

EXPLORING AGENDA DIVERSITY IN EUROPEAN PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA SPORTS DESKS

A comparative study of underrepresented disciplines, sportswomen and disabled athletes' coverage on Twitter

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In the digital age, many people are concerned about how Public Service Media (PSM) will be able to fulfill their remits and promote “cultural citizenship” through sports journalism. Delivering diverse content should be a cornerstone of PSM in their myriad platforms: they should not only concentrate on mainstream disciplines but also give exposure to underrepresented sports, leagues, and individuals, and organizations including female athletes and athletes with disabilities. This article employs a content analysis to explore sports agenda diversity on Twitter in four European PSM: RTVE (Spain), FranceTV (France), RAI (Italy), and RTÉ (Ireland). The examination of more than 7,000 tweets over a three-month period reveals that the long-standing inequalities with regard to sports diversity, gender and disability are reinforced, rather than counteracted, in the current landscape. In short, social media platforms seem to perpetuate a fairly restricted and routinized agenda. Going forward, PSM should take advantage of the potential of social media to promote a diverse and multi-faceted menu that ultimately contributes to enhance “cultural citizenship.”

KEYWORDS: Public Service Media; cultural citizenship; social media; Twitter; diversity; sports journalism; sportswomen; disability

Introduction

In today's cluttered, uncertain, and increasingly complex cultural landscape, the "media sport content economy is now 'on the move'" (Hutchins 2014, 509). The rapid expansion of digital platforms and mobile devices has tremendously altered the ways in which media organizations deliver a growing range of sports content and how people access it. As Hutchins (2019, 467) argues, this shift "represents a departure from over a century of institutional and commercial history in which broadcast (radio and television) and print (newspapers and magazines) have been the dominant technologies sustaining the production, representation, and consumption of sport."

In an age characterized by "digital plenitude" (Hutchins and Rowe 2009), concerns about how Public Service Media (PSM) will be able to fulfill their remits and enhance "cultural citizenship" through new platforms – including social media – are all the greater. These concerns are particularly significant given that PSM's ability to foster such citizenship through linear sports broadcasting "is increasingly under threat from a combination of the escalating cost of sports rights and a squeeze on their own finances/remits" (Smith 2017, 204). As Rowe (2018, 25) highlights, "the very idea of the public, as opposed to that of the market, is under severe pressure" in a market characterized by the increased competence from pay-TV broadcasters, telecommunications operators, and digital portals (Smith, Evens, and Iosifidis 2016; Lupien 2017).

According to Hermes (2005, 4), cultural citizenship refers to the "less formal every-day practices of identity construction, representation, and ideology, and implicit moral obligations and rights." In the context of sport, cultural citizenship can be described as "the rights and responsibilities regarding access to, and representation in, sports culture" (Rowe 2018, 12). Taylor and Thomass (2017, 119) highlight that "sports and its mediation contribute in a fundamental way to the construction and maintenance of cultural citizenship." PSM have operated under the principle of guaranteeing universal access to a breadth of content that enables "the full participation of citizens in the collectively oriented public culture environments that constitute the social" (Hutchins, Li and Rowe 2019, 989). Historically, "free-to-air broadcasting of sporting events has played a key role in the establishment of sports as a significant part of popular culture" (Smith, Evens, and Iosifidis 2015, 721). Through news output, documentaries, and live coverage, PSM have provided public value by creating and sustaining national sporting traditions (Scherer and Rowe, 2014).

Today, sports continue to be “especially well suited to achieve PSB’s goals of mass attention, and thereby, public legitimacy” (Lünich et al. 2019, 3). As a crucial part of their public service mandate, PSM can take advantage of the power of sports to promote cultural citizenship (Scherer and Whitson 2009; Smith 2017; Ramon and Haynes 2019) through their myriad platforms. As part of their broader ethos, public media can leverage technology to raise citizens’ awareness of a wide range of practices, thus playing a distinctive role in spreading inclusive sporting cultures.

Diversity is one of the most distinguishing components of cultural citizenship. Steiner, Magin, and Stark (2019, 102) emphasize that “as mass media serve as a pivotal source of information and forum for public discourse, they are – from a normative point of view – responsible for delivering diverse content.” Diversity entails informing people “about a wide range of issues, including niche topics” and making “diverse societal groups visible in their coverage” (Steiner, Magin, and Stark, 2019, 102).

Focusing on sport, Rowe (2004a, 16) argues that “free of demands for ‘shareholder value,’ public broadcasters can promote the values of *critique* and *diversity*.” Here, diversity not only implies citizens’ access to “the most important sports presented in the best possible way” (Rowe 2004b, 387) but also encompasses providing “coverage of neglected sports and sportspeople” (Rowe 2004a, 16).

