

The Impact of Alternative Journalism on Traditional Sports Media

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of alternative journalism on traditional sports media in Greece. It begins with a concise overview of current developments in the field of alternative journalism, with particular emphasis on its applications in sports reporting. The focus then shifts to the degree of adaptation demonstrated by sports journalists in response to the rise of alternative forms of information dissemination, such as blogs and social media platforms. The empirical part of the study is based on a structured questionnaire, addressed exclusively to active sports journalists working in traditional media, selected through purposive sampling. In total, 24 sports journalists participated, completing the questionnaire via an online platform. The data collected were quantitative and analyzed using statistical methods, with the aim of identifying patterns and correlations in participants' perceptions and professional practices. The findings reveal a slow rate of integration of alternative journalistic practices into traditional sports newsrooms. Although the majority of respondents acknowledge the importance of new media, they continue to face challenges in incorporating them into their daily routines. The study highlights the pressures that the digital environment exerts on traditional media, pointing to the need for redefinition of sports journalism—one that merges the ethical standards of traditional reporting with the agility and immediacy of social media.

Keywords: alternative journalism, participatory journalism, multimedia content, social media communication, journalistic ethics

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Introduction

In recent years, the media landscape has undergone a profound transformation, driven by the rapid proliferation of digital platforms and the rise of alternative forms of journalism (Wang, 2021). This shift has been particularly evident in the field of sports journalism, where the traditional gatekeeping role of mainstream media is increasingly being challenged by independent voices, user-generated content, and the immediacy of social media (Ugille, 2008). Alternative journalism — characterized by its participatory nature, decentralized structure, and flexible publishing models — has created new opportunities for storytelling and audience engagement, while simultaneously raising questions about professional standards, credibility, and the future of journalistic practice. (Flew, 2009)

In the Greek context, this transformation is unfolding within a media environment that is both highly centralized and economically constrained (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021). Sports journalism, a historically popular and commercially driven sector, finds itself at a crossroads. Traditional sports media, including print newspapers, television, and radio, are struggling to maintain relevance as readers and viewers migrate to digital-first platforms that prioritize speed, interactivity, and personalization (Gioltzidou et al., 2024). Meanwhile, sports blogs, podcasts, YouTube channels, and social media accounts operated by non-professional or semi-professional contributors are gaining traction, offering alternative narratives and challenging the dominance of traditional media.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate how professional sports journalists in Greece, working within traditional media organizations, perceive and adapt to the growing influence of alternative journalism. In an era marked by digital disruption, traditional journalistic practices are increasingly being challenged by participatory, decentralized, and user-driven models of content production and dissemination (Deuze, 2006). This shift is particularly pronounced in sports journalism, where speed, accessibility, and audience engagement are central to contemporary media consumption habits (Boyle, 2017).

While global scholarship has explored the effects of alternative journalism and social media on journalistic routines (Gioltzidou et al, 2024), little empirical attention has been

given to how these dynamics are experienced by sports journalists in the Greek media landscape—a context marked by financial precarity, media concentration, and limited institutional support for innovation (Papathanassopoulos, 2017).

Literature Review

Journalism in traditional and alternative media

The debate about finding a peaceful and balanced relationship between traditional and alternative journalism has been going on for several decades. The same applies to the constant questioning of alternative media by traditional media, and vice versa. What is certain is that after much academic research, we can say that alternative media journalism differs from mainstream journalism in several areas, while it converges in many others.

Most often when we talk about alternative journalism, we are referring to a form of online journalism. According to J. Bardoel and M. Deuze (2001), online journalism is the ‘fourth’ type of journalism, along with radio, television and print, while its special feature is that it enables journalists to create original content themselves and not simply relay information. The differentiation with traditional journalism is distinct. The foundations of mainstream journalism are no longer limited to professional journalists and traditional media, but transcend notions of professional expertise and institutions. Nowadays, those involved in alternative journalism are claiming the official role of the journalist. As Hartley (2009: 310, 322) puts it, “journalism is a creation of the working classes”. If we consider that professional journalists do not come only from the ‘working’ classes, we could conclude that today alternative journalism meets the needs of an emerging working class of journalists, while at the same time filling any gap in the education of readers and their political mobilization. In this context, alternative journalism is the result of a commitment that stems from the very Greek word “journalism” or “dimosiografos” which in the Greek language is associated with the need for journalists to speak to citizens or “dimo”, on issues that concern citizens, thus “dimo”. The need must be filled. Whether with traditional or alternative form, the need finally is filled.

