GLOBAL VERSUS NATIONAL: THE SPORTS COVERAGE IN SELECTIVE ONLINE PORTALS IN EUROPE AND USA

Dimitriou Minas, Sattlecker Gerold, Müller Erich
(University of Salzburg, Austria)

New media, in the form of the Internet and World Wide Web, have become a leading source for news and information over the past decade. In North America and Europe the internet is already being used by most of the adult population. Online media have grabbed the attention of communication researchers in the second half of the 1990s, but the focus has primarily been on media audiences and their use of these new forms. On the other hand, there have been a number of studies regarding the relationship between sport and national or international orientation in television and in print sports coverage. The purpose of this study is to analyse the developing relationship between content of the online sport portals and national or international orientation. More specifically the research will seek to identify the contribution of the new information technologies in the reconstruction of the national identity.

The study employed content analysis of four online sport portals – BBC-sport (GBR), T-Online Onsport (GER), NBC-sport (USA) and Sport1 (AUT) – at two seven-day time periods during March to May and October to December 2006. In order to select the sport sites to be coded, the Nielsen / Net Ratings top 20 sport news list (GBR, GER, USA) and the OEWA – Austrian Web Analysis – (AUT) were consulted to determine the most prominent sport news sites. To explore this more systematically, the contents of the websites were coded in two principle dimensions: First the communication interactivity, using four categories including social interaction, integration, research and multimedia. Secondly the content transparency evaluated and measured by the appearance of sport, the presence or absence of the types of sports reporting and the focus on the national or international coverage.

According to the communication interactivity, the analysis illustrated that all online sport portals have adopted interactive innovations. Regarding the national or international orientation, the study showed that all online sport portals focused on the national events, athletes and sport (T-Online Onsport (GER) / Football, NBC-sport (USA) / Basketball, Sport1 (AUT) / Ski Alpine and BBC-sport (GBR) / Football). Finally the English-speaking portals preferred more types of reporting in order to present the national sport than the German-speaking did.

The domination of national sport is a defining characteristic of the online sport journalism. However, the use of the typical advantages of the Internet – hypertextuality, multi-mediality and specifically interactivity – had a major impact on enhancing the ability of online sport to produce spectacular entertainment. The actual semiotics of the representation and operation of sport in general, supplemented by the media online coverage, do much to accentuate nationalistic fervour and creation of identity which may constitute nationalism and a media audience that is forced to identify itself with the nation through sport.

Keywords: Sport Journalism, Internet, Communication & Media