

Evaluation of Ethical Problems in Sports Media

Ahmet DEVECİ

Hatay Mustafa Kemal University

Uğur ABAKAY

Gaziantep University

Fikret ALINCAK

Gaziantep University

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Introduction

Sport is more than just a game or a competition; it has become a phenomenon that brings societies together, creates emotional bonds and is passionately followed by large audiences. For this reason, through television, the internet, social media and other communication channels, athletes' performances, achievements and even their private lives are brought to the audience. In this way, it can be said that it is an undeniable fact that sport has gone beyond being just a game and has become an experience followed by an inclusive audience.

Considering the power of the media to influence the thoughts of the masses and create perceptions, it is seen that it has mega-scale effects on societies (Burki et al. 2022). In this respect, it is a fact that the development of sports and the adoption of sports by the society are largely realized through the media (Durmaz, 2023). Especially with the development of technology, it is seen that the media has positive and negative effects on both the development of sports and the careers of athletes (Burki et al. 2022). Mass media such as newspapers, radio, television and the internet are used to convey sport events to the readers (Garrison and Salwen 1989). Considering that the rising profiles, performances and private lives of athletes have also become one of the focal points of the sports media (Deveci et al., 2023), many cases can be mentioned about the effects of media on athletes. While media attention can help athletes to feel more connected to their fans and the world of sport (Baker, 2023), it can also help athletes to be recognized and become admired figures (Deveci et al., 2023). However, of course, this situation will not lead to results that can only be characterized as positive. Because through the media, athletes, who are the main figures of the sports phenomenon, may be exposed to hurtful statements and online harassment. Athletes' relationships and privacy can also be damaged as a result of intense media scrutiny of their private lives (Baker, 2023).

Sports media, which is shown as one of the sub-professions with the highest number of ethical violations in the media, is criticized in every period (Garrison and Salwen 1989; Ozsoy and Eksioğlu, 2007). In this respect, people working in sports media are expected to act in line with ethical principles (Uzun, 2004; Garrison and Salwen 1989; Unsal and Ramazanoglu, 2013). In particular, the broadcasting approach of Turkish sports media is influenced by the fact that the common characteristics of the audience interested in sports in the society are young individuals and people with low education level. In this

respect, it cannot be said that ethical principles are taken into consideration too much in an environment where there are too many photographs, too little text, too much color, which does not tire the reader and which does not hesitate to use slang expressions over time (Ozsoy and Eksioglu, 2007).

As can be seen, the responsibility of sports media on society is high. However, although it is stated that the establishment of a control mechanism on the possible effects of each news item on sports in the media would provide opportunities to make significant progress in this regard (Deveci et al., 2023), it is known that no legal regulation, especially in Turkey, can provide ethical sensitivity in the media in a complete and real sense. Comprehensive and detailed legal regulations have a negative impact on the practices of media professionals. In this respect, media professionals actively seek strategies to overcome the legal obstacles they face, rather than internalizing and applying ethical principles in the light of imposed restrictions and limitations (Caplı, 2002; Ozsoy & Yildiz, 2013). What should not be forgotten is that the world of sport and the media may be different worlds, but the values that the media represents, the values that are considered important in mainstream society and how the media sells these values play a critical role (Kovacs and Doczi, 2020). In conclusion, as long as the current structure of the sports media in Turkey is maintained, incidents that undermine the credibility of the media are inevitable. This situation is the result of a complex chain that extends from the education level of the society to the understanding of sports. In order to solve the problematic structure of the sports media, both the positive and negative aspects of the current structure need to be identified as a whole (Ozsoy, 2007).

Aim of the Study

In this context, the aim of this research is to bring to light the events that occur in the context of the relationship between sports and media, especially by evaluating them in the light of ethical principles. It is thought that the research can guide researchers, readers and relevant institutions to better understand the complex and meritless structure of the sports media in Turkey and to deal with the negative situations that arise.

Method

Research Model

In this study, a qualitative research approach was utilized. Qualitative research focuses on phenomena within the flow of social life and aims to examine these phenomena without alteration (Maxwell, 2008). It envelops a assortment of viewpoints that offer assistance capture the multifaceted and complex nature of modern social life (Kitzinger, 1995). The essential objective of this approach is to realize a profound understanding of human wonders and occasions whereas keeping them in their setting (Bogdan and Biklen, 1997). Within this system, questioning using subjective strategies focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of a particular situation or curiosity being investigated (Morgan, 1996).

In this study, in order to examine ethical problems in sports media, the views of individuals who have directly experienced or observed such problems were utilised. Interview method, which is one of the qualitative research designs, was preferred in order to obtain in-depth information on the subject and to listen to the experiences of the participants first-hand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The reason why the interview method is widely used in qualitative research is that, unlike other research methods, it allows understanding people's ideas, experiences, emotions, perceptions and values. The fact that it provides detailed information and is easily applicable contributes to the frequent preference of the interview method in qualitative research (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002; Hay, 2000; Seidman, 2006).

Research Design

Qualitative research designs can be expressed as a strategy that forms the general structure of the research and aims to maintain the various stages of the process consistently in line with the determined approach (Yildirim & Simsek, 2018). In this study, phenomenology design was preferred. Phenomenology is an approach based on the personal experiences and experiences of individuals. In other words, it focuses on the researcher's in-depth examination of individuals' experiences (Merriam, 2013; Creswell, 2018). The main purpose of phenomenology is to analyse the meaning of human experiences (Van Manen, 2007). That is, it is a qualitative research method that allows people to express their perceptions, perspectives and feelings about a particular phenomenon or concept and reveals how they experience this phenomenon (Rose et al., 1995). The use of phenomenological design in this study was considered as an appropriate choice in order to better understand the experiences of individuals who have experienced or observed ethical problems in sports media. Thus, addressing the participants' personal perceptions, feelings and experiences on the subject in detail fully serves the objectives of the study. For this reason, the phenomenological design was accepted as the most appropriate method for in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences.