A necessary point of examination is also the potential ability of alternative media to play a counter-hegemonic role in relation to the dominant media. Hackett and Carroll (2006: 33) argue that, alternative journalism, challenges the ‘regime of objectivity’ that dominates professionalized journalism (2006: 33). Stuart Hall (1977) referred to the “ideological effect” of the mass media as an accepted foundation of critical media

studies, while Hebdige (1979) noticed the role that media play in shaping and maintaining concept (1979:156). Atton (2004:3) said that in its ideal form alternative journalism is produced outside traditional media and it can include “the media of protest groups, dissidents, fringe political organisations, even fans and hobbyists”. As Couldry and Curran, (2003: 7) explain, the term “alternative journalism” functions as a comparative term to indicate that ‘whether indirectly or directly, media power is what is at stake’. Many academics agree on the role of alternative media as those whose primary concern is radical politics and social empowerment, thus acting as critical citizens’ (Norris, 1999; Downing, 1984). Most of them come to the conclusion that those who practice alternative journalism are considered as the ones who can correct the imbalance “imbalance of media power in mainstream media”, which can result in the marginalisation of certain social and cultural groups and movements (Atton, 2009). On the other hand, some academics believe that alternative media might not be politically radical or socially empowering (Couldry, 2003: 7). The common assumption, however, is that alternative journalism fills a gap left by traditional journalism, while satisfying the needs of minorities and citizens who do not wish to be dependent on large media that hold a disproportionately large amount of power in their hands.

Very often definitions help us to delimit the discussion. Although it would be extremely difficult in this limited work to analyze all the definitions of alternative journalism, we could refer to what Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2007) mention about alternative journalism. According to them, alternative media can only serve specific communities and allow the participation of these communities in the production of media, since their primary goal is to represent communities that challenge dominant forms of power. In addition, there are alternative media that are essentially complementary to traditional ones, and not so autonomous. These alternative media may differ from traditional ones either in their organization, in the forms of representation they use in journalism, or in their methods of distribution. According to Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2007), the important thing is that alternative media also differ from each other in terms of their differentiation from traditional media, always having a common goal: to offer their audience a way of representing life that will be radically different from the representations of the dominant media. Of course, in this case too, the perspective of representation is defined by some journalists. In any case, an accepted idea is that alternative journalism should allow the circulation of information and opinions, in order to allow citizens to make their own assessments (Carlson, 2007). As described by Knight, Geuze and Gerlis (2008: 126),

alternative journalism aims to “transform journalism from lecture to debate”, encouraging news consumers to become news creators. This could be the general idea behind the ideology of alternative journalism.

In any case, the challenges facing alternative journalism are many. First, competition is fierce and the survival of alternative media is often extremely difficult. According to Lowrey (2006), non-professional journalists working mainly in alternative media must serve “every client” (2006: 492) in order to maximize circulation or gain a larger audience, while strong relationships between media organizations and authorities such as the government exert pressure on specific interests. Furthermore, in alternative journalism it is very difficult to ensure that journalists have the appropriate professional qualifications, as in most cases there is no mandatory licensing or membership in a professional organization. Despite the development of journalism schools, many journalists are hired without professional qualifications. As Knight, Geuze and Gerlis (2008: 126) state, “anyone can become a journalist”. In alternative journalism, comments and opinions are at times more important than accuracy and truth.

However, whether we are talking about traditional or alternative journalism, the basis is journalism. Therefore, it is vital to remember that journalism is defined as the collection of news and information and its dissemination through the media, with the aim of informing citizens (Vidalis, 1999). This is, or should be, the common goal in both traditional and alternative journalism. In each of these cases, journalists must adhere to the code of journalistic ethics, even if in some respects it has proven to be insufficient (Chronaki, 2018), as the code of journalistic ethics ensures, among other things, freedom of expression and information through the autonomy and dignity of the journalist. This is true even when the culture and perceptions in different societies differ. As Chronaki (2018) states, ethics differ from society to society and the way in which journalistic codes of ethics are formed based on these ethical values. However, the fact that ethics differ does not mean that they do not exist. Although the ethics of each journalist may differ from case to case, adherence to the code of journalistic ethics may prove to be more valuable than ever (Deligianni, 2004). Therefore, whatever the particular perspective of journalists on certain aspects of journalistic ethics and deontology, the alternative offered by new forms of journalism cannot be an excuse for not adhering to the basic principles. “Alternative” does not mean “irregular” and this principle must be applied to both alternative and traditional journalism.

Sports journalism in a traditional and alternative environment

Alternative journalism is particularly flourishing in sports journalism. It is easy to identify who can be called a "sports journalist" in Greece. The statute of the Panhellenic Association of Sports Press, article 7, paragraph 8, defines sports editors as "those whose main and exclusive profession is the collection, formation and presentation of sports material, which is published in daily sports, political and economic newspapers of the country, in sports and various magazines or presented in electronic media, on electronic pages and news agencies" (Tsakalos, 2012).

Does the sports journalist have any particularities in relation to any other specialized journalist? His close relationship with the "game" and the "entertainment" is perhaps a point of differentiation, while the lights and the shine are another. David Rowe (2007) believes that a key role of the sports editor is to create, maintain and enhance a system of prominent athletes within a system of sports celebrity, as a significant part of sports journalism is related to entertainment and not just news. Boyle (2017) states that sports journalism was for years considered "soft" journalism, as it lacked the rigor and credibility of other forms of "hard" journalism.

