

Review

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THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF MEDIA IN THE POPULARIZATION OF SPORTS

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Abstract: Sport, often described as the most important unimportant activity in the world, is both universally accessible and applicable to all aspects of everyday life. It is a highly dynamic social phenomenon that extends to digital platforms and social media, that have and continue to play a crucial role in its global popularization. This theoretical paper aims to investigate the importance and influence that media has had in the popularization of sports by analyzing different theoretical approaches and empirical studies.

This work focuses on three key areas of media influence: coverage of sports events, sports marketing and commercialization, and the role of media in shaping public perception and interest in sports activities. It concludes that media is an indispensable factor in the global popularization of sports. Media shapes the perception of sports, creates sports stars, and facilitates the spread of sports culture worldwide. This paper aims to deepen the understanding of the intricate relationship between media and sports, also highlighting the need for further research on this topic in the context of contemporary media trends and technological innovations.

Keywords: media, sports, influence, importance, popularization

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Introduction

In today's world, media and communication play an important role in many aspects of life—whether in public places, workplaces, homes, or even while traveling alone or with other people. Media not only entertains but also connects people with friends, provides diverse perspectives on the world, and platforms for people to express their personal identity and creativity. Given the deep integration of media into everyday routines, they play a significant role in shaping societal culture. As a result, it is reasonable to assert that humanity now inhabits a "media-orientated culture" or "media society." Media essentially act as channels for transmitting content from its source to the intended audience (Bartoš, 2012). Humans, as the original and most fundamental form of media, communicate thoughts, ideas, and emotions through speech and gestures that others can perceive. Modern media, on the other hand, broadens this capacity by allowing people to communicate with friends and acquaintances without physically being present—whether across rooms, cities, or even countries.

The current "age of communication," characterized by widespread media use, is shaped by the profound influence of evolving forms of mass communication and the ongoing development of human society (Radojković, 2017). Media devices are now deeply integrated into community structures, making them both accessible and ubiquitous, with a significant impact on a wide range of scientific fields and disciplines.

Sports have become an essential part of modern life, encompassing professional athletes, amateurs, fans, and sports organization leaders. Sports, which were once linked with "play" and "entertainment," have grown into a series of competitive physical, mental, and logical activities. While recreation shares many characteristics with sports, the absence of competitiveness sets the two apart. Aside from their impact on individual experiences, sports play an important role for societal development. Sports evolve alongside society; conversely, sports may impact societal changes. Moreover, sports, physical activity, and recreation significantly impact not only society but also culture and politics. Sports' growing popularity is evident in the way discussions and criticism about sporting events pervade everyday life, whether on the streets or in the media. This growing curiosity highlights sports' increasing popularity, which is mostly fueled by the media. By making sports more accessible and appealing across all social strata, media play a crucial role in their global reach (Dugalić, 2018; Nuriddinov, 2023).

The media reinforces and shapes society's perception of sports by transforming sporting events and athletes into role models, thereby incorporating them into cultural identity and inspiring future generations (Khaledian et al., 2013). Through broadcasts, analyses, and commentary, the media fosters team spirit, enthusiasm, and a sense of community among fans. By informing and educating the public, promoting and advertising events, enhancing access and visibility, connecting social communities, and influ-

encing cultural dynamics, the media act as a driving force behind the popularization of sports (Burki et al., 2022; Marwat et al., 2014).

Technological advancements have further facilitated faster and more interactive information exchange, with live broadcasts, real-time analyses, and social media engagement significantly increasing public interest in sports (Rodek, 2018). While digital media are not solely responsible for this popularization, they have established a robust foundation for it. Other stakeholders, such as sports equipment manufacturers and sponsors, also contribute to promoting sports, primarily through digital media channels.

