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The impact of social media on traditional sports journalism

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Abstract. The proliferation of social media has led to profound changes in the media field worldwide, and this has initiated a transformation in sports journalism driven by digitalization. New media actors continue to transform traditional sports journalism into processes that can be evaluated both positively and negatively.

This research examined how sports journalism is affected by the digitalization process through social media tools and football journalism. The main motivation of the study is the idea that sports journalism and digitalization have become contemporary research areas over the past decade, and that digital media continues to increase its importance.

In the scope of the study, it can be stated that football journalists are transitioning to a “secondary journalism” position in this new process, which is different from the usual, as football clubs now share important news related to them through their official social media accounts. The purpose of the study is to open a discussion on this concept.

While introducing the concept of “secondary journalism,” the research’s aim is to conceptualize the secondary position journalists face when presenting news to the audience, contrary to the conventional role of being the primary source in determining the agenda and delivering the news. This shift occurs as clubs now share their news with the public through official channels, including special content and professional public relations units’ activities.

Football journalists share the news content presented to the public firsthand by the football club, initiating discussions and evaluations by posting this news on their own social media accounts. In this context, the social media accounts managed by the clubs’ professional communication teams are the first to share significant football news with their followers. It is believed that the traditional media habits, where football reporters or journalists were the primary source for accessing news, have evolved into a secondary position, indicating a change in previous media habits.

Key words: Sports Journalism, Football Journalism, Secondary Journalism, Social Media, Football Clubs.

Introduction

After Web 4.0, the media has inevitably undergone transformation worldwide, and as a natural reflection of this, sports journalism has taken its share of digitalization. Similar to examples around the world, new media actors have significantly transformed traditional sports journalism as well.

This research examines how sports journalism is affected by the digitalization process within the scope of social media tools and football journalism. While some research in the relevant literature investigates the effects of social media tools on sports journalism, this area has recently emerged as a new subject. Considering that social media research in the field of sports started about ten years ago, it becomes apparent that research focusing on social media and sports journalism is crucial. Therefore, this research makes a conceptual contribution to the field by specifically examining sports and football journalism. Within the scope of the research, the impact of social media tools on football journalism in Turkey has been examined, and the concept of "secondary journalism" has been introduced as a new journalism approach. With this concept, the main aim is to discuss the observed radical changes in journalism and news production processes due to the increasing influence of social media.

In the era of traditional media dominance, reporters used a variety of sources to deliver the news to "first-hand" media actors. During this period, the public followed relevant news via journalists, who were the primary actors at the time. However, with the increasing influence of social media in every aspect of life, individuals and organizations have adapted the behavior of sharing news to communicate with the public through their official social media accounts. Based on the assumption that this new way of creating news content has distinctly transformed the traditional understanding of journalism, it is argued in this research that a new understanding of journalism has been developed. The increasing interest in social media platforms, particularly among broader audiences' day by day, has relegated sports journalists to a more background-followed position. Since sports clubs have expanded their media departments, taking on the role of managing their own social media accounts and sharing their own news content, sports journalists have found themselves obliged to follow these posts. On one hand, as a natural outcome of digitalization, sports journalists are required to provide more content and greater diversity; on the other hand, there is intense competition due to the increased effectiveness of sports clubs' own press and broadcasting outlets.

This situation, in turn, relegates sports journalists to a position where they follow content published by sports clubs on social media and share this news second-hand. In this research, the situation of following news content is defined as "secondary journalism." Through introducing the concept of "secondary journalism" and explaining how sports journalism has experienced a transformation process after digitalization, a conceptual contribution to the literature on sports journalism and football journalism in particular is presented.

As a result, the intersection of sports journalism and digitalization has become a significant research area over the past decade, and it is anticipated that this trend will lay the foundation for numerous studies in the coming years, considering the increasing importance of digital media every day.

Literature Review

The rapid access to and dissemination of information on the internet have significant implications for journalism. New media introduces innovations that alter individuals' news consumption habits. Nowadays, people can access news not only through traditional media but also via newspapers' websites or social media. Various news organizations, including television, radio, news agencies, magazines, and newspapers, actively use various social media platforms to quickly deliver up-to-date news to their readers. Printed sports newspapers publish news about every sport effectively using social media. Sports channels in Turkey broadcasting on Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are increasingly enhancing their influence in the media day by day (Kürkçü, 2016).

When examining studies conducted in Turkey and around the world, it has been determined that sports journalism or sports news has undergone a significant transformation after digitalization. This technological revolution worldwide has naturally spread rapidly in Turkey, almost completely transforming sports media from top to bottom. In studies conducted in Turkey, the transformed sports journalism has been approached from various examples and points, addressing both the negative and positive effects on sports journalism. In this context, the inability of sports journalists to keep up with the speed of the internet, a significant decrease in the need for reporters in newspapers, the pressure created by increased competition on journalists, and as a result, the erosion and even distortion of news content, can be listed as important examples of negative changes. On the positive side, the increase in sports broadcast revenues, the increase in the channels and number of sports news and broadcasts, and the ease of access to sports news are examples of positive outcomes of the transformation, as evidenced by studies conducted in Turkey.