Sports journalism also plays an important economic role, perhaps even more so than other areas of journalism. It is no coincidence that sports journalism often occupies the most commercial sections of newspapers, as it is an integral part of the commercial success of many newspapers (Boyle, 2017). Sports journalism is largely concerned with specific types of sports that often generate the most profit, while devoting a large part to sports stars and international events that generate the most turnover in parameters such as advertising, sponsorship, television and stadium attendance. As Rowe (2007) argues, a key role of the sports editor is to create, maintain and strengthen a system of prominent sports personalities. Thus, sports journalism has moved from the sports department to the financial department, where it is now considered crucial to the revenues of many media organizations (Farrington, 2012).

The great economic and commercial importance of sports journalism can explain, among other things, the strong relationship it has developed with technology. The landscape of sports journalism is characterized by rapid technological innovations, intense competition between media and the struggle to maximize audience (Brock, 2013). Thus, rapid technological changes directly affect both the production and consumption of sports journalism. Sports journalists realize that they are called upon to respond immediately to their new roles that require integrated skills, in order to enable active engagement in the

co-production of news with the audience (Malmelin, 2016). As Chadwick (2014) also states, the need for a hybrid form of traditional media that will incorporate alternative solutions is particularly strong in the field of sports journalism. Social media have become an integral part of modern life. More and more sports events are being broadcast digitally, with major sports events being covered by both traditional media and digital channels (Kroon, 2019). Furthermore, in recent years, more and more sports fans want to use a digital device to get more information about the program they are watching. Sports journalists therefore do not have the luxury of thinking about whether to follow the dictates of the audience. If they are late in responding, the audience will abandon them.

The close relationship of sports journalism with technology has also favored its transformation into a more alternative journalism, if we are allowed to accept that there are stages of alternativeness. In the era of social media, sports journalists are no longer limited to a closed and one-way communication system based on distributing content to the audience. Instead, they have created a much more open and interactive model that aims to connect with the audience (Schultz 2000). For example, according to Gregory (2008), sports fans often choose Twitter to get closer to the great moments of athletes and to events that are not broadcast by traditional media. These desires of sports fans strongly influence the practices followed by modern sports journalists, who are called upon to respond to the new demands. For example, traditionally, the journalist prepared content for a single communication platform, while today the same report is reshaped for publication on the Internet, in print and in electronic media (Hutchins, 2012). At the same time, professional athletes see the Internet as an opportunity to reach a wider audience, with the ultimate goal of profit, as a result they often bypass professional journalists and address citizens directly through social media. This can make the profession of a professional sports journalist much more difficult, as the possibility of an exclusive interview with a sports personality can be a great challenge.

Sports journalism also has a much more “fanatic” audience than other forms of journalism. The “fanatics” of political or economic news may be much fewer and also much less “fanatic”. However, the same is not true for sports journalism, which presents something to the audience that they already have in their hearts. Furthermore, alternative sports journalism can offer greater satisfaction to those who are fans and not only to sports fans, as they can find environments that are exclusively addressed to fans of a specific football team (Panagiotopoulou, 2013: 80). There, fanatic fans may be accepted with behaviors such as abusive speech, sexism, hate speech and threats. Ultimately,

alternative sports journalism can develop into an extension of the press offices of sports teams, dynamizing the climate in the ranks of organized fans. As Panagiotopoulou (2013: 81) points out, “a newspaper may not be directly responsible for acts of violence in stadiums, but with its publications it can cultivate hatred, uncritical rivalry and become the moral instigator for the outbreak of violent episodes.” In this context, a journalist in traditional media may have to decide how far he will go, which audience he will satisfy and ultimately which and how many “fanatic” sports fans he is willing to lose, in order to continue to adhere to the strict ethical principles of journalism.

Sports journalism has particular characteristics, which cannot be disputed. Real (2006:163) refers to alternative sports media as the “complement” of sports coverage, while Sandvoss (2005), referring mainly to the motivations for choosing sports news to be covered, emphasizes the form of meaning they give through the prism of admiration. An “admiration” that is not easy to find in other forms of reporting such as police or judicial reporting. Furthermore, as Shirky (2010) has argued, through alternative media, sports fans express their creativity and this is the innovation that characterizes them. The main motivation is the desire of alternative media journalists to share what they know with other fans, to be considered experts in the field, but also to express “narcissistic” instincts, as Cornell Sandvoss (1995: 145) states. As Brigid McCarthy (2014) states, those who choose traditional sports media have a clear expectation for accuracy, expertise and impartiality in information, while those who choose alternative media mainly want to hear different opinions, humor and originality. In alternative media, fans can take on the role of critic and thus feel that they themselves shape the narrative of sports.

In conclusion, we can say that in an increasingly changing digital environment, sports journalists are called upon to adapt violently, as the audience has already prepared and entered the digital world. Journalists in traditional media have a responsibility to uphold the principles and ethics of journalism, while they must learn and use online tools in the best way (Gioltzidou and Gioltzidou, 2022). The combination of traditional and alternative journalism is the great challenge that professional sports journalists already face. The separation of traditional and alternative journalism raises questions about morality and ethics, while expanding the boundaries of creativity and objectivity. The continuous development of sports journalists and the constant search for the ideal balance is the great challenge.