Three core areas of diversity imbalance in sports journalism

Two theorists of agenda-setting, McCombs and Shaw (1972, 176), explained that “in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters” make audiences “learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position.” Therefore, media outlets “cannot tell us explicitly what to think, but can be marvellously effective at outlining what a viewer should think about” (Billings 2008, 33-34). Research on sports journalism has stressed repeatedly that media outlets usually set a daily news agenda that not only lack diversity regarding sports, teams, voices, stories, and approaches but also reflect gendered and ableist inequalities. Thus, we can distinguish three core areas of diversity imbalance in sports media.

Diversity of sports: mainstream disciplines and underrepresented sports

Vann, Woodford, and Bruns (2015, 109) point out that “media play a particularly powerful role in determining which sports become dominant.” The representation of

certain mainstream disciplines in specific countries may differ from one another in terms of tradition and sporting culture (Boyle 2006; Tulloch and Ramon 2017). However, football (or soccer) is both the most practiced and most followed and covered sports on Earth (Horky and Nieland 2013). This predominance is especially obvious in Europe and South America, recognized as the strongest football cultures (Giulianotti and Robertson 2004).

The “global universal demand for association football above all else” (Ramon and Haynes 2019, 224) has translated into the “footballization of sports journalism” (Rojas Torrijos 2012), which implies that media outlets focus predominantly on one sport and thus diminish the scope of their coverage. Beyond other major sports (such as basketball, tennis, motorsports, cricket, or rugby), minority disciplines’ news is commonly sidelined in sports pages, broadcast transmissions, and online news services. This editorial approach provokes an information overload of football (Ticher 2013), mainly of top-flight male professional leagues and large international tournaments. Mainstream sports journalism even overlooks other football events and categories such as lower leagues, youth competitions, and women’s games, leagues, and competitions. As Daum and Scherer (2018, 560) point out, “the heightened dependency on coverage of professional sports in pursuit of a digital male audience commodity has only further eroded the already minimal presence of local amateur sports in both the print and digital sports pages.”

More often than not, the need for more coverage of and information about football has been fueled by media outlets themselves. It is increasingly common to see infotainment and sensationalist non-sports content (e.g. social media rumors and anecdotes related to footballer's private lives) stand out in the agenda (Serazio 2019). Moreover, contemporary sports coverage reflects an increasing commercialization of media and highlight the close relationship between sports and the economic pole of the sports journalism field (English 2018).

Schultz-Jørgensen argued that sports journalism is “the world’s best advertising agency” (2005, 4). This includes the sports industry being responsible for setting the agenda of coverage, which tends to be also limited by the frequent uniformity and similarity of its stories. Sports coverage usually neglects the relevant contexts connected to sports (Ramon and Rojas-Torrijos 2017), sets stories about money and politics apart, and reveals a “marginal exposure of social aspects of sport” (Schultz-Jørgensen 2005, 3), including recreational and amateur sports scenes.

Diversity imbalance in sports journalism also derives from the limited range of sources employed by reporters in day-to-day coverage – most of these sources come from within the sports world (Rowe 2007). Additionally, sports coverage is generally centered “on match-related elements and interviews with key players, coaches, or administrators, often in the sterile atmosphere of a stage-managed media conference” (English 2018, 9). When the news agenda is not built upon a broader range of sports and stories, sports coverage may easily become repetitive, flat, and predictable.

The long-standing minimization of sportswomen

A great deal of academic literature that has accumulated over the past three decades supports the notion that female sports and its participants are marginalized in everyday sports media coverage (Boyle and Haynes 2009; Cooky, Messner, and Musto 2015). This occurs regardless of the sport, type of media outlet, and the age or home country of athletes, reinforcing masculine hegemony in the sports world (Bernstein and Kian 2013; Bruce 2013; Whiteside and Hardin 2013; O'Neill and Mulready 2015). The coverage of leading female athletes in sports pages and programs is still marginal compared to that of their male counterparts (Sáinz de Baranda 2013).

Some of these studies underline a causal link between the under-representation of women's sports in the news agenda, the “ingrained assumptions about readership” (Sherwood et al. 2017, 647), and the scarce number of female sports reporters in newsrooms (Hardin and Shain 2006). After gathering data from 80 newspapers in 22 countries, *Play the Game – The International Sports Press Survey* indicated that more than 90% of sports articles are written by men (Horky and Nieland 2013).

In addition to this quantitative imbalance, researchers have remarked on language changes which occur when sports media talk about women. Guerrero (2017) highlights how female athletes are portrayed through speech which is primarily focused on their femininity rather than their athleticism or professional accomplishments. Through an analysis of millions of words from news and social media commentary around the 2016 Olympics, Cambridge University's study *Language, Gender and Sport* (2016) concluded that the disparity in the representation of men and women in sports also manifests linguistically through the use of certain terms and expressions that trivialize and “infantilize” women's sport.

Though there is still a long way to go, the gender gap in media representation seems to be narrowing. There are “promising signs of change” (English et al. 2018, 122)

in media visibility, especially in major sporting mega-events such as the Women's FIFA World Cup and the Olympics, where the amount of coverage received by male and female athletes is more balanced (Billings and Angelini 2019).

