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NEWS SHARING ON FACEBOOK: SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTS ON NEWS SELECTION IN SPORTS JOURNALISM

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ABSTRACT

Social media audiences and their preferences, as represented in social media analytics results, tend to replace the traditional gatekeeping factors. This new role of the audiences, which have taken on the task of secondary gatekeeping or gatewatching, creates a challenge to the newsrooms. It weakens the sports media in a fragile balance of power against athletes and sports organizations. This paper applies the news values concept, which is elementary for the research of news selection, to social media news-sharing practices. The analysis performed on the 2021 content of the Facebook pages of Czech traditional sports media shows that ethnocentric success, celebrity, competition status, and human interest are among the most prominent news factors for the top shared posts. The weakened newsrooms may tend to adopt these patterns that correspond to the priorities of a loud and formidable layer of social media users, i.e., sports fans. Enhancing sports journalists' own fandom can adversely affect current processes and disrupt the identity of sports journalism itself.

KEYWORDS

social media • sports journalism • news values • news gap • Facebook

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the rise of digital media, journalism (Pavlik, 2000) has experienced fundamental challenges – and changes. Additionally, the communication process has further developed due to the evolution of social media. People have found new access to news channels, and they have become more active players in the communication processes, including their roles in gatekeeping and news sharing. Instead of traditional news media usage (newspapers, radio, television, and their Internet platforms), the majority of people now read the news on social media. In 2015, Newman et al.'s (2015) report showed that two-thirds of Facebook users used the platform as a news source. Bergström and Jervelycke Belfrage (2018) found that 91 percent of people between 16 and 25 years of age read the news on social media. Being successful on social media has become crucial for traditional media corporations, and this aspect has influenced the practices in the production of media content, including news. The development of social media meant significant infringement of the power of traditional media and the establishment of new power relations between communication actors (Broersma & Eldridge, 2019).

After the introduction of social media, new multilayered features were added to communication culture (Humayun & Ferrucci, 2022), and at least two of them have affected the notion of media audiences. New platforms provided publishers and researchers with a chance to approach new data regarding media content reception. Web analytical tools replaced the vague ideas that publishers and journalists had about their audiences based on contact with familiar recipients and unrepresentative and partial responses from the unknown public, such as mailed individual reactions (Sullivan, 2019; Turnbull, 2020). Seeing what audiences like, share, or comment on their social media, together with present-day automated data collection and analytical tools changed, the idea of the audience (Hanusch & Tandoc, 2019; Tandoc et al., 2021). The audience, on the other hand, got a chance to demonstrate their active approach to the news flow. Bruns (2007) named the activity that was made available to the users through social media 'pro-usage'. The tracking of social media use and users' responses has become an integral part of journalistic routines, so mastering them is required for any journalist or media professional (Bossio, 2017) because it contributes to the evaluation of their professional qualities (Papanagnou, 2023).

1. SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTS ON GATEKEEPING PRACTICES

One of the most important duties journalists have is defining and deciding what content is suitable for the limited space available on the newspapers' pages or for a slot in a broadcasting time. The gatekeeping procedures

(Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Vos, 2009) are based on an evaluation of any real-world event or any topic that comes to the newsroom processes. The editors, in their role as gatekeepers, judge various aspects of the events and topics and then decide what is and what is not newsworthy. The complex criteria and characteristics assessed in this process were named 'news values'.

The concept of news values was first introduced by Galtung and Ruge (1965) for the research of reporting on international conflicts. The theory was developed by various authors. Nowadays, the constructed – and constructive – nature of the news values is emphasized, as the news values serve to construct the mediated reality while they are themselves constructed in the news discourse (Caple & Bednarek, 2015). When any event is assessed as having a high news value and is selected to be published in the respective media, the final story is developed and framed so that the news factors constituting the high news value are highlighted in the text to dominate the discourse.

