

**AN EXAMINATION OF DIGITAL NEWS REPORTING ON PROFESSIONAL
JOURNALISM PRACTICE: A STUDY OF FAKE SPORT NEWS AND WEBSITES**

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that “**AN EXAMINATION OF DIGITAL NEWS REPORTING ON PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM PRACTICE: A STUDY OF FAKE SPORT NEWS AND WEBSITES**”, a dissertation submitted by me in fulfilment for the degree Master of Arts in Media Studies at University of Limpopo is my own independent work, except where indicated and that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another faculty or university.

Name: Singh, K (Miss)

Date: 20 July 2019

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my only nephew, JACE, who represents the new generation who will take knowledge and human advancement to the next level.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of digital news reporting on professional journalistic practice focusing on fake sport news websites. It evolves from the fact that, despite the progressive benefits of the digital revolution, the rise of fake news websites has become common practice associated with the *clickbait* that spreads rumours posted on unofficial accounts often with a journalistic pretext. The aim of this study was to examine how fake digital sport news reporting impacts on professional journalistic practice. The objectives of the study were: to describe the nature of internet-based fake sport news stories and websites; to assess the credibility of sport news disseminated through fake news sites, and to determine the implications of fake sport news stories and websites on standard news practice.

The descriptive design within the qualitative interpretive paradigm was used to determine the negative effect that fake sport news has on professional journalistic practice. Qualitative content analysis of ten sample news excerpts and in-depth interviews with sixteen expert informants were complementarily used to collect data. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was applied to generate discursive themes which yielded the study outcomes. The data from screenshots and interviews were collected, corroborated and analysed, using content and thematic analysis techniques. After analysing both the screenshots and the interviews, a total of eight themes emerged from the study.

The study notes how fake sport news and its associated litany of misinformation and/or disinformation has contributed to the creation of false hypes about sports news to the detriment of professional journalism practice. The study revealed that fake sport news is prominent on social media and poses a major challenge to journalistic integrity and credibility. From the various screenshots, fake headlines were identified as a contributing factor to the rise of fake news stories. It was also found that fake sport news has a negative effect on journalism practice, as it spreads lies, makes people more interested in emotional stories and forces credible news agencies to also use sensational headlines to gain the attention of an audience. The interviews revealed that characteristics of fake sport news stories are exaggerated, misleading, have no source or attributions, no by-lines or unknown authors and misrepresent so-called facts.

The study recommends that research, fact-checking, naming and shaming people/websites that popularize fake sport news should be made known to the public; proper training and assertion of certain rules, regulations and ethics for new reporters and journalists to follow and stick to; there must be thorough research and cross checking of information gained from a secondary source; a governing body to possibly monitor and crack down on serial propagators and spreaders of fake sports news stories; sport journalists should alert readers of fake sport news and fake sport news websites, as these are common in sport due to the popularity of sport news sites; and sport journalists should stay away from reporting/re-writing and sharing fake news in order to maintain credibility and ethics in sport news reporting.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS OR ABBREVIATIONS

BBC:	British Broadcasting Corporation
BR:	Bleacher Report
ESPN:	Entertain and Sports Programming Network
FA:	Football Association
ICTs:	Information and Communication Technologies
ITKs:	In The Knows
MMA:	Media Monitoring Africa
PCSA:	Press Council of South Africa
PR:	Public Relations
SAD:	Situation definition, Analysis and Decision
SMS:	Short Message Service
TREC:	Turfloop Research and Ethics Committee
UK:	United Kingdom
USA:	United States of America

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CHAPTER 1

1. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution of the 1990s has dramatically reshaped the journalistic landscape, with sports journalism often being at the leading edge of this transition. This has further advanced journalism towards online publishing with many new (often fan-based) sources of information becoming available as part of the burgeoning global sports culture (Boyle, 2017:494). As a result, this has created a unique crop of media consumers who want news faster than ever before with younger audiences shying away from traditional media platforms such as television and the newspaper, preferring online sites instead (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010). The digital migration entails the moving of media audiences from utilisation of print publications or analogue broadcasts to online platforms (Roux, 2013), thereby creating a complex multi-media environment where users become content generators. With the ever-dynamic evolution of new media technologies, audiences have moved along with these technologies to an extent where, in certain instances, they have become 'second nature' which they depend on or use on a daily basis. Subsequently, their demand for more user-friendly media is often determined by how exciting news sites have become, how immediate they get feedback, how interactive it is, and most of all, the cost of consuming it (Boyle, 2017). Thus, contemporary new media users want sport consumption to be tailored to their personal interests, with unlimited accessibility in the comfort of their own homes.

The effect of convergence in many of its varied forms has pervaded much of "media technology, markets, production, content, and reception" in contemporary terms (Quandt & Singer, 2009:130). This has necessitated the ever-hastening development of technologies, structures, systems and processes, thereby enabling faster developments across a complicated web of relationships. For this reason, the body of literature on convergence in the newsroom has grown rapidly, and its contents have changed almost as quickly as the technology described in its pages (Roux, 2013). Owing to digital migration, journalists working in sport have had to adapt and re-invent themselves as journalism moves to digital spaces (Boyle, 2017). Thus, commitment

to ethical journalism now requires more than just mere talent and moral courage, but often a good deal of professionalism.

According to White (2008:138), the “media cannot play fast and loose with the truth and expect to get away with it. In the online world, it is ever more essential that the media voice is recognisable, truthful and reliable.” However, one of the challenges of modern journalism has been its failure to develop trustworthy systems of self-regulation. This has been due to its pliability in the hands of citizens since they can create their own content. For this reason, accountability in news reporting remains in the hands of both journalists and consumers with the latter not being subject to legal controls as the former. For sport journalists, this means constant self-questioning about how they practice journalism, striving for accuracy and good conduct in the telling of compelling and engaging stories while dealing with the complexities of ethical decision-making (White, 2008).

It is important to give mention of the post-truth age which appears through a repertoire of forms bearing political (mis-)use of false statements or a disregard for or misrecognition of facts, and a corresponding false belief or confusion (Andersen, 2017; Ingraham, 2016). Deliberate misstatement (disinformation) is hard to prove definitively, yet one can assume that many ambiguous, misleading, or partly false statements are deliberate, given the fact that this genre of communication is highly professionalized and mediatized (Serazio, 2017). These strategic misstatements or innocent misstatements that attract receptive audiences are often deliberate, strategically aimed at dis-informing as a way to manage opponents and/or govern by capturing attention.

Of late, sport has been rapidly changing as an art, making it an ideal object for social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Deprez, Mechant & Hoebeke, 2013). With the advent of these new media platforms, there is an added anticipatory dimension to sports coverage by journalists. Thus, when a sporting event is planned, sports journalists often begin to cover this as an upcoming sport event story, move with it till its completion, analyse and make an assessment of what occurred at the event through digital platforms (Montéréal, 2007). This becomes a multi-dimensional process into sports coverage which has transformed both the management and

consumption of sport news the world over. For example, *Sky Sports News*, *Supersport* and other sport media outlets have instant updates for a number of sporting codes rugby, cricket, tennis, hockey, Formula One among others; where sport fans can follow the event on social media rather than having to physically go to the stadia to watch it. More generally, these new patterns have made sports journalism a practice that seems to be frowned upon in the world of journalism and is gradually being considered derogatory as popular phenomenon (Derèze, Diana & Standaert, 2015).

The association of fake sport news through social media has not been without criticism, this is due to the rise of unreliable news stories circulating the internet. Some scholars have deplored the unreliability of information in social networks and have argued that the quality of information is being undermined by a growing 'cult of the amateur' where rumours and falsehoods can be instantly spread around the world (Keen, 2007). These issues have become pressing as mainstream media outlets integrate more and more social media content into their output and ordinary people increasingly continue to use social media as a source of news (Schifferes, Newman, Thurman, Corney, Goker, & Martin, 2014). Hence, this study examines digital news reporting on professional journalistic practice focusing on fake sport news stories and websites.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Fake news is referred to as typically sensationalistic 'news' published online by websites that run with names close to actual news organizations (Finlay, 2015). The portrayal of fake news on the internet can affect the public's opinion on a particular subject and this may equally cause the public to lose trust in journalism due to falsification. The rise of fake news stories and websites has brought about clickbait stories and rumours that have been posted on unofficial accounts. These accounts claim to represent 'sports journalists' who have sources that remain hidden in their posts. This becomes a problem because fake news has put sport journalists' credibility under scrutiny. Therefore, this study examines fake sport news stories and websites and their effect on journalism practice. Some examples of these fake news accounts are: *Indykaila News*, *Genius Football* and *Football Funnys*, found on Twitter. These accounts publish news that has not been verified by official sources and claim to have

anonymous sources who give them their information. Furthermore, these accounts try their best to get as many followers as possible by generating rumours about player transfers and other news related to soccer clubs, thereby creating false hypes about sports journalism.

1.3 LITERATURE SYNOPSIS

This section of the study focuses on a synopsis of the nature of internet-based sport news, digital journalism in the context of sport news coverage and the effect of fake sport news on journalistic practice as discussed below.

1.3.1 The nature of internet-based sport news

Following the advent of the digital revolution, the public can now look to the new media for the latest updates as well as find news on internet-based websites by the click of a button. In spite of their dynamic nature, some of the notable characteristics of internet-based sport news websites are a home page with latest news/features with various tabs on different types of sport codes with match fixtures and results. To keep up to date with the news as quickly as possible, some internet-based sport news sites use syndicated content and do not attribute any of the work to specific authors (Schiffes et al., 2014). Hence, there is no responsibility taken by any reporter or journalist for the stories published online. This tendency has escalated the debate about how the internet and people outside the newsroom have transformed the relationship between journalists, their audiences and their sources of information. Central to this scenario would be to harness these new interactions to improve the quality of news reporting including sport. To this end, some scholars have lamented the consistent failure of purely amateur-run on-line publications, thereby implying a compromised approach to journalistic practice (ibid). Furthermore, this suggests that the quality of sport news reporting is likely to be negatively affected at the expense of the added value of professional competence and the application of ethical principles.

1.3.2 Digital journalism and sport news coverage

For most professional journalists who have practised in the past two decades or so, life has changed considerably over the recent past because of the constant demand and growth of media technology uptake in the newsroom (Clastres & Méadel, 2007).

Digital media provides an easy means of communication where people can now read and see their favourite news on numerous platforms, including social media platforms, news websites and video outlets. It is now possible to read the same story three or four times with a different viewpoint depending on the editorial stance or ideological slant of the respective media organisation. Before this new media buzz, the consumption of sport news was “not the same as pre-satellite news when people waited for their morning papers or sat down at an appointed time for the evening television news” (Alejandro, 2010:10). Internet-based websites, predominantly Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat have changed the way “journalists do their job and how people consume news” (Adornato, 2017:6). This is evident as “more and more readers, viewers and listeners prefer to go online for their news searches” (Shahbazi, 2016:18).

Through smartphones and other media sources, such as the internet, there is a shift from acquiring news from print newspapers, to more available platforms such as online outlets, as an increasing number of media companies now offer free online content to users (Shahbazi, 2016:18). This alongside “the increasing amount of information that is accessible through mobile phones and a variety of programmes that facilitate news access, has become an important source of news information” (Li, 2016:53). Sheffer and Schultz (2010:475) argue that, “the media and journalism are even more pronounced for sports, which already has a large, built-in audience hungry for the opportunity to talk directly with sport journalists, athletes, and coaches.” Sporting activities are talked about on various social media platforms and audiences receive news from sport websites and accounts ubiquitously. Sheffer and Schultz (2010) state that due to the fast nature of digital media, it is ideal for headline formatting and covering stories that the mainstream media often ignore. For example, this is true for the emergent sport journalism hybrid which involves Twitter as an “instantaneous, interactive, intermedia conglomeration that seems to be continually redefining itself” (ibid, 2010:236).

1.3.3 Effect of fake sport news on journalistic practice

Fake news has had a negative effect on journalism in the recent past (Page & Parnel, 2017). At its core, “fake news necessitates assumptions about some kind of authentic or legitimate set of news practices” (Baym, 2005:261). Readers can be exploited and persuaded to believe untrue information when they believe that a

website is journalistic in nature. Silverman (2016) argues that fake news has become more popular and spreads on social media rapidly. Vargo, Guo and Amazeen (2017) confirm that fake news is on the rise as content generated on these sites has a 'push' or 'drive' in the broader online media ecosystem. Recently, some news organisations have remarked that "faced with this threat (fake news), news publishers cannot afford to retreat behind paywalls: everyone needs to be out there, in people's newsfeeds, challenging the lies at scale, treating disinformation on social media platforms as an urgent frontline beat" (Reuters, 2017:8). For most media houses, credibility and reliability of fake news websites has become the root of the problem for unethical news reporting since the content published on fake news stories is normally unattributed and no one takes responsibility for the story.