Methodology

Through a structured questionnaire, this study examines how professional sports journalists in Greece perceive and respond to the rise of alternative journalism. A quantitative research design was adopted, aiming to identify trends, correlations, and generalizable insights within the target population (Bryman, 2016).

Although the overall sample size was limited, the study deliberately focused on active sports journalists employed in traditional media — such as national newspapers, television channels, and radio stations. This sampling criterion was chosen to ensure that the data would reflect the experiences and perspectives of professionals directly embedded in traditional media environments, who are arguably more exposed to the pressures and disruptions caused by the rise of digital journalism. The research was conducted between December 15, 2024, and January 15, 2025, and included a total of 24 sports journalists working in newspapers, television, and radio. The sample was purposively selected so to include professionals at different stages of their journalistic careers. As such, the participants represented distinct journalistic generations, each shaped by different cultural backgrounds and professional norms—an element that enriched the diversity of perspectives and experiences captured in the study. The questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions, structured around four key thematic areas. The questionnaire was distributed and completed via a secure online platform, enhancing accessibility and minimizing time constraints during data collection.

The study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on three key research questions: (1) How do sports journalists perceive the credibility, impact, and journalistic value of alternative media platforms such as blogs and social media? (2) What challenges do they face in incorporating these tools into their everyday professional routines? (3) What strategies, if any, are being employed to reconcile traditional journalistic norms with the demands of a digital-first environment? All responses were anonymized and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, in order to identify recurring patterns and emergent trends in participants' views and practices.

Results

Perceptions of Credibility and Journalistic Value in Alternative Media

Although social media and blogs are becoming increasingly influential in shaping sports content, the responses from the journalists suggest that many professionals remain unconvinced about the overall quality of these sources. As shown in Figure 1, a significant percentage of the journalists expressed skepticism about the content published on

alternative platforms like blogs, Twitter, and YouTube. More than half (around 57%) rated the quality as low, while about 14% went further, describing it as very low. Only 29% felt the content was satisfactory. This hesitancy can be attributed to the professional and ethical standards cultivated through longstanding engagement with traditional journalistic practices. The journalists continue to emphasize journalistic ethics like verification and well-sourced information — principles they often feel that do not exist in the world of alternative journalism.

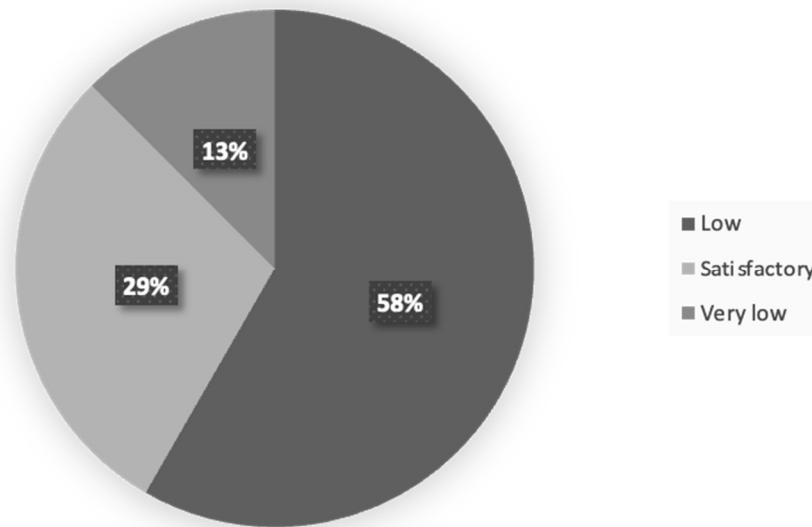


Figure 1. How would you evaluate the quality of content in alternative journalism (e.g., blogs, Twitter, YouTube) compared to traditional media?

As shown on Figure 2, all the journalists expressed concern regarding the long-term sustainability of traditional media. All participants — albeit with varying degrees of intensity — agree that alternative journalism, as represented through blogs, social media, and independent platforms, poses a threat to the traditional model of news production and dissemination. Approximately 43% of the sample (10 out of 24 respondents) stated they “strongly agree”, indicating a firm belief that the rise of alternative journalism is actively undermining the foundations of legacy media. The remaining 57% (14 out of 24) expressed agreement, albeit with slightly less intensity, but without expressing dissent.