A new development in the research of news values has occurred with the introduction of the audiences' preferences to the news selection. While shareability – the suitability to be shared in digital or social media – has been included among the news factors by Harcup and O'Neill (2017), it has been studied more often from within media contents (Trilling et al., 2017). The new tools of web analytics and social media analytics became available for news values research and helped create a new notion of audiences' preferences (Paulussen & Aelst, 2021). As soon as the first analyses of shareability were conducted, the relationship between the shareability of news items on social media and traditional news values was verified (Bednarek, 2016). On the other hand, the researchers found that the audiences' preferences (shareworthiness) and journalists' selection (newsworthiness) did not exactly overlap. Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2013) called this phenomenon 'the news gap'. This gap has consequences for the perception of specific types of news (Bright, 2016) and can be an important factor in the audience's decreasing level of trust in the media (Nelson, 2021). The uneasy debate on whether the media should succumb to the audiences' preferences or follow their journalistic logic that is important to their journalistic identity (Nelson, 2021; Tandoc et al., 2021) began long ago but has become more critical with the delivery of social media.

As of today, when the web and social media analytics data are available almost in real-time, the news gap problem backfires on journalistic routines. Web analytics often replace the editorial discussions of newsworthiness in the newsrooms and it brings up the question of whether the elementary principles of journalism are still being applied (Tandoc et al., 2021). The findings and the newly identified trends have led to the formula-

tion of a theory according to which the audience itself assumes the role of gatekeepers (Landis & Allen, 2022; Vu, 2014). While Singer (2014) called it 'secondary gatekeeping', Bruns (2003) described the activity of the online media users as 'gatewatching' – a principle on which the major task is not to block some stories from being shared, but on the contrary, to promote selected stories for further sharing.

Moreover, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in news avoidance, with many individuals actively disengaging from traditional news media such as television, radio, and print. This trend is particularly pronounced among younger demographics, who are increasingly turning to social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram for their news consumption. The Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2024 (Newman et al., 2024) highlights that while Facebook remains a notable source of news, its usage has been in long-term decline, with weekly access dropping from 42% to 28% over the past seven years. Conversely, platforms like TikTok have seen a surge in popularity among younger audiences, with 20% of 18- to 24-year-olds using TikTok for news, up from 15% the previous year. This shift suggests that younger users prefer platforms offering a more personalized, participatory, and engaging news experience, often curated by influencers and content creators rather than traditional news outlets. Toff et al. (2024) described the systemic causes of news avoidance on the audience's side, but gaps in evaluating the media's responses to news avoidance persist (Andersen et al., 2024). This evolution in news consumption habits underscores the need for traditional news organizations to adapt their strategies to engage audiences, especially of young age, effectively. Palmer and Edgerly (2024) studied the journalists' attitudes towards avoiding or reducing news avoidance, concluding that they fail to target structural causes. The phenomenon of news avoidance is multi-layered, and so some researchers (e.g., Villi et al., 2021; Tian, 2022) argue that the process of news avoidance can be culture-dependent and does not necessarily apply to each individual (even in the same age group) the same way.

Thus, the news selection process has become more vulnerable to any disruptions of the routines caused by the social media audiences' response. The gatekeeping procedures in sports journalism have been greatly affected by social media, not only by the audience's response but also by the individual journalists' social media presentation (English, 2017). Moreover, for the sports actors (e.g., athletes, sports organizations), social media serves as a direct channel to bypass the gatekeeping of the traditional media, further undermining their significance, although still maintaining the complementarity between the two (Nölleke et al., 2017). Being dependent on a strictly regular sports calendar, sports journalism is seen as even more

routinized than general journalism (Washburn & Lamb, 2020), and thus, the news selection process is even more vulnerable to any disruption of these routines.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA, SPORTS MEDIA, AND SPORTS JOURNALISM

