

Media influence on elite football performance: a literature review to develop a model

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Abstract:

Problem: Sports' news is utmost prominent in the pages of many Portuguese and international newspapers alongside an increasing interaction between fans and the clubs/players in several social networks. In addition, television contracts for sports broadcasting rights regularly reach hundreds of thousands of euros (Stead, 2010). However, the investigation of the consequences of these facts on athletes as well as the connections between sports and the media are still at a developing stage or unproven, which raises challenges and relevant research questions we will address. *Purpose:* In this paper we describe the development of a research project to get the answers for some important questions, such as: Does sport depend on the *media*? Does the *media* depend on sport? Are we looking at a reciprocal relationship? Does the *media* influence player's sports performance? Which influential mechanisms are present there? In which dimensions and intensities do they influence? Having become strong icons and instruments of change, does sports and social communication developed together as an important global industry with partnership dynamics? This paper constitutes the first part of an ongoing multidisciplinary research. The authors aim to contribute to the understanding and extent to which sports media/press influences footballers' performance. *Methods.* This is mostly a literature review uncovering several strands of opinion and coming across many well cited authors responsible for numerous analyses of sport events and media coverage. Hitherto, it became clear that few of them correlate media and sport as influential on the performance itself. Because of the thorough literature review, it will be presented a comprehensive theoretical underpinning for the correlation between media coverage and the performance of footballers. Based on some few empirical studies we also present a testable model to add value to some explanations. After this step we followed a large interview process to professional footballers, coaches, directors and media staff working at the clubs. At this stage in time we are analysing those results and using NVivo 10.0 software. Results are still under detailed analysis but seem to explain the expected influential mechanism. *Results:* The results are presented as a list and synthesis of the literature review and a description of the model used to build the half structure of the interviews to apply to our sample and get the major data for further analysis. *Discussion:* The discussion of the literature review is presented and the constructed model for data collection application is presented. *Conclusion:* We concluded there is a strong relationship between media and athlete performance although we could not prove as determinant; we describe some influential mechanisms of that relationship upon athlete's perspectives and we also could observe there is a long way to go on dynamic partnerships among media, clubs, athletes to build an important global industry.

Key words: Sport; Football; Media; Performance; Influence mechanisms.

Introduction

Sports news are utmost prominent in the pages of many Portuguese newspapers alongside an increasing interaction between fans and the clubs/players in several social networks. In addition, television contracts for sports broadcasting rights regularly reach hundreds of thousands of euros (Stead, 2010). But there are remaining and important questions:

Does sport depend on *media*? Does *media* depend on sport? Are we looking at a reciprocal relationship? Does the *media* influence player's sports performance? Which influential mechanisms are present there? In which dimensions and intensities do they influence? Having become strong icons and instruments of change, have sports and social communication developed together as an important global industry with partnership dynamics? For Shank (2002), the general interest in sport has increased significantly over the last two decades due to the development and increasing influence of the *media*. Football, an extremely popular

sport, has become a social phenomenon across all social classes and countries. A socio-cultural product strongly manufactured by the *media*. Football has a leading and dominant role in a large part of the leisure and entertainment industry, above any other sport. In Portugal there are daily over information on football: three daily sport newspapers and many TV prime-time shows.

Considering the demands of market forces in the world of sport it is important that the merge between these two major industries -the *media* and football – be rethought and reworked into a complementary partnership since they obviously belong to the same industry and need each other. The clubs depend on the *media* as their main source of projection and publicity and the media needs football as one of its major sources for audience *share and readership*. True stories about famous athletes who were submitted to intense scrutiny by the *media* are well known (*Canadian Olympic Committee, 2016*) but there are many other issues, which remain, opening a wide range of research opportunities. The remaining paper is structured as in the abstract.

Methods

This study combines the areas of Communication and Sports Science focusing on the influential role that *media* performs upon the reality of sport.

The relevant sources to elaborate this review were article databases: ISI Web of Science, Google Scholar complemented with the BOCC - Online Library of Communication Sciences. We used the following keywords in either Portuguese or English, under various combinations such as *football, media, influence, sports performance, elite, athletes and impact*.

Since references extracted were not satisfactory enough to support the technical and theoretical research; it was then used other keywords to make the searching process more diverse, combining, in a cumulative and dynamic process, other keywords that emerged during the preliminary survey. Terms such as *copying, theory of framing and theory of cognitive effects*. In these articles it was noticed a greater closeness to the main topic in the study. Besides the criteria selection was extended into Spanish. Publications somehow addressed the topic.

