

THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF MEDIA CONVERGENCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPORTS

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SUMMARY

Traditional and digital media are recognized as key communication channels in the promotion of sports. Major events, such as the Olympic Games, world championships, and continental championships, gather thousands of participants and accredited media teams. In this context, the media strive to enhance their capacities to fulfill their role in providing accurate and relevant public information to readers, listeners, and viewers. Respecting accuracy, speed, cost-effectiveness, and the removal of spatial and temporal boundaries in media availability, the media expect almost daily communication from sports organizations, presenting a new challenge. The partnership between the media, sports organizations, and athletes is crucial for developing advanced communication strategies that consider the convergence of media and the adaptation of media products. This paper specifically analyzes the importance of social networks in the complex public media space, focusing on the credibility of user-generated information through a legal and ethical lens.

KEY WORDS: *sport, media, promotion, communication, convergence*

ULOGA I ZNAČAJ KONVERGENCIJE MEDIJA ZA RAZVOJ SPORTA

SAŽETAK

Tradicionalni i digitalni mediji prepoznati su kao ključni komunikacijski kanali u promociji sporta. Pojedini događaji, kao što su Olimpijske igre, svetska i kontinentalna prvenstva, okupljaju više hiljada učesnika, ali i akreditovanih medijskih ekipa. U tom kontekstu, mediji ulažu vidne napore da osnaže vlastite kapacitete, kako bi njihova uloga i značaj u ostvarivanju javnog informisanja bila ispunjena, a plasirane informacije za čitaoce, slušaoce i gledaoce bile

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relevantne. Uvažavajući tačnost, brzinu, troškovnu prihvatljivost, kao i brisanje prostornih i vremenskih granica u dostupnosti medijskih proizvoda, mediji od sportskih organizacija očekuju gotovo svakodnevnu komunikaciju, što predstavlja novi izazov. Partnerski odnos medija, sportskih organizacija i sportista osnova je na kojoj je potrebno kreirati buduću unapređenu komunikaciju, uvažavajući specifičnosti konvergencije medija i tome prilagođenih medijskih proizvoda. U radu se posebno analizira značaj društvenih mreža u kompleksnom javnom medijskom prostoru, a kroz pravnu i etički prizmu, fokus se usmerava na kredibilitet korisnički generisanih informacija.

KLJUČNE REČI: *sport, mediji, promocija, komunikacija, konvergencija*

INTRODUCTION

Sport brings people together around common ideas, places, organizations, and values. These connections become strong, necessitating communication and synchronization of all activities within and outside the sports system. Consequently, the communication spectrum gains more modern information transmission mechanisms, leading to a significant transformation in communication itself. (Dugalić, 2018, p.57)

The most significant comparative advantage of digital media over traditional media lies in the active participation of consumers in media content creation, providing a wide-open space for user-generated content. In contemporary media discourse, digital media have eliminated spatial and temporal barriers, and their real-time news transmission attracts an ever-growing audience.

Media reports simultaneously reflect a subjective view of events and pre-established frameworks dictated by editorial policy, available human resources, technical support, and the complexity of media production, rather than being an exhaustive transmission of sports events. For decades, television has been unrivaled in daily media use, and this remains true when desktop and mobile internet usage are counted separately. However, when combined, total internet consumption surpassed TV consumption for the first time in 2019. Daily internet usage reached 130 minutes, a significant increase from 80 minutes in 2015. With 40 minutes of internet usage on desktop computers, total daily internet usage amounted to 170 minutes, exceeding the average daily TV viewing time of 167 minutes. (Richter, 2020)

Between 2014 and 2019, average time spent reading newspapers dropped from 17 to 11 minutes per day, while time spent reading magazines decreased from 8 to 4 minutes. Consumer interest in radio and cinema remained strong, with average radio listening time increasing from 53 to 55 minutes, and time spent at the cinema rising from 1.8 to 3 minutes per day.⁴ (Zenith, 2019)

Bartoš (2012: 162) highlights that a key reason media influence the popularization of sports is that people can attend numerous events, follow results, and read or listen to comments and reports without being physically present. However, watching a game in person offers a different experience, as the event is seen from a single perspective. Conversely, televised broadcasts can enhance the experience with visual effects, different angles, and graphic support. Improving the viewing experience is a major driving force behind the development and implementation of modern technologies in sports broadcasts. The high in-

⁴ Time spent reading newspapers and magazines refers exclusively to their printed editions, while time spent listening to the radio and watching television pertains only to traditional broadcast channels and stations. Time spent on online platforms owned by publishers or broadcasters is classified as internet consumption.

terest in sports broadcasts has spurred media competition for sports rights and the growth of specialized sports television channels.