Throughout the history of modern sports, the media have played a crucial role in shaping sports culture while simultaneously benefiting from the audiences that sports attract. Rowe (2008, 2011) refers to this interdependent relationship as the 'media sports cultural complex,' highlighting the mutual benefits and symbiosis between sports and media. The impact of social media on sports (Abeza et al., 2021; Abeza & Sanderson, 2023), sports fans (Kim et al., 2020), sports media, and sports journalism, is comparable to its effect on media and journalism in general (Boyle, 2021; English, 2014). Social media added new voices to sports communication, including fans and athletes, both strengthening and challenging the dominant discourse of hypermasculinity (Antunovic, 2022). The disruptive effects of social media usage on sports journalists' integrity have been described long ago (Reed, 2011). The sports world is also acclimating to the new environment (Miah, 2017); however, as the power balance is fragile, any weakening of sports media means that the equilibrium is disrupted in favor of sponsors and sports organizations (Boyle & Haynes, 2013; Rowe, 2008). Sports journalists deal with competition from the athlete's or club's media and fan blogs while struggling to establish or maintain their unique legitimacy and protecting their gatekeeping role (McEnnis, 2022). Wiske and Horky (2021) named interaction and social media agenda setting, data-driven content, loss of the sports media gatekeeping function, and entry of new players as the most significant sports journalism challenges caused by the development of social and digital media in general.

As far as news selection in sports journalism is concerned, Loosen (1998; Loosen & Ravenstein, 2000) applied news values research to this discipline of journalism. Although there were several later attempts to deepen the analysis further, they were more like individual ones – Ihle's studies (2018, 2022; Rehbach et al., 2016) or Lee and Choi's (2009) application of Shoemaker's (1987) concept of significance and deviance as news values in soccer journalism – these can hardly be described as a continuous interest in newsworthiness and news values research of sports events.

We consider the news gap in sports journalism, as it manifests on social media, to be a topic worthy of research. This study aims to examine and understand variations in news selection within social media stories. Given that news values traditionally represent the criteria for news selection,

they also serve as a valid framework for analyzing the news selection process, both in general and specifically within social media contexts.

It is clear that reasons for creating common users' social media posts vary, and they are mostly very different from what the journalists consider in their news selection; in fact, this is logically the source of the news gap. Many studies explore the reasons for sharing social media posts, even for the news stories in detail. In summary of these studies, Hermida (2014) and Martin and Dwyer (2019) concluded that the most important reasons for social media news sharing include, among others, entertainment, informativeness, socializing with others, maintaining relationships, status-seeking, criticism, promoting one's own opinions, political activation, seeking help. There are also examples of studies, like Diez-Gracia and Sanchez-García (2022) or de León and Vermeer (2023), that use the data from social media analysis to assess specifically the depth of a news gap. Park and Kaye (2021) conducted research to compare Shoemaker's (1987) news values of significance and deviance between the most liked and most shared posts of traditional Korean media.

For the news values analysis, we followed the theoretical framework of the two-component theory of news values, created by Kepplinger (1998; Kepplinger & Ehmgig, 2006). According to the theory, there are specific news factors attributable to any event. While these factors are less influenced by the type of media, organizational preferences, interests, and others, they are strongly influential on the news selection processes in newsrooms, including the individual preferences of the editor (comp. with Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The evaluation of the sum of news factors in the specific environment of the medium then establishes the specific news value of the event that determines if the event is or is not included in the media content.

All these statements are applicable to the situation in the Czech Republic. Although it is a small central European country, it has a rich sports legacy with a relatively extensive base of popular sports led by football (soccer) and ice hockey, supplemented by tennis, track and field, and others (Osborne et al., 2023). The media system in the Czech Republic is affected by manifestations of a post-communist and post-transformation era, including the onset of 'oligarchization' (Volek, 2022). The first Czech newspapers' sports sections were established in the first half of the 19th century (Lukšů, 2022), setting the tradition of sports media in Czechoslovakia, which has continued in the Czech Republic through a variety of services in traditional print and broadcasting media as well as new digital media, both specialized only in sports and providing sports related information inside a full-format service.

For our research on news values and social media in the Czech Republic, our research question is:

- *For the Facebook profiles of Czech sports media, is there any significant difference in the news factors of highly shared and low shared posts?*

3. METHOD

Multiple research methods are used for news values research; this methodological pluralism (Mast & Temmerman, 2021) offers scientists a free choice between the tools applicable to any specific research question. Since this study is grounded in the two-component theory of news values, we have followed the relevant methodological German tradition of news values theory and research, which relies on quantitative content analysis as the primary method (Maier et al., 2018).