Studies conducted in Turkey have revealed that digital technologies have transformed the media and sports journalism has also been affected by this transformation. In-depth interviews with sports journalists by Özsoy (2011) revealed that sports journalism has difficulty in competing with the speed of new media, that sports journalism has been eroded in terms of content and that sports reporters have difficulty in accessing news for various reasons. Additionally, sports journalists face difficulties in accessing news for various reasons. In a recent study, it was found that sports journalists are compelled to resort to creating "asparagas" (unverified or fake) news due to various professional challenges posed by innovations in the new media domain (Özel and Alkan, 2023).

In Turkey, digital sports broadcasting is predominantly carried out through channels operating on the web, social networks within YouTube, and podcast content (Budak, 2019). It is noted that sports journalism, especially in the realm of digital sports broadcasting, is primarily focused on creating football news (Özsoy and Doğu, 2006; Yüksel, 2021). Twitter's 140-character message length provides significant advantages, such as the quick delivery of professional events and news to users through regular updates. News organizations adopt Twitter as an effective news dissemination tool by using the feature of instant content updates. Twitter has become the most preferred social media channel by news organizations and newspapers because it responds quickly to individuals' need for continuous news (Kürkçü, 2016). In a study, it was found that

85% of the tweets shared on Twitter are related to news. This study reveals that Twitter is a news dissemination and sharing medium rather than a social network. Twitter has become a platform where many globally renowned athletes and sports newspapers have reached millions of followers by offering fans, athletes, coaches, sports newspapers and readers the opportunity to communicate directly (Özsoy, 2011).

Another study conducted in Turkey revealed that 86.8% of the posts shared by official Twitter accounts of sports newspapers are about football on average, while only 13.2% included news from other sports (Kürkçü, 2016). Considering these rates, it is seen that sports newspapers and sports news followers in Turkey show more interest in football news than other sports. According to the data obtained through the research (Kürkçü, 2016), it was determined that 95.4% of the sports news shared by Fotomaç Newspaper's, 84.9% of Fanatik Newspaper's and 84.3% of Amk Newspaper's Twitter account is related to football. According to the results of the study 77.8% of the football posts are related to Turkish football and 22.2% are related to world football. Büyükbaykal's (2003) study on the place and importance of football in the written sports media in Turkey indicates that football predominantly occupies the sports pages of traditional printed newspapers. In Turkish football, when the news shares related to the "big three" known as Beşiktaş, Fenerbahçe, and Galatasaray were examined, it was revealed that 65.3% of the shares related to Turkish football were associated with these three major teams (Büyükbaykal, 2003). In addition, the ratio of football articles about the big three to the total football articles in the sports pages was found to be over 60 per cent.

When examining sports journalism conducted by traditional printed sports newspapers and sports journalism carried out on social media, it is observed that they operate in a similar manner in certain aspects. Both printed sports newspapers and news tweets on social media highlight that football stands out among sports. Similarly, both forms of sports journalism tend to give more coverage to news about "the big three" football teams compared to other sports.

From Traditional Journalism to New Generation Journalism: A Concept Development

When the studies conducted in the world and in Turkey are examined, it is seen that there is a consensus on a journalism process that has largely transformed and continues to transform from traditional media to new media. Journalists have traditionally played a primary role in shaping the agenda and discussions around topics while collecting and presenting news in traditional media.

In the developments following the rise of new media, journalists have gained various advantages in terms of swiftly collecting and transforming news. However, the interaction style developed by new media actors with their followers in recent times is starting to put journalists in a disadvantageous position. Journalists, including football journalists we examined in our study, are transitioning towards a 'Secondary Journalism' position as sport clubs now share important news directly on their official social media pages. The outcome of our study aims to initiate a discussion around this concept.

In coining the concept of 'Secondary Journalism' here, we refer to the effort to conceptualize the shift where journalists, traditionally primary sources in setting the agenda and presenting news to the audience, find themselves in a secondary position as sport clubs share their news directly with the public through exclusive content and the activities of professional public relations units.

In this context, football journalists share the news content presented by the sport clubs to the public firsthand, just like on their own social media accounts, opening up the news to discussion and evaluation. In this regard, as the social media accounts managed by the sport clubs' professional communication teams share significant football news with their followers first, football journalists find themselves in a secondary position in accessing the news leading to a change in traditional habits in sports journalism.

As it is known, football clubs predominantly finalize their transfers, especially before the new season. In Turkey, during the summer, football fans are naturally most interested in and closely follow news related to football player transfers. Fans tend to measure their clubs' success by the trophies or cups they lift at the end of the season or the attention-grabbing and expensive transfers they make before the new season.

As an example in this context, winning a championship in an amateur branch other than football by the three big sports clubs will not attract as much attention among the fans as a "star" transfer would. This situation has been appreciated by the public since the time football was born and developed in Turkey, and in our opinion, it is evaluated that it will continue in this way for at least some time. Transfer news is exciting for the fans, allowing for hours of discussions, and they are news items that shift the competition between clubs on the field to another platform. In this context, while the agenda of football media predominantly includes match results and evaluations during the season, in the summer and mid-season breaks, the agenda is shaped by transfer news and initiatives, especially those of Beşiktaş, Fenerbahçe, and Galatasaray football clubs.