Results

This study revealed that there are few studies concerning the topic under analysis. The combination of relevant keywords to this study was done in a two-step procedure: first, we assessed all abstracts, titles and keywords for 137 articles and books. This resulted in a selection of 93 articles and 3 books. In a second phase and after the analysis of the full texts we kept 59 articles and 3 books that will be part of our referenced literature. Most of the articles found were based on themes that, although correlated, do not address exclusively the subject under analysis. However, the analysis allowed to identify which of the authors explored topics that still were concerned with any impact on the performance of elite athletes. Despite increased interest in this area, it was not easy to find any focus on the impact that media coverage can play in the sports industry, especially in elite footballers.

It was not found any publications where this theme was directly addressed; most of information concerned concrete cases of athletes who were victims of scrutiny by the *media*. Either that, or the authors addressed other different topics.

According to Bourdieu (1997), sport is the fundamental instrument of the contemporary media industry. Bourdieu discusses sports events that occur within the glare of full media involvement. With the inevitable availability of athletes' images and personalities to the masses, during competitions and the subsequent structuring of their individual and social representation.

Sport and Media - The Relationship

“The role of mass media has always been vital in boosting any activity of sport.” (Gulam 2016: 51). On the one hand, sport influences education and training, social practices and even the building of identities and cultural values of individuals; on the other hand, the *media* produce, reproduce and disseminate information, interpret events and provide the public with explanations and meanings, which structure their knowledge and understanding of things. Sport is an integral part of the success of many components of social communication as Bellamy (2006) refers. With a complementary relationship, *media* needs sport to increase levels of audience while sport needs the media to make everything connected with it familiar to the masses so that it can develop and project itself as social practice. *“In the present era, close interaction between the media and sport are indispensable. Both feed one another; sport needs publicity and mass approach to majority of the population, which media do, whereas media feeds on the sport news provided by the different activities of sport”* (Gulam 2016: 51).

Besides, Correia (2000) stated about the direct and indirect influence of the media over the knowledge, thoughts, behaviour and acting of its readers. Moreover, Boyle (2006) defended that global sport news could as well contribute to build global identities through sport in our contemporary world.

Football and the Media

Football has developed itself along the lines of a strong business, which is also major entertainment. *Media* plays an important role in this matter. Between football and the *media* concerns, Lash and Lury (2007) believe that the game of football became an instrument of mass communication, due to the active interaction between the game and the audience, which is of course part of the spectacle itself. The big sporting competitions are *media* shows on a global scale (Maguire 2004); it is easy to understand that the *media* constructs reality through their contribution to our perception of information and their control of its interpretation. Media coverage is essential to the sport visibility itself, enabling it as a lucrative business. They also impart all knowledge on the subject and so the spectator receives all the information through the *media*, even without having any direct participation in the events reported. These two strong concepts, *media* and sport, are characterised by Gastaldo (2004) as the two major sources of modernity.

Football - Before, during and after the game

Beyond the ninety minutes of the game, football has an integral role in newspaper's pages as well as in prime-time television. It provides a whole parallel culture that stretches from one game to another over time. Thus, it can be considered that the media football phenomenon goes through three different phases: the pre-game phase in which the media create a generalized speculative expectation around the event to prepare the environment around the game - increasing the tension, creating a betting climate, expectations and anxiety in the public.

Expectations

It is important to understand which criteria deserve greater attention from journalists in order to attract the public's attention. For Rowe (2007) the sports press has more impact while under the glare of television cameras and after the stadiums are completely empty of public. There is no difference between the news reported in the various media (Barbeiro 2006).

The emphasis in sports pages (Rowe, 2007) falls on specific situations in connection with the performance of athletes and teams in championships, but it does not refer to the social context or sporting environment in which such situations develop. The press focuses on the talent and potential of athletes and teams. Media is necessary for organizers (federations) and stakeholders (clubs and sponsors), although this introduces some entropy when performance does not go well enough for the athlete expectations. We can confirm with Kristiansen *et al.* (2011: 451) words: "*When they did not live up to their own or the media's expectations, most of the athletes used problem-focused strategies to cope with the media's intrusion on the competitive site*".

The Media / Fans in Football

Sports personalities are much talked about both in the general press and in the special sports press. Seen as icons of fashion, these personalities are famous players who, through their performance and reputation achieved daily visibility in the *media*.

