Journal of Religion, Media & Digital Culture (JRMDC)

<http://jrmdc.com>

Megachurch Pastor Twitter Activity: An Analysis of Rick Warren and Andy Stanley, Two of America's Social Pastors

Dr. Susan Codone

Mercer University

Macon, GA

Keywords: Twitter, analytics, mega-church, pastors, social media, social interaction

Abstract

Mainstream church leaders have taken to Twitter as a platform for spreading their message and promoting their churches. This study examines two American mega-church pastors, Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Orange County, California, and Andy Stanley of North Point Community Church in Atlanta, Georgia. The main objectives of this study are to analyse the Twitter activity of both pastors in an attempt to categorize their tweets according to research-based guidelines and to suggest new categories for ministry leaders who use social media. The study also tracks the Twitter activity over the life of the @rickwarren and @andystanley accounts. The study shows intriguing applications of Twitter by these two pastors and makes recommendations for those in ministry leadership who wish to use Twitter as a broadcast platform for their personal and ministry messages. Because research in ministerial use of social media is young, future studies are needed to determine if these recommendations can apply to the social media activity of other ministry leaders and to explore how ministry leaders across the religious spectrum are using social media.

About the Author

Dr. Susan Codone is an Associate Professor of Technical Communication in the School of Engineering at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. Her research focus is technology in churches and ministry and she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in document and web design, multimedia, instructional design, and technical communication. You can reach her at codone_s@mercer.edu, and her web address is http://faculty.mercer.edu/codone_s.

To cite this article: Codone, Susan, 2014. Megachurch Pastor Twitter Activity: An Analysis of Rick Warren and Andy Stanley, Two of America's Social Pastors. *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 3(2), pp 1-32. [online] Available at: <<http://jrmdc.com/papers-archive/volume-3-issue-2-august-2014/>>

1. Introduction

The explosive growth of Twitter as a micro-blogging tool has created a useful platform for evangelical leaders in the United States and beyond. History shows us that with any new platform, whether sound amplification or broadcast television, the use of new communication modes by religious practitioners is important, interesting, and worth studying. Ministers appear to be expanding their social identity by renegotiating communication activities arising from competition on the Internet, and taking on new roles as social arbiters of knowledge (Cheong 2011). Social media provides the pastorate with a new kind of megaphone to amplify their message with great implications for social change (Cheong 2011). The purpose of this paper is two-fold: first, to examine the Twitter activity of two mainstream, evangelical mega-church pastors in the United States: Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Orange County, California, and Andy Stanley of North Point Community Church in Atlanta, Georgia; and second, to study the types of tweets they post most often to derive suggestions for social media use by ministry leaders. Both men can be considered clergy and ministry leaders because they work in professional contexts as senior pastors.

By examining two American mega-church pastors who have enthusiastically incorporated corporate communication styles into their ministry models, we can gain insight into methods used for religious communication via social media. Part of the support for ministers who use social media may be derived from their ability to combine spiritual and secular strategies to

harness technological resources and build a personal brand online (Cheong 2011). Both Warren and Stanley have done this successfully.

This study is intended to be an early analysis of how two well-known evangelical Christian leaders are using Twitter. The literature in this field is young and still being established, so in many ways this study is preliminary research. Future research will be needed to address questions of how religious leaders in different contexts use Twitter and other social media platforms.

About Rick Warren

Rick Warren is the pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California. According to Saddleback's website (<http://www.saddleback.com/aboutsaddleback/ourpastor/>), Rick Warren was born in San Jose, California. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from California Baptist University, a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Ministry from Fuller Theological Seminary.

Warren founded Saddleback Church in Lake Forest in 1980 with one other family. Saddleback now has approximately 20,000 people attending the weekend services. Saddleback offers several hundred community ministries and multiple services each week. Warren is the author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, the bestselling hardback in American history (Gilgoff 2012). Warren built the Purpose Driven Network, a global alliance of pastors from 162 countries and hundreds of denominations and founded Pastors.com, an online interactive community that provides sermons, forums, and other practical resources for pastors. Many of these resources are mentioned often by Warren on his Twitter account.

Rick Warren is one of the most active evangelical leaders in social media. On Facebook, Warren's page has just over 1.7 million likes (Facebook, June 2014). He has a presence on LinkedIn, Google+, and Twitter. While some evangelical leaders have staff-authored social media accounts, Warren appears to write many of his own posts for Twitter, although this cannot be empirically stated.

On Twitter, Warren has, at the time of this writing, 1.4 million followers. He has posted 8,951 tweets and follows 6,806 other Twitter users.

About Andy Stanley

Andy Stanley is the senior pastor of North Point Community Church in Atlanta, Georgia. In an interview with *Leadership Journal* (2000), a publication of Christianity Today, interviewers Marshall Shelley and Edward Gilbreath state that Andy began his ministry as the youth pastor at First Baptist Church of Atlanta, where his father, Charles Stanley, is pastor. Andy Stanley graduated from Dallas Seminary and served as youth pastor for ten years at First Baptist Atlanta. In 1995, Stanley and others launched North Point Community Church, meeting at different locations for three years. In 1998, North Point moved into an 110,000 square foot building in Alpharetta, and the church has grown from there, now meeting over multiple campuses with thousands of attendees each weekend and throughout the week. North Point is considered the second largest church in the United States.

Rick Warren and Andy Stanley lead churches of comparable size and influence. Stanley is also active in social media. His church, Northpoint Community, has over 20,000 likes on Facebook, and Stanley has just over 392,000 followers on Twitter. He has posted 2,989 tweets and follows 447 other Twitter users. Like Warren, Stanley appears to write many of his own posts for Twitter, although this cannot be empirically stated. In addition, he created his @andystanley Twitter account almost two years after Rick Warren.