Discrimination against athletes with disabilities

Another major challenge that sports journalism faces with regard to diversity is its lack of coverage of athletes with disabilities. Sports media's concern with developing different strategies to maintain large viewing audiences leads to coverage centered primarily on entertainment that rarely addresses social problems (Bertling and Schierl 2008). Therefore, athletes with disabilities have been "rendered invisible" (Hardin 2006, 580) by the sports media agenda.

Athletes with disabilities rarely draw sports media attention, in part because sports journalism tends to "valorize elite, able-bodied, and professional sportsmen, especially those who bring glory to the nation" (Bruce 2013, 128). Despite the rise of the Paralympic Games over the past few decades, these games have not always been adequately represented in sports media (Pappous et al. 2011; Thompson 2013). Recently, Solves, Sánchez, and Rius (2018, 1713) analyzed 10 Spanish newspapers during the 2012 Paralympic Games and found out that the press "devoted less space to the Paralympic Games than to any other sport." The authors contended that these results not only indicate that "the so-called news values are being ignored but also – and above all – that a very important sector of society is being discriminated against" (Solves, Sánchez, and Rius 2018, 1721).

Journalism should not lose sight of the social relevance of leagues and competitions features athletes with disabilities, which may aid the social acceptance and integration of people with disabilities by pushing public opinion toward more comprehensive consideration and respect for their physical efforts and feats. To improve the current situation, different sports organizations – including The International Paralympic Committee, The British Paralympic Association, the Paralympic Games, and the English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) – have elaborated guidelines for reporting on sportspeople with an impairment (Ramon and Rojas-Torrijos 2018).

Social media: A new opportunity to promote diversity?

The advent of Social Networking Sites (SNS) has implied crucial changes in media consumption patterns. Users now consume and demand global content in real time and

on multiple devices. These new platforms have important implications for journalists and media organizations who are expected to use new technologies not only to gather and distribute news but also to engage with their audiences in a reshaped relationship that has the capacity to disrupt authorial structures and establish new flows of information (Hermida et al. 2012).

According to Newman (2009), there are three main reasons why mainstream news organizations have no choice but to take social networks increasingly seriously: (1) the need to search for new ways to tell stories, (2) the opportunity to establish more direct relationships with users, and (3) the challenge of amplifying their scope and reaching wider audiences.

In this regard, Twitter stands out as “a technology with a networked audience, where users create and exchange content in a many-to-many model” (Marwick and Boyd 2011, 129) and share their viewing experiences via social media message streams (Wohn and Na 2011). On social media, and on Twitter in particular, broadcasting corporations have found unlimited possibilities to fulfill their remit of universality – “to reach citizens on all platforms where audiences seek information” (Sjøvaag and Owren 2018, 14) – and to engage them. Engagement refers to the public’s participation or degree of involvement in third-party publications (Fernández Peña et al. 2014). Twitter also facilitates use of multimedia, including videos, photographs, and links, which enhance the quality of posted content and attract users’ attention (Rojas-Torrijos and Ramon 2017).

Twitter “has become the preferred social media platform for many sports journalists and fans” (Boehmer 2017, 303). Sports content, especially live events, frequently rank among the most talked about topics on Twitter. Nevertheless, the question remains: to what extent do PSM utilize Twitter to diversify their sports coverage? As Steiner, Magin, and Stark (2019, 100) contend, PSM’s normative requirement of providing diverse coverage “should be transferred to public service online supply in general” and to social media in particular.

As a way to complement their stylebooks, the main European PSM have also implemented social media policies to better disseminate news and connect with their audiences (Oggenhaffen and Scheerlinck 2014). Campos-Freire, Fernández, and Valencia (2015) highlight that, by the end of 2014, just seven out of 28 public corporations in Europe had created social media guidelines for their reporters and editors. These broadcasters were based in Austria (ORF), Belgium (VRT), Finland (YLE), France (France Télévisions), Ireland (RTÉ), Italy (RAI), United Kingdom (BBC), and Romania

(TVR). Shortly after, public corporations from Spain (RTVE), Portugal (RTP), and Germany (ARD/ZDF) were added to this list (Túñez and Costa 2018).

While France Télévisions' *Guide of Best Practices on Social Media* and *Charte des Antennes* (2011) and RTÉ *Social Media Guidelines* (2013) are especially concerned with maintaining ethical standards in their social media activity, *RTVE Stylebook* (2011) underlines the relevance of publishing news on social media to gain visibility and impact in society. Most notably, RAI's *Code of Ethics* (2017) conveys the need to preserve pluralism in information and promote cultural and gender diversity through television. It further clarifies that these standards must be also extended to social media reporting. The promotion of diversity stands out as a central component of the PSM remit in the age of social media. Yet, these documents do not specifically mention sports coverage in their remits.