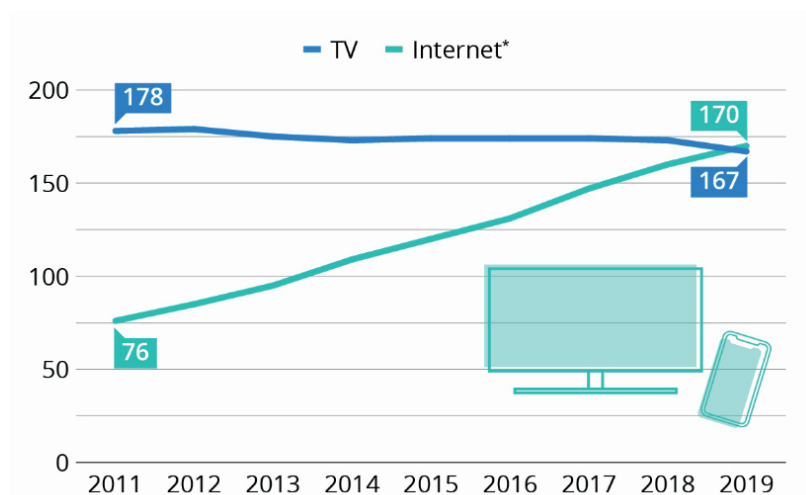


Figure 1. Estimated daily TV and Internet consumption per person worldwide (in minutes)
Source: Richter, 2020

Both the media and audiences are increasingly interested in broadcasting and consuming a growing number of sports events. (Ćitić, 2023)

The Olympic Games in Paris, from July 26 to August 11, 2024, together with 10,500 athletes, were followed by 20,000 accredited journalists. A record 9.7 million tickets are available, surpassing the previous record of 8.3 million tickets sold in Atlanta. Affordable tickets starting at €24 are available for every sport, though these were reserved for early buyers. However, a significant price disparity exists: tickets for the finals in athletics, swimming, and basketball cost up to €980, which is 40 times the price of the cheapest tickets. (Richter, 2024)

Many people believe that ticket sales or sponsorships are the primary revenue sources for major sports organizations. However, the largest source of revenue actually comes from broadcast media rights. To generate substantial income from media rights, it is essential to design and present professional sports competitions as media and entertainment products. (Ličen, 2023) Additionally, organizing mega sports events leads to significant media coverage and has a considerable economic impact on host cities and countries. Successfully organizing such events requires extensive planning and hinges on the satisfaction of the participants. (Al-Buenain et al., 2024)

LITERATURE REVIEW

The interaction between sports and the media is crucial for the popularization of a sport or sports event and the growth of its audience. Establishing effective relationships is therefore beneficial for sports federations, leagues, organizing committees, and other stake-

holders (Pilar et al., 2019). This strong media influence is evident, as children often idolize athletes, leading some of the public to take up sports, thereby further popularizing them.

Sydorenko and Volobuieva (2022) note that since the 2012 London Olympics, traditional media have faced significant competition from social networks. They specify that modern media promote the Olympic movement globally and that utilizing the latest media opportunities significantly democratizes and diversifies this process. Additionally, the Internet, with its interactivity, virtuality, and vast reach, has greatly contributed to the development of nearly limitless multilateral communication. (Yan, 2020)

Digital media products have become indispensable to media users, with social media playing a central role. Vermeer et al. (2020) highlighted that the complexity and diversity of the media landscape present numerous challenges for scholars studying online news consumption. By tracking Dutch online news consumers 24/7, they examined how context (web page) and content (news topic) influence news consumption patterns. The study revealed that users often go directly to their preferred news sources and continue browsing within the same issue. It also found a strong preference for entertainment news over other topics. Although social networks frequently offer entertainment news, they are not necessarily the primary source for such news.

In the ever-evolving landscape of sports communication, traditional views of sports journalism are changing due to the influence of numerous actors. Perreault et al. (2024) note that sports journalism, a longstanding source of sports information, now faces competition from team or league-owned media. Established media are grappling with challenges to their authoritative status, leading to more frequent questions about the field's boundaries, the definition of journalism, and the role of audience expectations in legitimizing journalistic authority.