In the context of 'technological determinism', McLuhan (1964), cited in Sheffer & Schultz (2010), suggests that new media technologies could create changes in the culture that trigger a corresponding change in journalism practice. Thus, fake news stories and websites have a negative effect on the credibility of journalists because their work becomes compromised as people often do not know the difference between credible and fake news or websites. Arguably, the image of journalism slowly gets damaged as individuals consume media content innocently without adequate knowledge about its origins and how it looks like or operate. For example, in a story published by *Indykaila News* on Twitter, the account suggested that Wayne Rooney (former Manchester United and England football player) was going to make a big money move to China, stating that reliable sources had given them the accurate information about the soccer deal. Two years down the line, Wayne Rooney has not made any move to China but continues to play in England for Everton Football Club. It is stories like these that result in the lack of trust in digital news as people become misinformed through fake news websites.

1.4 THE ROLE OF THEORY IN THE STUDY

Both the social responsibility and information society theories are critical in underpinning the study on the effects of fake digital sports news on professional journalism practice. Both these theories offer a better understanding into the study, the responsibility of journalist's in portraying information to the public and how the rise

of technology has given these journalists the tools to share information more widely. However, this has also negatively impacted on journalists with the rise of the phenomena which is fake news. The researcher is aware of the growing body of theories that characterise digital communication including the phenomenon of post-truth. As noted by Gooch (2017:14), post-truth refers to a “circumstance where the objective facts have less influence in public opinion than emotions and personal beliefs.” Despite its relevance in the world of digital journalism, the concept of post-truth does not fall within the scope of the study which analyses fake news websites from the realm of news production rather than the comedy paradigm.

1.4.1 Social responsibility theory

Social responsibility theory assumes that the media has a role in society as the watchdog and should publish news that informs decision making in society. The main premise of social responsibility theory is that it attempts to reconcile the ideas of freedom and independence with responsibility towards society (Fourie, 2007:194). It proposes that the media should support democratic political principles but at the same time withstand the social responsibility that comes with it towards the greater society. In addition to living up to their responsibility to the public at all costs, the media should also have various points of departure on stories and views from different kinds of social groups for diversity in the voices represented. Furthermore, Fourie (2007) argues that the independent nature of the media should be made significant in their responsibility towards society and should continue to uphold certain journalistic standards. In the context of both traditional and online publishing, social responsibility theory argues that the media should fulfil their responsibilities by supplying truthful information, being objective, accurate and providing balance in reporting (McQuail, 2013).

The social responsibility theory was born from the libertarian theory; the theory’s underlying principle is that the press is granted the freedom to perform certain functions in society however this comes with upholding responsibility (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012). Developmental journalism and public journalism are supported by a framework called social responsibility theory. Social responsibility theory is based on one major premise, which according to Gunaratne and Hasim (1996:103) is that “Freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position ..., is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential

functions of mass communication in contemporary society". The Commission on Freedom of the Press, which formulated the social responsibility theory, called on the media to do the following:

- "Provide a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning;
- Serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism;
- Project a representative picture of the constituent groups in society;
- Be responsible for the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society; and
- Provide full access to the day's intelligence" (Gunaratne & Hasim, 1996:104).

In an empirical study to determine the basic dimensions of social responsibility theory, Anderson (1978/79) cited in Fuchs (2013), identifies 31 tenets and made the following conclusions: six dimensions of social responsibility theory were proposed. The first dimension was professionalism which comprises of expertise, commitment, responsibility and autonomy. The second dimension was criticism which should be vigorous and from all quarters. "Members of the public would vigorously criticize the output of their sources of public affairs information so as to encourage the media to better fulfil their dissemination responsibilities" (Anderson, 1978/79:38; cited in Fuchs, 2013). The third dimension is interaction between public and professional communicator. The fourth dimension is freedom/responsibility. The fifth dimension, service to society and the sixth, government support.

According to Okunna and Omenugha (2012:3), "The underlying principle of the social responsibility theory of the press is that the press should be free to perform the functions ... but that this freedom should be exercised with responsibility". Dominick (2009), cited in Okunna and Omenugha (2012:3), state that "This approach holds that the press has a right to criticize government and other institutions, but it also has a responsibility to preserve democracy by properly informing the public and by responding to society's needs and interests. The press does not have the freedom to do as it pleases; it is obligated to respond to society's requirements".

It is this role that the media plays in society that is the subject of this study. Whilst the social responsibility theory calls for the upholding of these ethical standards; the rise of fake news goes against all the principles described. The media has a role in society, to be the watchdog and publish news that affect society. Fourie (2007) argues that the independent nature of the media should be made significant in their responsibility towards society and continue to uphold certain standards. The media should fulfil these responsibilities by supplying truthful information, being objective, accurate and balanced in reporting (McQuail, 2013). McQuail (1987:117) cited in Okunna and Omenugha (2012) suggests that the above form part of an 'ethical dimension' to the social responsibility theory and this ties heavily with the practice of journalism around the world.

1.4.2 Information society theory

The main argument of the information society theory is that knowledge production and brain power override the importance of industrial production and machine power in the economy (Fuchs, 2013). This experience is shaped by intellectual technologies such as the computer and other forms of telecommunications. The role of information society theory is to put emphasis on the significance of information technologies including the mass media, the internet and the mobile phone in society (Fuchs, 2013). The theory proposes the assumption that the effects of information technologies including social media, knowledge, science and communication on society have brought about a new kind of social order driven by the network society. The new society centres mostly on knowledge generation, information processing and symbols communication, achievable with the help of new and more flexible information and communication technologies than before (ibid). The information society theory elaborates how these ICTs have greater influence among people's behaviour in the contemporary world. Hence, an understanding of this theoretical proposition was critical for this study as new technologies influence sport coverage and circulation of fake sport news.

The generation of today do not acquire news from television or radio broadcasts like previous generations, this does not imply that the youth are disinterested in news but suggests the shift from traditional media to new media is becoming more and more

apparent (Marchi, 2012). Young people get their news from social networking sites, cell phone texts, emails among other things, they are “not necessarily uninformed but rather are differently informed” (Marchi, 2012:248). Marchi (2012:248) states that “unlike older generations, accustomed to postponing their news needs until a fixed hour of the day, young people prefer to get news instantly whenever they want it”. Furthermore, instant news is what young people prefer and usually get this from new technologies (ibid). There is a sense of gratification for the youth when they can engage with posts by commenting and contributing to posts online, the immediacy of ongoing conversations is valued highly. Interestingly, social media and blogs are also valued as they “transmit first hand experiences and diverse perspectives”, this enables teens to have their own views on various issues and talked-about topics.

It has become both anecdotally and empirically true that younger generations are immersed in digital environments, and have developed repertoires that draw heavily on information and communications technologies (ICTs). ICTs have become faster, cheaper, and more widely available than ever before (Techcentral, 2016). This implies that identity construction often takes place in online spaces. Social media has become a tool that enables us to self-represent on multiple platforms and in doing so shapes the way in which we see ourselves/present ourselves in online communities.

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 Aim of the study

To examine how fake digital sport news reporting impacts on professional journalistic practice.

1.5.2 Objectives of the study

- To describe the nature of internet-based fake sport news stories and websites
- To assess the credibility of sport news disseminated through fake news sites
- To determine the implications of fake sport news stories and websites on standard news practice

The research objectives can be stipulated into the following research questions for this study:

- What is the nature of internet-based fake sport news stories and websites?
- Is there any credibility of sport news disseminated through fake news sites?
- What are some of the implications of fake sport news stories and websites on standard news practice?

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

There are different types of research methodologies that may be employed in a research study, namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods (Flick, 2009). This study was conducted within the qualitative paradigm which is useful for its ability to produce non-numerical descriptive data suitable for examining social phenomena such as sport news and its effect on target audiences. Thus, in the context of the stated aim and objectives, the qualitative approach was appropriate in assessing and determining the implications of fake sport news on standard journalistic practice.

The study treats a research design as a blue-print or detailed plan of how the study will be conducted taking into account the procedures for data collection and analysis for the study (Flick, 2009). The study examined the phenomenon of fake sport news and websites using the descriptive phenomenological design within the qualitative approach. The design is considered appropriate in acquiring knowledge and diverse perspectives about the implication of fake digital news on journalistic practice. Fake sport news was interpreted within the news construction activity which locates sport journalists in the production of meaning via the news making process (Baron, 2018). The research methodology is elaborated in detail in chapter 3 of the study.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The significance of this study is located within the relevance and currency of the topic in today's multi-media environment. Sport journalists may benefit from this study as it explores professional journalists' outlook on fake sport news through the internet by highlighting the significance of fact-checking and verifying information before it is made public. Media academics, students and online publishers may equally benefit from this study because its focus on sports journalism provides insightful knowledge and

highlights policy gaps about fake news reporting and how this affect the credibility of professional journalistic practice. This study is significant in that it hopes to add new knowledge in the discipline of Media Studies and may inspire future scholars who may want to research further on the relationship between digital media platforms and the broader scope of journalistic practice. The study is significant also because it creates awareness about the phenomenon of fake sport news and websites and how they impact on producers and consumers of sport news.

1.8 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1.8.1 Fake news

According to State of the Newsroom (2015) by the Wits Journalism School, fake news is referred to as typically sensationalistic ‘news’ published online by websites that run with names close to actual news organizations, such as *News24-TV* and *T1mesLive*. It is often shared rapidly across social media platforms by unsuspecting internet users, testing the line between news-as-satire, and false information that would otherwise be in the public interest. In the context of this study, fake sport news and websites were examined.

1.8.2 Digital news?

Change in the media landscape is taking place in a gradual manner. McLuhan (1964) argues that as time goes on change is inevitable and would develop over time, depending on the adaption rate of the new technology. Digital news is a product of the development of technology. The Oxford dictionary (2018) defines digital news as “information about recent events that is online or available on the internet.” In this study, online content was used in the examination of fake sport news stories and websites.

1.8.3 Professional journalism practice

Professional journalism practice refers to the way in which stories are written in an objective manner with credibility to what is being published and portrayed to the public. The American Press Institution (2018) defines journalism practice as “the activity of gathering, assessing, creating and presenting news and information.” This definition of journalism practice was used in this study.

1.8.4 Clickbait

“Clickbait is a text or thumbnail link that is designed to entice users to follow that link and read, view, or listen to the linked piece of online content. Click-bait headlines typically aim to exploit the ‘curiosity gap, providing just enough information to make readers of news websites curious, but not enough to satisfy their curiosity without clicking through to the linked content” (Wikipedia, 2018:1). Put simply, “it is a headline which tempts the reader to click on the link to the story. But the name is used pejoratively to describe headlines which are sensationalised, turn out to be adverts or are simply misleading” (Buttry, 2019:1).

1.8.5 News website

According to Yadav (2017) a news website is a collection of interlinked web pages typically hosted from a single domain. A website is accessible over the internet or a private network such as Local Area Network (LAN) through an address known as Uniform Resource Locator (URL).

1.9 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 provides the background and motivation of the study and provides an explanation of the related terms/concepts. It briefly outlines the theories that underpin the study, the research problem, and the aim and objectives of the study.

Chapter 2 discusses the literature review and provides a detailed account of relevant literature related to fake sports news and websites. The theories that underpin the study are also discussed in greater depth in this chapter.

Chapter 3 explains and details the methodology used in the research. The research design is unpacked and the data collection instruments are discussed together with how the data analysis is conducted. It also discusses how quality criteria are employed together with ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 presents the data that was collated from the documents and interviews. The qualitative findings are discussed in the form of thematic analysis and inferences drawn from the findings are outlined.

Chapter 5 presents the summary of the research and outlines how the objectives of the study were met. Using the collated data, it summarises the findings and provides recommendations and other areas for possible further research. Limitations are also discussed in this chapter before the study is concluded.