Justification for Research and the Research Questions

To examine the role of social media in the church, it is crucial to look to recognized leaders and examine their social media activity to determine if it is appropriate for research. Pauline Cheong describes renewed interest in the changing nature of how religious leaders are using new media and their authority to extend their social influence (2011). As social media applications have grown in the last decade, certain evangelical leaders have capitalized on their power. Branded as “holy mavericks”, pastors such as Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, Joyce Meyer, Joel Osteen and others have adapted to contemporary media convergence and organizational branding and willingly used it to extend their ministries (Cheong 2011; Lee and Sinitiere 2009).

Rick Warren, the first evangelical leader profiled in this study, deserves study simply because of the broadly diverse and contemporary nature of his ministry. Saddleback Church is

multi-site, multi-city, and intentionally reaches different ethnic groups. Shayne Lee and Philip Luke Sinitiere, in their book *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace*, quote Warren in their chapter on his ministry:

Three key responsibilities of every pastor are to discern where God's spirit is moving in our culture and time, prepare your congregation for that movement, and cooperate with it to reach people Jesus died for. I call it "surfing spiritual waves" and it's the reason Saddleback has grown to 23,500 on weekends in 24 years.

Through his ministry at Saddleback Community Church, Warren has surfed many cultural waves and now manages a network of 40,000 other churches (Lee and Sinitiere 2009). Warren was named by Forbes magazine in 2005 as secular America's favourite preacher (Lee and Sinitiere 2009). Much of Warren's success lies in his ability to take the basics of Christianity and repackage them into quick tag lines for living well that contemporary Americans understand (Lee and Sinitiere 2009).

Warren operates a seeker-sensitive ministry with the goal of attracting the religiously unaffiliated and is willing to adjust his messages for people unfamiliar with religious jargon. According to Lee and Sinitiere (2009), seeker-sensitive churches adapt cultural codes to communicate the gospel more effectively. Rick Warren doesn't claim to teach a new theology but does craft his environment and his church's culture to remain attractive, changing service themes and methods and incorporating new music and worship trends regularly. Social media networks like Twitter provide Warren an outlet to broadcast his messages – not just the gospel, but responses to worldly needs as well. Pastors in his network of churches and beyond study his methods, publications, freely-downloadable sermons, and more. With over one million Twitter followers, Warren is an evangelical leader whose social media habits are worthy of study.

In contrast to Warren, Andy Stanley, senior pastor of North Point Community Church in Atlanta, Georgia, has not been extensively studied in the academic literature and is just becoming commonly known on a national level. The son of Charles Stanley, senior pastor of the historic First Baptist Church in Atlanta, Andy Stanley has built a large and prospering multi-site campus in midtown and suburban Atlanta along with a global network of thirty churches. He is the author of more than thirty books and study guides. Like Warren, Andy Stanley operates his

church on a seeker-sensitive mentality, using contemporary service design and worship media to attract both a younger demographic and those without a previous history of church attendance.

Because both pastors have made notable strides in their use of social media and both were early adopters of Twitter as a broadcast and microblog platform, they are worthy of study. While they may not represent the average ministry leader due to the size of their churches, they can be considered thought leaders in the broad reach of social media and ministry leadership and are thus of great interest to social media researchers. This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How engaged are Rick Warren and Andy Stanley on Twitter?

RQ2: Based upon the tweet classification scheme in Naaman, et al. (2011), discussed further on page 12, what types of tweets do Rick Warren and Andy Stanley post most often?

RQ3: How can we revise and improve the tweet classification scheme in Naaman, et al. (2011) to capture more nuanced distinctions between the kinds of Twitter messages posted by these two pastors, in order to create a categorization of tweets that could be useful for ministry leaders and the academics who study them?

2. Review of the Literature

Twitter, a microblogging social networking tool offering users the capability to send messages (tweets) of 140 characters or less, was founded in 2006 by a trio of programmers looking for a way to send texts on their cellphones. According to the website statistics tracker Statistic Brain, Twitter has roughly 645 million registered users worldwide (115 million of whom are active on a monthly basis) who send an average of 58 million tweets per day (<http://www.statisticbrain.com/twitter-statistics/>). According to The Snyder Group, a social media marketing company, Twitter is the chief competitor to Facebook in terms of user (<http://www.snydergroupinc.com/2014-stats-comparison-top-6-social-media-platforms-infographic/>).

Though there are quite a few studies of public Twitter feeds and branded accounts, there are no current studies of the Twitter activity of major evangelical leaders. Limited attention has

been paid to the mediated communication behaviours associated with those in religious authority (Cheong 2011). M. Craig Barnes, president of Princeton Theological Seminary, writes in *The Christian Century* (March 2013) that social media is changing the way stories are told and personal development is maintained, among leaders as well as their congregations. Although he states that he is weary of virtual relationships and constructed identities, Barnes indicates through personal experience that if he does not use social media in relationship to his ministry, it will defeat him. There is certainly evidence that Christian congregations are eager for their leaders to use social media: Lefebvre (2013) writes in *U.S. Catholic* that 73% of Catholics surveyed agree that priests and bishops should use social media to interact with parishioners.

Many evangelical Christians use Twitter and other social media platforms regularly for faith-based purposes. Adrian Warnock, writing on *patheos.com*, a religious blog, lists the top 60 Christian users of Twitter based on follower count (Warnock 2013). Warnock's list omits senior pastors and denominational leaders. Of the top ten, five are women: Joyce Meyer, Darlene Zschech, Beth Moore, Natalie Grant, and Christine Caine. Future research should examine the role of evangelical women in social media.