Method

This study examines agenda diversity in the sports Twitter accounts of four PSM corporations across Europe: RTVE (Spain), FranceTV (France), RAI (Italy), and RTÉ (Ireland). Three research questions guide this examination:

- RQ1. What is the volume and frequency of sports content published by European PSM on Twitter? What are the engagement figures (retweets and favorites) obtained by those corporations?
- RQ2. What is the sports agenda delivered by European PSM on Twitter? What is the amount of coverage devoted to sportswomen and athletes with disabilities?
- RQ3. Which multimedia elements are deployed by PSM on this platform?

In conducting our comparative research, we employed a content analysis. Content analysis is a research method “aimed at recording the salient features of texts using a uniform system of categories” (Franklin et al. 2005, 46). Content analysis allows researchers to read, interpret, and make valid inferences regarding the manifest content of Twitter posts in a systematic way. We apply this method to tweets published by the four PSM on their specific accounts devoted to sports, with the objective of contrasting the research questions (RQ1–RQ3) with the empirical data obtained (Bryman 2016).

The selected Twitter accounts are @deportes_rtve, @francetvsport, @RaiSport, and @RTESport. Spain, France, Italy and Ireland are four countries with an enduring public service broadcasting tradition, characterized, among others, by a strong emphasis

on sports content. According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019*, the four countries have high Internet penetration (92% in the case of Italy and 93% in Spain, France, and Ireland) and more than 40% of the population of these countries use social media as a source of news (Newman 2019). @RTESport was created in September 2007, which means that it is nearly seven years older than @deportes_rtve (May 2014), the most recently created account of those analyzed in this study (Table 1).

[Table 1 near here]

To ensure the rigor of the study and comparability between the aforementioned Twitter accounts, observation was carried out over three months (January 1 – April 1 2019). Posts were retrieved using Twitonomy (<http://twitonomy.com>), a specialized tool created by Digitonomy, which accesses data via Twitter's *Application Programming Interface* (API). This tool has recently been employed in scholarly research in the field (Rojas-Torrijos and Ramon 2017; García-Avilés et al. 2018). The Twitter API can only retrieve the last 3,200 tweets published by any open account. To ensure the retrieval of all the content published during the examined timeframe, data were extracted on April 3, 2019. The total number of downloaded tweets was $N=7,551$.

The seasonal aspect of the sample should be acknowledged. Across the board, sports news is highly dependent on the calendar of national and international sporting events and tournaments (Boyle 2006). While in many countries the coverage of football is constant all-year round, other disciplines (e.g.: winter sports) receive larger exposure during the particular months when major competitions are held.

Once Twitter posts were downloaded, they were processed with Microsoft Excel and examined through the content analysis technique. To answer RQ1 (volume, frequency, and engagement figures), all published messages were taken into consideration. To answer RQ2 (agenda diversity) and RQ3 (use of multimedia elements), we excluded a total of 125 tweets that focused exclusively on promotional content or customer service because they did not necessarily engage the diversity agenda or contain multimedia elements ($n=7,426$).

The content analysis codebook included the following variables: (1) Retweet count; (2) Favorite count; (3) Sports covered; (4) Gender of the protagonist; (5) Disability sport or non-disability sport; and (6) Multimedia elements included in each tweet. Before

the systematic analysis of the entire sample, we conducted a pre-test with 400 tweets (100 messages from each account) to ensure the reliability of the category system.

Results

Volume, frequency of publication, and engagement

During the observation period, all four PSM sports accounts were significantly and consistently active (Table 2). However, there were clear differences in the amount and frequency of tweets between them. The most prolific accounts were France TV (2,381) and RTÉ (2,374), which posted much more content than RTVE (1,541) and RAI (1,255). France TV and RTÉ posted more than 26 tweets per day on average; RTVE averaged about 17 per day, and RAI 14. It should be noted that the amount of retweets within these accounts ranged between 16.16% in the case of @deportes_rtve and 19.12% in the case of @RaiSport. Surprisingly, 74.94% of @RTEsport's messages were retweets, drawn from RTÉ's other accounts devoted to particular sports (@RTEgaa, @RTEsoccer, @RTEgolf, @RTEracing, and @RTErugby). Thus, it can be seen that @RTEsport works primarily as a platform that curates content from other in-house accounts. RTVE is the most willing to post replies, followed at a very considerable distance by the other three accounts (@RaiSport barely published 5 replies).

These accounts engaged unevenly with Twitter users. @francetvsport obtained the most retweets (16,164), followed by @deportes_rtve (7,701), and @RaiSport (5,853). @RTEsport's messages obtained only 2,868 retweets. @francetvsport's tweets also had the most favorites (54,285), followed by @RaiSport and @deportes_rtve.

PSM analyzed in this study employ social media not only to disseminate content globally but also to promote user participation. To do this more effectively, usernames (normally athletes or teams handles) are sometimes included in the tweets. This approach is more common in RTVE and RAI, which averaged 0.72 and 0.66 mentions per tweet, respectively.

