

# THE USE OF TWITTER AS A NEWS SOURCE IN SPORTS REPORTING

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## ABSTRACT

Professional athletes are actively using Twitter to communicate directly with each other and their fans. 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 and have served in a gatekeeping role, deciding what news and information is worthy of coverage. The present study sought to assess how reporters covering the four major U.S. sports—baseball, basketball, football, and hockey—are using athletes' Twitter feeds in their coverage and what impact athletes' presence on Twitter 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 an athletes' Twitter feed was used as a source. A textual analysis of these articles revealed that athletes' 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.