As Facebook is still the most popular social media platform in the Czech Republic despite the progress of Instagram, Pinterest, and TikTok (MediaGuru.cz, 2022), we chose Facebook and its pages of Czech traditional sports media or sports section of full-format media as the source of the material to be analyzed. The four different Facebook pages selected cover a wide and variable spectrum of the media production of sports journalism in the Czech Republic. ČT sport is a sports television channel, one of the six channels of the Czech national public broadcaster Czech Television. Nova Sport is a family of sports channels of the commercial television TV Nova. iSport is a website of a specialized sports daily Sport, and Sport iDNES is a sports section of a website iDNES.cz, which is an online project of the full-format daily newspaper MF DNES.

The basic set of data contained all posts from the period from June to December 2021, collected with the Crowdtangle.com tool on January 3, 2022. The overview of the posts selected into the basic set is described in Table 1.

Table 1: The basic set of Facebook posts and their users' shares.

Source: Authors processing

Facebook page	Number of posts	Average number of likes	Average number of shares	% of non-shared posts
ČT sport	3,861	564.56	19.94	26.24 %
iSport	9,328	88.88	3.17	48.48 %
Nova Sport	2,762	125.21	5.49	44.79 %
Sport iDNES	2,243	169.87	4.36	47.97 %
Total	18,194	205.32	7.23	43.14 %

As our tool for categorization of posts, we chose the posts' sharing instead of liking or commenting because it best represents secondary gatekeep-

ing or gatewatching. As demonstrated in Table 1, a significant number of posts were not shared at all. The data obtained from the four pages via Crowdtangle.com indicates that the frequency of sharing is a minor activity compared to liking. Except for the ČT sport Facebook page, the average varies between three and six shares per post, and almost half of the posts were not shared by anyone. The difference between the ČT sport page and the three others stems from the fact that the ČT sport page had approximately 2.5 times more fans than the other three pages at the time of data collection. However, just like the other pages, the ČT sport page exhibited a very uneven distribution of sharing of posts, the majority of them having only a low single-digit number of shares.

These characteristics were considered when we constructed the analysis sample. As we wanted to compare the highly shared posts with lowly shared posts, we divided the basic set into three parts: the top decile of the most frequently shared posts, the lower 75 percent of posts with no or low shares, and the remaining 15 percent of medium-shared posts that we were not interested in. The size of the low-sharing subset was determined by the frequency of non-shared posts in the sample, as we wanted to include at least some of the low-shared samples besides the non-shared ones.

From every sub-set, a computer random numbers generator was used to select 100 posts for the research sample of 800 posts, 400 with a high number of shares and 400 with a low number of shares. Table 2 describes the final research sample.

Table 2: Description of the analyzed sample. Source: Authors processing

Facebook page	Posts with high shares		Posts with low shares	
	Number	Average of shares	Number	Average of shares
ČT sport	100	118.15	100	1.78
iSport	100	18.62	100	0.28
Nova Sport	100	37.26	100	0.64
Sport iDNES	100	31.71	100	0.60
Total	400	51.44	400	0.83

All posts were tested for 14 news factors. The list of factors and codebook was created based on the founding work of Loosen (1998), who then, for her analysis, applied the news factors lists elaborated for the political or general news media. However, Loosen and Ravenstein (2000) stressed the importance of a specific approach to the general or political media news factors (for an exemplary summary of general media news factors lists, see

Caple & Bednarek, 2013) when analyzing sports journalism naming three procedures to be combined when constructing the news factors list for analysis of sports journalism: leaving the adopted news factors unmodified when possible, modifying the definition of adopted news factors that need to be redefined specifically for sports journalism, and adding new news factors specific to sports journalism.

Inspired by these remarks, a pre-graduate theses by Winnebeck (2010), and own-conducted interviews with the editors of Czech sports media regarding the news selection processes (Langer, 2021), we created the list of 14 news factors: timeliness, time form, proximity, ethnocentrism, facticity, controversy, rule violation, personalization, celebrity, human interest, sport status, competition status, ethnocentric success, and ethnocentric failure. All factors were coded on a four-point scale, from the lowest (or none) level of the factor coded 1 to the highest level coded 4, although there are exceptions in the coding as described in more detail in Table 3.