[Table 2 near here]

Diversity agenda: sports, gender, and disability

Although the promotion of diversity is heralded as a core principle in PSM stylebooks and social media guidelines, sports coverage on Twitter is still mainly focused on a small range of disciplines. The findings of this study (Table 3) indicate that football has a hegemonic relationship to the rest of sports content on social media. Between 30–58% of all sports tweets posted by PSM accounts in the examined period were football-related. In spite of this “footballization” of sports coverage, six other mainstream sports – rugby, motorsport, basketball, skiing, tennis, and cycling – also have significant presences in Table 3.

[Table 3 near here]

There are important differences among the four PSM, deriving from their respective national media systems and sporting cultures. In addition, the amount of coverage devoted to different sports is linked to successful results obtained by national athletes or teams in international competitions being held during the examined period (e.g. world championship medals), to events and tournaments taking place in their own countries, and broadcasting rights these public corporations hold. Those elements illustrate that the sports agenda – even in this digital age – is not absolutely “overridden by the global” (Rowe 2013, 22).

In Spain, basketball, motorsport, handball, and indoor football were responsible for significant shares of @deportes_rtve’s content (between 8.6–10.1%). In France, more than 21% of tweets were rugby focused, followed distantly by skiing, tennis, and motorsport (Dakar rally in the majority of cases). @francetvsport bears some resemblance to @RTEsport – rugby represents more than 22% of tweets (football 30.39%) – however, @RTEsport also gave prominence to indigenous sports of national significance, such as Gaelic football (12.5%), hurling (7.45%), and horse racing (5.21%). These five sports represent more than 75% of the sports coverage in RTÉ.

Football represented 58.34% of @RaiSport’s total sports-related tweets. Similar to @francetvsport, skiing was prominently covered by @RaiSport (the examined period coincided with the winter season). Other traditional sports in Italy, such as cycling and basketball, were well-covered as well. Notably, athletics, one of the biggest sports in the world and the cornerstone of the Olympics program every four years, was barely visible, ranging from 1.48 to 2.84% of total sports coverage in the examined Twitter accounts.

The scope of France TV's sports coverage was more diverse. The account's content covered 36 different disciplines – RTVE and RTÉ covered a sum of 34 sports, and RAI only delivered news about 28 individual and team sports. In the aggregate, these four PSM accounts on Twitter posted content about 64 different disciplines (excluding the category “multisport”). Nevertheless, the presence of two-thirds of these sports in the agenda was almost anecdotal, given the virtually irrelevant number of tweets (lower than 15) they received.

These accounts' diversity imbalance is gendered as well. Table 4 shows that, compared to their male counterparts, female athletes and teams were underrepresented by PSM on the observed Twitter accounts. On average, sportswomen were protagonists in only 9.4% of examined tweets – by comparison, around 84.5% of all references in these tweets were to sportsmen, and around 6% involved mixed disciplines. In this case a comparison between countries becomes meaningless. Female athletes always scored less than 9% of the total coverage and gained vague visibility on @francetvsport's timeline (13.2%). The space devoted to sportsmen never went below 85% except in @francetvsport (79.2%).

[Table 4 near here]

Athletes with disabilities were rendered almost invisible. Only 43 out of the 7,426 sports tweets that constituted the sample were concerned with athletes with any sort of impairment (Table 5). This extremely low figure means that only 0.58% of the sports content disseminated by the four examined PSM along three months concerned athletes with disabilities. When they did touch on disability, @RaiSport and @deportes_rtve covered events from different sports (fencing, skiing, swimming, wheelchair basketball, and cycling) including tweets on the preparation to Tokyo 2020 Paralympics. @francetvsport mainly focused on the World Para Alpine Skiing Championship, and @RTEsport's attention was primarily centered on the performance of Irish participants at the Special Olympics World Games held in Abu Dhabi between March 14 and 21, 2019.

[Table 5 near here]

Deployment of multimedia elements

Audiovisual content and links can drive user engagement and increase the reach of content delivered to audiences. In this regard, we identified consistent patterns of multimedia use throughout the sample (Table 6) – only 176 out of 7,426 tweets (2.3%) did not include anything besides text. The four PSM accounts reinforced the display of photographs and videos as key elements to present and enhance information.

The category “link plus photograph” was the most common across all accounts (e.g., this category represented 73.47% of RTÉ’s posts), followed by “video without a link.” In many cases these accounts covered important tournaments live, streamed them, and/or provided links to their websites, thus capitalizing on the “nowness” of sports (Rowe 2018). While photographs were very relevant as a stand-alone ingredient, especially in the RAI account’s tweets (23.50%), it was clear from our study that audio is still an emerging format regarding sports Twitter timelines (audio represented just 3.26% of RTÉ’s tweets and 1.58% of RTVE’s tweets).

[Table 6 near here]

It should be noted that multimedia resources were deployed regardless of the type of sport or the gender of athletes covered. In this way, links, photographs, and videos boosted the visibility of non-mainstream disciplines, sportswomen, and athletes with disabilities (Tables 7 and 8). Although this does not palliate the profound diversity imbalance found in the coverage, consistent use of multimedia elements helps portray underrepresented sports and social groups in an adequate and respectful way.