1.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter provided the background and motivation for the study. It outlined the evolution of digital media and associated technology. It also provided a synopsis into the nature of internet-based sport news, digital journalism and sport news coverage and effect of fake sport news on journalistic practice. The research problem was discussed together with the theories that underpin the study. The discussion of the research problem led to the presentation of the purpose of the study, the aim and objectives of the study. The research methodology and design were briefly outlined so that a good overview of the study is presented. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Some basic concepts related to the study are presented, together with a chapter outline.

CHAPTER 2

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the literature behind the various underlying matters in this study, namely fake news, rise of digital media/news reporting and professional journalism. Fake news is defined and explored, the features and characteristics of fake news stories/websites are looked at as well as empirical studies. This helped with further understanding the effects fake sport news has on journalist practice. In order to fully encapsulate why this study was done on digital media, the history and rise of digital media is described including the different forms and types of digital media. The advantages/disadvantages of digital news reporting on sport using Twitter in the 21st century was scrutinized. Thereafter, professional journalism practice is delved into, the basis of ethical journalism and principles that journalists follow are touched on. Finally, factors that inhibit journalistic practice as well as Van Wyk (2016) and Bath's (2017) fake news monitors are examined.

This study looks at the effect of digital news reporting on professional journalism practice by examining fake sport news stories and websites. The journalism industry has gone through countless changes in the 21st century, due to the development of the internet journalists around the world have had to become multi-skilled. As technology continues to advance, journalism has to move in the same direction. With Web 2.0 bringing with it social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat; there are many different ways to reach a readership and audience. Sport journalists in particular have adapted their reporting tools repertoire to suit online websites and social media platforms. However, this comes with evident disadvantages, one of those being fake news, which impacts the journalism profession. There is yet no academic research done on the long-term relationship between journalism as a profession and increasingly evolving technologies. Nevertheless, the adjustment of journalism has been evident for the last decade with a change in the way content is produced and shared with the public. In the section below, fake news is defined and explored, fake news websites are analysed using other empirical studies and their effects on journalistic practice is discussed.

The 4th Industrial Revolution has impacted journalism in a way never seen before; more and more media houses and agencies have ventured into the digital sphere. It is for this reason that the history of digital media, particularly social media is examined. Digital media use in sport has been on the rise and the information shared on these social media platforms are key in this study therefore this is investigated further with both the advantages and disadvantages set out. Due to the rise of digital media, this has directly impacted on journalistic practice. Ethical journalism, citizen journalism and the factors that inhibit the practice are also unpacked. Van Wyk and Bath's fake news monitors assisted to determine what fake sport news stories have been circulating in social media during the duration of the study.

2.2 FAKE NEWS

2.2.1 Definition and exploration of fake news

Page and Parnel (2017) state that fake news is fiction deliberately fabricated and presented as non-fiction with the intent to mislead recipients into treating fiction as fact or into doubting verifiable fact. The rise of fake news came a few years later with the explosion of the internet; the internet saw a boom in social media applications across the world (Laird, 2012). For some, this meant that anyone could be a journalist, producing information solely by themselves with no credible sources to speak of.

The forms post-truth takes are often not well distinguished, lies, rumors, fake news, spin, propaganda are used synonymously. Much of what is perceived as post-truth communication is a form of two general categories of communication (in lieu of simple information, which never appears without a communication context): disinformation and misinformation.

Recently, people have used 'false news' as opposed to fake news due to the phenomenon having minimal amount of available information. False news is more relatable as an everyday layman's term. The reason why fake news is so prevalent in society at the moment is due to the boom of information online, often readers can be tricked by deceitful online headlines and this information lures readers when it is sensationalised. Although it is difficult to alleviate fake news, there are other ways in which the public and the press can work to stay aware and prevent the spread of it.

2.2.2 Why fake news?

A social media following is easy to get, as long as one knows how to navigate social media sites and can get people to pay attention to your posts, your following is bound to increase. Kempen (2017:13) asks one important question, which is more vital regarding “creating a huge following or keeping your integrity”. This does not affect journalists’ in the way most people would think; citizen journalism in the form of keyboard warriors are quick to start rumours about fake stories. This negativity impacts journalism practice as people are not sure where they are receiving information from but tend to blame journalists for false reporting.

Fake news is usually found on websites but also can be found on social media platforms. Kempen (2017:13) states that “fake news creators utilize various digital platforms to ‘test’ people’s intelligence and common sense.” In South Africa, an example of kinds of fake news was the fake crime alerts during the Knysna fires in June 2017 (Kempen, 2017). Untrue stories of hijacking of vehicles and arsonists being on the loose were shut down by a police spokesman at the time of the disaster. This is merely one incident where fake news affected the public; another was about kidnapping and selling of body parts in KwaMashu, Durban. The police confirmed after this report that there are legal implications attached to sharing fake news which can result in criminal conviction, which was conveyed to the public. This can be seen in the arresting of a couple in Pietermaritzburg after they shared a fake news story which caused panic in their community (Pillay, 2017).

If people are ‘ill-informed and gullible’, this can cause chaos when fake news circulates in a community. Therefore, when one is doubtful if the information is true, Africa Check is a non-partisan fact-checking organization that can help verify the authenticity of the story (Kempen, 2017). This is not only a vital tool for journalists but also available to the public.

Allcott and Gentzkow (2017:212) claim that “fake news arises in equilibrium because it is cheaper to provide than precise signals because consumers cannot costlessly infer accuracy.” This is why it is vital to understand and interrogate this phenomenon. Figueira and Oliveira (2017:817) further argue that “on social networks, the reach and

effects of information spread occur at such a fast pace and so amplified that distorted, inaccurate or false information acquires a tremendous potential to cause real world impacts, within minutes, for millions of users". Social media is an information overload and this usually adds to the fact that individuals cannot tell apart what is truthful or fake.

A study conducted by Common Sense Media shows that 44% of children from the ages of 10-18 did not have the ability to spot a fake news piece (Anderson, 2017). The reason that fake news was chosen for this study is due to the excess of information, individuals tend to oversee what is authentic; also that digital literacy needs to extend further and "go beyond the mere ability to access and manage technology" (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017:818). An increasing proportion of adults have now started receiving their news on social media platforms; therefore, journalism runs the risk of being at stake here as many of these fictional stories circulate on social media platforms and make it difficult to distinguish between authentic stories and fake ones (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017).

Furthermore, it has become increasingly easier to set up a website as well as create profits from advertising on such websites. Fake news is easily disseminated through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter because of the enormous number of active users on the respective platforms (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). According to Andrews (2011), choices of where and when consumers access sport news for example and its information, has never been greater. Moreover, there is a continued decline in the "trust and confidence" of the mass media due to the lack of accurate and fair reporting (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

2.2.3 Features of fake news stories and websites

In South Africa, in particular, the press has recognised the need for making the public aware of fake news and how to spot these stories. Advertisements in newspapers such as *Sunday Times*, television channels such as *DSTV*, radio station *94.7FM* as well as articles on websites such as *News24* have made it clear that the reality of fake news is evident in the media including online publications. Social media giants such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter have also stepped forward in removing fake accounts and working with fact checkers to ensure that wrongful information is not shared on their platforms.

An advertisement in the *Sunday Times* (23rd December 2018) by Facebook read “Together we can fight false news. You can learn what to trust with our tips to spot false news.” These were the tips listed in the advert:

- Be sceptical of headlines.

False news stories often have catchy headlines in all caps with exclamation points. If shocking claims in the headline sound unbelievable, they probably are (Jolley et al., 2017:63).

- Look closely at the link.

A phony or look-alike link may be a warning sign of false news. Many false news sites mimic authentic news sources by making small changes to the link. Readers can go to the site and compare the link to established sources (Brigida & Pratt, 2017; Figueira & Oliveira, 2017).

- Investigate the source.

Ensure that the story is written by a source that you trust with a reputation for accuracy. If the story comes from an unfamiliar organisation, check their ‘About’ section to learn more (Jolley et al., 2017:55).

- Watch for unusual formatting.

Many false news sites have misspelling or awkward layouts. Read carefully if you see these signs.

- Consider the photos.

False news sites often contain manipulated images or videos. Sometimes the photo may be authentic, but taken out of context. You can search for the photo or image to verify where it came from (Jolley et al., 2017:59).

- Inspect the date.

False news stories may contain timelines that make no sense, or event dates that have been altered.

- Check the evidence.

Check the author’s sources to confirm that they are accurate. Lack of evidence or reliance on unnamed experts may indicate a false news story (Jolley et al., 2017:55-60).

- Look at other reports.

If no other news source is reporting the same story, it may indicate that the story is false. If the story is reported by multiple sources you trust, it is more likely to be true (Jolley et al., 2017:60).

- Is the story a joke?

Sometimes false news stories can be hard to distinguish from humour or satire. Check whether the source is known for parody, and whether the story's details and tone suggest it may be just for fun.

- Some stories are intentionally false.

Think critically about the stories you read, and only share news that you know to be credible.

This guideline is a comprehensive way to spot the features and characteristics of fake news stories and websites. It is also an invaluable asset for the public as this helps them distinguish between what is true and false reporting in the media.

2.2.4 Empirical studies on fake sports news and websites

Hillsborough tragedy

On 15th of April 1989 one of football's most tragic events occurred in England. During the 1988–89 Football Association (FA) Cup semi-final game between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest, ninety-six Liverpool supporters and another seven hundred and sixty-six were injured. It was one of the worst disasters in British sporting history. The media presence and coverage was in full force on the day and continuously throughout the coming days. The media played a significant role in the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster in covering the story of what happened. Four days after the disaster, *The Sun* newspaper ran a front-page story falsely accusing the supporters of outrageous behaviour, such as pick-pocketing victims, urinating on police officers and beating an officer while he was helping a victim. These false stories were all written and regarded under 'The Truth' by *The Sun*. This was a front-page headline that shocked the public, as it proclaimed that the blame of the tragedy itself lay on the supporters, and their behaviour. Most other national newspapers covered the same mistruths as *The Sun* about the tragedy at the time but those words 'The Truth' had the power to sway popular opinion. Kelvin MacKenzie, the then editor of *The Sun*,

chose those two words very carefully. Before going to print the rest of the editorial team knew how powerful and inappropriate it would and “warned him against the front page” (Blair, 2016). This caused outrage in Merseyside resulting in “thousands of copies” being “stolen and burnt” (Contrast.org). *The Sun* spun its attention into slandering the Liverpool fans and blaming them for the tragedy. This led to a nationwide disdain of the newspaper, particularly among football fans, and the people of Liverpool. The paper has been shunned on Merseyside ever since its coverage of the Hillsborough disaster in 1989. Previous readers of *The Sun* in Liverpool were now looking elsewhere for the facts of the disaster, and comfort from the tragedy. Campaign spokesman Peter Hooton said, "Most Liverpool fans will never forgive the paper and will never buy it" (BBC News, 2012). The paper has largely been boycotted in Merseyside and throughout the United Kingdom ever since. This was a front page that shocked the public, as it was in fact dishonest news, instead labelled 'The Truth' that was shown to the nation.

The media play an essential role every day in notifying the public about what occurs in the world, and to form an opinion, predominantly in areas where viewers do not have immediate knowledge or experience. The problem of the story covered by *The Sun* was that it framed the Hillsborough disaster in a deceitful manner and did not focus on the actual disaster of many football supporters dying. One of the founding members of the Hillsborough Justice Campaign, Peter Carney, was a survivor of the disaster after being pulled out of the Leppings Lane pen by other fans. Peter says, "*The Sun* didn't just sow the seeds [with the front page], they picked the fruit from that powerful tree and fed their family with it" (Brett, 2017). This suggests that the media have a large influence over what the public deems to be the truth, and this notion is further supported by Lippmann (2008) as he claims that “mass communication could become the basis for people’s view of the world” (Perse, 2008:3). The portrayal of such information left many heartbroken after losing their loved ones. Fake news on such a horrific disaster and of such a great calibre meant that *The Sun* lost a large readership resulting in a decline in their overall newspaper.

Twitter bid

News of a \$31 billion bid for Twitter was made on the 14th July 2015, the company's stock jumped to nearly 8 percent after the news (Brigida & Pratt, 2017). This news was portrayed on a site that was made to look like that of *Bloomberg News* website – the website that posted this news was <http://bloomberg.market> but the legitimate *Bloomberg News* website is <http://bloomberg.com>. Many big news companies including CNBC tweeted about the takeover bid, less than 10 minutes after a member of CNBC tweeting about the news a journalist (Ty Trippet) from Bloomberg News tweeted that the Bloomberg.market site is fake (Brigida & Pratt, 2017).