Social media has become mainstream for American evangelical Christians. The website *StickyJesus* (<http://www.stickyjesus.com>) contains multiple blog articles intended to equip Christians to share their faith online. Posts such as “10 Steps on the Digital Road to Reaching Millions”, “3 Ways You Could Help Save a Life on Facebook”, and “10 Ways to Live Out Your Faith on Pinterest” are meant to instruct believers on how to use social media platforms to freely express and share their beliefs. The founding authors, Toni Birdsong and Tami Heim, also recently released a book with the title *@StickyJesus: How to Live Out Your Faith Online* (Heim and Birdsong 2012), building on their Twitter account, which currently has just over 13,000 followers.

Sarah Pulliam Bailey writes in *Christianity Today* (October 2011) that at the 2011 Catalyst Conference, a gathering of 13,000 pastors and other attendees, Claire Diaz Ortiz, leader for social innovation at Twitter, reached out to evangelical leaders in an effort to help Twitter verify their accounts and engage other Christians. Bailey quotes Diaz Ortiz as saying that “religious organizations have been relying on word-of-mouth marketing and relational marketing for forever, so they take to social media well... [But] when you're talking about religious

Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture
<http://jrmdc.com>

Volume 3, Issue 2 (August 2014)

organizations, you're talking about a belief and you're sending a message, which is different from sending information, which is what non-profit organizations are sending." Hughes, et al (2011) suggest that individuals who use Twitter for informational purposes are primarily doing so for its utilitarian value and cognitive stimulation – but according to Diaz Ortiz, this is not primarily what religious organizations are trying to achieve.

Amy O'Leary covers Ortiz's investigation in the New York Times (June 2012). O'Leary reports that much of the engagement religious leaders experience on Twitter is due not so much to their fame, but to the inspirational themes of their tweets. Female religious leaders have benefitted as well as men, including Ann Voskamp, a blogger and author of the book "One Thousand Gifts" and Lysa TerKeurst, popular speaker and author of the book "Made to Crave". Both women, O'Leary reports, say that Twitter has been very effective for building partnerships and influence outside traditional church hierarchies. O'Leary states that tweets by religious leaders often spark as much engagement and interaction as tweets from secular celebrities, even with lower follower counts. Indeed, O'Leary claims that tweets from some religious leaders attract thirty times the level of engagement.

Meredith Gould, writing in her book *The Social Media Gospel* (2013), urges church leaders to use social media, recommending it as a set of tools that can be a stethoscope (to magnify the ability to listen to a congregation) and a megaphone (to magnify the ability to proclaim God's word). Gould presents a comprehensive work that promises to serve as a master plan for any church or religious organization wishing to use social media. While Gould doesn't specify exactly what should be contained in social media posts, she does offer guidelines for the typical kinds of content communicated by churches and how that content can be efficiently broadcast and managed using social media. Gould offers elements of a social media policy and also clarifies how to use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and YouTube for religious purposes.

3. Research Question One (RQ1): The Building Blocks of Social Media and the Twitter Activity of @rickwarren and @andystanley

I used the Twitter archiving service Twitario (www.twitario.com) to assess the Twitter activity of @rickwarren and @andystanley. The maximum number of archived tweets allowed

by Twitter is currently 3200. At the time of this writing, Rick Warren has generated almost 9000 tweets while Andy Stanley has produced just over 2200. Tweets from the @rickwarren account were extracted from March 2012-May 2013. Tweets from the @andystanley account were extracted from April 2009-July 2013. Since Andy Stanley has tweeted less than 3,200 times, his entire Twitter feed was extracted for study, while approximately 1/3 of Rick Warren's Twitter feed was analysed. Figures 1 and 2 indicate their respective Twitter activity.

Figure 1 Rick Warren Aggregate Daily and Hourly Tweets

Figure 2 Andy Stanley Aggregate Daily and Hourly Tweets

From these graphs, it can be concluded that both men typically tweet every day and that the Twitter activity of both peaks in the early afternoon, staying fairly consistent until after 12:00am, when activity drops sharply. Although both men tweet fairly consistently each day, Warren tweets most often on Fridays, while Stanley tweets most often on Mondays.

Figure 3 displays the monthly activity of the @andystanley Twitter account since its creation in 2009.

Figure 3 Andy Stanley's Monthly Twitter activity since account creation

This graph shows that the activity of the @andystanley account increased steadily from its inception in August of 2009 to present, peaking during the Christmas season of 2012. Stanley averages 2.2 tweets per day and 42 tweets per month.

The @rickwarren account contained so many tweets (over 8,000 at the time of this writing) that Tweetstats.org was unable to provide a monthly breakdown. Since inception of the @rickwarren account, Tweetstats reports an average of 7.9 tweets per day and 196 per month. Based upon these graphs, it can safely be concluded that both the @andystanley and @rickwarren accounts have a strong and consistent presence on Twitter.

Neither Rick Warren nor Andy Stanley engage extensively with other Twitter users. Figures 4 and 5, also taken from Tweetstats, show that both pastors occasionally reply and retweet, although Andy Stanley retweets more often than Rick Warren. This fulfills Java, et al.'s (2007) assumption of high follower, low following status on Twitter in a study probing the reasons people use Twitter to disseminate information. This study predicted that Twitter power users with a high follower count would in turn have a lower number of fellow Twitter users they

would follow and interact with on a regular basis, as they were using Twitter to spread information rather than to engage directly with users.