Table 3: List of news factors for the analysis. Source: Authors processing

News factor	Definition, description, coding
Timeliness	What is the length of the time period of the event (competition)
	4 - 1 day
	3 - several days (to two weeks)
	2 - long period (months, years)
	1 - no definitive time period connected
Time form	The time when the event (competition) takes place
	4 - today
	3 - yesterday
	2 - before yesterday
	1 - in the future
Proximity	The proximity of the location of event to the Czech Republic.
	4 - event in the Czech Republic
	3 - event in Europe
	2 - event in North America or Asia
	1 - event in South America, Africa or Australia
Ethnocentrism	The relation of the depicted event to the Czech Republic
	4 - event in the Czech Republic with participation of a Czech or Czechs (a Czech participant)
	3 - event outside the Czech Republic with a Czech participant
	2 - event in the Czech Republic without a Czech participant
	1 - event outside the Czech Republic without a Czech participant
Facticity	Does the post deal with facts or opinions (of actors)?
	4 - almost exclusively facts
	3 - mostly facts
	2 - mostly opinions
	1 - almost exclusively opinions

Controversy	Does the post contain information about a controversy or conflict between the participants? 4 - big controversy 3 - medium controversy 2 - small controversy 1 - no controversy
Rule violation	Does the post contain information about a rule violation? As the rules, the sports rules as well as the civil norms and laws are taken into account. 4 - severe violation 3 - moderate violation 2 - minor violation 1 - no violation
Personalization	Does the post name specific people, general group or impersonal phenomena? 4 - post names at least one participant by name 3 - post names at least one participant by his function (e. g. coach, referee, young footballer) 2 - post names a group of people (e. g. club players, fans, men) 1 - post names only impersonal actors or institutions (e. g. football union, club, also natural forces or social phenomena)
Celebrity	Does any sports celebrity act in the event? 4 - big celebrity (personality known even in the audiences that rarely follows sports) 3 - medium celebrity (personality known in sports environment, the star of his or her sport) 2 - minor celebrity (personality regularly celebrated in his or her sport, exceptionally labeled a star) 1 - no celebrity
Human interest	Does the post deal with sports or with out-of-sports (personal, family, social etc.) circumstances of the actors' story? 4 - the post deals almost exclusively with an out-of-sports (human interest) dimension 3 - the post deals predominantly with an out-of-sports dimension 2 - the post deals predominantly with a sports dimension 1 - the post deals almost exclusively with a sports dimension
Sport status	Social status of the sport 4 - highest status (like football/soccer, ice hockey, tennis, formula 1) 1 - low or no status (minor non-olympic sports)
Competition status	Social status of the competition. 4 - highest status (like the Olympics, world or continental championships) 3 - middle high status (widely respected international competitions) 2 - middle low status (national competitions) 1 - low status (local competitions)
Ethnocentric success	Does the story include information about the success of a Czech participant? The success is evaluated for the strength of the opponent, quality of competition, partiality or finality of the result etc.) 4 - big success 3 - middle success 2 - small success 1 - no success
Ethnocentric failure	Does the story include information about the failure of a Czech participant? 4 - big failure 3 - middle failure 2 - small failure 1 - no failure

Although the discussion of the coded news factors is not a focus point of this paper, we should stress that not only are the individual news factors of any story media-constructed, but also many of the general definitions are media-constructed, such as the celebrity status of actors and social status of a specific sport or competition. This is also one of the reasons why news factors are not universal; on the contrary, they are culture-dependent, as Galtung and Ruge (1965) have mentioned.

As requested by Loosen and Ravenstein (2000), the news factors were modified to suit the area of sports journalism. From the list of news factors, timeliness, time form, ethnocentrism, facticity, controversy, and personalization are the values that were adopted similarly to the general media news values analysis. The definitions of proximity, rule violations, and celebrity were modified to emphasize the sports aspect of the factors. As completely new news factors, human interest, sport status, competition status, ethnocentric success, and ethnocentric failure were introduced.

The authors of the paper conducted all the coding. A random sub-set of 80 items (10 % of the data) was coded by both authors to test the coding reliability. The inter-coder reliability was measured using Krippendorff's alpha with the result values ranging from 0.80 for factor of human interest to 1.00 for sport status, that proves sufficient inter-coder reliability.