The website was registered by an unknown individual and was removed later that day after the news release was made saying “account suspended”. What must also be noted is in the release of the website incorrectly spelt the former Twitter CEO Richard Costolo's name (Brigida & Pratt, 2017). Although, this study was done on trading activities for a tender offer for Twitter; it further shows how Twitter lends itself to information that is not truthful. The information was not only discovered on Twitter, but was also announced to be fake on the platform. A clear record of events took place on this social media platform is reflected and all happened in less than one day (Brigida & Pratt, 2017).

2016 US Presidential election

In the political landscape, the phrase “fake news” was coined by US elected President Donald Trump. Stories such as Pope Francis backing Trump in his campaign emerged and were reported to be fake. This was published by a website called *Ending The Fed*. Facebook was also scrutinized during the 2016 Presidential elections because “it allowed the propagation of fake news disguised as news stories coming from unchecked websites” (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017:818). According to Silverman and Alexander (2016) from a BuzzFeed News investigation, there were more than 100 news websites that portrayed pro-Trump content and this further showed that there were blurred lines between fact and speculation. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) also cited these examples of how fake news contributed to Trump's win in the election:

- A staggering 62% of adults in the USA received their news on social media platforms (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016).

- Popular mainstream stories were shared less often as compared to popular fake news stories which were shared widely (Silverman, 2016).
- Reports suggest that people who see fake news stories often believe they are true (Silverman & Singer-Vine, 2016).
- Donald Trump was discussed more in fake news stories than his counterpart Hillary Clinton (Silverman, 2016).

Further evidence of this is the official website abcnews.go.com and a mirrored fake news website abcnews.com.co; which were huge successes when it came to the 2016 US Presidential elections (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017). Various fake news stories circulated on the website during this time; and the greater the web traffic, the more likely one could earn profit for advertising and damaging another individual's reputation on these fake news pages (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017). Therefore, fake news has become a type of business.

A study conducted by Jang et al., (2018) called "*A computational approach for examining the roots and spreading patterns of fake news: Evolution tree analysis*" looked to use the evolution tree analysis by combating fake news. The study suggests that it was crucial in identifying the origins and patterns of this fake news, and used the example of the 2016 US presidential election as their case study. The evolution tree analysis is a recent development in the computational network science. "An evolution tree is a tree graph that illustrates the evolutionary history and relationships among entities," as stated by (Jang et al., 2018). The evolution tree can help researchers understand trends in evolution and predict future happenings as noted by previous research done by Hsieh et al., (2015), this is because the approach was able to expose "similarities among entities during the evolutionary progress" (Jang et al., 2018).

The study obtained dates from the Crimson Hexagon database, a total of 60 stories were selected (30 real news stories and 30 fake news stories). The study purposively sampled stories that were circulated widely on the internet before and after the 2016 US Presidential election which ranged from 1 January 2016 to 30 April 2017 (Jang et

al., 2018). Both Trump and Clinton fake news stories were divided into 15 stories each to keep it politically balanced.

Jang et al (2018) found that there were significant differences between real and fake news content. Fake news trees showed greater depth whereas real news trees showed greater breadth. What this suggests is that a greater breadth indicates a wider dispersion and a greater depth means there were a number of modifications to the content (Jang et al., 2018). The study observed that when people encountered real news, they would share or retweet the content without modifying any of the information. However, when readers encounter fake news stories they are more likely to attach their opinion about the topic in the story at hand (Jang et al., 2018). What was also noted by the authors is that the life expectancy of fake news stories may last longer than real news stories as they can be revived at any point.

Other empirical studies (Jolley et al., 2017)

Case study 1: A picture sparks a thousand stories (Turkey)

An anonymous piece including gruelling images of murdered (beheaded) soldiers was featured in a reputable publication called *Sozcu* in Turkey in 2016 was found to be false imagery (Jolley et al., 2017:54). Numerous websites had run the same news of the deaths of these soldiers with the images. However, later Istanbul's medical jurisprudence announced that none of the 99 dead bodies were beheaded. This fuelled the flames in the political divide in Turkey which influenced public opinion.

Case study 2: A case of mistaken philanthropy (China)

Jack Ma is one of the wealthiest men in China; he is the founder and executive chairman of e-commerce sites under the Alibaba Group. An article that was widely circulated suggested that Ma would fund the education of an eight-year-old-boy named Fan Xiaoquin because of his resemblance to Ma (Jolley et al., 2017:57). No official word from Alibaba was made, however, a story on a Chinese news website mentioned that the company intended to address education among the poor in the country using Fan as an example. There was no direct pledge to fund his education alone, the story still began to spread until Ma's press team put out an official statement denying said news.

Case study 3: Not a laughing matter (Mexico)

An article about two clowns being killed in Mexico was written by an uncommon, little known news website *DenunciasMX*. A low-resolution picture accompanied the article with little or no information of the witnesses, neither was there a by-line to the story. Upon investigation, the image was used before in 2015 with a full article on what had happened to the two clowns was stated with facts, showing that the article published in 2016 was fake (Jolley et al., 2017:58).

Case study 4: Not North Korea (Eritrea)

A story was reported that North Korean ambassador, Sin Son-ho claimed that it was insulting that his “advanced, prosperous, nuclear-armed nation” was compared to Eritrea; a wide discussion was started on social media with the story receiving 36 600 hits (Jolley et al., 2017:61). The website was in fact satirical in nature and had put out many stories similar to the above, proof of this was articles only being written by an unnamed “Editor” and the about a section of the website saying it was founded in 32AD.

Case study 5: And that’s a cut (South Africa)

Circumcision is common in African cultures and a headline that indicated that “men can now circumcise themselves at home, it is easy – says minister of health” was unpacked to be false (Jolley et al., 2017:62). Stories like these including death of well-known South African leaders are common in the country. This article was said to be fake because there was poor grammar, no official statement by the minister or an author byline.

2.2.5 Effects of fake news on journalist practice

“In everyday language, ‘trust’ is a very broad term. Often it is linked to a belief in something or someone but involves expectations directed at the future than the concept of credibility” (Otto & Köhler, 2018). Media forms opinions and views without the public knowing all the details, so the need to find out if people will always believe the media no matter what, is imperative. The public look to the media for the latest news updates and it is vital that the media portray the news as honestly as possible.

Newspapers, websites and social media accounts are some of the most influential media outlets and most capable of forming public opinion.

The media is a powerful tool which is used to broadcast news and events to the public through television, radio, newspapers and social media. Van Dijk (Illustration 10) states that, “media power is generally symbolic and persuasive, in the sense that the media primarily have the potential to control to some extent the minds of readers or viewer.” The persuasiveness of the media can make the public feel forced to understand a story in the way that they want it to be portrayed as. Lewis and Crick (2014:5) state that it is “not to suggest that readers or viewers are *en masse* stupid, indiscriminating or unintelligent”; however due to lack of time and the different media outlets portraying the story, the consumer “can only make a judgement on the information available.” Lewis and Crick (2014:5) claim that “the power of the media means that it is often seen by the public as a friend, even though that friendship may sometimes be abused, and we are accordingly reluctant to see the restrictions imposed upon it.”

The public are given a story and it is up to them to decide how they interpret it. The Hypodermic Needle model theory also relates to journalism trust as it correlates to the media being powerful enough to inject their messages to recipients, and to influence a reader. By having this tremendous control to force “certain values, ideas and attitudes, which are injected into the individual media user” (Fourie, 2001:294), it emphasises the notion that trust and truth are essential to both the outlet and reader. Fake news imposes on the relationship between the press and their readership, once trust is broken it is often difficult to regain the trust and build the relationship once again. It is apparent that fake news has a negative impact on journalistic practice but has to be overcome to ensure that accurate information is disseminated in the media to keep a sustainable relationship with the public for generations to come.

2.3 RISE OF DIGITAL MEDIA AND NEWS REPORTING

Brief history of the media (Gilmor, 2010)

- Media 1.0: Printing Press – the printing press consisted of analogue material like newspapers, books and many other materials that were considered the first form of media (these usually fall under old media).
- Media 1.5: Telegraph – this form of media extended in distance without direct contact to a person, which could not previously be done by the printing press.
- Media 2.0: Broadcast – the instantaneous retrieval of information and news by means of a radio through any particular individual's voice (and this travelled through long distances). The first features that are mentioned could not be done with a telegraph.
- Media 2.5: Television – this engaged the recipient by means of using their eyes and ears to receive various information. Visual images thus disrupted radio because it required listening and seeing of the information compared to listening alone.
- Media: 3.0: Internet – the Internet expanded on all of the above and allowed the individual to not be in the same space (or time) as in other forms of the media. The Internet only required you to select the information you wanted to absorb compared to the limited information that was available to the individual in the first forms of media.

It is clear that convergence is a broad, multidimensional concept that affects the media in a number of different ways (Roux, 2013). The effect of digital convergence in traditional media spaces can be seen in the evolution of the media through history (Quandt & Singer, 2009). Each form gradually increases with some kind of interaction with the individual who will thus absorb the form of media being given to them. The key difference in the evolution of media forms is the leap from analogue to digital that is inevitably portrayed in this brief timeline of the media forms.

2.3.1 Development of digital media

The media has come a long way from traditional newspapers, but Web 2.0 means that if one has an internet connection one can have news at a click of a button. This is what started the transition from newspapers to digital websites. Generation Z (those born

after 1997) have a completely different routine of news consumption from that of previous generations X and Y. Strauss and Howe (1997), the social historians known for pioneering generational theory, would say that Gen X (the “13th generation”) and Gen Y (the “millennial generation”) each have the traits of their corresponding generational archetypes.

Halsall (2017) states that:

Generation X is generally used to refer to people born in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Strauss & Howe (1997), it is a *Nomad generation*, an archetype they share with the “Lost Generation” of the 1890s and 1900s.

Generation Y is used to refer to people born in the 1980s and 1990s. Their archetype is the *Hero generation*; an honour they share with the “G.I. Generation” who fought WWII. Known as sophisticated, technology wise, immune to most traditional marketing as they have been exposed to them since early childhood.

Generation Z are people born from 1995 to 2010 and are true digital natives. From earliest youth, they have been exposed to the internet, to social networks, and to mobile systems.

Media provides an easy means of communication where people can now read and see the news on many platforms, these include social media, news websites and video outlets. It is now accessible to read the same story three or four times with a different viewpoint depending on the stance and bias of the media. Before the millennium, the consumption of news was “not the same as pre-satellite news when people waited for their morning papers or sat down at an appointed time for the evening television news” (Alejandro, 2010:10). Looking at mobile journalism, “an innovative form of reporting where people only use a smart phone to create stories” (Borum & Quinn, 2015:11), sharing exclusive material has become a common way of communicating stories to the public, as mobile phones have “the potential to become a functional source beyond the traditional way in obtaining news information” (Li, 2016:53).

Due to the ever-changing nature of technology in the world, this means that journalism has to follow this particular sequence. It can be argued that technology is a disruptor; however, it does push advance human knowledge once it has been properly studied and understood (du Toit, 2014). Digital technology influences and constrains the

structure in which media practitioners work (Pavlik, 2016). The Internet has seen a rise in online readership on many newspaper websites. However, newspapers themselves continue to die out as the age of technology is quickly advancing. More advertising is placed on social networks as most people tend to receive their information and news through those kinds of platforms. Due to this, journalists have to be multi-skilled and have an online presence. They must be able to use this technology on a daily basis. For example, when using Twitter and Facebook platforms, journalists have to ensure that everything is verified before it goes viral on the Internet. In addition to this, because the nature of technology is about speed, it increasingly becomes more about getting the breaking news first and being able to release it to the public as soon as possible. This also links to the capitalist ideologies of the mass media as whoever breaks the news first is more likely to get the most money out of it.

As digital technology continues to develop, consumers expect more sport news on an “as-it-happens-basis” and it has become readily available to them (Andrews, 2011:1). Previously, readers had to wait for information on matches to be represented in the newspaper the next day. However, currently social media platforms and cell phone applications have spoilt consumers with information on live scores, match analysis, post-match reactions, video highlights and statistics of every team and player (Andrews, 2011). The structure of social media platforms such as Facebook has changed drastically in comparison to other media technologies (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). This means that there is no significant verification, filtering or editorial judgements made on content shared among users on the platform. An individual has the capability to reach as many readers of that of the New York Times, suggests Allcott and Gentzkow (2017).