Figure 4 Rick Warren percentage of replies and retweets

As shown by this graph, Rick Warren replies and retweets at a very low percentage of his total Twitter activity. Figure 5 shows that in contrast, Andy Stanley is slightly more engaged with other users, replying 4% of the time and retweeting 1/3 of the tweets he receives, but mostly from the same set of users.

Figure 5 Andy Stanley percentage of replies and retweets

The Twitter analytics tool Twitalyzer (<http://www.twitalyzer.com>) was used to generate a brief report of the influence of both Rick Warren and Andy Stanley. Figure 6 describes the Twitter activity of Rick Warren over a one-week period in August 2013, reporting that he has an overall impact score of 26.2 and a Klout score of 90/100. Twitalyzer impact scores reflect the overall level of influence within Twitter, while a Klout score (<http://www.klout.com>) is a platform-independent overall ranking of social media influence. Warren is also characterized as a Trendsetter by Twitalyzer.

According to a blog posting by Michele Kiss on the topic of Twitter analytics, (<http://www.michelekiss.com/category/twitalyzer/>), Twitalyzer defines the impact score by five factors:

- The number of **followers** a user has
- The number of **references and citations** of the user
- How often the user is **retweeted**
- How often the user is **retweeting other people**
- The relative **frequency** at which the user posts updates

Figure 6 Twitalyzer Report for Rick Warren August 3-9, 2013

Figure 7 displays similar information for Andy Stanley.

Figure 7 Twitalyzer Report for Andy Stanley August 3-9, 2013

Both pastors are similar in regard to their Twitalyzer statistics. Both Rick Warren and Andy Stanley have a similar impact score, although Rick Warren's Klout score is 19 points higher than Andy Stanley's. By comparison, Barack Obama's Klout score is 99/100.

Barack Obama's Twitalyzer impact score is 45.5, and Justin Bieber's is 49.4.

Both Rick Warren and Andy Stanley have a strong reputation on Twitter.

4. Research Question Two (RQ2): What types of Tweets do Rick Warren and Andy Stanley post most often? Examining Twitter and “Twiterature” Tweet Categories

Multiple studies (e.g., Dann 2010) have attempted to categorize tweets into different types of content in an attempt to develop insight into what users tweet and why. Dann (2010) is a meta-study of tweet categorizations, ranging from tweet classifications that are serious and silly. One study, in particular, is relevant to this study. Naaman et al. (2010) conducted a study often cited by others studying Twitter activity. The authors obtained a random sample of 125,593 tweets from the Twitter public timeline, selecting users with at least ten friends, ten followers, and who had posted at least ten messages. After randomly sampling users fitting those criteria from the sampling frame, the authors settled on a sample of 350 users and manually examined each user's profile and coded their tweets into nine general broadcast categories, as follows:

1. Information sharing (IS) – a tweet typically with a URL to an information article
2. Self-promotion (SP) – a tweet specifically about the user or the user's personal content (i.e. blog, book)
3. Opinions/Complaints (OC) – personal statement of preference or happiness/unhappiness
4. Statements and Random Thoughts (RTh) – a tweet irrelevant to anything specific

5. Me Now (ME) -- a personal comment specifically about the user
6. Questions to Followers (QF) – a specific question to the user’s followers
7. Presence Maintenance (PM) – a tweet that references time/date to maintain social presence
8. Anecdote Me (AM) – a statement about the user or an event in the user’s life
9. Anecdote Others (AO) – a tweet that names another user and describes the user or an event in the other user’s life (known as a mention in other categorization schemes)

Naaman et al (2010) found that the largest proportion of tweets fell into the Me Now category, following closely by Random Thoughts, Opinions/Complaints, and Information Sharing. The lowest level of tweets fell into the Anecdote Others category.

Based upon the tweet classification scheme in Naaman, et al (2010), what types of tweets do Rick Warren and Andy Stanley post most often?

To answer this question, I used Twitario’s export feature to archive 3,200 tweets from @rickwarren and 2,262 tweets from @andystanley into a PDF diary document. Using Adobe Acrobat Pro, the PDF document was converted to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and document formatting removed extraneous rows generated by Twitario and the file conversion process so that as much as possible, each row contained one tweet. This was not possible in all cases and some tweets spilled over into two or more rows.

Using the survey calculator at www.surveysystems.com, a sample size was derived based upon the populations of the total rows in the two spreadsheets, using a 95% confidence level and a confidence interval of 5. For @rickwarren, the spreadsheet contained 4462 rows, and the spreadsheet for @andystanley contained 3432. Using the row count as the population size, the sample size generated by the survey calculator was 343 rows (tweets) for @rickwarren and 329 rows (tweets) for @andystanley.

The random interval number generator from www.random.org generated 343 random numbers from 1-4462 for the @rickwarren spreadsheet and 329 random numbers from 1-2262 for @andystanley.

Within the spreadsheet, each row number listed in the random number set was highlighted for further analysis. If the tweet content spread over multiple rows, only one row was highlighted to indicate that tweet for later coding.

Using Naaman's Twitter message categories, a column was inserted in each spreadsheet before each identified row representing a randomly sampled tweet. Then, the author manually coded each tweet by from 1-9 as described in Table 1.