As all the data have nominal or ordinal character, the results were tested by chi-square tests of equality, one-by-one news factor.

4. RESULTS

Analysis proved that some of the news factors are present with a different distribution in the set of posts with high shares. Table 4 presents the results of the tests, with the detailed results included for individual factors where the difference between both groups of posts was found by chi-square test on a 0.05 significance level.

Many significant differences between posts with high number shares and posts with low number of shares were identified. For seven news factors, the significance of the difference was under 0.01.

Of the sports-specific news factors, two were high determinants of higher sharing, competition status, and, especially, ethnocentric success: When the Czech Republic or Czech athletes record a big or at least a medium success that is described in the post, it is much more likely to be frequently shared among the users. In the sample of 243 high-shared posts within the sample (excluding the missing values for posts with no Czech participation), there were 79 medium to high ethnocentric success posts (32.5 %) in contrast to 31 medium to high ethnocentric success posts among 229 low-shared posts (13.5 %).

Table 4: Results of the test of equality between the highly shared and lowly shared posts. Source: Authors processing

News factor	N	Chi-square	Sign.	Differences among the individual factors for posts with high shares			
				adj. resid. for value 4	adj. resid. for value 3	adj. resid. for value 2	adj. resid. for value 1
Timeliness	759	3.89	.274				
Time form	758	12.48	.006***	today -3.55 ▼	yesterday +3.28 ▲	before +58	future -49
Proximity	782	2.23	.526				
Ethnocentrism	748	6.70	.082*				
Facticity	758	9.14	.027**	facts -2.74 ▼	+2.46 ▲	+13	opinions -81
Controversy	771	14.40	.002***	high controversy +2.52 ▲	+2.70 ▲	-.84	no controversy -1.90
Rule violation	764	14.20	.003***	severe violation -.03	+3.77 ▲	-.27	no violation -2.44 ▼
Personalization	776	5.49	.139				
Celebrity	772	17.19	.001***	high celebrity +2.07 ▲	+2.56 ▲	+92	no celebrity -4.08 ▼
Human interest	764	14.83	.002***	mostly human interest +1.15	+3.40 ▲	-.42	mostly sport -3.08 ▼
Sport status	773	2.46	.482				
Competition status	660	15.54	.001***	high status +3.55 ▲	-3.28 ▼	-.58	low status -49
Ethnocentric success	472	28.19	.000***	big success +3.49 ▲	+3.38 ▲	-.26	no success -3.90 ▼
Ethnocentric failure	476	04.9	.129				

* sign. < .1, ** sign. < .05, *** sign. < .01, ▲ adj. res. > +2, ▼ adj. res. < -2

If a given news value factor occurs significantly more often in the group of posts with high shares, it is marked with an upward arrow. Conversely, if the factor appears significantly less frequently, a downward arrow is used. For example, regarding the 'ethnocentric success' news factor, the highest two values (indicating major successes) appear significantly more often among highly shared posts, while the lowest value (indicating 'no success') is significantly less frequent. All differences are statistically significant at the 0.000 level. The rightmost four columns present differences in specific

news factors only for cases where the Chi-square test indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level or lower.

Although for journalists, the Czech success stories are the most attractive, as proved in interviews with Czech sports editors (Langer, 2021), social media users are even more keen to share these stories. On the contrary, the difference for the news factor ethnocentrism was lower and closer to the threshold significance of 0.1 (more specifically, the posts with no Czech participation taking place outside the Czech Republic were more often in the low-shared group, with the adj. res. = +1.97), while there was no significant difference in sharing the posts according to the ethnocentric Czech failure.

For human interest stories, the most frequent sharing was in the group where human interest dominated, but some sports dimension was present. It is typical for stories published shortly after a big ethnocentric success, where the personal and professional stories of the respective successful athletes are presented to the audiences, usually in an attempt to explain the success.

The users also shared elite competitions related posts much more often than posts related to the regular international competitions (including the NHL and UEFA football European cups).