A challenge that the digital age has brought is that media organizations are tempted to rush news in order to be the first to break a story. Examples of this are websites reporting unverified deaths and retracting the story later (Andrews, 2011). News going onto a platform like Twitter means thousands of people see this information, which may not be credible. Sports organizations are increasingly breaking news online and the social networking world allows for rumours to thrive, a number of news websites are also putting news online “virtually minutes after it happens” (Andrews, 2011:10). The history of the media is a complex one and continues to evolve. Therefore, the

immediacy of content is particularly important in sports journalism. Journalists are able to interact and get feedback from their readers in real time. Moreover, the quantity of sports content is becoming increasingly vital for consumers. With updates around the clock, loyal consumers appreciate the quantity if it is matched by quality journalism and accurate reporting.

2.3.2 Forms of digital media

Social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram act as a tool for digital news reporting in the 21st century. These are explored further below.

Social Media

Social media has changed the way people communicate all over the world. The traditional way of getting new information from television and radio has ultimately transitioned to social interaction that provide additional sources of information and influence through allowing users to generate, share and receive information with ease and at the click of a button (Laird, 2012). Social media continues to be the way in which people communicate with one another and the more time they spend on it, the greater the influence it has on them. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media applications have a remarkable impact on the world of sport among fans, players, teams and sponsors alike (Laird, 2012). Breaking news information, transfer rumours and the interaction with players all take place on social media applications such as Twitter and Facebook.

“Social media is now an integral part of modern sports broadcasting, which combines old and new media into a redefined and multidimensional experience for fans” (Vann, 2014:438). Vann (2014:440) explains that the shift from old broadcast media to new social media platforms gives fans a new way to consume sport news coverage in a more “complex” and “participatory experience”, she suggests that this can “transcend some of the existing structural restraints of old media” (ibid).

Types of social media and their utilities/functions

Some of the uses and utilities/functions of social media (Twitter/Facebook) use is:

- Information gained instantly (near real time)
- More networks to receive the information from

- Exposure to many different media forms throughout a single day
- The sharing of information is made much easier through likes, retweets and shares
- Able to consume the media they 'want to' consume

The rise of the Internet has allowed for more interactivity and has resulted in the convergence of various media forms (radio, print, TV, Internet). Audiences can now consume the items that interest them and are able to share it with their friends across the world through social networks. Although changes in the media landscape may lead to better in-depth storytelling, issues arise with regards to social media as audiences make poor judgements on what they perceive as news online (Pavlik, 2016).

These social media platforms have a massive impact on sports journalists and their work. If used correctly, these platforms can and often do benefit sports journalists. New York Times sports editor Tom Jolly said this, "The great thing about Twitter is it's a great opportunity to be pro-active in pushing news out to our readers," he argues that people have to visit a website for content but using Twitter to push news to their readers is good because it allows for interactivity that one often does not get in a static environment like a website (Andrews, 2011).

2.3.3 Digital media in sport

Sports reporting on Twitter, how live updates are used to ensure online consumers stay informed.

Twitter

Twitter is defined as an online social networking and microblogging service that enables users to send and read 'tweets', which are text messages limited to 140 characters. Registered users can read and post tweets, but unregistered users can only read them. Users access Twitter through the website interface, short message service (SMS), or through a mobile device application. Twitter members can broadcast tweets and follow other users' tweets through multi platforms and devices (Jang et al., 2018; D'Monte, 2009). Twitter had reached 20% of the adult market in the form of 5.5 million users in 2013, with expectations of it rising to 30% in the following few months. The report shows that 79% of South African corporations use Twitter to update their markets on matters involving their corporations (Rouse, 2012). Ronnie Ramos the

digital operations manager for National Collegiate Athletic Association, said that in the forefront of digital revolution is sport and most of the record days on Twitter have been sports related (Andrews, 2011:2). Many sports fans on Twitter talk about “ITKs” which are also known as “In The Knows” and refers to individuals who claim to have exclusive information about transfer details and club gossip with evident anonymous accounts. During the transfer window, dozens and dozens of these accounts pop up. Fans often click the ‘follow’ button as the account states it gets exclusive news about big football transfers. These often do not come to pass and fans question why such fake news was published by the account. This is a disadvantage of Twitter as individual’s can remain unknown and spread inaccurate information to thousands of people in a matter of minutes. Twitter’s demise comes from one of its liked features, being instantaneous. Due to an overload of information, consumers often retweet false statements or events.

Media consumers are becoming “active users and participants in the creation as well as the usage of media and culture” (Bruns, 2008:16). This shift is mentioned in agreement by Spurgeon (2009:143) as “mass communication to mass conversation”. The convergence between old and new media has meant that consumers, now more than ever are able to engage with sport stories which was something that was unable to happen before. “Transmedia sport involves fans seeking out different content via multiple platforms and creating an experience that would not be achievable through the use of one platform alone” (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012). “Transmedia content plays a significant role in how an audience member will understand, react to, or participate with a central text, and can be created either by audience members themselves or members of the industry” (Gray, 2010:23). The primary broadcast for fans is television, however social media, various sports websites and online content are operating as “second screens” (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012:4). The future of sport heavily relies on the relationship between these screens (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012).

Twitter and live television’s relationship has become symbiotic in recent times as it enables fans to “connect with others in real time, and engage in a live, effectively unmediated, communal discussion of television programs” (Harrington, 2014:240). The hashtag feature of Twitter ensures that users are able to be a part of conversation on a specific topic. Because there is a character limit on tweets it pairs with the live

action on television as sport content is usually “intensifying and proliferating” online (Hutchins, 2010:239). With the rise of new media, it is clear that there is an interweaving of social media and sport broadcasting. Hashtags are broadcasted on television, for example *Supersport* has various hashtags such as #SSCricket #SSFootball #SSTennis and so on. This leads the audience to social media platforms where there is eminent activity which shows the participation of fans and essentially is a type of citizen journalism online (Vann, 2014). It allows fans to be empowered online and voice their opinions on social media platforms such as Twitter (Vann, 2014).

2.3.4 Digital news reporting on Twitter in the 21st century

“The role of sports journalists has been affected considerably by the influence of Twitter” (English, 2014:1). Twitter has had a “significant and sudden impact on journalism”, the application is (10 years old) and still is changing how sports journalism is practiced. Twitter has become a platform that has breaking news, which is accompanied by promotion of stories and a place to meet new contacts and connect (Hermida, 2012; Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012). Twitter not only benefits sports journalists and reporting but across all genres of news (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010). Twitter has been met with mixed reactions from journalists and academics, as the effectiveness of the social media application for journalists has not been fully investigated (Hermida, 2012). Twitter and sports journalism have become co-dependent on one another and sports journalists continually utilise the application to publish stories and interact with fans (Sears, 2011; Sherwood & Nicholson, 2013). Twitter is used as a platform that sport journalists’ use to “break news, promote stories” (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010 cited in English, 2014:2), “monitor news, research and discuss with the audience” (Sherwood & Nicholson, 2013 cited in English, 2014:2). “Twitter offers a more direct and casual link to sources,” states English (2014:7). The public want to know new insider information about sports teams and players; hence platforms like Twitter ensures that sports journalists are closer to their subjects with current information which is more striking to their audience (English, 2014). Tweeting links to stories results in more traffic to the website, the more followers on the account the greater the reader interaction. Twitter as any other social media platform has many benefits for sports journalists and media organizations, however this comes with apparent disadvantages.

2.4 PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE

2.4.1 Ethical journalism

Ethical journalism entails a commitment to journalistic practice; high standards of truth, reliability and independence is at the centre to a journalists' moral commitment. Borden and Tew (2007:302) state that "when journalists present news in a way that distorts the truth, their performance is at odds with the commitment to truthfulness that their role substantively requires". It is important that sports media maintain high journalistic standards as well as portray up to date and accurate information, which poses a challenge because everything happens at such a rapid speed online (Andrews, 2011).

Borden and Tew (2007) suggest that valuable lessons can be taken from journalists' interaction with fake news. Harcup (2009: 81-82) argues that objectivity is used by a journalist in certain cases. Although, Ettema and Glasser (1998: 23-24) say that no fact can exist without values and no value can exist without facts. The approach of subjective journalism needs to be embraced and if invoked appropriately by journalists', can yield good stories.

Journalistic news values underpin ethical journalism; they are explained below:

Construction of news – Objectivity

News is all around us, but one of the critical notions of journalism is that the construction of news becomes evident in everyday surroundings. Journalists often get to choose in a given situation what is and what is not newsworthy (Borden & Tew, 2007), what will be the best story that will captivate the reader and be part of the massive trends in newspapers around a country. This is basically the construction of news; it happens in every kind of media company and stories have to be chosen very wisely according to the values of the company.

News frames - Gatekeeping

News framing is very important when one is a journalist. It shows the different traits of one's personality and inevitably gives life to any story. The way in which journalists

angle a story will result in whether or not it will be published. The editor has full power of what will go into the article, this is known as gatekeeping and thus will reflect the current news that is happening or is important to that particular newspaper (Coddington & Holton, 2014). The news should not be familiar and a waste of the reader's time, it should be fresh and current for gatekeeping to become easier for an editor. The public becomes susceptible to fake news without the protection of gatekeepers who detect misinformation (Weissman, 2016).

Manufacturing of news – Factuality

Different news stories are always evident in a publication. The manufacturing of different news stories is an important factor relating to news values (Borden & Tew, 2007). The various news values should be considered when writing a story and this in turn will indicate to a journalist how newsworthy the piece is. The generation of news in different forms also falls under this category as it meets the requirements of news values.

2.4.2 Legality of fake news

Civil legal concerns – Defamation (USA)

Defamation is one of the most common legal claim invoked against fake news publishers. Defamation is defined as information that is proved to be false that harms another's reputation or character (Klein & Wueller, 2017:6). Defamatory statements that are written or recorded are defined as libel and those that are spoken or unrecorded is known as slander (Klein & Wueller, 2017:6). A case of defamation can be opened when there is a requisite intent or the publisher has acted with actual malice. The issue here is that courts are lenient to claims of defamation regarding satire or parody. Statements that are falsely made in satire or parody are only actionable if understood to describe the plaintiff or events the plaintiff participated in (Klein & Wueller, 2017:7).

Civil legal concerns – Intellectual property (USA)

Unauthorized use of third party intellectual property pose high risks for people who are associated with fake news or similar online content. It is illegal to distribute content that has been created by another individual without permission by the said individual

to re-use the content (Klein & Wueller, 2017:8). Publishers of fake news can be taken to court if information is falsified and shared with the public.

Website and social media account policies (Worldwide)

Fake news publishers try to monetize their articles by partnering with advertisement networks and marketing programmes which may place banners of their content on their websites. In December 2016, Google banned around about 200 AdSense for misrepresentative content that violated the updated AdSense Program Policies (Klein & Wueller, 2017:10). Website operators are encouraged to set out 'Terms and Conditions' as part of a registration process that then becomes legally binding; this must include restrictions, liability among other legal guidelines (Klein & Wueller, 2017:11). Social media allows for fake news content to travel on platforms and go viral. For example, advertisers were warned by Facebook that if a violation on advertising policies were breached their accounts could either be suspended or deleted. Furthermore, fact-checking was nailed down by Facebook in both the USA and Germany (Wendling, 2017; Klein & Wueller, 2017).

Ethical Guidelines for the Practice of Journalism

Rhodes University in South Africa is well known for its journalism qualification. In the first year module in Media Studies entitled *Journalism in Practice*, budding journalists are taught that they should subscribe to the following ethical guidelines, recognising the following very important principles (Harrower, 2007): ethical behaviour is the moral compass of journalism practice, ethical practice gives journalism credibility and helps to maintain high media standards, ethics regulate the practice of journalism in relation to its audiences, its sources, its community of practice and its obligations to society.

Legal Framework

Section 16 of the Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution, Second Amendment Act, No. 3 of 2003, states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes: Freedom of the press and other media; Freedom to receive and impart information or ideas; Freedom of artistic creativity; and Academic freedom and freedom of scientific research." The Constitution goes on to say that (this right) "... does not extend to propaganda for war; incitement of imminent violence; or advocacy

of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm.”

Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (2015):

Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

The **Press Code of South Africa (2019)** says: “The press exists to serve society. Its freedom provides for independent scrutiny of the forces that shape society, and is essential to realising the promise of democracy. It enables citizens to make informed judgments on the issues of the day, a role whose centrality is recognised in the South African Constitution.” The documents form the basis for the practice of journalism, however, despite guiding principles and documents, there are always people, including journalists, who blatantly disregard all ethical standards in the quest for a story.