Table 1 Naaman, et al Tweet Classification System

Category Identifier	Category Name	Coding Explanation specific to this study
1	Information Sharing (IS)	Any tweet with a url to information unrelated to either Rick Warren's or Andy Stanley's churches or church programming or a tweet sharing a Scripture verse
2	Self Promotion (SP)	Any tweet about Rick Warren or Andy Stanley promoting their churches, ministries, books, or other personal content or events.
3	Opinions/Complaints (OC)	Any personal statements of happiness or unhappiness, or any political or issue-oriented statements
4	Statements and Random Thoughts (RTh)	A tweet irrelevant to anything specific
5	Me Now (ME)	A personal comment specifically by and about Rick Warren or Andy Stanley not attributable to anyone else or any event

6	Questions to Followers (QF)	A question posed by Rick Warren or Andy Stanley to their followers
7	Presence Maintenance (PM)	A tweet intended to time or date stamp presence on Twitter or to remind followers of their presence
8	Anecdote Me (AM)	A statement about an event in Rick Warren or Andy Stanley's life, such as a family event, conference attendance, or personal story
9	Anecdote Others (AO)	A statement by Rick Warren or Andy Stanley about someone else, usually in the form of a Twitter mention (using the person's Twitter handle) describing an event or issue

After coding, rows were sorted numerically, listing all coded categories together for counting purposes. Although some tweets could have been coded into multiple categories, tweets from both samples were manually coded carefully according to one of Naaman's definitions as described in Table 1.

For @rickwarren, formatting issues within the spreadsheet limited the usable sample size to 344 tweets, and for @andystanley, the sample size was 304 tweets. As @andystanley contained less tweets than @rickwarren, this was expected.

Rick Warren and Andy Stanley are somewhat similar in the kinds of tweets sent from their Twitter accounts. Figure 8 displays the breakdown of tweets by Naaman's, et al (2010) category for Rick Warren and Andy Stanley.

Figure 8 Tweets by @rickwarren and @andystanley by Naaman, et al Classification

As Figure 8 shows, Warren’s highest category of tweets using the Naaman, et al. (2010) classification was Random Thoughts, followed closely by Information Sharing and Self Promotion. In contrast, Andy Stanley’s primary tweet category was Self Promotion, followed by Anecdotes Others, Anecdotes Me, and Information Sharing.

For both pastors, the Self Promotion category of tweets most often included messages referencing services or events at their church and less often, their books and other publications (podcasts, video series, etc).

Table 2 contains actual tweets from the predominant categories from Naaman, et al.’s studies taken from the Twitter feeds of Warren and Stanley. Notations in italics explain how or why the tweets could have been classified into multiple categories but were not for the sake of consistency.

Table 1 Examples of Tweets from @rickwarren and @andystanley using the Naaman Classification Scheme

Naaman category	Warren	Stanley
1 Information Sharing	“Who determined the course of history from the	*“To refrain from imitation is the best revenge.” – Marcus Aurelius

	<p>beginning? I, the Lord, was there first, and I'll be there to the end! Isa 41:4"</p> <p>Help me help African journalists tell the captivating stories of Africa! [url deleted]</p>	<p>[url deleted]</p> <p><i>*Note: this tweet linked to a book on Amazon with a comment by Andy Stanley, but was coded as information sharing since it referred to someone else's work.</i></p> <p><i>**No One Higher is #62 on iTunes. No, not in the Gospel category, in ALL categories. The line forms here. [url deleted]</i></p> <p><i>**Note: this tweet linked to the iTunes retail site for a North Point Ministries worship album, which could have been coded as self-promotion, but was coded instead as information sharing since it pointed followers to a retail product.</i></p>
2 Self Promotion	Warren	Stanley
	<p>"LIVE NOW I'm teaching "Standing Out At Work" - 6 Traits from the life of Joseph. Gen 3 [url deleted]"</p> <p>"Your WORK matters to God! Today watch LIVE our #ocbusiness summit</p>	<p><i>**"Okay, if you missed church this AM you really need to tune into [url deleted] at 11 to hear @clayscroggins #so powerful"</i></p> <p><i>*Note: this tweet could have been coded as Anecdote Others since it mentions another Twitter user by Twitter address but the intent is to</i></p>

	for small or new businesses. [url deleted] Text questions.”	<i>promote a North Point Ministries worship service so it was coded as self-promotion.</i> ** Hey, married people! Looking for a night of great music and food? How does June 8 at 8pm sound? Here’s the scoop: [url deleted] **Note: this tweet included a url linking to a North Point Ministries site, so it was coded as self-promotion.
4 Random Thoughts	Warren	Stanley
	<p>“Has anyone ever actually seen a chia pet until Christmas? Do they hide in the dark until December?”</p> <p>“If you choke a Smurf, what color will it turn?”</p> <p>“We take ourselves too seriously, but don’t take God seriously enough.”</p>	<p>“A single act of courage is often the tipping point for extraordinary change.”</p> <p>“Inconsistency between what a leader says and a leader does inflicts a mortal wound on a leader’s credibility.”</p>
8 Anecdote Me	Warren	Stanley
	“Saddleback Concert for AIDS. Wynonna had me sing a U2 song with her.	*“Flying home from Toronto. Spent the entire day discussing The Grace of God. Very energizing.”

	<p>Reaction caught by LA Times! [url deleted]”</p> <p>“One of the many kids who came to Blocktober dressed as #PastorRick. #MiniMe [url deleted]”</p>	<p><i>*Note: this tweet could also be coded as self-promotion since it refers to Stanley’s book, The Grace of God”, but the intent of the tweet reflects a personal event.</i></p> <p>“Just wrapped up 5 awesome days skiing and snowboarding with Garrett.”</p>
9 Anecdote Others	Warren	Stanley
	<p>“He’s the greatest preacher, but I’ve known him as the greatest listener and encourager. Happy 94th to my 30 yr mentor @Billy Graham.”</p> <p>*“Today my Muslim neighbor gave #PurposeDrivenLife to his Jewish friend who is searching spiritually! [url deleted]”</p> <p><i>*Note: the above tweet could have been coded also as self-promotion since it mentions Warren’s book, but the intent of the tweet seems to be to</i></p>	<p>*“Big shout out to the NP staff. They are out serving the people who serve the people that most need to be served. Couldn’t be prouder!”</p> <p><i>*Note: though this tweet references Stanley’s church, the intent of the tweet is focused on the staff, thus it was coded as anecdote others.</i></p>