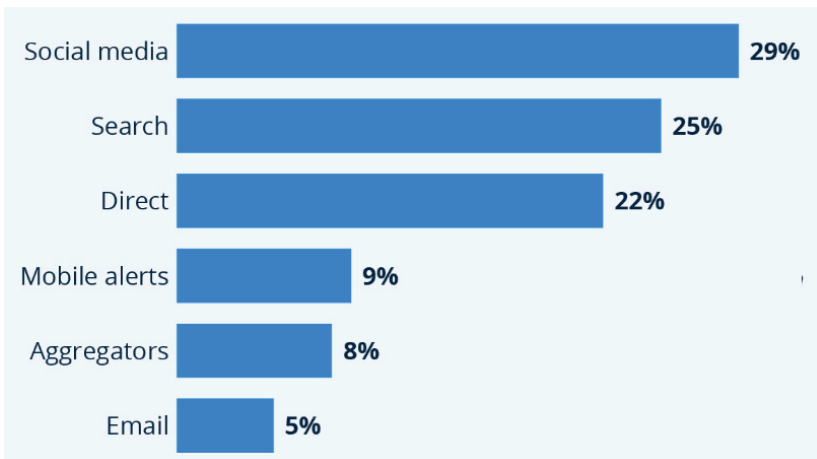


Figure 2. Share of online news consumers who named the following as their main gateway to online news in the past week
Source: Newman, 2024

Social media platforms have become not only a source of news but also the main gateway to online news. According to the Reuters Institute's 2024 Digital News Report, 77% of

over 95,000 respondents surveyed in 47 countries get their news online, compared to 55% who watch news on television and 19% who still read print. In 2018, direct access to news websites was the most common entry point for online news consumption, but by 2024, it has become the third most important gateway, behind search engines and social media. (Newman, 2024)

Facebook is the most popular social network for news among Americans, with three out of ten American adults regularly getting news from it. Slightly fewer Americans get their news from YouTube (26%). Following these are Instagram (16%), TikTok (14%), X (12%), LinkedIn (5%), Snapchat (4%), and WhatsApp (3%). Some social media sites, despite having smaller overall audiences, have a high percentage of users who visit them regularly for news. Just over half of X users (53%) get their news there, while only 15% of Snapchat users do so. (Pew Research Center, 2023)

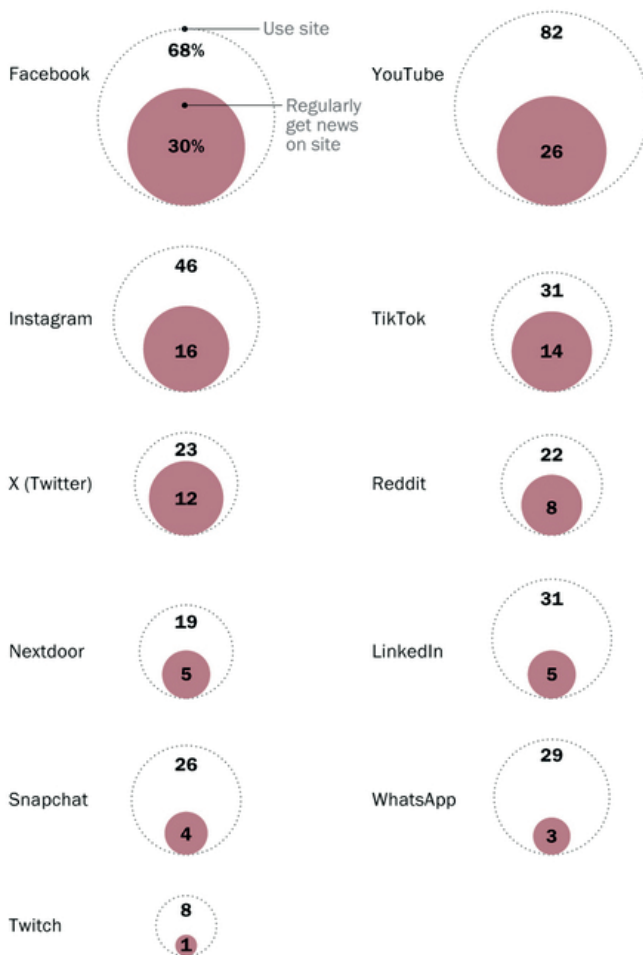


Figure 3. News consumption by social media site
Source: Pew Research Center, 2023.