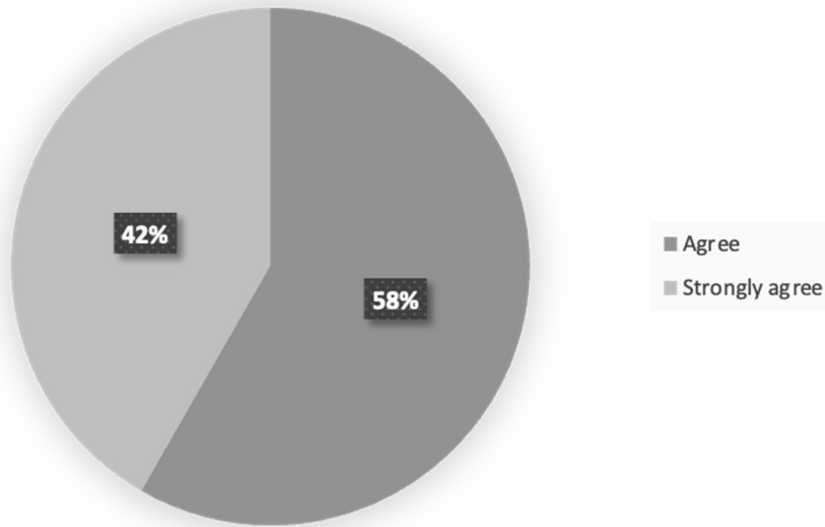


Figure 2. Alternative journalism threatens the sustainability of traditional media.

However, the journalists acknowledge the ability of alternative platforms to deliver timely updates, unlike the delays in traditional media. Especially in the case of sports journalism, where being first often matters as much as accuracy, the value of speed becomes even more pronounced. As shown on Figure 3, four out of seven participants, which corresponds to approximately 63% of the full sample, selected the "immediate and rapid news dissemination" as the most positive aspect. Other features also received recognition, though less frequently. Roughly 12% of the journalists identified "interactive communication with the audience" as a key strength, emphasizing the participatory dimension of alternative media, which allows the real-time feedback and dialogue with readers or viewers. An equivalent percentage valued "Innovative approaches to content presentation", pointing to the storytelling techniques often adopted by digital-native journalists. Additionally, the 4% highlighted the representation of diverse viewpoints, suggesting an appreciation for the pluralistic nature of alternative journalism.

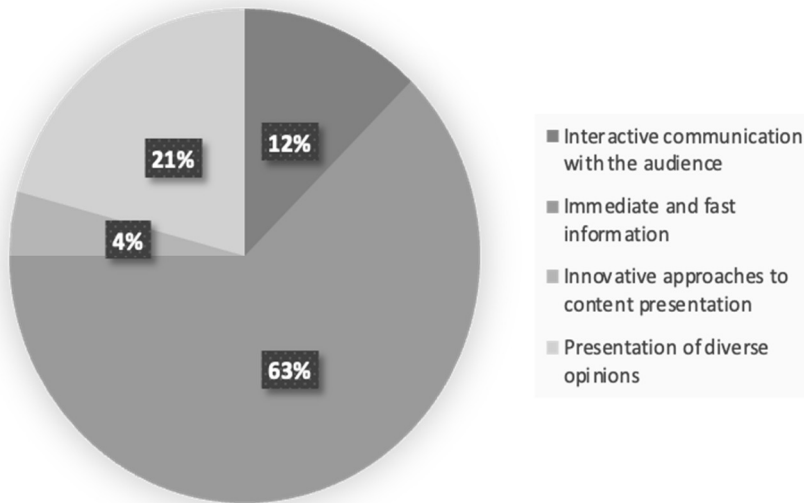


Figure 3. What aspect of alternative journalism do you consider most positive?

The majority of journalists are concerned about the reliability and accuracy of alternative journalism (Figure 4). Approximately 43% of them (10 out of 24 respondents) pointed to an “excessive emphasis on opinions rather than facts” as the most problematic aspect. This is a common critique among traditional journalists, that alternative platforms tend to prioritize subjective commentary over reporting. Closely following, about 29% of participants raised issues related to “insufficient source verification”, and another 29% emphasized a broader “lack of credibility” in alternative journalism, capturing an overall skepticism about the trustworthiness of content produced outside conventional journalistic frameworks.