	<i>mention the actions of another person, thus it was coded as Anecdote Others.</i>	
--	---	--

A clearer distinction between the two men, using the Naaman, et al (2010) classification scheme, lies in their tendency to tweet random thoughts versus anecdotes about themselves and others. Also, neither pastor often uses Twitter to share opinions or complaints, and both seem to avoid frequent mentions of political and social issues. Rick Warren uses humour often in his tweets and seems to spontaneously tweet thoughts that come to mind, making the largest category in the @rickwarren sample Random Thoughts.

In contrast, Andy Stanley tweets about his church, their individual campuses, and their events quite a bit. While these tweets were categorized as Self-Promotion, in context they can be seen as promoting the churches themselves and their events, not necessarily Andy Stanley himself. In addition, Andy Stanley retweets more often than Rick Warren.

5. Research Question Three (RQ3): Revising and improving the tweet classification scheme in Naaman (2011) to capture more nuanced distinctions between the kinds of Twitter messages posted by Warren and Stanley

The tweet classification by Naaman, et al. (2010) provides a framework for categorizing Twitter messages that cannot fully encapsulate the types of tweets by evangelical leaders or clergy in general. For example, ministry leaders who tweet under the “information sharing” category provided by Naaman, et al. (2010) may be providing encouragement or instruction, two quite different kinds of content. Because Naaman, et al.’s categories are meant for the Twitter activity of the general public, this study proposes a new list of categories that more effectively

captures the messaging habits of these two highly active pastors. These categories are derived from Naaman, et al.'s study and are based upon the analysis of the content and sentiment of the Twitter activity of Rick Warren and Andy Stanley.

These categories are meant to be a broadly inclusive guide to the types of content that ministry leaders may want to include in Twitter messages, but are not meant to be explicit recommendations. Both Warren and Stanley use Twitter primarily to broadcast messages, and ministry leaders in other contexts may want to interact more directly with followers.

Using Dann's (2010) exhaustive list of Twitter categories in which he compiled the results of multiple studies of tweets and their classifications by other researchers, along with Naaman, et al's (2010) guide to tweet categories, the overarching purpose of this study is to present a new set of categories to guide ministry leaders who use Twitter. These categories are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 Ministry Leaders Tweet Classification Categories

Ministry Leaders Tweet Classification Categories	Definition
1. Encouragement/teaching (ET)	Any tweet offering public encouragement or teaching, involving Scripture or scriptural principles.
2. Personal statements (PS)	Any tweet referencing a personal activity, situation, or issue facing the ministry leader.
3. Marketing – self (MS)	Any tweet promoting content the ministry leader has created as an individual, not within the context of a paid ministry position (i.e. books, external speaking activities, etc).
4. Marketing – ministry (MM)	Any tweet promoting the churches, ministries, or other organizations with which the ministry leader is associated.
5. Humour (HU)	Jokes or silly comments meant to

	maintain presence and reveal personality.
6. Random Comments (RC)	Any tweets whose meaning is not attributable to anything specific and have no discernible application and are not necessarily funny, thus separating them from the Humour category.
7. Retweets or Modified Tweets (RT/MT)	Any tweet from another user that is retweeted or in the case of a Modified Tweet (MT), annotated with a personal comment by the ministry leader.
8. Endorsements (EN)	Any tweet endorsing, supporting, or recommending another person including a mention of the other user(s) Twitter handle.
9. Information sharing (IS)	Any tweet directing followers to information not directly related to ministry content from the ministry leader's church or personal content, usually including a url.

Recoding @rickwarren and @andystanley using the Ministry Leader Tweet Classification Categories

Using the Ministry Leaders Tweet Classification Categories described in Table 6, the tweet samples from the @rickwarren and @andystanley account were recoded and analysed to determine if there were significant differences between the Naaman, et al (2010) tweet classification categories and the new Ministry Leader tweet classification categories. The same coding strategy described earlier in the Methods section was used for the second round of coding.

Figures 9 and 10 display the newly coded categories of tweets according to the Ministry Leader Tweet Classification categories for the @rickwarren and @andystanley accounts.

Figure 9 Tweets by @rickwarren recoded by Ministry Leaders Tweet Classification Categories

Figure 10 Tweets by @andystanley recoded by Ministry Leaders Tweet Classification Categories

As Figure 9 shows, the number of tweets re-classified as Encouragement/Teaching was by far the highest in the @rickwarren sample, at 197. What had formerly been categorized as “random comments” in the Naaman, et al. (2010) categories were most often coded as

Encouragement/Teaching in the second round of coding, leading to the decrease in tweets categorized as random comments. Since many of the tweets classified as Encouragement/Teaching included links to free ministry resources, they switched categories from Self Promotion under the Naaman, et al. (2010) classification to Encouragement/Teaching under the Ministry Leader classification scheme, leading to a decrease in what was Self Promotion and is now considered Marketing Self or Marketing Ministry.

It is worth noting that Rick Warren is so well known for tweeting encouraging statements on Twitter that the hashtag #rickwarrenquote is searchable and often used by users making inspirational comments to humorously indicate they are tweeting like Rick Warren. There is also an active @rickwarrenquote Twitter account that exists solely to tweet quotes made by Rick Warren in the past. The @rickwarrenquote Twitter account has over 12,000 followers, which is notable for an account that is essentially copying statements that Rick Warren has already made.

