

# Researchers examine bias among sports journalists on Twitter

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Sports journalists covering the Penn State sex abuse scandal posted commentary on Twitter that was inherently biased, Clemson University and University of Louisville researchers say.

Their study explored how sports journalists used [Twitter](#) to develop and promote their stories during the scandal. Their [research findings](#) were published Thursday in the *International Journal of Sport Communication*.

While sports journalists used Twitter in ways that were similar to traditional media channels, a key finding was that they posted commentary that reflected a personal involvement that lacked any pretense of impartiality and objectivity.

"The behavior of the 151 sports journalists analyzed appear to have blurred personal and professional boundaries as they mocked fans and promoted their competitors," said Marion E. Hambrick, assistant professor in the health and [sport sciences](#) department at Louisville.

This personal investment also appeared as sports journalists had highly charged interaction with fans. Given the sensitivity of the story, coupled with their personal investment, these interactions often were confrontational.

"Twitter seems to elevate sports journalists' willingness to step outside of their professional spheres," said Jimmy Sanderson, assistant professor in Clemson's communication studies department. "Many of the journalists

uttered commentary that would be unlikely to appear in more traditional platforms, and in this respect, sports journalists seem to be mimicking athletes in creating [social media](#) controversies."

Social media have become the standard when sports news breaks and where media consumers turn to obtain the most current information and commentary. However, in the rush to be first with a scoop, there has been a rise of inaccurate information being reported on Twitter, according to Sanderson and Hambrick.

"Sports journalists must maintain a viable presence in the social media realm or risk becoming irrelevant with [sports media](#) audiences," said Sanderson. "The speed and acceleration that Twitter provides creates a challenge among sports journalists and media organizations for being first vs. being right."

Mainstream sports media outlets face increasing competition from adversaries who may not follow established journalistic procedures. How media organizations respond to this challenge may be dictated by whether they choose to be first or accurate when reporting news.

Sanderson and Hambrick are conducting additional research to more closely investigate the personal and professional boundaries of sports journalists on Twitter and determine how mainstream [media organizations](#) respond to the social [media](#) challenge with their online competitors.

**More information:** See Sanderson's related blog post about his research: [blogs.clemson.edu/discovery/20... ing-sports-scandals/](https://blogs.clemson.edu/discovery/2014/05/15/ing-sports-scandals/)

Provided by Clemson University

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