Clarke and Mannion (2006) also refer that sports brands realised very recently the great opportunity that sports fans represent in what concerns business opportunities and increased revenues. The fans interact with their club and become part of its fabric. Because of this they also have an influence in their club's strategic decisions.

Factors that influence the sporting performance

Stress and high tension are caused by the demands of high performance in their respective sports, but also influenced by other factors relating to their personal and social lives. The lack of specific strategies for dealing with situations of tension can limit their development and sporting performance. Among other authors, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define stress in sport because of the fusion of an imbalance created by a certain situation and an athlete. Cox *et al.* (2010) highlighted the importance of *coping* in sporting performance as a behavioural effort that shows a capacity, which helps distinguish who can and who cannot deal with stress in the context of sports performance. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as the ability to manage cognitive and behavioural efforts that are constantly altering.

Nonetheless, there are few studies on any of the above mentioned factors; although the media are the only factor subject of this study, it was decided to take a brief approach to three more factors considering important reflections presented by authors such as Dale (2000), Gould and Weinberg (2001), Fletcher and Scott (2010), Miranda and Bara Filho (2008), Hays *et al.* (2009), among others.

Routine

During competitions there are certain behaviours that the athletes repeat out of habit as a preparation for victory. This happens either deliberately or because of a sort of superstition. Some authors, like Kristiansen *et al.* (2008), consider that this type of routinely executed actions can lead to higher levels of concentration and motivation throughout the competitions. For Kristiansen *et al.* (2008), it is vital for the athlete to maintain the routines under control.

Emotions and Concentration

Several studies such as Coetzee *et al.* (2006), Cox *et al.* (2010) and Elferink-Gemser (2005) emphasize the importance of psychological characteristics for success in elite sports. Hook, Valentiner and Connelly (2013), Howle and Eklund (2013), think of sports performance as of a situation of evaluation, which is influenced by emotional and cognitive factors. This is why, according to what has already been said and agreeing with Fletcher and Scott (2010), personal characteristics as well as the situational and cultural objectives of the athletes are factors to be considered. The impact of the correlation between psychological characteristics and sport performance in elite players is obviously of great importance. “*The athletes need help from the coach and the support personnel to create a supportive climate rather than dwelling too much over their media responses and the reported ‘mistakes’*”. (Kristiansen *et al* 2011: 451). In sports such as football it is difficult to maintain the same level of concentration from the beginning to the end of the games.

The Relationship Coach - Athlete

The relationship between the athletes and the sports organizations is subject of recent research in the psychology of sport: “*These studies explored specific aspects of coach motivation, behaviour, and the coach-athlete relationship, and highlighted some practical implications for working with coaches to enhance the athlete experience.*” (Olusoga *et al* 2012: 230).

According to Fletcher and Scott (2010), all coaches are subject to moments of tension, either because of team achieved classification in the league or in any championships, or because of organizational, contractual and financial issues. These, among others, oblige them to focus on to competitive results.

Consequently, these tensions affect the players, who train and work to improve their performance so that they can become better known and achieve results that will satisfy the coach, the technical staff and the club’s board of directors. It is therefore important to consider the motivational environment as a source of balance in the relationship coach-athlete (Roberts 2001; Pensgaard and Roberts 2002). Gould Maynard (2009) argues that the coaches have the role of motivators and of encouraging their athletes to a good performance, and on the other hand, they bring with them a multitude of factors which cause nothing but tension. Here it is very important the role of sports press. “*Specifically, coaches in the present study underlined the importance of being able to communicate effectively with athletes, remain athlete focused, maintain consistency of behaviour, and offer emotional support for athletes.*” (Olusoga *et al* 2012: 236).

Greenleaf *et al.* (2001) add that the coach should prepare and develop the team because any lack of focus on them all influences their performance. On the other hand, when a team has several outstanding athletes that compete for the attention of the *media*, this causes an increase in the competitive environment of the team. In this context, coaches have a very important role, since they can and should, decrease this potentially destructive perception. It is important to remember that coaches can be both part of the problem and part of the solution (Giacobbi *et al.*, 2004 and Kristiansen and Roberts, 2008). For Hays *et al.* (2009), confident athletes tend to be skilled in the use of the resources required for the attainment of full success in sport.