Press Freedom Commission

The matter of how to regulate online user generated content or digital speech has been discussed for many years in South Africa within the regulatory environment - mostly with regard to press regulation and accountability (Reid, 2018). The Press Freedom Commission failed to adequately deal with the issue, but it is important to note that these debates are not new, and have been delved into for some time already.

Recently, serious concerns have been raised regarding the increased flouting of the code of ethics that govern reporting to the detriment of the public the media is supposed to serve. The level and content of criticism on the quality of journalism in South Africa suggests that the media is failing to recognize the responsibility that comes with the right to report freely (Reid & Isaacs, 2015). According to the office of

the Press Council of South Africa (PCSA), which houses the Press Ombudsman and the public advocate, journalists often neglect to give subjects of critical reportage a right of reply, which more often than not leads to inaccurate and unfair reporting (Reid, 2018).

The PCSA is the industry co-regulatory mechanism set up by the print media and online publications to provide impartial, expeditious and cost-effective settlement of disputes over the editorial content of publications (Reid & Isaacs, 2015). Media Monitoring Africa (MMM) also lamented worrying trends when it comes to quality journalism, with research showing how the number of sources in a story has dramatically declined in the past 10 years (Reid, 2018).

2.4.3 General ethical principles for journalists

Journalists' recognise the following general principles in their practice: Differences in understandings of the definition of ethical behaviour (and the definitions of critical ideas such as 'public interest', 'privacy' etc.) should be resolved in discussion. Each case merits its own particular ethical considerations. To be a journalist involves rights and obligations, freedoms and responsibilities (Harrower, 2007). Democratic rights, especially those of free expression, are values that need to be actively pursued both as a journalist and as a citizen. Information is viewed not as a commodity but as a fundamental right of the citizen. Given South Africa's post-apartheid context in which many citizens have minimal access to media and great difficulties in expressing their opinions and voice, journalists have an ethical duty to critique social injustice and the media regime which skews access to information and expression (Wasserman, 2013). One's own conscience guides the relationship one has with sources, audiences, fellow journalists, teachers, employers and media institution.

2.4.4 Specific journalistic principles

The first specific journalistic principle is self-disclosure. Journalists should always be honest about their identity as media workers and the purposes for which they are collecting information (Wasserman, 2013). They also should be contactable by their sources. The second journalistic principle is public interest vs personal rights. It is in the public interest to have the most up-to-date and accurate information about the

society we are part of. The right to privacy is inalienable, except in circumstances that strongly promote the public interest or in which a person decides to make public their own private details (Wasserman, 2011). Negotiating informed consent and the unintended outcomes of publication/broadcast must constitute part of the process of reporting. The next journalistic principle is accuracy. It is important for journalists to be accurate and comprehensive in the representation of subjects and issues, providing context and sensitivity and not to intentionally contribute to, alter, or seek to alter or influence events (Wasserman, 2013). This principle should not be confused with the right of journalists to take editorial or activist positions in their analysis of these events.

Another principle is that journalists should not manipulate language, images and documents or add to or alter sound in any way that can mislead the public or misrepresent subjects and issues (Wasserman, 2011). They should resist being manipulated by staged media opportunities. It is also important not to exploit one's duties for the principal purpose of acquiring prestige or personal influence. Ethnocentric bias in journalism, whether it is based on racial, ethnic, cultural, class, gender or religious grounds, needs to be transparent. It is recognised that a complete lack of bias, whilst valuable for accuracy and fairness, is unattainable in practice (Wasserman, 2013). Journalists also need to be aware of, and transparent with, their own bias. Journalists should publish correct retractions of any information found to be harmful and/or substantially inaccurate. One of the most crucial journalistic principles concerns plagiarism. Plagiarism is not strictly not allowed. Journalists should always declare the sources they have used as background and research material.

Another key journalistic principle relates to sources and subjects. Trust between journalists and the public, and between journalists and their sources is of paramount value (Harrower, 2007). All subjects should be treated with respect and dignity. It should be remembered that everyone has the right to reply. It is of paramount importance that journalists should minimise harm to their sources and they should respect off-the-record (and similar) arrangements. A key principle is to avoid the use of anonymous sources unless there is no other way to place very important information in the public domain. Such information should be corroborated. It is very important to avoid chequebook journalism where informants are paid. Journalists should give special consideration to vulnerable subjects (such as children and those unable to give

informed consent) and be compassionate to victims of crime or tragedy (Harrower, 2007). They should intrude on private moments of grief only when it is strongly in the public interest. It is also crucial not to identify children who have been victims of abuse or exploitation, or have been charged with or convicted of a crime. If there is any chance that coverage might cause harm of any kind to a child, he or she should not be interviewed, photographed or identified unless a parent or guardian consents or a public interest is overwhelmingly evident. It is however important to recognise that children also have the right to freedom of expression.

With respect to criminal cases, the legal presumption of innocence, in particular in cases that are still *sub-judice*, must be respected. It is important to remember that information that prejudices the outcome of a court case must be withheld. An important journalistic principle is consideration for the audience. Care and responsibility should be exercised with regard to the presentation of brutality, violence and atrocities. In situations of conflict, journalists must consider the role news journalism can play in heightening tensions and seek ways of encouraging understanding, tolerance and trust between the various parties (Reid, 2018).

Since this study examines online sources, the principles related to the online environment are of key importance. In fact, all these ethical principles and considerations discussed apply to the online environment as well. Journalists have a right to engage online as journalists and citizens. Because the online social world is so pervasive it will touch and affect professional work, so private opinion needs to be ethical and take cognisance of the borderless nature of the internet (Reid & Isaacs, 2015). For online information, journalists need to verify information and sources in the same way as one does for analogue media (Reid, 2018). It must be assumed the entire public can see everything one publishes online.

The final principle relates to practical decision-making. Kruger (2004) suggests in *Black, white and grey: Ethics in South African journalism* that it is vital as a journalist to make practical decisions in day-to-day work situations. Too often ethics are seen as an undefined, fuzzy area best tackled by gut feel. In fact, better decisions will be made if a more deliberate, analytical approach is adopted.

The next section points out some ways in which decision-making can be improved. Ethical principles often compete with each other. Dilemmas usually arise when different values pull people in different directions. Very often, real life situations are not painted in simple black and white. Journalists need to be willing to explore the shades of grey too. That means balancing competing values. Several excellent models have been developed to guide journalists through a decision-making process if they are faced with an ethical question. The US ethicist Louis Day (2006) has developed what he calls the situation definition, analysis and decision (SAD) formula.

In the first step, the issues need to be defined. Firstly, the journalist/writer should make sure that all the necessary facts are at your disposal (Day, 2006). This means being able to summarise the situation as if you were explaining it to an editor. It is important to pay attention to any areas of factual uncertainty. Secondly, you should formulate the question. What exactly needs to be resolved? It is surprisingly useful to force yourself to formulate the question precisely. Ethical questions often feel fuzzy, and forcing yourself to commit to a form of words that define the issue is a good technique to ensure you think exactly (Day, 2006).

The second step requires one to think through the issue. There are a number of things that one must consider as one grapples with a problem. Firstly, work out the public interest. Why are you doing this story? Why does your audience have an interest in it? (Day, 2006). Secondly, you need to identify the people or groups who stand to be affected – the stakeholders. The most obvious of these are sources, the subject of a story, their family and your news organisation. How will they be affected? What are their motivations? Are these legitimate? (Kruger, 2004). Thirdly, identify the principals involved. Most often a dilemma arises because different ethical imperatives collide. For instance, the right of the public to information may clash with an individual's right to privacy. In order to resolve an issue properly, we need to be able to define the principles at stake (Kruger, 2004). Fourthly, look at guidelines and precedents. These could include ethical codes, rulings by the industry watchdogs, examples from other fields, personal experiences and so on (Day, 2006). Fifthly, identify the options. It is important to think laterally in formulating different possible courses of action. Publishing a story or killing it are not the only options. Imaginative solutions are often the way out of a dilemma (Day, 2006).

Day's (2006) final step involves decision making. Finally, one has to commit oneself to a particular course of action and be willing to defend that decision to all stakeholders, including colleagues, the audience and the subject of the story. In a situation of controversy, challenges from various quarters must be expected and will have to be dealt with. Dennis Pather, the editor of the *Daily News*, says the best test of having taken a good decision is "to stand up in public and defend your decision" (Kruger, 2004:43-45).

2.4.5 Factors that inhibit standard journalistic practice

Sports journalism is unlike any other practice of journalism; it has often defied the "normative standards" of the profession. According to Ramon-Vegas and Rojas-Torrijos (2017:159), this can be alleviated by various accountability instruments. Sports journalists have a role to the public to produce quality media, not only comprehensively but ethically as well. The current media landscape involves "citizen's increasing preoccupation with the ethics of media professionals", therefore sports journalists must continually better their knowledge in their field and commit to high-quality content (Ramon-Vegas & Rojas-Torrijos, 2017:160). According to McQuail (2003:19), "accountable communication exists where authors (originators, sources, or gatekeepers) take responsibility for the quality and consequences of their publication, orient themselves to audiences and others affected, and respond to their expectations and those of the wider society".

Ramon-Vegas, Mauri-Ríos and Alcalá-Anguiano (2016) note three important mechanisms that can be used by media houses to track accountability, that is, self-regulation, transparency and citizens' participation. An essential accountability instrument is in-house stylebooks, this is a social responsibility tool that establishes a binding contract between journalists and the public and further promotes the highest level of quality in news production (Ramon-Vegas & Rojas-Torrijos, 2017). The issue faced by most newsrooms is that there are no specialized stylebooks for sports journalism, however the *Bleacher report* is one of the only sports outlets that has amended their stylebook for the new digital environment.

Additionally, *ESPN* and *Reuters* have their own guidelines and standards for sports journalists (Ramon-Vegas & Rojas-Torrijos, 2017). “The role of ombudsmen is nearly non-existent in sports media outlets” (Ramon-Vegas & Rojas-Torrijos, 2017:163), however *ESPN*’s public editor writes a monthly column on the website tackling various issues that inhibit journalistic practice. Online chats and social networking sites help journalists answer a number of questions, such as when it is appropriate to grant anonymity to a source and separating bias or loyalty to a team you may support for objective reporting to keep your journalistic integrity (Ramon-Vegas & Rojas-Torrijos, 2017).

Lack of credibility

An important point of departure is journalist credibility. Journalists working in sports have had to adapt and re-invent themselves as journalism moved to digital spaces (Boyle, 2017). Commitment to ethical journalism requires talent and moral courage, and often a good deal of physical bravery as well (White, 2008). According to White (2008:138) “media cannot play fast and loose with the truth and expect to get away with it. In the online world it is ever more essential that the media voice is recognizable, truthful and reliable.”

Lack of regulatory system

One weakness of modern journalism has been its failure to develop trustworthy systems of self-regulation. If media accountability is to remain in the hands of journalists and not subject to legal controls, it will have to be more credible and more consistent. At the same time, new technologies and converging media platforms such as text, broadcast, and online have created increasingly overlapping areas of media jurisdiction; regulatory bodies need to work together more closely to provide an integrated service that delivers accountability across the whole media landscape (White, 2008).

Development of new technologies

Internet journalism raises new questions about how to enforce standards in journalism that extend beyond national boundaries. For journalists that means constant self-questioning about how they practise journalism, whilst striving for accuracy and good

conduct in the telling of compelling and engaging stories, while dealing with the complexities of editorial decision-making (White, 2008).

Rise of citizen journalism

Citizen journalism is also another concept that comes under the spotlight in terms of journalistic practice. “The digital turn of the 1990s has dramatically reshaped the journalistic landscape, with sports journalism often being at the leading edge of this transition as journalism moved online and many new (often fan-based) sources of information became available around sports culture” (Boyle, 2017:494). A key element in the debate about how the internet and people outside the newsroom are changing the relationship between journalists, their audience and their sources of information is how to harness these new connections to improve the quality of media. The consistent failure of purely amateur-run publications suggests that quality will always depend on the added value of professional competence and the application of ethical principles. But the role of citizen journalists is still far from being clearly defined. What acts of gathering, preparing and distributing information comes under the umbrella of citizen journalism? Who takes responsibility for content? How are standards maintained? (White, 2008). Despite all the excitable talk about a new information space, the question of what makes reliable information (is it truthful, is it ethical, is it honest?) remains the major challenge for citizen journalist enthusiasts. Is this a substitute for dedicated journalism of quality produced by well-trained reporters and editors working full time? A legitimate ethical concern about the ‘blogosphere’ in citizen journalism is that too much of it is about unsubstantiated gossip, speculation and rumours.