Research Group

Qualitative researchers tend to use non-probability purposive sampling method when forming the research group (Yildirim & Simsek, 2018; Neuman, 2012). In this respect, in this study, purposeful sampling method, which is one of the non-probability sampling strategies frequently preferred in qualitative research, was used to determine the research group (Merriam, 2018).

Since there is no generalisation in qualitative research, the selection of participants is shaped within the framework of the criteria determined by the researcher in line with the subject and design of the research. The phenomenological design used in this study does not foresee any fixed criteria for the selection of participants. However, what is important in the phenomenological approach is to select individuals or groups that can best reflect the phenomenon that the research focuses on or provide rich information about this phenomenon (Yildirim & Simsek, 2018; Neuman, 2012). In this direction, the criterion sampling technique, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used to identify individuals with the appropriate qualifications for the research question. This technique enabled the selection of participants who meet the specified criteria and enabled the collection of data directly related to the research question. Criterion sampling involves examining all situations that meet a set of predetermined criteria. These criteria can be determined by the researcher or pre-prepared criteria lists can be used (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Yildirim & Simsek, 2018).

The main objective of the criterion sampling technique is to ensure that the selected cases are rich in information and suitable for in-depth analysis (Marshall, 1996). In this study, criterion sampling was used to identify the main deficiencies in programmes or organisations, to provide opportunities to overcome these deficiencies and to raise awareness of relevant stakeholders about standards and norms. Thanks to this method, it is aimed that the data obtained from the research will provide useful outputs for practical applications (Charmaz, 2011; Morgan & Morgan, 2008).

The criteria determined in accordance with the purpose and method of the research are as follows:

- Being an athlete or a spectator with a high level of interest in sports,
- To be studying in the field of sports sciences at universities in Türkiye,

In qualitative research, it is aimed to select situations rich in information rather than

quantitative size (Glesne, 2013). In this respect, the research group in this study consisted of 25 students (6 females and 19 males) who were studying in the sports sciences departments of universities located in different provinces of Turkey and who were also amateur athletes.

Table 1

Distribution of Data on Personal and Demographic Information of the Participants Constituting the Research Group

Codes	Age	Gender	Branch
P ¹	28	Female	Court Tennis
P ²	22	Male	Fitness
P ³	20	Male	Football
P ⁴	25	Female	Volleyball
P ⁵	27	Female	Volleyball
P ⁶	20	Male	Athletics
P ⁷	20	Male	Football
P ⁸	21	Male	Basketball
P ⁹	24	Male	Court Tennis
P ¹⁰	20	Female	Volleyball
P ¹¹	22	Male	Wrestling
P ¹²	22	Female	Volleyball
P ¹³	21	Male	Football
P ¹⁴	23	Male	Football
P ¹⁵	20	Male	Football
P ¹⁶	27	Male	Badminton
P ¹⁷	22	Female	Athletics
P ¹⁸	21	Male	Football
P ¹⁹	20	Male	Wrestling
P ²⁰	26	Male	Basketball
P ²¹	21	Male	Basketball
P ²²	30	Male	Football
P ²³	23	Male	Kickboxing
P ²⁴	22	Male	Football
P ²⁵	24	Male	Fitness

Data Collection Tools

“Personal Information Form” and “Semi-structured Interview Form” developed by the researchers were used in the study. The personal information form includes information about the participants’ age, gender and sports branch. In the semi-structured interview form, the open-ended question directed to the participants is as follows:

- What would you like to say about how unethical actions in sports media affect sporting identities (athletes, teams, fans, etc.)?
- What would you like to say about how the sports media should approach ethical issues?

Data Collection Process

The field application of the semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers was carefully conducted between May 06, 2023 and June 25, 2024.

- The research data were obtained through face-to-face in-depth interviews after obtaining an appointment and permission from the participants. The participants were made to feel comfortable and the interviews were conducted in a friendly and reliable environment.
- In order to prevent data loss during the interviews, the researchers recorded all interviews with a cell phone with voice recording feature after obtaining the necessary

permissions from the participants. This method eliminated the need for note-taking and allowed the researchers to listen to the participants more carefully and to pose questions more flexibly.

- The interview records were meticulously computerised and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. These raw data were elaborated and a more comprehensive document was created and then copies of these documents were taken and archived. These steps increased the accuracy of the data and created a solid foundation for the analysis process. As a result, the data collection and editing stages minimised the risk of data loss and strengthened the methodological reliability of the study.

Validity and Reliability of the Research

To ensure validity and reliability in this study, several strategies commonly employed in qualitative research were implemented, including credibility, expert review, transferability, consistency, and participant confirmation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Yildirim and Simsek, 2018; Sahin, 2020). In this context, detailed information about all procedures undertaken in the research was provided. Using the participant confirmation method, the interview findings were shared with participants for accuracy verification. Additionally, expert feedback was sought to assess the results and enhance the depth of the research. The transparency of the data collection and analysis process was upheld by maintaining thorough records. Each code that emerged from the analysis was described in detail, supported by direct quotes from participants. These quotations served to enrich the understanding of the codes and provided a more concrete representation of participants' perspectives.

Lastly, to ensure validity and reliability in this study, a sufficiently large sample was chosen, multiple researchers contributed, and various sources and perspectives were consulted. Furthermore, the research was conducted impartially, free from the personal biases of the researchers (Baltacı, 2019; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).

Analysis of Data

In this study, descriptive analysis and content analysis methods, which are frequently used in qualitative research designs, were used to analyse the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2000; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Descriptive analysis is generally preferred in cases that do not require detailed decomposition of the qualitative data set. For example, the description of the demographic characteristics and various qualities of the participants makes the use of descriptive analysis mandatory (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Content analysis, on the other hand, aims to examine the collected data in depth and to reveal concepts, categories and themes from these data. In this analysis method, by focusing on the data set, codes are created based on the events and phenomena frequently emphasised by the participants. These codes are categorised on the basis of similarities and relationships and brought together around broader themes. In other words, related and similar data are collected and interpreted under certain concepts and themes. Content analysis enables the participants' views to be systematically analysed and made sense of. Moreover, the tools required for the application of content analysis are generally accessible, easy and economical (Bengtsson, 2016; Berg & Lune, 2015; Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Krippendorff, 2004; Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

The reliability of the data revealed as a result of the data analysis was calculated using Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula. This formula is as follows.

$$[Theme\ of\ agreement / (Theme\ of\ agreement + Theme\ of\ disagreement)] \times 100$$

For the reliability calculation between the coding experts, the acceptable agreement value should be above 85% (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2020).

