analyses were performed to analyze which of the remaining variables had a statistically significant impact on the dependent variables in question.

Results

The 203 issues served as the total sample size, from which the subsets for the study of each league were drawn. The timeframe of the study yielded for analysis a total of 108 articles and 703 photographs.

Of the 108 articles, 52 (48.1%) were written when the league in question did not have a television contract with the ESPN/ABC family of networks. Sixty-six

of the 108 articles (or 61.1%) appeared in issues where the league did not appear on the cover of the magazine. There were 106 articles related to the NBA, one related to the AFL, and one related to Triple Crown Racing. The average length of an article was between four and five pages. The average number of photographs included in an article was six.

Of the 703 photographs, 694 related to the NBA, eight related to the AFL, and one related to Triple Crown Racing. A total of 529 photographs (75.2%) were coded as 'small' (less than one-quarter of a page in size), while 42 of the photographs (6%) were coded as 'medium' (between one-quarter and one-half of a page in size), and 132 of the photographs (18.8%) were coded as 'large' (over one-half of a page in size). The overall average size of coded photographs was 'small'. A majority of the photographs, 422 (60%), occurred in issues where the league in question did not appear as the cover photo, and 386 of the photographs (54.9%) occurred in issues where the league in question did not have a television contract with the ESPN/ABC family of networks.

The number of articles and photographs were disproportionately devoted to the NBA. All but two of the 108 articles were devoted to the NBA, as were all but nine of the 703 photographs. Of the two articles devoted to the other sports, one was written about the AFL, and one about Triple Crown Racing. The AFL article was written when no television contract existed, while the Triple Crown Racing article was written

when a television contract did exist. Only one photograph was included with the article on Triple Crown Racing, while eight photographs were included with the AFL article. Because of the relatively few articles and photographs devoted to the AFL and Triple Crown Racing both for contract and non-contract years, statistical analyses were only performed on NBA articles and photographs.

Regarding research question one, the coverage provided to the NBA, AFL, and Triple Crown Racing leagues did not differ significantly based upon the league's contract television status. For the NBA, the cross-tabulations for articles showed no statistically significant relationship between a league's contract status and its appearance on the cover of the magazine. Using Gamma and Kendall's tau-b, there was a statistically significant negative relationship between the length of a story and whether the league was under contract. Kendall's tau-b produced a correlation value of $-.224$, and Gamma produced a stronger correlation value of $-.366$. Both of these values were significant at the .01 level.

Regarding research question two, the length, placement, and number of photographs per article did not differ significantly based on the television contract status of the leagues in question. The strongest relationship discovered was between photographs included in articles and contract status, and once again it was a negative relationship, indicating that more photos were included when the league was not on ESPN's airwaves. Kendall's tau-b generated a correlation of $-.290$, while Gamma pro-

duced a correlation of $-.445$, both significant at the .01 level. There was no statistically significant relationship between starting page of a story and contract status. There was a weak negative correlation, but it was not significant at the .05 level.

Regarding research question three, the size, placement, and number of photographs did not differ significantly based on the television contract status of the leagues in question. Cross-tabulations for photographs showed only one statistically significant relationship, between a league's contract status and the size of included photographs. While the relationship was significant, it was also weak (.110). There was no statistically significant relationship between photographs appearing in an issue where that league was on the cover and contract status.

Regression analyses were also done, in order to study the effects of the other variables on length of story and number of photographs. Using the recoded length of story as the dependent variable, the only statistically significant relationship existed between length of article and number of photographs. The Beta for this relationship was .472, indicating a strong positive correlation between number of photographs and length of story. Using the original length of story variables as the dependent variable (i.e., not recoding them into categories) shows the same relationship between length and number of photographs.

Using number of photographs as the dependent variable, there were two re-

relationships that were statistically significant at the .01 level. Contract status has a negative correlation of $-.230$, indicating that when the league does not have a contract, it is more likely to include a larger number of photographs. Length of stories has a strong positive correlation of $.454$, indicating that the relationship between photographs and length is reciprocal. These findings are also confirmed by the cross-tabulations performed above.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that there was no noticeable increase in coverage given to a league based upon its television contract status with ESPN/ABC. Surprisingly, the relationship between several variables and contract status was negative. This is surprising because one would assume, based upon the theory of agenda-building, that at the very least the relationship between contract status and these variables would have been neutral, if not positive. If ESPN were following the framework of agenda-setting, one would expect them to increase the amount of coverage devoted to a league, particularly in the early stages of the contract. However, no such trend exists, and the overall number of articles and photographs during the period where a contract exists is less than during the period where no contract exists.

