

Public Abstract

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Graduation Term:FS 2014

Department:Journalism

Degree:MA

Title:THE USE OF TWITTER AS A NEWS SOURCE IN SPORTS REPORTING

It has been well documented that professional athletes have been actively using Twitter to communicate directly with each other and their fans; however, relatively little media and/or mass communications research has explored the effect this direct communication channel has had on the role of journalists who cover these athletes. Traditionally, sports reporters have served in a gatekeeping role, deciding what news and information is worthy of coverage on the beat. The present study sought to assess how, if at all, sports reporters covering the four major U.S. sports—baseball, basketball, football, and hockey—are using the Twitter feeds of athletes in their coverage and what, if any, impact the Twitter presence of athletes has had on their role as gatekeepers. A search of sports beat coverage in eight daily newspapers during a one-month period yielded a total of 74 articles in which the Twitter feed of an athlete was used as a news source. A textual analysis of these articles revealed that tweets are used in place of quotes when an interview is not possible, as a source of breaking news about the athlete and/or his team, as the genesis of a story, and to gauge public sentiment toward an athlete. Interviews with 20 of the sports reporters covering the four major sports at the eight newspapers and five of the editors at these outlets confirmed these uses. Respondents also acknowledged that Twitter has enabled athletes to communicate directly with their fans without involving the traditional sports media. However, most the respondents also noted that the limitations of the medium kept their roles as reporters relevant to the fan/reader.