As a result of the application of the formula, 28 of the 32 codes proposed by the coders

were approved, and $28/(28+4)*100=87.5$ consensus was reached on the appropriateness of the coding. The 4 codes on which there was no consensus were combined with other appropriate codes. In this context, it is accepted that the results of the current research are reliable.

Results

In this part of the study, findings based on the analysis of qualitative data are presented. These findings reflect the participants' views on the effects of unethical actions of sports media on athletes and some sporting identities and how sports media should approach ethical issues.

Table 2

Participants' Views on How Unethical Actions in Sports Media Affect Sporting Identities

Themes	Categories	Code No	Code	Participants	Frequency
Negative Effects of Unethical Actions of the Media on Sporting Identities	Private Life and Career	1	↻ The negative impact of the media's rating-oriented behaviour on the private life and careers of athletes	P ¹ , P ³ , P ⁴ , P ⁵ , P ⁶ , P ⁷ , P ⁹ , P ¹¹ , P ¹³ , P ¹⁴ , P ¹⁷ , P ¹⁸ , P ²³ , P ²⁴	14
	Psychological Pressure and Performance	2	↻ The use of violent, hateful and misleading language by the media negatively affects the psychological state of athletes and reduces their performance	P ¹ , P ¹³ , P ¹⁹ , P ²⁰ , P ²¹ , P ²⁴	6
		3	↻ Due to the fact that the media does not comply with the principle of equality in bringing athletes to the agenda, it causes a sense of inadequacy in athletes	P ⁸ , P ¹⁰ , P ¹⁵ , P ¹⁶ , P ²²	5
		4	↻ The media's continuous psychological pressure on athletes	P ⁸ , P ¹² , P ¹⁴	3
		5	↻ The media complicates the decision-making processes of athletes	P ¹³ , P ²⁴	2
		6	↻ The media causing athletes to be subjected to negative criticism by society	P ¹² , P ²⁵	2
	Media-induced Image and Prestige Losses	7	↻ The media's harm to the team community that athletes are part of	P ¹³ , P ²² , P ²³	3
		8	↻ Damage to the prestige of the country by the media	P ⁵ , P ²²	2
	Substance Use and Addiction	9	↻ Media encouraging substance use and creating addiction on the audience	P ² , P ⁵ , P ¹⁷ , P ²⁵	4
	Behaviour and Character	10	↻ The media encourages athletes to exhibit spoiled behavior	P ¹⁰ , P ²³	2
		11	↻ Creating a negative impact on character development by causing excessive ambition	P ¹⁴	1
Total		11			44

According to Table 2, as a result of the data analysis, it is seen that the participants' views on how unethical actions in sports media affect sporting identities consist of one theme, five categories and eleven codes. The codes related to this theme and the sample opinions directly quoted from the participants related to these codes are given below, taking into account the frequency size according to the categories.

Theme 1: Negative Effects of Unethical Actions of the Media on Sporting Identities (f:44)

Code 1: The negative impact of the media's rating-oriented behaviour on the private life and careers of athletes (f:14) "Nowadays, the media generally intervenes in the private lives and thoughts of many athletes for the sake of ratings. I can give an example to this situation with the enmity between footballer Arda Turan and artist Berkay. Because once the incident came to the agenda, it attracted a lot of attention of the society. Since this was the case, the media tried to keep the agenda busy with these issues by going more on this situation. For this reason, since this incident in the private lives of two individuals was presented very differently in the media, I think that this situation harmed their status and professions..." (P³).

Code 2: The use of violent, hateful and misleading language by the media negatively affects the psychological state of athletes and reduces their performance (f:6) "Especially in traditional media, athletes are presented to the public in the same way as they are presented by the people and institutions that make the news. Therefore, sometimes the private lives of athletes can be violated due to false news in the media. ...The media constantly intervenes in the private lives of athletes in order to make money and increase their earnings. As a result of this situation, athletes can be exposed to ugly discourses by the media, completely ignoring their psychology. This is an issue that I consider to be a serious ethical problem. Indeed, there is a language of psychological violence in traditional and social media. Online bad behaviours that include swearing, threats and insults to the athlete himself/herself, his/her family and relatives, and this situation can be seen as an ethical problem within the scope of the whole world. This situation that athletes are exposed to reflects negatively on their performances..." (P²⁰).

Code 3: Due to the fact that the media does not comply with the principle of equality in bringing athletes to the agenda, it causes a sense of inadequacy in athletes (f:5) "The media's unequal treatment of athletes-focusing on successful athletes while neglecting others-leads to a situation where athletes are left to fend for themselves. If the media fails to act ethically and behaves emotionally rather than objectively toward athletes, this can result in feelings of alienation from the sport and a sense of inadequacy. I believe that these reports, which violate the principle of equality, may also cause athletes to become withdrawn in their personal lives..." (P¹⁵).

Code 4: The media's continuous psychological pressure on athletes (f:3) "...Sports media can have positive effects on athletes as well as negative effects. In a match where an X athlete is selected as the player of the field, good sections and good aspects about that athlete will be reflected in the media. This situation will cause the athlete to gain popularity and increase his/her fan base. For the athlete, this situation will move him/her forward mentally and make him/her feel good. This good feeling will be a source of motivation in other matches. On the other hand, an unethical behaviour or a bad game played by the athlete will be presented to the audience and sports fans by the same media. This situation will cause the athlete to be badly commented and therefore create a serious psychological pressure on him/her. The athlete may go to other matches with a bad psychology after the media reflects him/her in this way..." (P¹²).