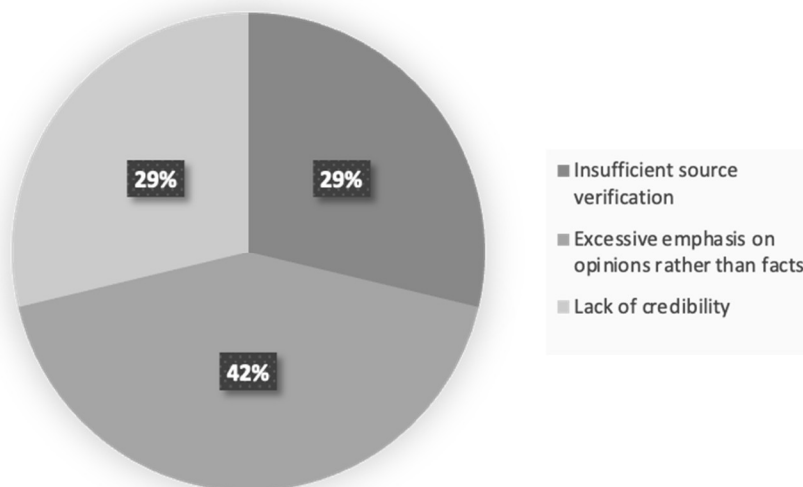
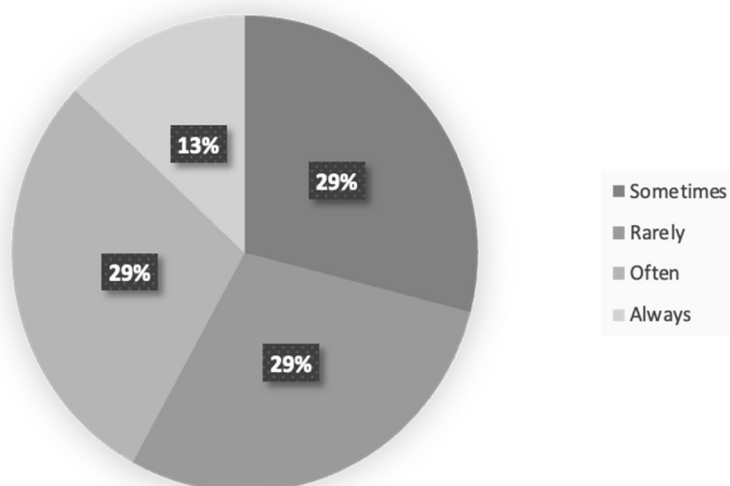


Figure 4. What aspect of alternative journalism do you consider most problematic?***Barriers to Integrating Alternative Media in Daily Journalistic Practice***

The responses in Figure 5 demonstrate the transitional phase in which traditional sports journalism in Greece currently finds itself. The responses indicate a varied pattern regarding how often traditional sports journalists incorporate content from alternative media sources into their work. Approximately 29% reported that they “often” use such content, while about 13% stated that they “always” rely on these alternative sources. Conversely, another 29% said they use alternative content “sometimes,” and approximately 29% admitted to doing so “rarely.”

**Figure 5.** How often do you use content from alternative sources (e.g., Twitter, blogs, YouTube) in your work?

In response to the question about why they do this (Figure 6), the vast majority (86%) of journalists cited "innovation or access to new information not available elsewhere." Only a small minority, about 14%, mentioned "audience demand" as the main reason for using such content.

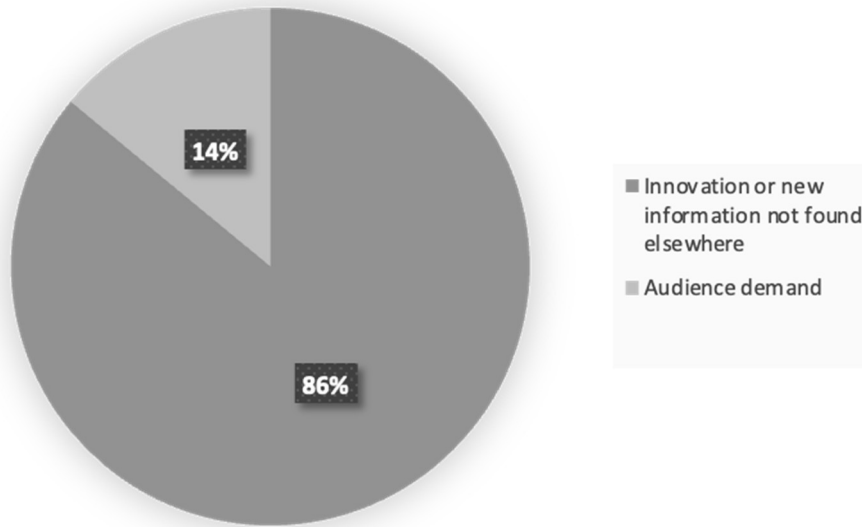


Figure 6. If yes, what is the main reason you did so?

Regarding the attitude of the Media, it appears that there is no clear strategy for managing information originating from alternative sources (Figure 7). Approximately 29% strongly agree that the traditional media they work for have established such a strategy. On the other hand, about 14% disagree with this statement. The majority, around 57%, remain neutral (neither agreeing nor disagreeing), which may reflect a lack of clear policies in this area.

