

The Construction of National Identity at Major Sporting Events

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Theoretical Background

Modern sports like soccer are nowadays called "world sports" which reach a growing global audience (see Schwier, 2009). National identities become visible in the context of sporting events, such as the FIFA World Cup, and they play an important role in the age of globalization. The present contribution addresses the possibilities for the print media to construct national identity in the reporting of sporting events. Due to current developments such as digitalization, print media are struggling to cope with declines in circulation. The aim of this study is to examine how the German nation is represented in the coverage of two selected newspapers during the FIFA World Cup 2014 and whether this presentation helped to promote the perception of the recipients' national identity. Here, differences and similarities between the two selected print media are shown, which are representative of the genre of the quality and tabloid press.

Methodological Approach

The analysis includes a quantitative and qualitative content analysis, by analyzing the reporting of the supra-regional quality newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) on the one hand and BILD tabloid press newspaper on the other hand of the 2014 FIFA Soccer World Cup in Brazil. The reporting investigated was analyzed as part of a three-stage content analysis according to Mayring (2010). The Mayring framework was chosen because it focuses on reducing the starting material and is therefore particularly well-suited for the analysis of large, unstructured data sets. The content analysis pursues the goal of drawing conclusions about certain aspects of communication. The subject of the investigation was the coverage of FAZ and BILD during the FIFA World Cup. The material was analyzed using the MAXQDA 12 software program. The subsequent development of the code system was at the center of the content analysis. The categories were developed in a reciprocal relationship between the theoretical question and the concrete material. After certain construction and assignment rules, the categories were subsequently defined and repeatedly revised and re-examined during the analysis (see Mayring, 2010). For this purpose, codes and associated subcodes were formed for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. A total of 215 FAZ articles with a total of 2,991 units of meaning were extracted and 279 BILD articles with 3,803 units of meaning were included in the analysis, which represented the population.

Findings and Discussion

The quantitative content analysis showed, that both newspapers followed the trend of going away from the so-called "1:0 journalism", in which significant areas beyond the results and performance-related information are excluded. Instead, they focused their coverage on the representation of emotional background reporting (vgl. Kamp, 2009). The object of investigation was the self-image, the external image and the use of national symbols in order to highlight the feeling of national identity of the recipient. The differences and similarities between the reporting of both newspaper genres were also elaborated.

The results of the qualitative content analysis showed that both media focused on the self-portrayal of the German national team. Another important subject was individual players of the German national team. However, there were slight differences between FAZ and BILD.

The analysis of the communication in relation to the respective footballing opponents of the German national team showed both parallels and nation-specific differences to the self-portrayal of the German nation.

The direct comparison of the use of national symbols made clear that the use of national symbols was much more intensively used by BILD reporting than by FAZ. The FAZ tried harder than BILD to maintain the sporting aspects in its background coverage. Typically, however, for the genre of tabloids, BILD focuses more on non-sporty background coverage. The statement of a large-scale belief in the team is expressed by the media, which helps to create pride and identification of the German population, but in turn generates pressure on the team. Both of the media give the impression that this tournament is about "all or nothing", which reinforces this effect.

Conclusion and Implications

Media play an essential role in the process of identity construction, as the mass media processed top sport is becoming increasingly important and they are in a symbiotic relationship with it.

For the print media as the basic medium for society, reporting on national supporters is a commercially attractive area, that attributes a key role to the integration of society. Society is developing into an increasingly differentiated and more complex structure, which is characterized by disintegration. The print media can therefore influence social change in society as part of their social functions through their reporting. Here they have the opportunity to express the recipient's commitment by showing how connected people feel to their own nation. Furthermore, general concepts of the nation can be conveyed and the actual value orientations of the society can be shown and influenced.

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