All these results may have been affected by the specificity of the 2021 June to December sample which included the 2020 UEFA Euro tournament, end of the 2021 IIHF World Championships in ice hockey and, most of all, the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympic Games. While in the Olympic Games the Czech team was unusually successful, it performed more or less as expected in the 2020 UEFA Euro and underperformed in the IIHF World Championships.

Users also shared sport celebrity related posts much more often than posts without any celebrity. Rules violations provoked higher number of shares in cases of moderate violations, which was a typical coding for the dispute between Czech and Scottish football teams and Czech and British media on racism issues that resonated extensively in Czech society and won high-share rates on social media.

DISCUSSION

The analysis confirms that there are general patterns of preferences in the news selection process of users who further share sports social media posts. The higher *shareability* of posts based on the presence of sports celebrities and ethnocentric success can be understood and described as a manifestation of fandom (Bradshaw & Minogue, 2019). It confirms that for sports fans, the factors that provoke their media usage patterns include those specific to the sports sphere, like fandom identity and identification (Koronios et al., 2020). Fandom group identification is one form of identity

construction processes, and these processes, described as ‘symbolic declaration of the self’ or ‘shaping how others see us’, are important functions of news sharing in general (Hermida, 2014, pp. 35, 36). It is yet another example of how the interconnected operation of mainstream sports media and fandom is mutually beneficial (Kim et al., 2020). Although only one part of the audience follows sports events with an intense fan interest and the other part is much less engaged (Crawford, 2004), it is reasonable to conclude that the higher *shareability* of social media posts is powered largely by the users inclined to fandom. The posts about the athletes’ successes – and especially of the successes of sports stars – with which the audience identifies achieve the best results in sharing statistics. They overperform the effect of other, generally accepted news factors. From the methodological point of view, that confirms the need to consider a specific repertory of news factors for the specific types of journalism, as forecasted by Loosen and Ravenstein (2000) and as we did in this study.

The interpretation of the results must account for the fact that social media users engage with a media-constructed reality (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Loosen, 1998; Schulz, 1989), in which various events are allocated different levels of prominence based on editorial evaluations of news values – concepts that are themselves mediated constructs (Caple & Bednarek, 2015; Paulussen & Aelst, 2021). While this mediated reality reflects the preferences of media gatekeepers, the differences identified in this study reveal the autonomous preferences of the audience. Therefore, when the news values of highly shared posts differ from those of less shared posts, it indicates the presence of an existing or emerging news gap, which could lead to future disruptions in sports journalism practices. As the study is based on the audiences’ responses to the social media content, a more precise description of the audience is crucial because – as Turnbull (2020) pointed out – the definition of the audience is often a function of the research design. For this research, it is easier to describe what the true audience captured in our data is not rather than what it is. Facebook audiences, even those of the respective traditional media Facebook pages, overlap with the original audiences of the traditional media (the television or the newspapers), but they are not identical. Moreover, the individual post’s audience, although similar to the population of fans of the respective Facebook pages, is not the same either. The Facebook engine offers individual posts to a range of users that is difficult to define, where the interaction of the users, the hypertext functions, and other factors play their role in the Facebook algorithms (Lada et al., 2021). While there were multiple studies about what the algorithms present to audiences (e.g., Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2021, 2023), the attempts to describe actual algorithmic audiences (Gallagher, 2017)

were much less frequent. As Riemer and Peter (2021) put it, algorithms select the set of recipients for any message ad hoc. For these reasons it is hard to describe the relationship between the original audience of traditional media outlets and the audience of social media individual posts. For sports digital media, the connection between users' engagement and sports fandom is often mentioned (Kennedy et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2017). This aligns with our findings that sports fandom-related characteristics of social media content are a positive factor for higher shareability.

The algorithms that provide the users with stories according to what they and their social media friends previously interacted with are, to some extent, black boxes whose functional parameters are not publicly available (Burns, 2017). The role of these algorithms is challenged by some authors who show that news consumption on social media might still be incidental and such opportunities for incidental news reading have increased lately (Park & Kaye, 2020), while other authors object that algorithmic selection of news in social media feeds undermines the reliability of the news media (Scheffauer et al., 2023). However, whatever the reason for displaying the post in an individual user's news feed, the means of attraction to such a news story is crucial not only for the recipients but also for the media.