Computer digitization forms the foundation of all modern mass media, making digital media those that distribute content via the internet, web platforms, or digital networks and devices (Nuriddinov, 2023). This category includes various formats such as photographs, text, audio and video recordings, animations, and other digital content, all of which can be accessed through computers, tablets, mobile phones, televisions, and other digital devices. Traditional media forms, including television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and books, now have digital counterparts, such as websites, mobile apps, blogs, photo galleries, audio recordings, movies and video clips, digital libraries, real-time streaming, and social media pages (Zgrabljic Rotar, 2017; Zgrabljic Rotar, 2020).

Consequently, this research explores fundamental concepts related to the popularization of sports through digital media, emphasizing their significance and impact on global sports recognition. It examines the relationship between digital media and sports, highlighting the various ways in which digital media contribute to making sports more widely recognized and accessible worldwide.

Methodology

For data collection, analysis, and classification, this research utilized theoretical analysis and the descriptive method. Materials were gathered using internet search engines and databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, Web of Science, and ResearchGate. The search was restricted to studies published between 2003 and 2024, using keywords such as *media*, *digital media*, *popularization*, *sports*, *significance*, and *impact*. Only studies that aligned with the research objectives were included. Studies were excluded if they lacked sufficient sample sizes or if their results were not clearly presented for further analysis.

The Relationship Between Media and Sports Throughout History

The integration of sports and media has deep historical roots. Early sports articles appeared in newspapers even before the advent of dedicated sports editions. In around 1790, England saw the launch of the world's first sports magazine, *Sporting Magazine*, followed by the introduction of the first daily sports newspaper. In London, *Bells Life* began featuring a regular section on sports events (Beck & Bosshart, 2003). Other English publications, such as *Sporting Chronicle*, *Athletic News*, and *The Field*, also included occasional columns focused on sports (Beck & Bosshart, 2003).

Following developments in England, sports journalism emerged in the United States, with the first published reports covering local sporting events. Notably, the first publicly broadcast sporting event in the U.S. was a boxing match between John Faulcomer and Bob Russell (Bry & Holt, 2009). The first American sports newspaper, *The American Farmer*, was dedicated entirely to sports coverage (Bry & Holt, 2009). In Germany, early sports reporting began with coverage of gymnastics (Schiller & Young, 2009). Meanwhile, France launched *Le Sport*, a magazine exclusively covering global sports events. By the late 19th century, Croatia introduced *Sport Dalmato*, a newspaper primarily focused on mountaineering, hunting, and fishing (Rodek, 2018). This was followed by the establishment of *Jugoslovenski sport*, a magazine covering a broad range of sports events and disciplines (Rodek, 2018).

By the late 19th century, newspapers across much of Europe began to attract a wider readership, extending beyond the upper classes to include broader social groups. As interest in sports grew through print media, numerous magazines dedicated to sports competitions emerged throughout Europe. This surge in sports-focused publications contributed to the increasing popularity of sports, with journalists emphasizing their entertaining aspects. However, it is important to recognize that the increased production of sports articles remained heavily influenced by patriarchal norms, resulting in a significant underrepresentation of women in sports across both print and other media forms (Goldlust, 2018). Furthermore, the media's portrayal of sports events often diverges from the actual events. This discrepancy stems from the selective nature of media coverage, where only certain aspects—those deemed most significant by the journalist—are highlighted. As a result, the coverage creates a media-constructed image that fails to capture the full complexity of the event.

Following the era of print media, sports coverage extended to radio. Initially, radio faced limited acceptance as a new mass medium; however, it soon played a pivotal role in attracting a broader audience to sports, largely through live event broadcasts. From the beginning, radio capitalized on its strengths as a mass medium, with live audio broadcasts offering listeners a sense of being present at the event.

Radio's primary advantage over print media was its speed of transmission, enabling listeners to access audio information instantly, regardless of location, through receivers (Goldlust, 2018). Initially, radio was seen differently across regions: in America, it was perceived primarily as an entertainment medium, whereas in the United Kingdom, it was considered an electronic medium of cultural importance (Bry & Holt, 2009). After print media and radio, television became the dominant medium for presenting sports events in the 1960s (Rodek, 2018). Like radio, television enabled live broadcasts; however, unlike radio, which conveyed only audio, television offered both audio and visual coverage, providing a more immersive experience for viewers (Raney & Bryant, 2009). By broadcasting both images and sound, television provides viewers with an even greater sense of involvement in the sporting event.