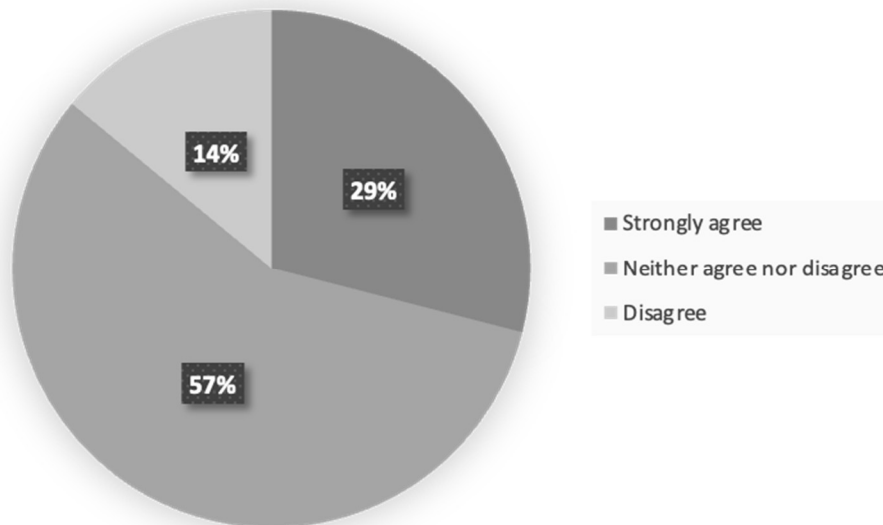


Figure 7. The traditional media I work for adopts a clear strategy for managing information originating from alternative sources.

Citing sources remains an important journalistic principle for the majority of journalists, who reportedly make efforts to maintain their credibility despite the challenges posed by the diverse and rapidly evolving landscape of alternative journalism (Figure 8). Specifically, about 50% stated that they “always” cite the source of alternative content in their reporting. Another 29% said they do so “often,” while approximately 14% reported doing it “sometimes.” A small minority, around 7%, admitted that they “never” cite these sources.

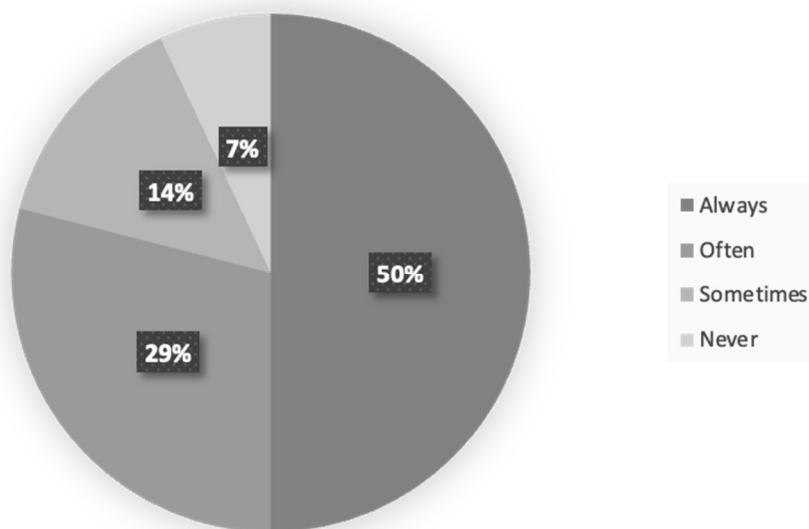


Figure 8. How often do you cite the source of content you use from alternative sources in your reporting?

While verification and correction remain the primary principles, emphasis is also placed on media literacy and public engagement as part of managing misinformation in the digital age. In response to the question, "How do you handle situations where the public spreads unverified information about sports events or personalities?" (Figure 9), approximately 38% reported that they actively respond by verifying information and publishing corrections when necessary. Similarly, another 25% stated that they counter false claims through official statements. Interestingly, about 25% of journalists mentioned undertaking educational initiatives aimed at helping the public understand how to verify information on their own. A small minority, around 12%, admitted that they sometimes simply ignore such information when they encounter it.

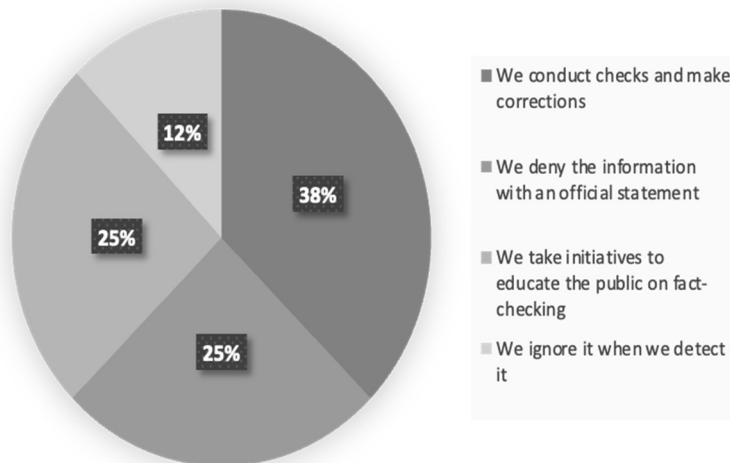


Figure 9. How do you handle situations where the public spreads unverified information about sports events or personalities?

Reconciling Traditional Norms with Digital Journalism

The vast majority of sports journalists (approximately 72%) recognize that the biggest challenge posed by alternative journalism to their industry is the decline in the credibility of news (Figure 10). This reveals journalists' strong concern regarding the quality and validity of information circulating through alternative platforms. A smaller percentage (around 14%) highlights the pressure for faster and greater news production, imposed by digital platforms, as a significant challenge. Finally, only 14% consider the decline in readership or viewership of traditional media as the main difficulty. This response may indicate that, although important, audience loss is not the journalists' primary concern when it comes to the challenges brought by alternative journalism.