[Tables 7 and 8 near here]

Discussion and conclusion

As “the analogue world recedes and the digital universe beckons” (Rowe 2014, 181), the growth of social media platforms raises important questions about the extent to which diversity is present in sport-centered Twitter accounts created by PSM. The comparative analysis undertaken above reveals that PSM are remarkably active on Twitter and attract significant engagement. Those entities deploy a wide range of multimedia elements to capture users’ attention and provide the most complete coverage possible. That being said, this content reinforces, rather than counteracts, the long-standing diversity

imbalances present in the analogue age. The game has not moved on: following a clear pattern of continuity, social media platforms seem to perpetuate a fairly restricted and routinized agenda.

First, the “tyranny” of football coverage, combined with a prominent attention on other popular sports in each territory, restricts the diversity of these agendas and leaves little room to showcase other minority disciplines. Giving exposure primarily to revenue sports while minimizing smaller but still relevant disciplines – some of which are “closely tied to place and locality” (Rowe 2013, 26) – contributes to their diminished value in sporting, social, and economic terms. Arguably, this reinforces the situation of many sports, which remain on the periphery of the media-sports complex.

Second, Twitter has not bridged the traditional gap between the media coverage devoted to male and female athletes (Cooky, Messner, and Musto 2015; O'Neill and Mulready 2015), revealing that it may not yet be the time for a “victory lap” (Bernstein 2002) for women’s sport. The investigation reveals that sportswomen are not invisible on PSM timelines; however, their restricted exposure prevents them from standing out among men when major events such as the Olympic Games are not being held. Steiner, Magin, and Stark (2019, 112) argue that in the digital age public media must serve “the interests of all societal spheres to contribute to an integrated society.” Here, the persistence of gender imbalances in sports coverage is particularly troublesome, as it can create barriers to promoting female role models in society, especially among youth.

Third, the enduring invisibility of athletes with disabilities in legacy media (Hardin 2006; Bruce 2013; Solves, Sánchez, and Rius 2018) is not being challenged in the social media landscape. It should be noted that, in the examined sample, athletes with disabilities were defined by their achievements and competence rather than their disabilities (EFDS 2016) and were portrayed using the same range of multimedia elements employed to showcase able-bodied athletes. Traditional stereotypes and stigma related to coverage of athletes with disabilities (Pate and Hardin 2013) were not present in the observed content. However, the coverage devoted to athletes with disabilities by the four PSM was almost non-existent. Given that the coverage of “disability sport can have a major impact on how other groups and individuals within society view them also” (Brittain 2010, 72), PSM should take advantage of social media’s potential to consistently promote inclusion rather than exclusion.

The male-centered, football-driven, and able-bodied agenda of PSM on Twitter cannot be disassociated from the fast-changing environment in which those public

corporations operate. As Steiner, Magin, and Stark (2019, 104) emphasize, PSM are “forced to adapt to the highly commercialized SNS, whose aim is to satisfy consumers instead of citizens.” In this context, “normative standards such as diversity come into conflict with commercial aims including popularity and salability” (Steiner, Magin, and Stark 2019, 104).

PSM are fully aware that nowadays sport is a “killer app” which contributes to “secure that most prized and evasive of commodities nowadays: human attention” (Serazio 2019, 69). They compete not only with legacy commercial media but also with telecommunications operators, content aggregators, and sports leagues’ and teams’ communication departments (Hutchins and Boyle 2017). Therefore, PSM “find themselves pressured to publish stories that appeal to these platforms’ algorithms so that they are more likely to cut through a cluttered media environment and get noticed by audiences” (Nelson 2019, 5). In the outlets examined in this study, the search for wider engagement did not translate into click-bait-oriented content, but rather to a narrow approach that reproduced the centrality of major sports, particularly of those capable of driving users to linear or streaming broadcasting transmissions.

According to Smith (2017, 213), PSM “should renew their commitment to the provision of a wide range of minority sports and sports that have not traditionally received adequate coverage, most notably women’s sports.” The seemingly limitless commodification of the sports-media market and the increased dependence on metrics should not dissuade PSM from enhancing diversity in their sports coverage on social media. Given their capacity to set the agenda across legacy and new platforms, PSM should work harder to promote a more diverse menu that ultimately contributes to enhance cultural citizenship. Going further, PSM should reframe their social media strategies, guidelines, and stylebooks (Ramon and Rojas-Torrijos 2018) to incorporate specific remits to sports diversity. Broadening the range of disciplines covered and giving exposure to the profiles of unfamiliar protagonists is essential to build a multifaceted and comprehensive sporting media which not only informs, entertains, and educates citizens but empowers them as well.