Code 5: The media complicates the decision-making processes of athletes (f:2) "...The media's unethical coverage of athletes' private lives... affects their psychology and, therefore, directly impacts their decision-making abilities in response to the situations they encounter..." (P¹³).

Code 6: The media causing athletes to be subjected to negative criticism by society (f:2) "...The media's unethical reporting of athletes' private lives may also cause them to be subjected to bad criticism by the society..." (P¹²).

Code 7: The media's harm to the team community that athletes are part of (f:3) "...Slander and defamation campaigns by the media against the identity of footballers during the transfer processes of footballers damage both the career of the footballer and the community of the current team in a negative way" (P¹³).

Code 8: Damage to the prestige of the country by the media (f:2) "...I was a bit young, but I remember that in the final of the 2006 Football World Cup, French player Zinedine Zidane made an iconic moment by headbutting his rival, Italian player Marco Materazzi. In my opinion, this black mark in the history of football is one of the moments that will never be forgotten. Therefore, Zinedine Zidane's behaviour was unethical. This situation has led to a bad name for this star footballer in the eyes of society and problems in his social life. Of course, this situation should not only be looked at personally. Because the most important situation here is the loss of reputation of France in the eyes of billions of people in the World Cup final, which is followed by billions of people..." (P²²).

Code 9: Media encouraging substance use and creating addiction on the audience (f:4) "...Unfortunately, although digital media has made positive contributions to the fitness branch I am interested in these days, its negative aspects have also increased gradually. Especially when sedentary individuals see professional fitness athletes in the media, they work unconsciously to be popular and liked like them. They are trying to do the training that Olympic athletes do. For what, to be like him. However, they themselves have just started. When they cannot be like him, they want to take steroids immediately within 3-4 months, or they take protein powder from the first month and try to achieve something immediately. Then, addiction to these substances increases in an undesirable way for our branch..." (P²⁵).

Code 10: The media encourages athletes to exhibit spoiled behavior (f:2) "...Now that the press and media make athletes look bigger than they really are, this affects the athlete's career, let alone his/her career, even the way he/she walks on the street. ...For this reason, they can show spoilt behaviours brought by popularity and set the wrong example. Men can even reflect this spoilt behaviour to their families. We have witnessed these events many times..." (P¹⁰).

Code 11: Creating a negative impact on character development by causing excessive ambition (f:1) "...In my opinion, one of the most important effects is the excessive ambition to win in athletes. This is a situation I have seen from time to time in my football life. In case of any injury in football, if the referee does not stop the game, you throw the ball to the team so that the injured player can be intervened. When the game restarts, the player who uses the throw-in should give the ball to your team within the framework of ethical values. But some players are so blinded by the excessive drive to win that they use the ball in their own favour instead of giving it to you, even though it is not ethical. This situation will create the impression among the fan base that every means is permissible to win. As a result, I think that these unethical incidents will also have negative effects on the character development of the audience..." (P¹⁴).

Table 3
Participants' Opinions on How the Sports Media Should Approach Ethical Issues

Themes	Categories	Code No	Code	Participants	Frequency
Media Ethics	Accuracy and Reliability	1	☞ Principle of ethical and accurate journalism	P ¹ , P ³ , P ⁴ , P ⁵ , P ⁶ , P ⁸ , P ⁹ , P ¹⁰ , P ¹¹ , P ¹² , P ¹³ , P ¹⁴ , P ¹⁵ , P ¹⁷ , P ¹⁸ , P ²⁰ , P ²¹ , P ²⁴	18
		2	☞ Providing up-to-date and timely news presentation	P ⁶ , P ⁹ , P ¹²	3
		3	☞ Quality and professional journalism	P ⁶	1
	Impartiality and Equality	4	☞ News approach based on the principle of impartiality and equality	P ² , P ⁴ , P ⁵ , P ⁶ , P ⁸ , P ⁹ , P ¹⁰ , P ¹¹ , P ¹² , P ¹³ , P ¹⁴ , P ¹⁵ , P ¹⁶ , P ¹⁷ , P ¹⁸ , P ²⁰ , P ²¹ , P ²⁵	18
	Confidentiality and Privacy	5	☞ Privacy of private life	P ¹ , P ³ , P ⁴ , P ⁵ , P ⁶ , P ⁷ , P ⁸ , P ⁹ , P ¹⁰ , P ¹¹ , P ¹² , P ¹⁴ , P ¹⁵ , P ¹⁶ , P ¹⁷ , P ¹⁸ , P ²⁰	17
		6	☞ Respect for the private life of athletes	P ¹⁷ , P ¹⁸ , P ²⁰ , P ²¹	4
		7	☞ Athletes' awareness of being under media scrutiny	P ⁴ , P ¹⁰	2
	The Way to Determine the Accuracy of News	8	☞ First-hand collection and verification of data	P ¹³ , P ⁹ , P ¹⁷	3
Total		8			66
Media and Athlete Relations	General Problems	1	☞ The sporting aspects of athletes being the main theme of the media	P ⁴ , P ⁷ , P ¹⁰ , P ¹⁴ , P ¹⁵ , P ¹⁷	6
		2	☞ Excessive media interest in the private life of athletes	P ⁴ , P ¹²	2
		3	☞ The problem of freedom in the sports media in Turkey	P ⁵ , P ¹⁶	2
		4	☞ Media being under the influence of popular cultur	P ²	1
	Constructive Criticism and the Principle of Non-Harm	5	☞ Constructive criticism of athletes	P ¹⁹ , P ²¹ , P ²³	3
		6	☞ Avoiding news that may negatively affect the careers of athletes	P ²¹ , P ²⁴	2
		7	☞ Reporting without damaging the reputation of clubs and teams	P ²¹ , P ²²	2
Total		7			18
Legal Regulation and Enforcement	Criminal Sanction	1	☞ Implementation of permanent and effective criminal sanctions to prevent unethical behaviour	P ² , P ¹⁵ , P ²² , P ²³ , P ²⁵	5
	Controlling Media Actions	2	☞ Leaving the private life of athletes to the athletes themselves or their coaches, not to the control of the media	P ⁴ , P ²⁴	2
Total		2			7
General Total		17			91

According to Table 3, as a result of the analysis of the data, it is seen that the opinions of the participants on how the sports media should approach ethical issues consist of three themes, eight categories and seventeen codes. The codes related to these themes and the sample opinions directly quoted from the participants related to these codes are given below, taking into account the frequency size according to the categories.