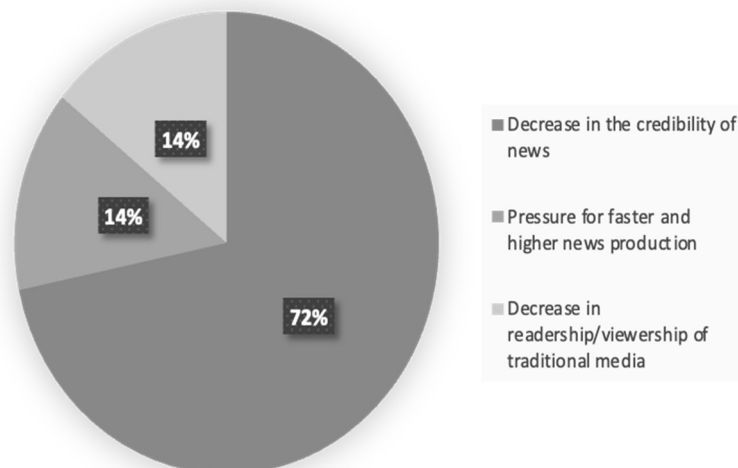


Figure 10. What do you consider to be the biggest challenge posed by alternative journalism to your industry?

The majority of sports journalists believe that incorporating participatory content, such as comments or reports from fans, into traditional media would be beneficial (Figure 11). Specifically, about 72% maintain an open attitude towards utilizing content generated by the audience. However, there is also a percentage, around 14%, that remains neutral (neither agreeing nor disagreeing) — a figure that suggests there is still some uncertainty regarding how and to what extent such material could be effectively integrated. Finally, a small percentage, approximately 14%, strongly disagree with the idea, indicating that for some professionals, public participation in content may raise concerns about the credibility or quality of the news.

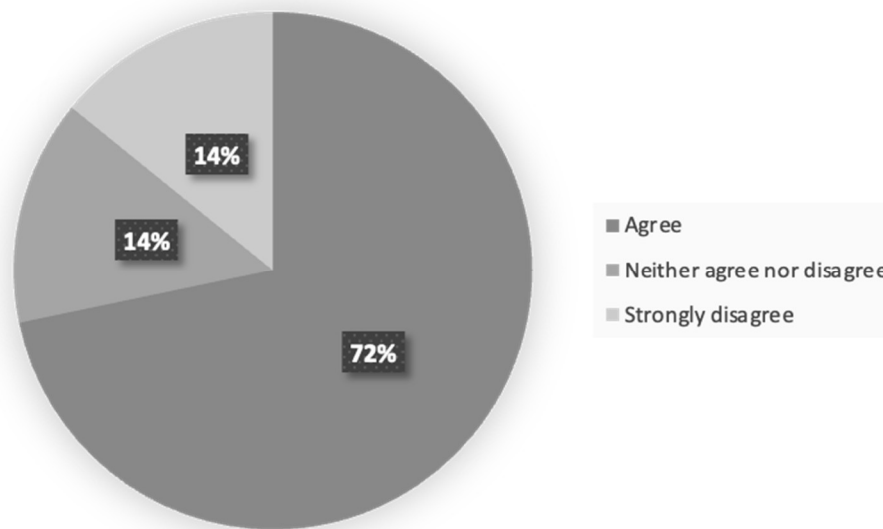


Figure 11. Incorporating participatory content (e.g., comments or reports from fans) into traditional media news would be beneficial.

Conclusion

The research reveals that sports journalism in Greece is undergoing a significant transformation, with the adoption of alternative journalism practices in newsrooms progressing at a slow pace. Although most sports journalists acknowledge the importance of social media and new media platforms, they face notable challenges when it comes to integrating these into their daily routines.

The increasing use of content from alternative sources — such as blogs and Social Media — is now a reality, although the extent and frequency of this usage vary considerably. This transition takes place amidst challenges related primarily to the speed

and immediacy of information dissemination in a digital world, where there is intense pressure to produce news quickly and continuously.

Journalists express deep concern about the decline in news credibility associated with alternative media, as well as the demands digital platforms impose for high-volume news production within short time frames. At the same time, the vast majority continue to place great importance on verification and source citation, thereby upholding core journalistic principles.

Furthermore, there is a clear need for a new approach to sports journalism — a combination of the accuracy and reliability characteristic of traditional media with the flexibility and immediacy of new media. The incorporation of participatory content, such as fan comments or reports, is viewed by most journalists as a useful practice, though some reservations remain about the quality and credibility of such material.

Finally, the absence of a clear strategy within media organizations for managing content from alternative sources highlights the need to develop organized policies and tools. These would help professional journalists to address effectively the challenges of the modern era and strike a balance between traditional and alternative journalism, while ensuring the quality and reliability of information.

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