This comparative study raises important issues for the role of PSM in promoting cultural citizenship through sports journalism in the age of social media. Naturally, the findings of the research should be seen in light of their limitations. Because this issue is underexplored by scholars of sports media, we attempted to establish the groundwork for future studies which will provide a more comprehensive and nuanced account of these

phenomena. Future research should have a broader scope, perhaps by examining other platforms such as Facebook, YouTube or Instagram, and analyzing the sports-centered social media accounts from a broader range of PSM corporations in Europe and beyond, including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), the Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai (NHK), and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). Such studies should observe whether these and other PSM offer a multi-faceted account of the sports world and bridge the aforementioned gaps in coverage.

Future studies should also employ different methods, perhaps by conducting in-depth interviews with reporters and social media editors at PSM sports desks to allow for a deeper examination of the particular values under which they operate, their professional routines and the underlying aspects of the publication process. Interviews could be useful to gain a deeper insight into their editorial philosophies and understand how they balance the need to sustain and increase engagement with the requirement to enhance inclusiveness in sports journalism. Such interviews could also be valuable to unpack why the imbalances in broadcast coverage are reproduced in social media. Interviews can also be helpful to shed light on the cross-media strategies employed by PSM to scrutinize the extent to which their social media content is determined by the broadcasting rights they hold. These conversations could also prove a valuable means of observing how those actors use existing instruments of accountability (e.g. ethical codes, stylebooks, and social media guidelines) and how these documents could be improved to better wield sports diversity as a crucial component of cultural citizenship.

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TABLES

TABLE 1

Contextual data about the accounts examined

	@deportes_rtve	@francetvsport	@RaiSport	@RTEsport
Tweets	17999	119615	84024	114399
Following	209	1094	516	1214
Followers	86518	218257	207504	93807
Joined Twitter	May 22, 2014	May 04, 2010	November 30, 2011	September 19, 2007
Followers/following	413	199	402	77
Listed/1,000 followers	2,72	7,53	4,59	4,94

TABLE 2

Volume, frequency, and engagement figures of the analyzed tweets

	@deportes_rtve	@francetvsport	@RaiSport	@RTEsport
Analysed tweets	1,541	2,381	1,255	2,374
Tweets per day	16.93	26.16	13.79	26.09
Retweets	249	436	240	1,779
% of tweets being retweets	16.16	18.31	19.12	74.94
User mentions	1,114	1,156	832	374
Mentions per tweet	0.72	0.49	0.66	0.16
Replies	460	44	5	17
% of tweets being replies	29.85	1.85	0.4	0.72
Links	1,010	1,342	746	398
Links per tweet	0.66	0.56	0.59	0.17
Hashtags	1,029	2,997	3,110	468
Hashtags per tweet	0.67	1.26	2.48	0.2
Tweets retweeted	1,062	1,537	850	349
% of tweets being retweeted	68.92	64.55	67.73	14.7
Total number of retweets	7,701	16,164	5,853	2,868
Retweets per retweeted tweet	7.25	10.52	6.89	8.22
Retweets/100 followers	8.9	7.41	2.82	3.06
Tweets favorited	1,090	1,900	1,012	561
% of tweets being favorited	70.73	79.80	80.64	23.63
Total number of favorites	14,433	54,285	25,352	16,604
Favorites per favorited tweet	13.24	28.57	25.05	29.6

TABLE 3
Sports agenda

Sports	@deportes_rtve		@francetvsport		@RaiSport		@RTEsport	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Adventure Sports	1	0.07	3	0.13	0	0.00	0	0.00
American Football	4	0.26	9	0.39	24	1.97	9	0.38
Athletics	43	2.84	38	1.63	18	1.48	64	2.71
Australian Football	1	0.07	0	0.00	0	0.00	6	0.25
Badminton	13	0.86	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.04
Basketball	153	10.10	76	3.26	79	6.49	10	0.42
Biathlon	0	0.00	30	1.29	9	0.74	0	0.00
Boxing	3	0.20	6	0.26	0	0.00	58	2.45
Breakdance	2	0.13	3	0.13	0	0.00	0	0.00
Bridge	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.04
Camogie	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	19	0.80
Canoeing	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.04
Climbing	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.08	0	0.00
Coursing	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.04
Cricket	0	0.00	1	0.04	0	0.00	16	0.68
Curling	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.08	0	0.00
Cycling	27	1.78	149	6.39	98	8.05	13	0.55
Darts	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	12	0.51
Diving	0	0.00	5	0.21	1	0.08	0	0.00
Equestrian	0	0.00	1	0.04	0	0.00	2	0.08
Fencing	0	0.00	2	0.09	7	0.58	0	0.00
Fighting	3	0.20	0	0.00	0	0.00	17	0.72
Figure Skating	71	4.69	57	2.45	5	0.41	1	0.04
Football	604	39.87	695	29.82	710	58.34	718	30.39
Gaelic Football	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	296	12.53
Golf	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.08	126	5.33
Gymnastics	2	0.13	2	0.09	3	0.25	0	0.00
Handball	134	8.84	58	2.49	0	0.00	1	0.04
Hockey	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	13	0.55
Horse Racing	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	123	5.21
Hurling	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	176	7.45
Ice Hockey	3	0.20	4	0.17	0	0.00	0	0.00
Indoor Football	131	8.65	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Judo	0	0.00	10	0.43	0	0.00	0	0.00
Karate	23	1.52	5	0.21	0	0.00	1	0.04

