

SPORTS PHOTOJOURNALISM

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Annotation: This article is a global survey of photojournalism and practical research on the latest developments in the use of photography in sports, a critical analysis of current professional practices of sports photojournalists, additional challenges for accrediting sports photographers in a specific field of sports photojournalism, video technology and digital details of the self-publicity of the photographs.

Keywords: amateur, digital, photography, photojournalism, sport.

Introduction

Sports photographers are more likely to be formally employed by media companies and only a relatively modest proportion are finding access to stadia and sports clubs difficult. Most photographers tend to cover a wide range of sports, particularly those who gain relatively more of their income from the sport.

For professional photojournalists, the broadening of visual culture around sport may be viewed as a direct challenge to their previously privileged position to provide visual storytelling around the sport. The multi-variegated access to images from sports, where a sports star's 'selfie' can become a more socially valued mode of engagement than a professional photograph, can potentially undermine the economic value of professional sports photography as the main visual record of an event or sports star.

Literature analysis and methodology

A challenge also comes from the user-generated images of fans, whose access to networked mobile photography brings new perspectives on the sporting event which can be instantaneously produced, distributed, and shared during live-action to various online communities.

The speed of distribution is key to the cultural capital of fan-made digital photography from sport, and in terms of accessibility to a visual record of an event, usurps the professional distribution of images that have to be processed via editorial controls and syndication. In short, fan-made media, in this case sporting images distributed in networked social media, do not face the same professionalized, routinized, and conventionalized practices of sports photojournalists.

However, they may quite rapidly become distributed and shared as the visual image telling the story of a sporting event or happening that renders industrially-produced media images as either redundant or lacking relevance to the fan experience.

In addition to the competition brought by fan-made media, the expansion of digital images from sports online has brought with it new constraints and forms of sports industry regulation. As the volume of sporting images increased, so too have attempts to increase regulation of accredited access to sporting venues, as well as mechanisms to increase the control of licensing rights of sporting images in the online environment.

Results

This is mainly due to increased awareness on the part of governing bodies of sport, individual venues, and professional sports clubs of the value of visual culture in sport. The ownership and control of intellectual property rights to sporting, in particular, the regulation of the rights of access to either broadcast or distribute commercial images from sports have become incredibly lucrative aspects of contemporary sports economics.

For example, there has been a marked increase in preferred media partnerships between sports organizations and media outlets that are prepared to collaborate on exclusivity contracts regarding access and syndication of images to competing new organizations.

In particular, from within our general survey of international photojournalists from the World Press Photo Competition, we were interested in gathering some basic data on the range and specialization of photographers in the sports they covered. We wanted to know about the demographic breakdown of sports photojournalism with the wider survey, including gender balance and regional distribution, as well as how these factors related to the coverage of particular sports.

Discussion

Our focus on sports photojournalists draws on data from a broader questionnaire survey of photography practice and routines in wider news contexts. The broader study investigates the attitudes and values of photographers on a range of issues relevant to contemporary developments in their profession, covering for instance employment arrangements, professional practices, and opinions about future developments in the field.

Many of these issues are relevant to the study of sports photojournalism and will be factored into the contemporary responsibilities and work roles of

professionals in the industry, many of whom are struggling to survive the impacts of declining circulations in newspapers and the proliferation of images online.

In terms of how sports photojournalists are coping in the digital era, despite the restructuring of the industry and the ‘crisis’ so frequently alluded to, the loss of formally employed positions, and the technical challenges, photojournalists who mainly cover sports are doing relatively well. Their income is generally higher than photographers as a whole and they are somewhat more positive about their circumstances than are other photojournalists.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the question of the future sustainability of sports photojournalism is less clear from the data. Certainly, there are challenges and how these are resolved or allowed to develop will have an impact on the profession going forward as well as on the representation of the sport. The gradual disappearance of women sports photographers will not help correct the sexism, racism, homophobia, and lack of diversity already evident in the cultures of sport.

The capturing of iconic sports moments and their inspirational impact may be undermined by a lack of quality images and inadequate equipment. A new narcissistic aesthetic of subject-generated content may be looming. These diverse factors may encourage or discourage young people from entering the profession or force sports photojournalists in their prime to leave.

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