

Dunja Antunovic: What is Still “New” about Social Media? The Importance of Sociology of Sport in Research on Mediatization

Digital platforms are central to the production and consumption of sport media content and have disrupted the relationship between media organizations, athletes, governing bodies, and audiences. The process of “mediatization,” which entails changes in the institutional order and transformations in society, is pronounced in all levels of sport, including international mega events and recreation. The implications of mediatization are uneven and context specific. To document the emergence of new platforms, representation strategies, and networked interactions between stakeholders, scholars have produced a high volume of research. Indeed, over the last 10 years, journal articles, edited collections, and special issues have published empirical findings and have also reflected on the theoretical and methodological limitations of this work. However, considering the ubiquity of social media, the continued disruptions, and the persistent social inequalities, sociology of sport researchers are particularly well positioned to contribute to this area of research.

This talk examines the role of sociology of sport in evaluating and analyzing the implications of social media in sport. First, I overview key findings to address what was “new” about social media. Then, I examine how sociological research expands and contradicts industry narratives about the “transformative” potential of social media. Finally, I identify theoretical and methodological challenges in sociological research on social media. While my focus is specifically on agenda diversity in relation to gender, national identity, and disability, these dilemmas are relevant for other areas of sport studies. The talk intends to invite a discussion about future directions for research for European sociology of sport and wider international sociology of sport communities pertaining to the complex relationship between social media and sport.