Figure 10 shows interesting shifts for tweets in the @andystanley account. The largest number of tweets classified according to the Ministry Leader classification scheme was Marketing Ministry, because Andy Stanley seems to use Twitter primarily as a broadcast medium for announcements about events related to his churches. The Ministry Leader classification scheme also allows tweets to be classified as Retweets or Modified Tweets, and Andy Stanley sends many more retweets, often with annotations (Modified Tweets) than Rick Warren.

Because the Retweet/Modified Retweet category for @andystanley was so high, the tweets in this category were analysed and coded with the full Ministry Leader classification scheme to determine what kinds of content Andy Stanley was retweeting verbatim or modifying before retweeting. Of this subset of data, Andy Stanley retweeted most often tweets from others about his books, and slightly less often about church events. He also showed a tendency to retweet or annotate and retweet humorous tweets, sometimes following a trending hashtags or topics such as “IfIWerePOTUSIWould” or “If I Were President I Would”, adding his own twist to how followers responded to these statements. Stanley also uses humour in a different way than Warren, usually by disclosing something personal about his life that users might find humorous, like his predilection for candy corn. In this way, Andy Stanley engages and interacts with, replies

to, and retweets his followers at a slightly higher level than Rick Warren, but based upon this analysis, both men seem to use Twitter primarily for presence and not interaction with others.

6. Implications of This Study

The Twitter activity of these leading pastors does indicate interesting trends possibly generalizable for other ministry leaders, though further research is necessary. According to existing research-based tweet categories, both men seem to use Twitter primarily for ministry promotion and random comments. But, according to the Ministry Leader tweet classification system proposed by this study, the combined Twitter activity of both pastors is dramatically recast as Encouragement and Teaching and Marketing Ministry, which falls more closely in line with their stated roles as evangelical leaders of mega-churches in the United States.

Sarah Pulliam Bailey (2011) suggests that religious leaders may use social media to deliver a message. This suggestion can be seen in the reclassification of both Warren's and Stanley's tweets from the Naaman, et al. (2010) categories of information sharing and self-promotion to the new classifications of encouragement and teaching and ministry marketing. Clearly, both pastors are not just sharing information for the sake of passing on tidbits to their Twitter followers – they are sending messages of hope, encouragement, and information about specific ministry opportunities. Like Ann Voskamp and Lysa TerKeurst, the female authors interviewed by Amy O'Leary (2012), both Warren and Stanley are building influence outside traditional church hierarchies through their extensive use of Twitter and other social media platforms, as evidenced by their high follower counts.

Gould (2013) strongly recommends that religious organizations have a social media policy in place. While this may still be evolving at many churches, one can assume that both Rick Warren and Andy Stanley fall within the respective policies of their organizations while continuing to reflect their individuality by crafting their own messages on Twitter. Both men use Twitter as the megaphone that Gould recommends, but neither uses it fully as a stethoscope to take the pulse of their organizations, at least based solely on the evidence of their interactions with followers. The examination of their Twitter activity in this paper indicates that both men use Twitter far more as a broadcast medium than for interacting directly with their church members

or their fans. This may be the opposite goal of many ministry leaders, who may want to capitalize on the ability of social media to interact with others online.

However, Stanley is more of an example of Gould's (2013) recommendation that church leaders use Twitter as both a stethoscope (to listen to his congregation) and a megaphone (to magnify the proclamation of God's word). Because Stanley interacts more with his followers than Warren, he may be able to monitor the spiritual interest and engagement of his followers while simultaneously broadcasting church events and opportunities. Rick Warren, perhaps because of the large size of his Twitter following, may not be able to interact as much as Andy Stanley.

Admittedly, bias exists in this study as the author was the single coder, and additional research into the social media usage patterns of ministry leaders is welcomed to verify or extend these findings.

Implications for Future Research

While this study reveals useful information about the Twitter habits and broad social media content themes of these two well-known mega-church pastors in the United States, future research should continue to investigate how social media can be used to make ministry communication more effective. More research is needed to determine if more pastors tweet in the same ways as Rick Warren and Andy Stanley and if their Twitter communication can be deemed generalizable to the broad population of ministry leaders, especially across ecumenical lines.

Future research in this area could include more longitudinal studies of social media activity of ministry leaders, not necessarily limited to Twitter that could continue to clarify how social media can be used to service the mission of the church. In addition, studies of how ministry promotion and messaging on social media platforms native to countries other than the United States would provide a more global picture of capabilities for missions and growth. Also, a study of more ministry leaders, rather than a focus on only two, could provide a much more comprehensive evaluation of the possibilities of social media. An examination into ministry social media accounts managed institutionally as compared to personal accounts, like @rickwarren and @andystanley, might also be helpful in placing ministry use of social media in context.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, Rick Warren and Andy Stanley are both well known, contemporary mega-church pastors in the United States who actively use Twitter as a social media platform to spread their message. It is clear that current Twitter content classification systems are not adequate to fully describe the nature of their messages. This study attempted to answer three research questions – the engagement of Rick Warren and Andy Stanley on Twitter, the types of tweets they send, and the categories of tweets most descriptive of these ministry leaders. Along with an analysis of the presence of these two pastors on Twitter and an examination of their Twitter activity, this study offered a categorization of their Twitter messages according to current literature.

When that classification system was deemed inadequate for the Twitter content of ministry leaders, the new Ministry Leader Tweet Classification System was generated and is offered for consideration by others studying ministry and social media and by ministry leaders themselves as a potential framework for successful use of social media, namely Twitter, with the understanding that it is based upon the Twitter activity of two Protestant mega-church pastors.