Theme 1: Media Ethics (f:66)

Code 1: Principle of ethical and accurate journalism (f:18) *“...In general, since media programmes compete among themselves, they sometimes do most of the things to produce unfounded and random news. This situation affects individuals, teams and society in a bad way. The press is free, yes, but I think that equal, fair, accurate and reliable publications in the press will benefit the society, us, all concerned rather than harm...” (P⁹).*

Code 2: Providing up-to-date and timely news presentation (f:3) *“...In my opinion, if sports news is going to report an event and present it to the media, it should do a thorough research on that event and should not present it to the media without proving the accuracy of the event...” (P¹²).*

Code 3: Quality and professional journalism (f:1) *“...The priority of sports news and broadcasts is to reach a wider audience and become a popular news channel. In this context, they need to provide quality, up-to-date and reliable information...” (P⁶).*

Code 4: News approach based on the principle of impartiality and equality (f:18) *“...The commentators participating in the discussion programmes broadcast on sports channels also have a great influence. While these commentators should express themselves in a more equal and impartial manner, I do not find it right for them to make comments as if they are only supporters of one team. Because this situation both misleads the viewers and prevents them from analysing the events objectively...” (P¹⁴).*

Code 5: Privacy of private life (f:17) *“In my opinion, there should not be things like misrepresentation of news without taking into account the privacy of private life, as the current media has done. Because who talks and travels with whom is private life. This issue should not be the subject of any news or magazine. Especially for the continuation of the careers of athletes, such news cannot be positive. For example, many negative things happen in the lives of Mauro Icardi, the famous footballer of Galatasaray football club, and his wife Wanda Nara, and they reflect these experiences to the media by sharing them. Although there are many news about them, they reconcile again after a short time. This situation negatively affected the footballer’s career and many fans stopped following him on social media after this incident and they are now on everyone’s lips. In my opinion, the private life of people and athletes should not be reflected in the media so much. Because the relationship of individuals with their spouse, friend or family should be private. Therefore, it is not right for the media to scrutinise these issues in detail” (P³).*

Code 6: Respect for the private life of athletes (f:4) *“...There is a traditional media in our country that interferes in the private lives of athletes. In this sense, the media should approach human rights and athletes’ rights in a respectful manner...” (P²⁰).*

Code 7: Athletes’ awareness of being under media scrutiny (f:2) *“...Everyone has a life. Of course athletes too. I think that the more the athlete wants to reflect his private life, the more media coverage he should find. The person who will prevent this situation is the athlete. Because athletes are constantly under media attention. The athlete should put a barrier in front of this situation. They should pay attention to the media content they put on their own accounts and related sharing sites. Because the press can be such a dangerous tool that sometimes the situation that occurs at that moment can be perceived in a very different way. The athlete needs to draw that fine line well...” (P¹⁰).*

Code 8: First-hand collection and verification of data (f:3) *“There is more than one way to determine how true or false any sports news is, to what extent it is objective, and the most effective and correct way among these options is to get first-hand data from the people and institutions involved in the news (event) in question and to confirm the data. If the process we recommend for accurate and healthy information is not carried out, speculation news that has no connection with false reality has a direct negative impact on the private lives of athletes. In order to prevent such situations from occurring, it should be ethically obligatory to carry out the above-mentioned process immediately...” (P¹³).*

Theme 2: Media and Athlete Relations (f:18)

Code 1: The sporting aspects of athletes being the main theme of the media (f:6) *“...Our media likes to make empty news. Athletes can be on the agenda even with their private lives. I don't think this is right. I think an athlete should be remembered in the media with his/her prestige, his/her success in the branch he/she plays, in other words, his/her sportive aspect...” (P⁷).*

Code2: Excessive media interest in the private life of athletes (f:2) *“...The media has negative as well as positive sides. In particular, there is excessive interference in the private lives of athletes. If we have a little empathy, I think it is not a pleasant situation for the media to closely follow the private lives of athletes. An athlete may want to live his/her private life in secret and this is extremely normal. I think this should be respected.” (P¹²).*

Code 3: The problem of freedom in the sports media in Turkey (f:2) *“...News should not be produced under oppression. In such situations, sports news must be reported freely and transparently. If reporting is done subjectively and under oppressive conditions, rather than maintaining an objective stance without ethics, we may face unresolved issues. Unfortunately, we encounter such problems in our country from time to time...” (P¹⁶).*

Code 4: Media being under the influence of popular culture (f:1) *“...The media gives more space to popular sports and athletes with high popularity. The reason for this is to earn more money... Unfortunately, unrecognised or developing branches and athletes are rarely covered in the sports media...” (P²).*

Code 5: Constructive criticism of athletes (f:3) *“Unfortunately, the media in Turkey ignore the fact that athletes are human beings, even though they should not forget that they are human beings too. We need to remind ourselves that the other person is not a machine but a human being. While we, as the press, watch them from the outside at some points, the level of criticism can be carried to a more understandable level for both the press and the athletes...” (P¹⁹).*

Code 6: Avoiding news that may negatively affect the careers of athletes (f:2) *“... News that may adversely affect the career of athletes should not be reported...” (P²⁴).*

Code 7: Reporting without damaging the reputation of clubs and teams (f:2) *“...It is necessary to present the news by considering everything good and bad. In particular, news should be interpreted without defaming the name of the club or the team and without causing any victimisation...” (P²¹).*

Theme 3: Legal Regulation and Enforcement (f:7)

Code 1: Implementation of permanent and effective criminal sanctions to prevent unethical behaviour (f:5) *“...I think that if there are permanent and effective criminal sanctions to prevent unethical behaviour, such situations will be minimised...” (P¹⁵).*

Code 2: Leaving the private life of athletes to the athletes themselves or their coaches, not to the control of the media (f:2) “...I do not find it very ethical for the sports media to be too involved in the private lives of athletes. Of course, the athlete should be sensitive in his/her private life. However, this situation should be left to the athlete’s own control or coaches...” (P⁴).