We believe that the process of the evolution of football journalism to the position of "secondary journalism" that we developed in the research can be better explained with two important transfers that took place in the summer transfer period of 2023 and their reflections in the media. On August 16, 2023, Beşiktaş Gymnastics Club's official Instagram account "Milot Rashica" definite transfer post received 503 thousand likes in total, while the same transfer news and video content received only 1151 likes on the Instagram post of Fanatik newspaper, the most followed sports newspaper on social media. The Fanatik Newspaper's news content titled "Rashica revealed the main reason for choosing Beşiktaş: They showed respect to me!" from August 16, 2023, consists of a direct quote from the interview the football player gave to Beşiktaş Gymnastics Club's YouTube Channel.

Another example is the Mauro Icardi transfer of Galatasaray Club, which was the most liked transfer of the 2023 summer period. The Instagram video content regarding the definite transfer of Mauro Icardi on July 28, 2023, was first published on Galatasaray Sports Club's official Instagram page and received 1,076,000 likes. However, the Instagram account of Fanatik Newspaper, which directly reported the club's post as news, only managed to gather 999 likes. When examining all 2023 summer period transfers made by the three major clubs in Turkey; Beşiktaş, Fenerbahçe, and Galatasaray, it is revealed that they first announce their transfer posts on their own social media accounts. The number of likes on all transfer news content is much higher than the content shared by official social media accounts of sports newspapers after each transfer.

One of the explanations that accurately illustrates the subject forming the basis of our research claim is found in an interview given by Rıza Çalimbay, an important figure in Turkish football and Beşiktaş Club, who served as the captain of the Beşiktaş and the Turkish National Team in the

1990s. In the interview that was conducted on the TRT Sport channel (TRT Spor, 2023). In the interview, Çalimbay stated, "Whether I was selected for the national team or not, I would find out from newspapers or radio."

In fact, I couldn't stand the excitement and would go to newsstands selling late-night editions, buy a newspaper, and find out whether I was selected for the national team from newspapers or the radio at night." By saying this, he reveals the fact that football journalism was indeed the primary source of news. However, in today's context, football players selected for the National Team officially receive the first news either from the official website of the Turkish Football Federation or from the platform called "Millitakımlar" on Instagram, which has 1.9 million followers. Unlike the traditional sports journalism, football newspapers are able to convey the relevant news to their followers through "secondary journalism".

In this context, examining the examples provided above and also reviewing all transfer news conducted by football sport clubs in recent years, it can be clearly stated that football journalism has been compelled to evolve towards a process of "secondary journalism." This involves disseminating information by directly quoting news from primary sources when presenting football news, which is highly valued by followers and fans, and subsequently initiating discussions about the information.

Conclusion

Just like other branches of news, football transfer news has been significantly influenced by the processes brought about by new media. News on football has especially undergone a major transformation in the last 15 years with the increasing dominance of social media. Previously, the transfer agenda, determined through written and visual media by club reporters and commentators, has experienced a substantial transformation in recent years.

Clubs prefer to share transfer news on their social media accounts through meaningful content and videos. This choice is motivated both by public relations activities and the sensitivity of today's fan base to social media. It also serves the purpose of making a reference to the competition between the football clubs. One of the reasons why transfer news attracts significant interest from followers is that the finalization of transfers is now directly presented to followers first-hand by the clubs itself, not by club official reporters or the media.

The digitalization process continues to transform sports from the production of news to its consumption in various aspects. The increase in social media content has had an impact on the rapid spread of football news in Turkey. The interaction of mobile applications with followers is increasing day by day. Noteworthy changes include the interpretation and discussion of football news on social media, instant interaction of followers with these news and comments, and the increase of the audience through live broadcasts and interactive content.

Digital platforms can present the statistics of football matches to their followers or subscribers in much more detail through data-driven news. Fans or football enthusiasts can adapt to contemporary interpretations brought by new media journalism with evaluating team and player performances with an analytical approach. In this context, subscription-based football content platforms can increase their advertising revenues with the increase in the number of followers, leading to an improvement in the quality of content and comments.

The focus of our research is on the potential of football clubs producing content on their own digital platforms to transform football journalists into a secondary news source. This development seems to have a negative impact on football reporters or commentators. In the era of traditional media, football journalism, which could directly influence clubs' transfer news, has transformed into a secondary source with the official statements and video content published on clubs' official digital platforms. During transfer periods, football fans now follow the latest transfers not through traditional or new media channels but directly from the clubs' official social media accounts. As a result, football media is evolving beyond being a news source into becoming transfer commentators.

Generally, within the scope of our study, the digitalization process of sports journalism in Turkey is open to new challenges and new opportunities. It is anticipated that in the future, the impact of technological revolutions such as artificial intelligence and augmented reality on football media will become even more pronounced.

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