Decades ago, when Billy Sunday and Billy Graham led crusades, they spoke to hundreds of thousands of people at one time in one location, with television used as a media extension – but their exposure was still only for limited periods of time. Now, pastors such as Rick Warren and Andy Stanley can reach millions of social media users multiple times a day on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, opening new possibilities into the ability to spread their messages and for users to listen to and interact with them. This has great implications for current and future ministry leaders who use social media as a broadcast platform for their personal and ministry use. As ministers move more fully into social media, possessing an awareness of general guidelines for posting content may be helpful, as long as future research continues to explore this new platform for communication.

Bibliography

About Our Pastor. <http://www.saddleback.com/aboutsaddleback/ourpastor/>. Accessed August 3, 2013.

Barnes, M.C (2013). "Faith Matters: Facebook Tsunami," *The Christian Century* 130 (5), 35

Bailey, S.P. (2012). "Twitter Reaches Out to Christian Leaders at Catalyst's 'Be Present' Conference," *Christianity Today*, October 7, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/octoberweb-only/twittercatalyst.html>. Accessed August 6, 2013.

Cheong, P.H. (2011). Religious Leaders, Mediated Authority and Social Change. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 39 (4), 452-454.

Dann, S. (2010). "Twitter Content Classification," *First Monday*, 15 (2). <http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2745/2681>. Accessed July 2, 2013.

Gilgoff, D. (2012). "Short Takes: Gauging the Impact of 'Purpose Driven Life,' 10 years on". CNN Belief Blog, November 29, <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/11/29/short-takes-gauging-the-impact-of-purpose-driven-life-10-years-on/>. Accessed May 30, 2014.

Gould, M. (2013). *The Social Media Gospel*. Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN.

Heim, T. and Birdsong, T. (2012). *@StickyJesus: How to Live Out Your Faith Online*. Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN.

Hughes, J.D., Rowe, M, Batey, M., and Lee, A. (2012). "A Tale of Two Sites: Twitter vs. Facebook and the Personality Predictors of Social Media Usage," *Computers in Human Behavior* 28 (2): 561-569. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2011.11.001>

Jansen, B., Zhang, M., Sobel, K, and Chowdury, A. (2009). "Twitter Power: Tweets as Electronic Word of Mouth," *Journal of American Society for Information Science and Technology* 60 (11): 2169-2188

Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture
<http://jrmdc.com>

Volume 3, Issue 2 (August 2014)

Java, A., Finin, T., Song, X., and Tseng, B. (2007). "Why We Twitter: Understanding Microblogging Usage and Communities." Paper presented at the Joint 9th WEBKDD and 1st SNA-KDD Workshop, August 2007, San Jose, California.

Kiss, M. (2012). "E-metrics Tweet activity." <http://www.michelekiss.com/category/twitalyzer/>. Accessed August 9, 2013.

Lee, S. and Sinitiere, P.L. (2009). *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovations and the Spiritual Marketplace*. New York University Press, New York, NY.

Lefebvre, E. (2013). "Reach Out and Tweet Someone," *U.S. Catholic*, 78(7): 31-33.

Macskassy, S.A. (2012). "On the Study of Social Interactions in Twitter." Paper presented at The 6th International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, Dublin, Ireland, June 2012.

Naaman, M. Boase, J., and Lai, C.H. (2010). "Is It Really About Me? Message Content in Social Awareness Streams." Paper presented at CSCW 2010, February 6-10, 2010, Savannah, Georgia.

Nichols, T. (2007). "The Pastor's Role in Vision-Based Leadership," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, 2(1): 20-31.

O'Leary, A. (2012). "Twitter Dynamo's, Offering Word of God's Love." *New York Times*, June 2, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/02/technology/christian-leaders-are-powerhouses-on-twitter.html?_r=0. Accessed October 10, 2013.

Picard, A. (2011). "The History of Twitter, 140 Characters at a Time," *The Globe and Mail*, March 20, 2011, <http://theglobeandmail.com/technology/digital-culture/social-web/the-history-of-twitter-140-characters-at-a-time/article573416>. Accessed August 1, 2013.

Ritter, R.S., Preston, J.L., and Hernandez, I. (2013). "Happy Tweets: Christians are Happier, More Socially Connected, and Less Analytical than Atheists on Twitter." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 0(0). DOI: 10.1177/1948550613492345.

Shelley, M., and Gilbreath, E. (2000). "Invite Them Into the Kitchen." *Leadership Journal*, January 1. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2000/winter/1.22.html>. Accessed October 15, 2013.

Statistic Brain (2014). "Twitter Statistics". <http://www.statisticbrain.com/twitter-statistics/>. Accessed June 15, 2014.

The Snyder Group, (2014). "2014 Stats Comparisons for the Top Six Social Media Platforms Infographic". <http://www.snydergroupinc.com/2014-stats-comparison-top-6-social-media-platforms-infographic/>. Accessed June 10, 2014.

Warren, R. (2002). *The Purpose Driven Life*. Michigan: Zondervan.

Warren, Rick. (2014). Personal Facebook Page, accessed June 20, 2014. <https://www.facebook.com/pastorrickwarren>

Warnock, A. (2013). "Top 60 Christians on Twitter", 25 February. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/adrianwarnock/2013/02/top-60-influential-christians-who-tweet-non-pastors/>. Accessed October 15, 2013.

Yang, X., Ghoting, A., Ruan, Y., and Parthasarathy, S. (2012). "A Framework for Summarizing and Analyzing Twitter Feeds." Paper presented at KKD 2012, Beijing, China, August 12-16.