Media

Considering other author, “*the study of the media’s influence on sport is a growing one, with scholars such as Lawrence and Rowe (1986), Whannel (2000), Rowe (2007) and Nicholson, Kerr and Sherwood (2015) providing significant contributions to the impact of the media in commercialising and professionalising sport and in examining the sports-media nexus*” (Duncan 2018:9). Although we briefly addressed different factors, our main goal is to understand the relationship between athletes and media (social communication), specially the impact of this relationship on their performance (Kristiansen *et al* 2011).

There is a clear consensus among authors regarding the importance of the relationship between these two strong industries, football and the *media*, but there is a shortage of articles on the impact, as well as methodological standardization of models approaching these themes.

Discussion

We could not see any studies with empirical evidences of the determinant influence of media over athletes’ performance; however, we saw that such influence exists and we think it can be scientifically explained through a New (extended) Communication Model presented next.

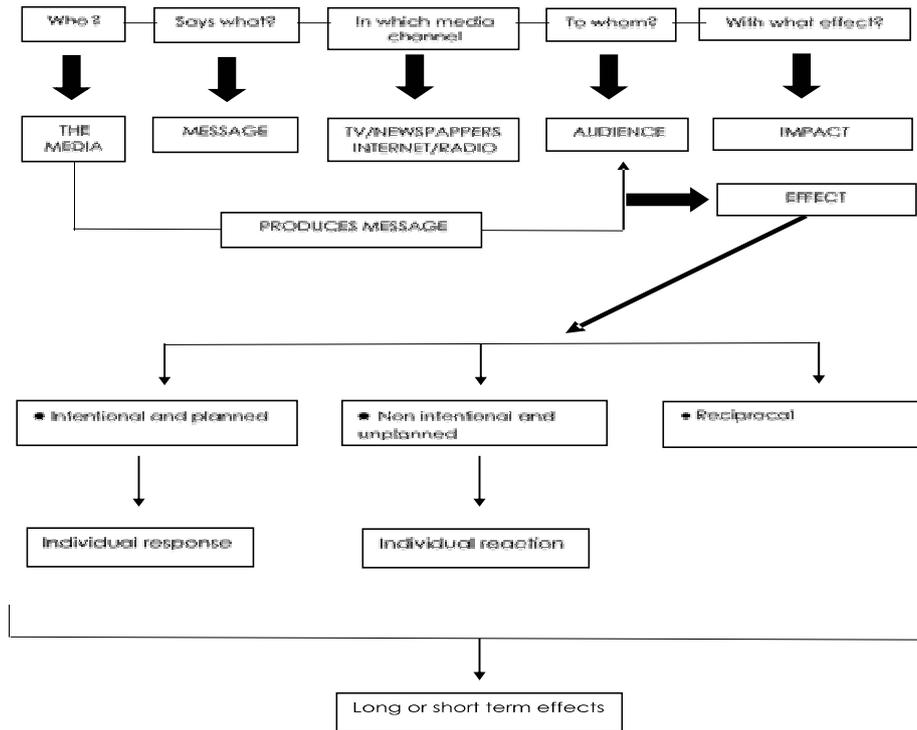


Diagram 1. LASSWELL Communication Model (Extended)

Intermediate factors that according to Blumler (1977) will function as sources of influence on society through the media.

Conclusion and future work

The literature review identified most of the studies approaching the relationship media-performance. However, we feel media is understudied in that relationship, which motivated us to do the follow-up study. Other of the limitations of this research lies on the difficulty to establish a concrete link between our topic and a communication theory that would explain in what way the *media* would produce effect upon the athletes, as well as measuring the impact of it on their performance. Considering the focus of the study it then became extremely important to find a methodology that would allow a theoretical generalization and enable to prevent the possibility of an easy refutation of the systematic content.

A deeper study of cognitive effects in connection with sport will be a first step towards the recognition of the power of the *media* as an intentional factor or a reciprocal influence on those receiving the messages, according to the model presented in diagram 2 and constructed through Communication Theory and Models. It will be possible to establish a relationship between the several theories above described and understand what people involved in the whole process feel in practice. The creation of communicational measures as well as sporting activities within the clubs will aim at minimizing the negative impact of media coverage upon athlete’s performance and wellbeing is also our main objective. Following most of the authors, *media* represents an important role on performance but not determinant over elite athlete’s performance.

If the expected results of the study will allow, it is also intended to develop tools and communication strategies which will enable sports organisations to measure, control and coach their athletes, managers and staff on this dimension. Finally, since the correlation of media and elite athletes’ performance remains poorly explored novel high-quality studies based for example on the Theory of Cognitive Effects (Macquail, 2003) principles are highly recommended.

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