Discussion

The research results in Table 2 show that unethical actions in sports media have far-reaching negative effects on athletes’ identities and careers. Accordingly, it is seen that the rating-oriented approaches of the media can harm both the private lives and careers of athletes. The participants’ statements on this issue reveal that the media’s interference in every aspect of athletes’ lives and violation of their privacy has devastating consequences both personally and professionally. In a study conducted by Deveci et al. (2023), it was concluded that the media is a structure that does not contribute to human development for the sake of ratings and damages the reputation of sports and athletes. Kovacs and Doczi (2020) concluded that athletes want to read quality publications about themselves, including their profession, and they want to avoid having their private lives exposed and being a part of scandals.

According to the results of the research, it is seen that the language of violence, hate and fake news used by the media negatively affects the psychology of athletes and causes a decrease in their performances. However, it is thought that it would not be correct to evaluate this situation only with the decrease in the performance of athletes. Because it can be said that these unethical approaches of the media may lead to the occurrence of violence at the social level and the dominance of hate language. According to Ozsoy and Eksioglu (2007), one of the situations that can be considered unethical is that sports media sometimes broadcast in a way that encourages violence in sports. At this point, it is important not to ignore the influence of club managers and sports people who make irresponsible statements. While the media is expected not to convey provocative messages to the fan masses, it is a controversial issue to what extent the journalistic competition ensures compliance with these principles (Ozsoy and Eksioglu, 2007). In this context, it can be said that the explicit or implicit hate speech used by traditional and new media in violent incidents in sports arenas has an effect that escalates and reproduces the tension between fans (Ozsoy and Yildiz, 2013). Therefore, it can be stated that sports media can also have a structure that can sow seeds of hatred among sports fans, incite violence and feed hooliganism (Unsal and Ramazanoglu, 2013). As Unlutepe (1991) states, the sports media, especially sports writers, have a great responsibility to establish sports ethics in Turkey and to raise public awareness on this issue. News language in newspaper publications should be organized in accordance with social moral values. Unfortunately, the Turkish sports press does not display a correct attitude in this regard (Unlutepe, 1991). Although these results in the literature support the results of the current research, there are also studies that report interesting results about this situation. For example, in the study conducted by Yuceturk and Besna (2022), it was stated that athletes think that behaviors such as harassment, disclosure, insult, slander that they encounter or are subjected to on social media are a natural process and they do not see it as something that will significantly affect their careers. According to the results of the research, media behaviors that do not comply with the principle of equality in bringing athletes to the agenda cause some athletes to experience a sense of inadequacy. In this respect, the constant foregrounding of certain athletes may cause other athletes to remain in the background and feel inadequate. It can be stated that this situation may cause damage to athletes’ self-confidence and difficulties in decision-making processes. Therefore, it is thought that this unequal attitude of the media may not only create a competitive environment among athletes, but may also cause an increase in psychological pressure on them in the long run. In a study in the literature, similar results were found with the current results of the study. Accordingly, the public thinks that biased news reports,

especially about the big four sports clubs, have a positive effect on circulation and generate more advertising revenue, and therefore media organizations exhibit these unethical behaviors (Unsal and Ramazanoglu, 2013).

According to the results of the research, it is thought that the media's constant psychological pressure on athletes may cause an increase in their stress and anxiety levels in both their personal and professional lives. In this respect, the fact that athletes are exposed to negative criticism by the society can be considered as a result of this perception manipulated by the media. It is thought that this kind of media pressure may leave permanent marks on the social image of athletes and lead to loss of prestige. In the literature, there are studies that overlap with the results of the current research, which indicate that unethical behaviors of the media will expose athletes to more criticism and damage their reputations (Baker, 2023, Burki et al., 2022).

According to the results of the study, it was found that the media had negative effects not only on the individual identities of the athletes, but also on their team communities and the prestige of the country. It can be said that this situation may indicate the existence of a media effect that may result in athletes harming the institutions they represent. As Unsal and Ramazanoglu (2013) state, sports media also serves the opposite purpose of weakening cultural identity or destroying national unity and solidarity.

According to the results of the research, the fact that the media can create addiction by providing content that encourages substance use stands out as an important risk factor for both athletes and viewers. This can be exemplified by the use of doping, which is seen in almost all sports branches today and leads to fake successes. In this respect, many lower level athletes or teams observing this situation may turn to doping unless there are sufficient deterrent measures. Indeed, it can be said that the teams and athletes that the fans support and love can have positive or negative consequences on the fans. For example, MacPherson and Kerr's (2021) research shows that fans gain a sense of identity and belonging through fandom through perceptual relationships with professional athletes through social media. However, when these relationships are undermined by media norm violations, fans' sense of identity and belonging is threatened, leading to a sense of social shame. According to the results of the study, spoiled behavior and excessive ambition encouraged by the media have negative effects on the character development of athletes. While athletes are expected to exhibit healthy personal and professional development, such manipulative effects of the media may cause negative changes in their behavior and identity. According to the research results in Table 3, the participants' views on the approach of the sports media to ethical issues are categorized under various themes. It is seen that the views of the participants in the theme of media ethics are in agreement that the sports media should strictly adhere to the principles of accuracy, reliability, impartiality, equality, confidentiality and privacy. Based on these approaches, it is considered important to make the necessary interpretations regarding the codes in the research results. Accordingly, according to the results of the analysis made for the related problem of the research, it can be said that ethical and accurate journalism understanding, up-to-date and timely news presentation are considered important by the participants, which means that sports media should provide not only fast but also reliable information. According to Ozsoy and Eksioglu (2007), one of the most frequently violated ethical principles in sports media in Turkey is the publication of false news. Sportswriters who participated in the related study stated that especially during the transfer periods of football players, news that many local and foreign players have signed agreements with other clubs are frequently on the agenda. Some of these news reports appear as a result of the efforts of football players or their agents to increase their salaries or the distraction strategies of club managers. In this context, researchers argue that sports media, in a complex web of relationships, prioritize such news in order to please their readers, the majority of whom are fans (Ozsoy and Eksioglu, 2007). When a profession loses its