One of the most revealing results indicated that longer stories were given to the NBA when it was not under contract with ESPN. Similarly, the number of

photographs included with a story actually decreased when the league had a television contract with ESPN. This runs counter to the hybrid message concept, which would predict that the synergy of publicity and advertising would result in more content (i.e., longer stories, more photographs). By decreasing the length of stories and number of photographs present in stories during periods where a television contract exists, *ESPN The Magazine* decreased the volume of material devoted to the leagues in question. This decrease in volume also lowered the potential opportunity for the inclusion of hybrid messages.

While the vast majority of articles and photographs were devoted to the NBA, the relative lack of articles and photographs devoted to both the AFL and Triple Crown Racing is also revealing. Of the two leagues, the article with the most photographs included was the AFL story, and it was written when no contract existed. There were no articles written during the AFL's contract period with ESPN/ABC. By comparison, the article on Triple Crown Racing occurred within the contract period, but contained fewer photographs and was considerably shorter in length than the AFL story. If *ESPN The Magazine* was engaged in agenda building, one would expect them to devote more space to the league that was under contract, but in this case, the reverse is true.

Regression analysis indicated that the longer a story was, the more photographs it had included with it, which is logical given the normal layout of magazines. Furthermore, regression analysis

indicated that having a television contract with ESPN/ABC had a negative effect on the number of photographs included in a league's story. This regression analysis confirms the cross-tabulation analysis, and again runs counter to the hybrid message concept.

In summation, these results would indicate that *ESPN The Magazine* decreased both the length of articles and the number of photographs included in stories regarding the NBA once the league entered into a television contract with ESPN/ABC. In regards to the AFL, the magazine's coverage only increased after the television contract had expired, and even then by a minute amount. For Triple Crown Racing, what minimal coverage there was disappeared completely after the conclusion of the television contract.

Given the overall statistical relationship between articles and included photographs, it is reasonable to conclude that the length of articles was shortened after a television contract was signed, and that the reduction in number of included photographs was a byproduct of that editorial decision. While this decision may not have had an effect on the framing of the stories included, it did decrease the amount of overall material on the leagues in question. This decision runs counter to both Lang and Lang (1983) and Carter et al. (1993), because it reduces the number of opportunities for a collective experience to be shared by the public.

Conclusions

The results of this study do not support the accusations (Lieber, 1998; Poniewozik, 1998; Whitmire, 1998; Wolfley, 1998) against ESPN and Disney/ABC of cross-promotion and commercialized agenda setting. *ESPN The Magazine* did not give significantly more editorial written or photographic coverage to leagues in which it had contractual television agreements. Therefore, based on the analysis of the data gathered, it is reasonable to conclude that there was no significant alteration of coverage methodology by *ESPN The Magazine* for a particular league based upon that league's television contract status with the ESPN/ABC family of networks. Despite the history of cross-promotion present in the Disney corporation's business practices, this philosophy of cross-promotion and agenda setting does not appear to have affected the journalistic decisions made in terms of amount or placement of coverage of these leagues in *ESPN The Magazine*.

The major limitation of this study is that its results can only be applied to *ESPN The Magazine* and the three leagues examined. The study did not involve any analysis of other media channels owned or operated by ESPN or Disney/ABC (i.e. television, radio, Internet). Furthermore, the nature of the data involved created certain limitations as this was a content analysis of manifest data (i.e., articles; photographs) and not latent data (i.e., images, meanings, biases). Future studies could examine the more latent aspects of the coverage

to determine possible coverage disparities of those leagues in or out of contractual relationships with ESPN or Disney/ABC. Furthermore, it is recommended that future research endeavors examine the total proportion of space devoted to leagues, rather than examining only the feature articles in question. Based on purely empirical examination of *ESPN The Magazine's* contents, the amount of non-bylined stories, advertisements, and special sections in terms of total exposure given to the selected leagues did not appear to be disproportionate to the amount given to other leagues, but for the purposes of studies under this theoretical framework, might be worthwhile to examine. It would also be academically beneficial to examine cross-promotion and agenda setting with regard to the other ESPN/ABC properties, including television, radio, Internet, and other media channels.

The changing faces of journalism and the media demand monitoring and evaluation. The prevalence of hybrid messages and agenda setting has blurred the lines between journalism and corporate interest. This study is important because it examines a popular media entity—which covers a topic that is popular to the public—that is owned by a media conglomerate that has demonstrated a history of extending its brand through its various media channels. The study of such an entity provides a look at the current state of the sports media, and the factors which can influence the messages being provided to the public. Furthermore, the study of these mes-

sages is important, so that the public can be informed of the sources of information (Cameron et al., 1996). If journalists are truly expected to serve their publics instead of their corporate interests (Lee & Hwang, 2004), then continued investigation into the types of messages produced by the media, and the factors that influence those messages, will continue to be of paramount importance to the industry.

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Drs. Galen Clavio and Paul M. Pedersen are on the faculty at Indiana University.