

Sports broadcasting gender roles echoed on Twitter

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Melinda Weathers (left) discusses social media communication strategies with co-author Samantha Warren at Clemson's Social Media Listening Center. Credit: Craig Mahaffey, Clemson University

Twitter provides an avenue for female sports broadcasters to break down gender barriers, yet it currently serves to express their subordinate sports media roles.

This is the key finding of a new study by Clemson University researchers

and published in the most recent issue of *Journal of Sports Media*.

"Social media has been embraced by the sports world at an extraordinary pace and has become a viable avenue for sports broadcasters to redefine their roles as celebrities," said Melinda Weathers, lead author on the study and assistant professor of [communication studies](#) at Clemson.

"However, given the differences in the ways females and males are utilized in sports broadcasts, we found there are also disparities in how they present themselves on [social media](#)."

This study explored self-presentation strategies used by sports broadcasters Erin Andrews and Kirk Herbstreit on Twitter with attention focused on potential [gender](#) differences.

"Although each broadcaster used Twitter in some complementary ways, there were clear differences that seemed to fall along traditional gender boundaries inherent in [sports media](#), as Andrews primarily discussed personal items, whereas Herbstreit largely provided sports-related commentary and analysis," says Weathers.

Andrews heavily promoted her sense of fashion and engaged non-sports related celebrities, offering little in the way of sports insight and opinion. Herbstreit, on the other hand, focused more on game-related information and connecting with sports-related people, while offering very little in the way of his personal life or popular culture and entertainment.

"The disparity in analysis was somewhat surprising as Andrews previously hosted FOX College Football for Fox Sports and covered college football for College GameDay on ESPN, so it would not be out of the realm of possibility for her to offer sports commentary on Twitter," stated Jimmy Sanderson, co-author on the study and assistant professor of communication studies at Clemson. "The absence of such commentary suggests that Andrews' reticence may be attributed to

perceived backlash from followers."

Although reflective of only two sports-media personalities, the researchers note that the behavior found in this study may cultivate sports consumers to expect certain behavior from sports broadcasters on Twitter.

"If male and female sports broadcasters by and large conform to expected gender roles, it may become extremely difficult for a broadcaster of either gender to break the script and deviate from expectations," stated Weathers.

While Twitter possesses exciting potential for female athletes, reporters and broadcasters to break out of traditional gender molds in [sports](#) media, it appears that a pioneer is still needed in the digital realm, according to the researchers.

Provided by Clemson University

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