prestige, it cannot fulfill its functions and this leads to the realization of the expression “erosion of the legitimacy ground of the profession”. This makes it difficult to talk about the existence of sports media or its influence on public opinion in the following years. For this reason, all media workers, especially media organ owners and editors, should protect and safeguard their own reputations by upholding ethical values such as integrity and should not allow the erosion of the legitimacy of their profession (Uzun, 2004).

It is thought that the need for quality and professional journalism understanding, which was reached as a result of the research, points out that the media should stay away from amateurish approaches. In addition, it can be stated that the understanding of news based on the principle of impartiality and equality draws attention to the necessity of the media to provide a fair platform by approaching athletes equally. According to the information in the literature, the public thinks that the media does not broadcast impartially (Unsal and Ramazanoglu, 2013). In this respect, it is seen that the media’s biased attitude is not considered ethical (Ozsoy and Eksioglu, 2007). In addition, it is also a fact that the media’s focus on profitability reduces the importance given to quality (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014). In the light of this information, the sports press and media should convey information in line with objective criteria within the framework of journalistic ethics. It should fulfill its duty in line with the rules of honest and impartial press ethics (Unsal and Ramazanoglu, 2013). According to the results of the research, when it comes to the issue of privacy and confidentiality, it can be said that the participants consider the issues of privacy and respect for the private lives of athletes as an important part of the ethical responsibilities of sports media. Therefore, this can be explained as the media should not interfere excessively in the private lives of athletes for the sake of ratings. According to the results of the research, it can be said that the issue of being aware that athletes are under media attention focuses on the need for athletes to control how they present their private lives in the media. According to the participant views, athletes should be as visible as they want to be in the media. In this respect, given the risk of the media distorting events in a way that may lead to misunderstandings, it is thought that athletes should be more careful in their social media accounts and posts. Therefore, it is stated that athletes have the responsibility to draw this fine line well and set a boundary between the media and their privacy. Therefore, even if the media violates ethical boundaries, it is suggested that athletes should control the reflection of their private lives in the media. In the study conducted by Yuceturk and Besna (2022), the statements of a participant in the study about athletes being very careful about their relations with the media and the pressure this situation creates on the athlete reveal how important this situation is. This statement is as follows: “... *I am already thinking that I have to be very careful about my private life. They even sent me a message just now. I am hesitant to reply, in case I talk to someone and they distort my conversation and share it with someone else. I am honestly worried about being associated with such things when I should be associated with my success. These situations can affect my concentration and sports (P3)*”. According to the results of the research, it is considered important that the sportive aspects of athletes constitute the main theme of the media in the theme of media and athlete relations. This can be said to support the view that the media should focus on athletes’ achievements and performances and should not focus excessively on their private lives. In this regard, Farzalipour et al. (2012) also mentioned that the media should focus its attention on performance and the sport itself to keep the spirit and excitement of the game alive (Farzalipour et al., 2012). In this regard, if the media focuses more on the controversy beyond the performance, the risk of the player not being wanted in future tournaments may increase. This is thought to be detrimental to the athlete’s career and personal life (Burki et al., 2022; Baker, 2023).

According to the results of the research, the participants consider the media’s excessive interest in the private lives of athletes as an ethical problem. In this context, it is thought that this situation may harm the careers of athletes. Farzalipour et al. (2012) emphasized that the media’s excessive interest in athletes’ private lives has increased recently and

that athletes are uncomfortable with this situation (Farzalipour et al., 2012).

According to the results of the research, it can be stated that the opinions of the participants regarding the freedom problems in the sports media emphasize that the sports media should function freely and impartially, not under pressure. In this respect, it is thought that a more free and impartial structure of the sports media is important for the development of the country. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) also stated that media workers are under great pressure to provide news for the public, but they must write the truth despite everything.

According to the research results, the participants' criticisms of the sports media being under the influence of popular culture emphasize that the media generally prioritizes popular sports and athletes. In this context, the fact that the sports media give more space to popular sports and athletes and rarely give space to unrecognized or developing sports branches is expressed as a problem by the participants. While it is stated that the main reason for the media to keep highly popular sports and athletes on the agenda is to gain financial gain, it is stated that this situation leads to lesser known branches and athletes not being given the value they deserve. One participant stated that traditional sports media has not provided sufficient coverage for emerging sports disciplines like fitness, which has made it more difficult for these sports to gain popularity. Consequently, it was observed that while the transfers of high-profile football players, such as Arda Güler, have been extensively covered by major media outlets, other sports have often been overlooked. This perspective has been criticized by participants, who believe that sports media should not only focus on popular athletes but also highlight successful athletes from lesser-known sports. The studies in the literature on the subject overlap with the results of the current research. Accordingly, although there is a lack of interest in lower level athletes in the society (Deveci et al. 2023), football, which is the most popular sports branch, creates a hegemony that overshadows other branches and this situation sometimes draws the reaction of sports fans interested in branches other than football (Ozsoy and Eksioglu, 2007). As a result, it can be said that sports media should get rid of the influence of popular culture and give more space and support to different branches and athletes at different levels. This would be an important step in ensuring a wider diversity and balance in the world of sports.