The usefulness of social media in sports is evident through their creation of an “echo chamber,” which reinforces pre-existing personal attitudes. This happens because algorithms on these platforms recognize users’ preferences based on their behavior and suggest content that aligns with those preferences (Richter, 2024). However, the increasing reliance on social media as a news source has led to a rise in the spread of false information. TikTok (27%) and X (24%) are the platforms where it is most challenging to determine the trustworthiness of content, making it difficult to distinguish between true and fake news. Nearly one in four respondents surveyed in January and February 2024 in 47 markets reported finding it very or somewhat difficult to differentiate true from false content on these platforms. Facebook (21%), Instagram (20%), LinkedIn (18%), WhatsApp and YouTube (17% each), and Google search (13%) followed. (Fleck, 2024)

In the modern digital environment, which prioritizes speed and brevity, journalists are often directed toward easily accessible sources. This practice can lead to questionable credibility and the creation and distribution of unverified or fake news. While user-generated content enables a global hyperproduction of data and information and offers almost unlimited user connections, social networks should not be considered credible media channels. They can serve as initial sources on current topics but require further verification. (Penjišević & Sančanin, 2023)

Moral values play a significant role in media, acting as a lens for interpreting and monitoring activities. Studies have shown that arguments aligned with similar moral values are more likely to influence someone’s viewpoint in online discussions, and people are more inclined to spread misinformation from individuals or groups sharing the same moral values. One of the biggest challenges in the media industry will be uncovering patterns of moral expression used in fictional content. (Mitiaeva & Yiao, 2024)

TRANSFORMATIVE BENEFITS OF MEDIA CONVERGENCE

The twenty-first century has introduced a new challenge to the media through digital technologies, which question previous media characteristics, alter how content is produced and distributed, and fundamentally change the relationship between media and audiences. (Martinoli, 2010) Milenković (2022) highlights that in the information society, media industries function either as mass media producing and distributing informative, entertaining, and educational content or as global media conglomerates controlling media operations.

Sančanin (2018) notes that, compared to all previous innovations, media convergence—resulting from enhanced multimedia communications—is one of the most significant changes, impacting not only the production and distribution of media content but also the roles of athletes as both actors and consumers. Therefore, addressing the complex topic of media convergence necessitates highlighting new frameworks that have transformed the approach to mass media, previously separate platforms.

Content that was once exclusive to certain media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and cinema, is now accessible to billions. Olaitan Ridwanullah and Ali Bala (2022) suggest that this paradigm shift, driven by technological progress, has influenced how individuals think, feel, act, and how society functions overall. In the context of

dynamic and evolving media, a new axiom has emerged: thanks to convergence, news is now consistently current.

Kleut (2012) clarifies that multimedia convergence involves not only the merging of media but also the integration of different services, such as Internet telephony and digital television, within a single media system or platform. This convergence results from integrating data storage, processing, and transmission methods of the already convergent computer network with other media, including mobile phones, television, and radio. In such an organized ecosystem, the boundaries between the audience and content reception are blurred, giving way to a hybrid model where individuals shape, share, and reshape content in unintended ways. In the digital space, new media highlight their changeability, leaving digital traces. (Nikolić, 2020)

Beyond its technical aspects, media convergence is an economic strategy aimed at unifying the operations of a company's media assets to achieve financial gain. Chakaveh and Bogen (2007, p. 812) identify three key elements of this strategy:

- *Corporate concentration*: Fewer large companies are owning more media assets.
- *Digitization*: Media content created in a universal computer language can be easily adapted for use across various media.
- *Government deregulation*: Increasingly allows media conglomerates to own different types of media (e.g., TV and radio stations, newspapers) within the same markets, and permits content companies (e.g., cable TV) to own content producers (e.g., special channels).

The strategy significantly reduces labor, administrative, and material costs. It allows multiple media organizations to share the same content, offers advertisers package deals and the convenience of shopping across multiple media platforms in one place, and enhances brand recognition and loyalty among audiences through cross-promotion and sales.

CONCLUSIONS

Media convergence enables both linear and non-linear distribution of sports media content, eliminating previous spatial and temporal barriers. Information technology and digitization drive this unstoppable global process, which not only promotes sports and physical culture but also permanently preserves significant collective sports events and top individual achievements without loss of audiovisual quality. The traditional mass media model, where all information flows from the center to consumers, has given way to innovative and interactive methods that generate and distribute new content in unlimited quantities. The hyperproduction of information in the public media space motivates and directs sports organizations and individuals to offer alternative models for consuming available media content, filtering it based on useful preferences. Sports successes provide an excellent platform for popularizing certain sports and building their image, and integration with media platforms has become essential. As a modern phenomenon, media convergence with multimedia content allows for two-way communication and enables media recipients to further distribute the information, either unchanged or modified.

User-generated content represents a significant area for future research, given the numerous legal and ethical questions it raises.

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