Korfbal	1	0.07	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Luge	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.08	0	0.00
Motorsport	139	9.17	207	8.88	37	3.04	12	0.51
Multisport	30	1.98	18	0.77	11	0.90	66	2.79
Paralympic Cycling	1	0.07	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Parkour	0	0.00	1	0.04	0	0.00	0	0.00
Pentathlon	0	0.00	1	0.04	0	0.00	1	0.04
Rowing	0	0.00	1	0.04	0	0.00	0	0.00
Rugby	11	0.73	498	21.36	5	0.41	525	22.22
Sailing	0	0.00	2	0.09	2	0.16	2	0.08
Skateboard	1	0.07	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Skiing	3	0.20	218	9.35	119	9.78	0	0.00
Sled dog racing	0	0.00	1	0.04	0	0.00	0	0.00
Snooker	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.08	16	0.68
Snowboard	6	0.40	1	0.04	9	0.74	0	0.00
Speed Skating	0	0.00	0	0.00	15	1.23	0	0.00
Squash	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.04
Surfing	1	0.07	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Swimming	2	0.13	9	0.39	14	1.15	10	0.42
Synchronized Swim.	1	0.07	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Table Tennis	0	0.00	1	0.04	0	0.00	0	0.00
Tennis	79	5.21	211	9.05	11	0.90	45	1.90
Triathlon	6	0.40	1	0.04	0	0.00	0	0.00
Volleyball	2	0.13	6	0.26	20	1.64	0	0.00
Waterpolo	2	0.13	0	0.00	12	0.99	0	0.00
Weightlifting	12	0.79	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Wheelchair Basketball	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	0.25	0	0.00
Windsurf	0	0.00	1	0.04	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	1,515	100.00	2,331	100.00	1,217	100.00	2,363	100.00

TABLE 4

Gender of protagonists

	@deportes_rtve		@francetvsport		@RaiSport		@RTESport	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	122	8.05	309	13.26	89	7.31	214	9.06
Male	1,295	85.48	1,848	79.28	1,047	86.03	2,068	87.52
Mixed	98	6.47	174	7.46	81	6.66	81	3.43
Total	1,515	100.00	2,331	100.00	1,217	100.00	2,363	100.00

TABLE 5

Presence of disability sport in the coverage

	@deportes_rtve		@francetvsport		@RaiSport		@RTESport	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Disability sport	6	0.40	8	0.34	16	1.31	13	0.55
Non-Disability sport	1,509	99.60	2,323	99.66	1,201	98.69	2,350	99.45
Total	1,515	100.00	2,331	100.00	1,217	100.00	2,363	100.00

TABLE 6

Deployment of multimedia elements

	@deportes_rtve		@francetvsport		@RaiSport		@RTESport	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Audio	24	1.58	0	0.00	0	0.00	77	3.26
Link	112	7.39	17	0.73	62	5.09	42	1.78
Link + Photograph	787	51.95	1,149	49.29	447	36.73	1,736	73.47
Link + Video	118	7.79	163	6.99	114	9.37	17	0.72
No multimedia	38	2.51	43	1.84	43	3.53	52	2.20
Photogallery	15	0.99	23	0.99	38	3.12	6	0.25
Photograph	98	6.47	52	2.23	286	23.50	53	2.24
Survey	5	0.33	15	0.64	38	3.12	5	0.21
Video	318	20.99	869	37.28	189	15.53	375	15.87
Total	1,515	100.00	2,331	100.00	1,217	100.00	2,363	100.00

TABLE 7

Multimedia elements used to present sportswomen

	@deportes_rtve		@francetvsport		@RaiSport		@RTEsport	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Audio	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	13	6.07
Link	9	7.38	3	0.97	7	7.87	1	0.47
Link + Photograph	67	54.92	130	42.07	41	46.07	150	70.09
Link + Video	14	11.48	32	10.36	5	5.62	5	2.34
No multimedia	2	1.64	5	1.62	0	0.00	2	0.93
Photogallery	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	2.25	0	0.00
Photograph	8	6.56	11	3.56	22	24.72	2	0.93
Survey	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Video	22	18.03	128	41.42	12	13.48	41	19.16
Total	122	100.00	309	100.00	89	100.00	214	100.00

TABLE 8

Multimedia elements used to present impaired athletes

	@deportes_rtve		@francetvsport		@RaiSport		@RTEsport	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Audio	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Link	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Link + Photograph	1	16.67	3	37.50	4	25.00	4	30.77
Link + Video	1	16.67	0	0.00	1	6.25	0	0.00
No multimedia	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Photogallery	0	0.00	1	12.50	1	6.25	0	0.00
Photograph	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	18.75	0	0.00
Survey	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Video	4	66.67	4	50.00	7	43.75	9	69.23
Total	6	100.00	8	100.00	16	100.00	13	100.00