The journalistic profession has begun to adopt the means of increasing the attractiveness of social media posts. Journalists have become more than just authors of the stories in their media; they also create short social media 'statuses'. In their few sentences, the author (or the editor, if the media outlet has a dedicated social media personnel) must grab the audience's attention through principles different from those that apply to traditional press headlines (Opgenhaffen, 2021). Although all four media we included in the research have independent teams of journalists for traditional media and social media, this is not the rule. For newsrooms where one team takes responsibility for both areas, the influence of the practice of using social media on the creation of traditional journalistic content is strengthened.

In sports journalism, the traditional journalistic identity is challenged even stronger. The socialization of journalists with regard to sports fandom is typical for sports journalists, especially for the male ones (Schoch & Ohl, 2021). Although while executing their jobs, they want to distance themselves from being sports fans (Reed, 2018), they are continuously under pressure to balance their position between objective journalism and the ever-growing sphere of journalists-like bloggers, publishing their fan-made sports blogs (McCarthy, 2014; McEnnis, 2021). This creates serious ethical challenges and opens sports journalists to criticism objecting against their proximity to the athletes and lack of objectivity (Bradshaw, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The shareability analysis of sports social media posts suggests that audiences specifically seek out and spread posts related to specific news factors, most notably celebrities and ethnocentric successes. In answering our research question, we identified these news factors as more common in Facebook posts that users share more frequently. If the traditional media continue their accommodation to the audience's preferences (Tandoc et al., 2021) and their effort to bridge the news gap (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013; Bright, 2016), more of this fandom-related orientation can also be expected in their mediated content.

The results of this study can be seen as a prognosis of trending changes in preferences in news selection in the sports media that can have serious consequences for sports journalism and journalists' identity (English, 2014; Reed, 2011) and their gatekeeping role (McEnnis, 2022; Wise & Horky, 2021). Since we posed a research question concerning only the intensity of news values related to the shareability of Facebook posts, while we did not compare the representation of the topics in the original traditional media, we cannot state the existence or the severity of the news gap in sports journalism. We also did not study the actual effects of shareability statistics on journalism practices, neither through observations in newsrooms and through interviewing journalists nor in their manifestation in the shift in media content. There is also a lack of relevant data on traditional sports media content in the Czech Republic that could be compared with this paper's findings. That inadequate basis fundamentally leaves all these questions open for further discussion and research.

The main limitations of this research relate to the selection of one social media platform – Facebook – in one cultural environment of the Czech Republic. It is vital to understand that various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok provoke a different approach to what to share. As different readers consume different content on these platforms, so do the topics vary. For instance, in some European countries – e.g., Norway, Twitter is considered to be a place for sharing the hard news and is usually used for breaking news, whereas soft news would more likely be shared on Facebook (Kalsnes & Larsson, 2018). This may, of course, vary in different countries depending on various factors.

Little is known about traditional media's reaction to social media development, specifically in the Czech Republic. Eight years after its publishing, we can already evaluate the ground-breaking study of Hladík and Štětka (2017) as outdated, and further updates like Pavlíček (2022) provide only partial findings, however valuable they can be. Based on that little evidence,

we have no reason to dispute the general validity of the theory that social media metrics can lead to modifications in editorial processes to bridge the actual or presumed news gap.

Further research is necessary to enhance the insights provided by this initial study. Other social media besides Facebook should be studied, as well as other countries and cultural spaces, to evaluate if the findings presented in this study can be assumed culturally unconditioned and unrelated to the specific features of Facebook. And, for the more advanced stage of the discussion, the comparison between traditional media and social media contents, their prominence in terms of media outlets' attention, and users' shareability and likeability shall be studied, both in the framework of news value theory and in general. Asynchronous research studying the development of editorial practices and the identification of its dependency on the influence of social media users' behavior, using observation or survey questioning techniques, is another way to continue the research. With further findings, media studies can evaluate the actual level of the risk that social media usage and traditional media orientation to shareability statistics pose to sports journalistic independence.

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