Beyond traditional media—newspapers, television, and radio—the popularity of internet media has rapidly increased. Internet media includes social networks, various professional and editorially organized outlets, sports web portals, and blogs (Wenner, 2021). Similar to television, the internet facilitates live streaming of sports events; however, it also promotes interaction among individuals and groups, enabling active participation in discussions about these events. It can be argued that the media have advanced in tandem with technological progress, evolving to keep pace with innovation.

Importance and Influence of the Media on the Popularization of Sports

Today, many raise a valid question: "Why is sports so popular, and what makes it so appealing to audiences?" Unlike other social events, such as political or economic ones, sports events are distinguished by their simplicity and a stronger connection to individuals' personal experiences, even when conveyed through media (Rodek, 2018). These events often generate tension, creating uncertain situations and final outcomes within a set time frame that ultimately determines a winner (Sahu, 2020).

Sports events are often perceived as representative, comprehensible, and self-evident, enabling audiences to relate directly. They consist of short-duration events with clear winners, fostering a general understanding of success or failure. Consequently, sports have become a crucial element of contemporary culture, shaping new social values and driving changes within societal systems (Javid & Asadi, 2018).

It is evident that the immense significance and broad appeal of sports across all social layers in the modern world have been greatly influenced by media (Omran et al., 2023). Similarly, sports have significantly contributed to the increased social relevance of media, as the rise in sports participation expands the media market (Deveci et al., 2023). Sports rely on media not only for promotion but also to attract sponsors more

effectively, while media benefit from sports due to their inherent attractiveness, which boosts audience numbers.

In today's modern world, media play a significant role not only in promoting sports but also in the process of socialization (Kumari, 2019). Beyond print media, which young people tend to use selectively, digital media have a substantial influence and importance. Through digital media, young people participate in sports events as indirect audiences while also receiving and processing specific information and knowledge. This indicates that digital media hold immense importance in the field of sports and its popularization (Nazari & Ghasemi, 2013).

Moreover, digital media have contributed to the popularity of sports not only among the youth but also among older populations, whether it is related to recreational, amateur, or professional sports. It is crucial to highlight that modern sports have reached a high level of commercialization and professionalization, largely thanks to media, especially digital media. Since the public now uses digital media as one of the primary sources of information, it is necessary to continuously monitor technological innovations and leverage them for the popularization of sports (Nazari & Ghasemi, 2013).

To effectively inform or popularize a particular sport or event, a strong relationship with the media is essential (Kumari, 2019). This relationship should be managed by professionals, as only then can it positively impact the increased popularity of sports and sporting events.

Digital media today serve as the marketing force of modern sports. Good relations between media and sports organizations gradually establish a foundation for promoting sports events and familiarizing the audience with them, thereby slowly increasing the sport's popularity. The popularity of a sport grows in parallel with its representation in digital media. As the visibility of a sport increases through digital media, the audience becomes interested, and some even decide to participate in that sport. For example, digital media could popularize women's water polo if influential circles chose to do so. However, media generally promote only the sports from which they derive significant benefits or those that are easiest to market to the audience.

Additionally, digital media must adhere to certain trends, many of which they themselves have created over time. The primary function of digital media is to inform and fulfill leisure time (Kumari, 2019). Since modern life is divided into work time and leisure time for relaxation and recreation, sports occupy a significant place in terms of leisure activities. Therefore, the broadcasting of sports events should primarily serve as a source of relaxation and entertainment.