According to the research results, it emerges as a significant point that criticisms directed at athletes should be constructive and that the sports media should adopt a responsible stance by avoiding news that could negatively impact athletes' careers. When examining participants' statements, it is evident that the human aspects of athletes should not be overlooked, and emphasis is placed on the importance of conducting criticisms within a framework of respect. It is highlighted that criticisms should be presented in a constructive manner that supports athletes rather than "kicking someone when they're down." According to Ozsoy and Eksioslu (2007), one of the ethically unacceptable behaviors is the use of derogatory or insulting language by journalists towards individuals. Regardless of the intent, statements that cross the boundaries of criticism and verge on insult should be carefully reviewed by editors, even if expressed by news sources. According to the results of the research, it is stated that reporting news without damaging the image of clubs and teams is an important ethical requirement that points to the impartiality and responsibility of the media. In this context, it can be said that sports media should adopt a more responsible, respectful and constructive approach towards both athletes and clubs and teams. According to the results of the research, under the theme of legal regulation and sanctions, it can be said that the participants' demands for the implementation of permanent and effective law-backed criminal sanctions to prevent unethical behaviours in the sports media emphasise the need for more deterrent legal steps to be taken against the media's exceeding ethical boundaries. It is thought that clear and effective legal regulations supported by laws against ethical violations can keep the sports media in a more responsible line. According to the results of the research, the opinions that the

private lives of athletes should not be under the control of the media clearly reveal that the protection of the privacy of athletes by laws is an important expectation and that the personal boundaries of athletes should not be violated by the media. However, according to Ozsoy and Yildiz (2013), although there are legal regulations in Turkey such as the Law No. 6222 on the Prevention of Violence and Irregularity in Sports, which includes articles for media members, it is seen that these are not deterrent for broadcasters (Ozsoy and Yildiz, 2013; Ozsoy and Eksiolu, 2007; Caplı, 2002). In the light of these general evaluations, this study suggests that the media should strictly adhere to basic principles such as accuracy, impartiality and respect for private life while addressing the approach of sports media to ethical issues. As a result of these findings, it is thought that it will provide an opportunity to develop a media understanding that will protect the interests of both athletes and the sports public by reconsidering the ethical responsibilities of the sports media.

Conclusions

In general, the research results reveal that unethical attitudes and behaviours of the sports media have far-reaching negative effects. This situation, which creates great pressure especially on the identities, careers and psychology of athletes, also damages the image of the teams represented by the athletes, the perception of sports by the audience and their behavioural patterns. In particular, the media's excessive intervention in the private lives of athletes violates their privacy and damages their professional careers. This approach of the sports media creates psychological pressure on athletes and negatively affects their performances.

The media's ratings-oriented and popular culture-based approaches lead to prestige losses not only for athletes but also for sports communities and reinforce violence, hate language and misinformation by creating false perceptions on the viewers. Therefore, the media's popular culture-based approaches lead to a sense of inequality and inadequacy among athletes, which shows that the media does not provide a fair representation.

In addition, the presentation of content that encourages substance use by the media poses risks that may create addiction for both athletes and viewers. As a result of the research, it was concluded that the sports media should adopt a more constructive, impartial and responsible attitude and that it is important to put legal regulations and sanctions into effect if necessary to prevent unethical behaviours.

As a result, it is concluded that a more fair, responsible and ethical line of the sports media can create a healthier sports environment for both athletes, teams and spectators.

Suggestions

- Ethics training programmes should be developed by journalists working in sports media, media organisations and relevant educational institutions. These programmes should be made compulsory by the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTSC) and Turkish Sports Writers Association (TSWA) in cooperation with media organisations. In the content of the programme, basic principles such as ethical journalism, respect for privacy, impartiality and accurate information should be taught. In addition, the participation of members of the media in these trainings should be documented with certificates and updated at regular intervals. Thus, it is thought that media workers will act with the knowledge of their ethical responsibilities.
- An independent ethics commission should be established through a joint effort of RTSC, TSWA, and academic circles to monitor and oversee ethical violations in sports media. This commission would be responsible for continuously observing media content to detect violations and implement sanctions. Additionally, a platform should be created where athletes can directly submit their complaints, and the commission should evaluate and resolve these complaints, allowing it to impose

sanctions on media organizations. This way, the monitoring process is expected to become transparent and effective

- The government, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and RTSC, should implement legal regulations to strictly prohibit content that promotes substance use in sports media. These regulations should target any content in sports broadcasts that praises the use of alcohol, drugs, or doping, and should foresee significant fines or broadcast suspensions. Additionally, the Ministry of Youth and Sports should organize awareness campaigns aimed at athletes and young people to promote healthy lifestyles in the media.
- In future research on this topic, it is believed that having the research group consist of elite athletes will significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of the issue.

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About the Authors

Dr. Ahmet DEVECİ He was born in September 1991. On 26.05.2014, he graduated from the Department of Sports Management and the Department of Physical Education and Sports Teaching with a degree. On 19.11.2018, he completed his master’s degree at Hatay Mustafa Kemal University Institute of Health Sciences. On 16.03.2023, he completed his doctorate education at Gaziantep University Institute of Health Sciences, Department of Physical Education and Sports. Since 18.04.2019, he has been working at Hatay Mustafa Kemal University Faculty of Sports Sciences.

E-mail: ahmetdeveci08@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-1814-3539

Prof. Dr. Ugur ABAKAY received his doctorate degree from Gazi University, Institute of Health Sciences, Department of Physical Education and Sports in 2010. Research and interests; Physical education and game teaching, sports management are included. Research articles were published in national and international journals. There are also book chapters in different publishing houses.

Email: uabakay@gmail.com , ORCID: 0000-0002-3426-6785

Prof. Dr. Fikret ALINCAK received his PhD in 2016 from Kırıkkale University, Institute of Health Sciences, Department of Physical Education and Sports. Research and interests; Physical education and game teaching, sports culture are included. Research articles have been published in national and international journals. There are also book chapters in different publishing houses.

E-mail: alincakfikret27@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-3459-3441

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