2.4.6 Van Wyk’s (2016) fake news monitor

Even with all the journalistic principles described in this literature review section, fake news still exists and is on the rise. This leads one to some of the ways of addressing this problem. Van Wyk’s article entitled *How to spot fake news* (Van Wyk, 2016) recommends the following checklist/ fake news monitor:

- Check the websites credentials – Fake news websites often are not registered and have little or no information on their “About” section. If it is not a registered website that is credible, alarm bells should ring and consuming content from said website should stop.

- Look for a disclaimer website – Some websites blatantly state that their content is solely based on either satire or parody. This helps consumers understand what kind of content they will get from this kind of website and not to take it too seriously.
- Is it a satirical website? – Satirical websites often state that they are representing news in a specific way, to invoke humour from their consumers.
- What do the comments say? – Comment sections give the consumer a bigger picture of what kinds of content is on the page, who are their readership and whether or not stories are accurately reported on. Faithful followings are usually able to point out to newer consumers whether they have made the right decision in following such a page or website.
- Does the text or image ring a bell? – It is vital to look out for images and text that is formatted in an unfamiliar way, this is because fake news publishers often put out old images with their stories and the websites are not as neatly put together like that of a well-known media organization.
- Search for the owner of the website – The owner of the website gives one an idea of the values and ethics they possess. If the website is attributed to someone unknown, this is a reason to not engage with the information on the website and look for more credible media organizations with websites.

This implies that vigilance needs to be taken by the reader in all situations. The fake news monitor is a practical means of detecting early alarm signals that the information one is reading or accessing may be fake news.

2.4.7 Bath's (2017) fake news monitor

Bath (2017) also cautions the reader to beware of fake news, and advises on how to spot fake news. In the same line as Van Wyk's (2016) fake news monitor, Bath (2017) insists that readers should check their sources. The reason behind this is because knowing if information comes from a credible source or news organization, helps in ensuring that the spread of fake news is not only stopped but also managed by everyday online media consumers. Add a healthy dose of scepticism. This is particularly effective as it keeps the reader alert always to the possibility of fake news. As the common phrase goes, "you can never believe everything you read online". This

remains a true statement as with the rise of fake news, one must always be alert to the possibility of scrolling past such stories. Resist the lure of click-bait. This is difficult to do especially if one is conditioned along these lines, to want to know the rest of the story because of the flashy headline. For example, what celebrities are up to or what kinds of lifestyles they lead. Consumers need to be more aware of these misleading headlines that provide no real information about a topic. Finally, Bath (2017) advises to 'slay it, don't spray it'. This means that before information can be shared, it should be interrogated. Before sharing stories on social media platforms, it is important to check if the same story is being published by other reputable news houses; are there credible sources present in the story as well as a by-line, among other things.

Kristy Cooke, UK editor of *Kantar*, on a "trust the news" survey, said that "it has revealed that the reputation of 'mainstream news media' remains largely intact while social media and digital-only news platforms have sustained major reputation damage as a result of the 'fake news' narrative during recent election cycles." The use of social media to influence during elections has gained popularity in recent years. Elections are often run on the principle of 'win at all costs' and social media with its close association to fake news is easily exploited in this regard. Fake news monitors can play a crucial role in such circumstances.

According to Van Wyk (2016), the reader can also assume some responsibility in stopping the spread of fake news. He suggests that the reader should be responsible. Responsibility could entail a number of things including choosing of content for reading; sharing of the content and frequenting recognised fake news sites. The reader can also stop the spread of fake news by getting quality content. This is also linked to the suggestion for the reader to support real news organisations. These are usually well known and have a reputation for ethical news reporting. Finally, Van Wyk (2016) recommends that fake news can be stopped if fake stories, authors and websites are exposed and readers flag false news. These suggestions by Van Wyk (2016) and Bath (2017) to monitor and stop the spread of fake news are simple, yet practical ways of addressing this unpleasant issue in journalism practice.

Approaches to how can fake news be prevented

Wendling (2017) reports on a number of initiatives and worldwide establishments that are aimed at putting a stop to fake news, namely:

Human intervention – information verification, this is done by users on American and German Facebook by flagging fake news stories online; the Washington Post as well as Snopes.com have fact checkers and Le Monde has a branch of decoders who assist in ensuring that fake news does not get to the public. Human intervention comes with a twofold approach, one of literacy and another of correction (Jang et al., 2018). By heightening an individual's cognitive ability, this ensures they are able to distinguish between fact and fiction, this is what the literacy approach argues (Jang et al., 2018; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Jang & Kim, 2018). On the other hand, the corrective approach makes fake-checking readily available to users online.

Use of algorithms – the identification of fake news and the corroborating of information can be part of the prevention of the spread of fake news. Due to algorithms being a reason popular content is usually spread, it can now be reversed as a solution to the growing problem.

2.5 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter has presented a detailed literature review on the phenomenon of fake news. This included features and characteristics of fake news stories/websites; empirical studies on fake sports news/websites; and effects of fake news on journalistic practice. The digital media space was also explored and the role of sports journalists in this space was highlighted. Of importance was the discussion on principles of ethical journalistic practice together with the relevant legislations and policies in this regard. The chapter also covered the factors that inhibit journalistic practice. Finally, the chapter was concluded by examining fake news monitors and the responsibility of the reader with regards to stopping the spread of fake news. The next chapter explores the research methodology employed in the study.

CHAPTER 3

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Owing to digital migration, online journalism has somewhat given rise to fake news. More and more readers, viewers and listeners prefer to go online for their news searches. Sports journalism as a professional practice has not been spared either. For this reason, sport journalists have been compelled to adapt and re-invent their practice because of digital spaces. This chapter focuses on the research methodology used in this study. It discusses the research design, population and sampling, data collection instruments and data analysis; quality criteria and ethical considerations.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Babbie, Mouton, Voster and Prozesky (2012), research methodology is explained as the tools and procedures that are followed in conducting a research. Other researchers also provide definitions for research methodology. For example, Babbie and Mouton (2008:649) define research methodology as methods, techniques and procedures which are employed in the process of implementing the research design as well as assumptions and principles related to it. Research methodology goes beyond merely presenting data collection methods. Ideally, methodology should be viewed as a correlation of assumptions that portray how the researcher observes reality. The manner in which this reality is expressed, depends on the method chosen and shows what the researcher seeks to unveil (Kamwendo 2014:58). In this study, research methodology is the system of collecting data for the research project and which specifies how the researcher went about practically studying the examination of digital news reporting on professional journalism practice by using fake sport news and websites. There are different types of research methodologies that may be employed in a research study, namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods (Flick, 2009). Each has its purpose and depending on the nature of the study, they can be used individually or can be used collectively to achieve the desired outcome of the study. In the case of this study, the purpose was to gather qualitative data which explains the workings of fake news websites and stories so that the reader is able to make decisions about them when they are encountered.

This study employed a qualitative approach which is useful for its ability to produce non-numerical descriptive data suitable for examining social phenomena such as sport news and its effect on target audiences. Thus, in the context of the stated aim and objectives, the qualitative approach was appropriate in assessing and determining the implications of fake sport news on standard journalistic practice. According to Litchman (2010), the qualitative research approach is an inductive and context-specific research approach that focuses on the observation and the description of a specific phenomenon, behaviour, opinions and events. These usually exist to generate new research and theories. The goals of qualitative research are to provide a detailed narrative description and holistic interpretation that captures the richness and complexity of behaviours, experiences, and events in natural settings. In the case of this research, the focus was on the events captured in fake sport news websites and the experiences of practitioners in the field of sports journalism to determine the implications of fake sport news stories/websites on standard journalism practice.

In this research, the qualitative research approach was used for two purposes. In the first instance, it was used to gather information through interviews that informed the researcher of the experiences of key informants in the digital media communication industry. These included sport journalists, academics, online editors and social media analysts. In this instance, the qualitative research approach was used to address research objective three, namely; to determine the implications of fake sport news stories and websites on standard news practice.

In the second instance, a qualitative research approach was used to obtain additional data through a qualitative content analysis of the screen shots derived from sport news websites. In this instance, the qualitative research approach was used to describe the nature of internet-based fake sport news stories and websites and assess the credibility of sport news disseminated through fake news sites.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study treats a research design as the blue-print or detailed plan of how the study was conducted taking into account the procedures for data collection and analysis for the study (Flick, 2009). There are various definitions for research design. Mouton

(2006:55) describes it as a plan on how one intends conducting research. It is therefore a plan or a route which guides the researcher on how to conduct research. In order to address the research objectives, a well-structured plan, a research design, is essential (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011:118).

Malhotra (2010:10) adds that a research design is a structure used to execute a research project and it has a process that needs to be followed in order to gain the required information reach the set research objectives. When deciding which research path would be followed during the course of the study, the researcher may ask the following two important questions: What will the research strategy be? How will the data be collected for the research? According to De Vos (1998:77), the blue print or detailed plan on how a research study is conducted ranges from a theoretical foundation to the strategies used in the collection and analysis of data. Finally, Kumar (2011:94) states that “a research design is a plan, structure and strategy of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions or problems.” The research design is related to two main functions: the development of procedures and logistical arrangements and the importance of quality in these procedures. In the context of this study, the purpose of the research design was to help the researcher to avoid a situation where evidence does not match the objective of the study.

The study examined the phenomenon of fake sport news and websites using the descriptive phenomenological design within the qualitative approach. Groenewald (2004) states that phenomenological research design describes as accurately as possible the phenomenon whilst refraining from any pre-given notions. This design is based on the lived experience of the population. In the case of this study, the experiences of sport journalists and media experts were extensively examined. The design is considered appropriate in acquiring knowledge and diverse perspectives about the implication of fake digital news on journalistic practice. Fake sport news was interpreted within the news construction activity which locates sport journalists in the production of meaning via the news making process (Baron, 2018).

3.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

3.4.1 Population

A population is regarded as a group of class subjects, variables, concepts, or phenomena that may be sampled for a study (Oliver, 2004). Usually it comprises all subjects likely to be participants in the study. The population may be found in one location or may be spread across a geographical area or even across countries. The population depends on the nature and extent of the study. While in some cases research is achieved through the investigation of the entire group, this study used a sample population which is a result of the selection of a sub-section representative of the population. Hair *et al.* (2010:129) indicate that the target population includes the total group of elements or objects, such as individuals who have similar significant characteristics, and whose information is used for the research study. All sport journalists in the digital newsrooms including those outside SA were part of the population frame.

3.4.2 Purposive sampling

Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006:97) define sampling as a technical accounting device to rationalise the collection of information, to choose in an appropriate way the restricted set of objects, persons, events and so forth from which the actual information will be drawn. Sampling is done because the inclusion of the entire population in the study may be impossible, with the main restrictions being time and cost. In choosing sample size, the researcher is guided by certain criteria. Patton (2002:244) states that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what we want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources.

Purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method, was used in this study. This sampling method is used in special situations where the sampling is done with a specific purpose in mind (Maree & Pietersen, 2007:178). The researcher used the purposive sampling technique to identify key informants who are active user of digital media in the communication industry. These include sport journalists, academics, online editors and social media analysts. The total sample for this study consisted of (n=26) entities comprising 16 interview participants and 10 screenshots based on purposively selected fake sport news.

3.4.2.1 Screenshots

To assess the credibility of sport news disseminated through fake news sites, screenshots of 10 sport stories (e.g. club transfers that turned out not to be true) were purposively selected. In addition, posts linked to the stories in the screenshots were also examined to corroborate data from the screenshots.

3.4.2.2 Interview participants

In addition to a literature review, interviews were conducted with 16 key informants which helped describe the nature of internet-based fake sport news and websites. In order to determine the implications of fake sport news stories and websites on standard news practice, these 16 key informants or media experts were interviewed so that they could provide data with as much depth as possible. Information based on these interviews with key informants have been administered to saturation levels to guarantee adequate information for the study.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Choices about research methods are often dictated by certain specific epistemological positions (Byrne, 2012). The following instruments were used in order to elicit the best information for the study about fake sport news and websites: essentially, two techniques, namely interviews and textual content analysis were used to produce data for the study. Each technique was conducted differently, with respect to the information received within the instruments capacity.