When it comes to sports events, they are broadcast by dozens of radio stations, television channels, and even websites. There is also a noticeable increase in the number

of users whose interest in sports not only persists but continues to grow. Today, there are more sports channels, more radio broadcasts, numerous online streams, reports, and articles about sports events. This is not only about the popularity of sports but also the popularity of athletes. The general public is interested in athletes' activities, scandals, diets, and fashion choices. While these details are generally irrelevant, digital media have made them interesting and important to the audience (Shabani & Rezaei, 2015).

The modern significance and impact of media on sports popularization can be seen as serving as an intermediary between society and sports (Shahbazi et al., 2018). In addition to promoting sports, digital media also introduce promotional material from other fields. The reason for the media's impact on sports popularization is clear: the audience can engage with various sports events by following results or listening to commentary and reports after competitions without physically attending them (Moradi et al., 2012).

However, it is crucial to note that the perception of a sports event differs when viewed in person—at a stadium or arena—compared to watching it on television, the internet, or through radio broadcasts. When the audience watches a live sports event on-site, they perceive it from one perspective and dimension of reality. However, if a television or online broadcast is well executed, the audience may feel as if they are present at the event. Additionally, enhanced effects, slow-motion replays, different camera angles, graphics, schemes, and various statistics contribute to the overall impression, sometimes providing a better experience than watching the event live.

For example, a sports event like a boxing match is more interesting to watch through digital media. Similarly, diving is more appealing and engaging when viewed digitally. One reason is that a dive lasts only a short moment, and live spectators can see it only once as performed by the athlete, whereas digital media can replay the dive multiple times from various angles, in slow motion, with added commentary. Thus, the impression of a sports event can vary depending on how it is viewed.

Another significant factor influencing the popularization of sports through digital media is the sports journalist or commentator who covers the event (Shahbazi et al., 2018). Digital media can also extend the impact of a sports event by prolonging its coverage. This means they can write about a particular sports competition for weeks or promote upcoming events months in advance, increasing interest and popularity (Shabani & Rezaei, 2015).

All of this can affect the audience's perception of a particular sport or athlete. Digital media have made a tremendous impact on the popularization of sports over time, creating new roles for sports. The most notable functions include entertainment, visual appeal, social engagement, and motor skill development (Moradi et al., 2011; Rodek, 2018). The popularization of sports has been driven primarily by digital media and will likely continue to rely on them moving forward.

Positive and Negative Effects of Digital Media on Sports

Today's audience wants to know all the information about their sports heroes, sports clubs, and national teams. Digital media today provides this information, sometimes even offering more than what the audience demands, often crossing certain boundaries (Shahbazi et al., 2018). They obtain various details about players and their clubs, starting from their history to even personal information about the players. Mundane details from athletes' lives are now presented to the public. All this information is intriguing to the audience. The influence of the media is particularly evident among young players, who have not yet developed their personalities or careers. Before their professional careers, winning was the only important thing for players, whereas, once they become professional athletes, their main concern becomes achieving higher earnings through contracts and advertising via digital media.

The main positive aspects of media influence are: digital media expose sports to audiences who do not have the opportunity to watch sports events live; digital media have contributed over time to the equality of male and female athletes (Farzalipour et al., 2012); and it has led to an increase in athletes' earnings proportional to media exposure.

In addition to the positive aspects, media also have some negative effects on the popularization of sports and athletes, the most significant of which are: the media often invade the privacy of well-known athletes, athletes are often considered above the law compared to ordinary people, and injuries or poor form of players lead to a loss of media attention.

It can be said that the impact and significance of media on the popularization of sports have both advantages and disadvantages, but overall, the media have more advantages that outweigh the negative aspects.

Conclusion

The development of digital media has had a tremendous impact and significance on the popularization of sports. From the first emergence of media until today, just as they have influenced economic and political events, they have equally affected sports events. Today, the popularity of sports is primarily driven by digital media through constant television and internet broadcasts. Sport is a cultural and social phenomenon that has found its place in contemporary culture, particularly within the media. It can be said that digital media have made sports a global phenomenon. In this way, sports have become a part of the lives of both the young and the old, serving as a form of relaxation, recreation, and entertainment.

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