

The New Age of Sports Commentary

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COM 386 (001)

4/30/2025

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Introduction

In the digitized media landscape we currently exist in through our mobile devices where world relations and entertainment are broadcasted, posted, and debated 24/7, the newspaper loses its value and gives media conglomerates, like ESPN the chance to capitalize and control the spread of information, where nearly everything notable from the high school, collegiate, semi-pro and professional levels of sports is concentrated within them. Within the company, various news anchors, commentators, journalists, and reporters are hired to represent ESPN by covering different sports, which gives these individuals the ultimate power in determining how the games are covered, where greed, bias, and negativity is bound to arise; this was not always the case. Media monetization has ultimately changed how the control of information spreads, examples being platforms like X—where a monthly subscription can push your posts past the algorithmic barriers and earn monetization through impressions—and TikTok, where creators with large influence can potentially create a career from posting. For this project, I will be conducting a content analysis on sports media, including commentary, journalism, social media headlines/news reports and more, where analyzing rhetoric at both individual and organizational levels is my main focus. I ultimately want to demonstrate how the monetization of media has changed how sports are covered presently, not only through the conglomerates and professional organizations, but the second-hand journalists that form through fandoms of these organizations. My data was gathered through social media platforms including X and other journalistic or broadcasting media outlets; specifically, 6 out of the 9 pieces of content I found and coded came from X.

Final Project Report

Throughout the past two weeks of research, I essentially chose the pieces of content at random; if a headline, X post, or clip caught my attention, I'd bookmark it and copy it into a doc. I included a mix of primary and secondary sources, as for example some X posts I found were independent/secondary journalists covering recently released information from sources like ESPN, Fox Sports, etc. I created the codebook along the lines of the Patagonia example sheet given to us in class, where I outlined informative and persuasive coding guidelines to code the content, which I then used to gauge if the content portrayed was positive, negative, or neutral. To my surprise, 5 out of 9 were coded as negative overall (negative/not positive coverage of sports) and the remaining 4 were coded as neutral. The way this was determined is if all 3 boxes of persuasive coding were checked off for a singular piece of content, I coded it as negative, whereas if one box was left unchecked from that category, I left it as neutral while also taking into consideration the informativeness coding categories checked.

The main trends in content I observed from reporters, analysts, anchors, journalists, and fandoms were a) comparison, b) condescending rhetoric, c) engagement baiting, d) overgeneralizations not based on factual evidence, and e) provocative quotes of opinions by reporters/analysts with aim to stir controversy. On the note of comparison, the X account Bleacher Report—owned by Time Warner—made a post highlighting an NHL player who broke the playoff scoring record, then comparing his achievements to the entirety of Montreal's NHL team roster, which shines a negative light on the organization with its condescending tone. Another X post from an independent NBA insider source, @TheDunkCentral, quotes a soundbite from an interview with a former NBA player who uses condescending rhetoric to put down another player. The use of language adds to how these posts are received—capital letters in a

headline/post usually signify something grand or surprising, dramatic emojis grab attention—which leads some of these reporters to engagement bait; essentially misconstrue/spin words or a story to grab the attention of others. The first round of the NFL draft took place last night on April 24th, where one specific narrative has been the hot topic of the league for months: Shedeur Sanders, a quarterback for Colorado University, whose dad is a former NFL legend. ESPN and other media conglomerates/affiliates have been covering him nonstop, making him out to be much more than his achievements, because his name is a hot topic with fans. This led to organizations media teams focusing more on his spot in the draft than the actual draftees themselves, where Bleacher Report's X account posted the headline "GIANTS PASS ON SHEDEUR at pick 25 and draft Jaxon Dart...TWO QBs off the board before Sanders." Instead of focusing on the draftee, Jaxon Dart, or celebrating his accomplishment of getting drafted in the first round, they chose to create a false narrative that the Giants were going to pick Sanders without any proof, just suspicion. Article headlines I found also seem to be in the game of suspicion-based reporting to garner engagement, where one from Yahoo Sports starts with "ESPN reporter hints at drama...", which is not elaborated on whatsoever in the article—just a tactic to get heads moving. Focusing on all the hot topics will certainly improve ratings, viewership, and subscriptions within these companies and individuals, but the problem I found is that the people in control of this spread of information are not staying true to the sports they cover.

Some of the challenges that I ran into within my content analysis dealt mostly with creating the informative and persuasive coding categories for the content. The language some reporters, journalists, and anchors use may seem to have straightforward intentions, but certain ways it is displayed can give it negative connotations. If I had more time, I would have included

more interviews, talk show clips/sound bites, and broadcasted reports to show exactly how sports are covered live in this day and age, but with the convenience and mass-spread of news on platforms like X, it was perfect for my intentions. Quantitative data can be very tricky to work with due to the amount of coding guidelines and hidden language rules you have to follow in order to gain accurate, valid, and reliable data, but it is crucial for observing contemporary trends in media like this.

Appendices

Coded Results - Sports Media Coverage (Headlines, Social Media Posts, Articles, Interviews, etc.)

