
SPORTS JOURNALISM AND THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

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RESEARCH CONCEPT AND FIRST RESULTS OF A STUDY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES IN SOCHI/RUSSIA

Sports is one of the most important topics covered by traditional media with high viewing figures and big circulations. Obviously there's a growing influence of social media in sports - and in sports journalism (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; Pedersen, 2013; Sanderson, 2011). Beside other topics this influence of social media is of special interest, when thinking about the pioneer role of sports journalism regarding to other parts and sections of journalism (Scholl & Weischenberg, 1998). Overall the characteristics of social media and sports journalism are known as high involvement, the economical junction of the sports/media-complex, the democratization of journalistic production and publication via social media and the mediatization of sports and of society.

With this background we build up the following research questions: In which way do social media influence topics and thematization in sports journalism? And: In which way do social media help to build up cooperation and network effects in sports and sports journalism? With reference to the literature and some case studies the impact of social media on sports journalism can be theoretically summarized as followed:

Marketing: social media are used as a (additional) distribution channel for advertising, product placement or as self promotion channel in form of self marketing by athletes, sports federations and organizations as well as sports journalists.

Audience building: with social media sports organizations, particularly in minor sports try to build up an audience with e.g. web-tv-formats for their contents and news. Sports journalists can increase their personal audience with social media as a form of self marketing.

Distribution of topics: social media are an additional distribution channel for journalistic content that might not be covered by traditional media. Contents are often rumours, fakes or topics with a special kind of self development, in addition in social media private topics are distributed in public (Horky, 2013).

Investigation and thematization: social media are a platform that enables sports journalists in their quest to be more investigative. They may receive additional information, exclusive photos or quotes and check their contents and themes. With social media sports journalists can get in contact with athletes and organizations to gain further insight.

Increase of relevance: social media can help to boost media marketing (promotion), with social media offers traditional sports journalism can increase its intimacy (proximity) and exclusiveness. As a consequence this process helps to increase relevance of sports journalism.

Exchange and collegiality: within networks on social media sports journalists collegially exchange information and topics and by that check the relevance of their work (Hembrick, 2012).

With this theoretical background we build up the following research questions: In which way do social media influence topics and thematization in sports journalism? And: In which way do social media help to build up cooperation and network effects in sports and sports journalism? To analyze the impact we have done the a study related to the Olympic Games, because their relevance as a mega event and a highlight of sports communication (Billings & Hardin, 2014). So the object of research was defined as the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi/Russia (February, 7 – 23), to include include pre- and post- coverage we set the examination period was set to January, 25 – February, 25 / 2014. Methodological we use three different ways for the study: First we did a content analysis of journalistic coverage in online, print and social media based on the agenda setting theory. Secondly we sent out a questionnaire to all in Sochi accredited German journalists and thirdly we collected the tweets of all these accredited journalists and did a network analysis with this data.

This presentation will give a short overview on the first results of this survey, which will be finished completely ready in summer 2014. We can show the different agenda of traditional print, online and most shared stories in social media and with that the impact of social media on other media. This impact seems to be very low, out of 320 analyzed news stories shared by Facebook, Twitter and Google+ (Top-Ten/day) just 30 were based in the sports section, only 4 of them regarding the Olympics. In traditional online news outlets 61 of 320 news stories are from the sports section, which is position 2 behind politics (97). Regarding the actual usage of social media in the course of journalistic work results from our online survey (n = 90) indicate that German sports journalists highly appreciate the value of social media as a research tool. 82% of them state that they use social media formats in their journalistic

practice; 71% perceive social media either as 'relevant' or as 'very relevant' for their research. Obviously, sports journalists are mainly interested in inside information from popular athletes. However, most respondents do not use social media in the course of a specific research but rather to keep themselves up-to-date. The respondents agree that social media will become more and more important for journalistic research in the future. However, regarding the actual usage of Twitter our analysis reveals that only the minority of 134 German sports journalists accredited at the Olympics in Sochi maintains a Twitter account (23.1%). Those who have a Twitter account mainly follow national athletes. The analysis of 68 accounts of German journalists and presumed journalists shows that major events significantly affect the number of accounts who follow sports journalists.

As a first conclusion you can say, the impact of social media on sports journalism in Germany seems to be limited to a few areas, most of all to self marketing, to the use as a distribution channel of topics and in some parts for investigation of themes. But we think, that the Olympic Games play a special role with minor sports and the attention on the event instead of sports –we expect a difference impact of social media on sports journalism related to Football in Germany and prospect a re-issue of the study during the Football World Cup 2014 in Brazil.

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