3.5.1 Face-to-face interviews

The interviews were used as a mechanism to solicit the informants' views about the nature of fake news on websites. The researcher used open-ended questions to help get considerably well thought-out responses as this provides flexibility and better insight into the participant's views, interpretations, and experiences (Byrne, 2012). These questions were prepared prior to the interviews and are contained in the Interview Schedule (Annexure 1). The questions were derived from the objectives of the study.

The interviews were conducted with 16 participants, namely sports journalists and media practitioners from around the world. The mediated technologies used for global

data collection were Skype and Facebook video messenger interviews. The researcher informed the respondents that the information provided was for research purposes only. The data was collected through face-to-face interviews as well as through mediated technologies and were conducted from the end of September 2018 till the end of January 2019 with 16 media experts and key informants. The chosen data collection techniques are appropriate to the research as the use of the interviews encourages and promotes confidentiality, as also emphasised in the ethical considerations that the participants were not given names. As a result, the participants provided information in-depth as confidentiality is one of the researcher's priority areas. The nature of the interviews also did not require the participant to provide their names when the recording was done. The participants were labelled Interviewee 1 to Interviewee 16 (INT1 to INT16).

3.5.2 Content analysis

Ten screenshots were obtained from Twitter based on sport stories deemed untrue as determined by Bath's (2017) and Van Wyk's, cited by Kempen (2017), fake news monitor which helps to spot fake news and websites through application of specific verification criteria. This mechanism implies checking the websites' credentials, looking for a disclaimer on the website, questioning the news classification, credibility of website and what the accompanying comments say about the news content. Thus, the study collected additional data through a qualitative content analysis of the screen shots derived from sport news websites. This ensured that an interpretative approach to the analysis of fake sport news and websites was achieved in the study.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

For the data analysis process, content and thematic analysis techniques were employed.

3.6.1 Content analysis (screenshots)

Content analysis is a technique used for examining and analysing the content of the text. In the case of this study, the content of the screenshots was analysed. Babbie (2010:338) alludes that content analysis is essentially a coding operation. He defines coding as the process of transforming raw data into a standardised set which is then used to retrieve and organise information gathered and to categorise the data into an

easy format for the researcher to find and cluster the information into themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994:57). Qualitative content analysis was adopted to interpret the messages in the selected screen shots to determine the credibility of digital sport news. This was done with the assistance of Bath (2017) and Van Wyk's, cited by Kempen (2017), fake news monitor which assesses headlines, sources, sensational undertones and the features of credible stories among selected issues.

3.6.2 Thematic analysis (interviews)

For the interviews, qualitative thematic analysis was employed. The interview proceedings were recorded, transcribed and interrogated for themes. This is a method used for the systematic search of themes within qualitative data (Eatough & Smith, 2017). In analysing the data, thematic categories were defined. This entails the definition of themes across the transcribed texts by reading them several times (Smith & Osborne, 2008). These themes may take the form of words, sentences or groups of sentences. The researcher also allocated codes to each respondent in the interviews, ranging from INT1 to INT16. By reading through the interviews and screen shots in the news stories, the researcher was able to get insight about the implications of fake sport news disseminated online.

3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA

Since qualitative researchers regard reliability and validity as inappropriate in establishing the truth value of a qualitative research project, the qualitative tools for the study was tested for credibility and authenticity, transferability, dependability, and conformability as follows:

3.7.1 Credibility and authenticity

Punch (2005:255) asserts that credibility refers to the degree to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure. Research procedures were followed to ensure that the study has been systematically conducted and that the results are trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An attempt was made to ensure that the data provided by the participants was represented as accurately as possible through use of a recording device to augment accompanying field notes.

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability, that is, the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied or replicated in other situations was adhered to. In other words, how generalizable and transferable are the results of the study and whether the results were consistent and dependable with the data collected (Merriam, 2009). The study used a diverse sample population that is in the sports journalism field, because this is a digital media study that can be researched in different spheres of journalism and online spaces. A detailed literature review was provided and data collection procedures were followed as a rigorous exercise to provide unquestionable information on the subject under investigation.

3.7.3 Dependability

Dependability requires a fit between the research findings and the data (Flick, 2009). Therefore, the research process was conducted in a logical, well documented manner where study records were audited. For example, the questions for the interviews were constructed in a manner that allowed respondents to provide data that linked to the objectives of the study. In addition, the responses from the interviews was recorded using codes which linked to the thematic areas used in the analysis section of the study.

3.7.4 Conformability

Conformability is the criterion used to establish the freedom from bias in the research procedure and results (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005). In order to satisfy this criterion, the researcher ensured that the study tools are informed by a thorough literature review process and the work is read by an external decoder to ascertain whether it agrees with the coded categories used to avoid subjective biases. In this case, respondents were contacted after the interviews as well, to confirm data provided.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics was observed to prevent research abuse and to assist the researcher to conduct her responsibilities in an ethical manner. Research ethics places an emphasis on the humane and sensitive treatment of research participants, who may

be placed at varying degrees of risk by research procedures (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:28). Therefore, the following procedures were followed:

3.8.1 Permission to conduct the study

The researcher received an ethical clearance certificate from the University of Limpopo Research Ethics Committee (TREC) before commencing with the data collection process. The clearance certificate made it possible for the researcher to reach out to the study participants without hindrances.

3.8.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality of the participants' contributions was maintained throughout the research process and participants were informed about the purpose of the study so that they could co-operate with the researcher (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013). Participants were also informed that they could terminate their participation at any time when they felt uncomfortable to continue. A consent form was signed in this regard before the commencement of the interviews.

3.8.3 Anonymity

Participants were assured about the anonymity of their responses and that their personal identities would not be revealed, and if the need arises, the process will not be done without their permission (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005). Participants' identities and personal details remained concealed and were not mentioned during the entire course of the study.

3.8.4 Honesty

The study did not attempt to injure people, regardless of whether they volunteered to participate or not. Furthermore, the study strove for honesty in all scientific communication and data were not fabricated, falsified or misrepresented. Participants were informed that if they are affected in any way, the researcher would ensure that psychological counselling was available.

3.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even though the researcher obtained more than the anticipated number of interviewees, the sample was still small and the population not diverse enough. Any future research should attempt to alleviate this limitation. Even though the qualitative nature of the study made provision for this limitation, a bigger sample would have provided a wider range of experiences with the phenomenon of fake sports news and websites. Sports journalists are few and it was difficult to contact them. It was difficult getting interviewees to reply because some were not prepared to commit to participating in the research whilst others indicated that they were busy with deadlines and were not available to be interviewed.

3.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

In this chapter the discussing of the methodology of the interviews as the main tool for the gathering of data was put forward. Some ethical considerations were also pointed out as the researcher has kept in mind the importance of dealing with the participants. Being anonymous and protected whilst partaking in research was essential. Quality criteria was also discussed. The next chapter explores the findings of the research which are described and discussed. In the analysis of the findings, the researcher interpreted the responses of the participants in order to shed light on the issue that was stated in chapter 1.

CHAPTER 4

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a presentation of the data collected from the two research instruments namely interviews and screenshots. It examines the effect of digital news reporting on professional journalistic practice focusing on fake sport news websites. It evolves from the fact that, despite the progressive benefits of the digital revolution, the rise of fake news websites has become common practice associated with *clickbait* headlines that spreads rumours posted on unofficial accounts often with a journalistic pretext. Beyond the description of the nature of internet-based fake sport news websites, the chapter assesses the credibility of fake sport news and determines the implications of their operations on standard news practice.

This chapter unfolds as follows, the descriptive phenomenological design within the qualitative interpretive paradigm is used to determine the negative effect that fake digital news have on professional journalistic practice. Qualitative content analysis of sample news excerpts and in-depth interview with expert informants were complementarily used to collect data. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was applied to generate discursive themes which yielded the study outcomes. Therefore, data collected from social media accounts on fake sport news is presented by examining the fake news stories (screenshots) in detail. A description of the fake sport news is presented followed by qualitative content analysis of the salient features of the blog/website that render it as fake news. The implications of the blog/website are discussed and linked to relevant literature. In total, ten blogs/websites were identified and used in this study. The fake sports news stories/blogs/websites were obtained from the following sources: internet, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter.

This is followed by presentation of the data from interviews with media experts such sports journalists and academics. The data from the interviews is presented by collating similar questions into a theme. A total of sixteen interviews were conducted as follows: ten sports journalists/online editors and social media analysts; three media experts and three academics. The data is then analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis. The study notes how fake news and its associated litany of misinformation

and/or disinformation has contributed to the creation of false hypes about sports news to the detriment of professional journalism practice. This section is preceded by the biographical data collected from the interviewees.

4.2 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL SPORTS

ACCOUNTS/WEBSITES

For the analysis section, the specific verification criteria as stated in section 3.6 was applied to the data. Each website is stated and tested against the indicators listed below, which are Bath's and Van Wyk's credibility criteria. The following criteria were used:

- Checking the website's credentials
- Disclaimer
- News classification
- Credibility
- News content

4.2.1 Davide Astori contract extension

Illustration 1: Davide Astori contract extension

Fiorentina have reportedly decided to renew Davide Astori's contract for life with the salary going to his family, and will also help his children in the future.

What an incredible gesture. Rest in Peace Davide. 🙏



43K 953 Comments 1.4K Shares

Source: Facebook/ Troll Football India. Accessed on the 6 March 2018.

News content

Former Italy and Fiorentina football player Davide Astori tragically died in his sleep last year (2018) which came as a shock to the football community. *Troll Football India* reported that after his death, Fiorentina had extended his contract for life and donated his salary to his wife and their daughter.

News classification

This is classified as a sport news story.

Credibility

This post can be identified as fake news as the story is a human-interest piece that can generate traffic on a page or website. The story is clickbait in nature and lures the reader into believing something that has not been officially announced or confirmed by the football club itself (Brigida & Pratt, 2017). “The tweet went viral, with thousands of retweets and likes generated. What’s more, popular media outlets picked up the essence of the story and went with it. Talk of a contract was parlayed into something that wasn’t true, and Fiorentina has been placed in a terrible position of having to refute a gesture that had been applauded around the world.” – Forbes Magazine.

“A large number of Twitter accounts that sell themselves as ‘on the side of the fans’ saw the post. And they decided to get busy, whether or not it was true. Accounts like @Sporf, @geniusfootball, @thefootystands, @futballtweets and many others piled on, and basked in the retweets.” – Football365. Illustration 1 is a testimony to this statement, as the post received 43 000 likes/reactions and 1 400 shares on Facebook which mean that 43 000 people read this information and acknowledged that it was truthful. Figueira and Oliveira (2017:817) further argue that “on social networks, the reach and effects of information spread occur at such a fast pace” and this concurs as further evidence with this story. Shares also spread information to more ‘friends’ on an individual’s personal profile which further continues the lifespan of the fake news story on social media. Another significant implication of this news story is that it emotionally impacted David Astori’s family who were still grieving his recent death. *Serie A* (Italian League) Commissioner Giovanni Malago even went as far as congratulating Fiorentina for the gesture during a press conference; only later was it confirmed to be untrue information. Fiorentina had just lost the captain of their club and as this information was surfacing on social media, the club was viewed negatively because this false gesture was congratulated. Stories like this affect real families and the sports community at large.

Checking the websites credentials

The resultant backlash after the story was published came from Italian football journalist Tancredi Palmeri, where he stated that the story was fabricated by social media account *Troll Football India*. The credible journalist, Palmeri took the onus upon

himself to name and shame the account. This is one instance where the social responsibility of sports reporting comes into the forefront.

Disclaimer

Troll Football India's page on Facebook does not have any disclaimers on their 'about section', the only present text is "like and support our page" with an accompanying image that states: "Our old page got banned for Copyright Infringement, Facebook disabled access to our page for a video posted way back in 2017." This rings alarm bells, as information found on the page is neither credible or authentic content.

Implications on standard news practice

The media must be responsible towards society and hold a professional standard, false information should be avoided at all costs (Bajracharya, 2018). Stories such as these hinder journalistic practice as journalists have to correct fake information online and have to fight for their own credibility while doing it. Media outlets such as *Joe Sport*, *Forbes* and *Football365* also began naming and shaming *Troll Football India* and making the public aware that this information was a lie and only for likes and retweets.

Illustrations 2, 3, 4 and 5 provide evidence of the extensive reporting on this fake sport news story and the type of hype that it created, together with the realisation of the fake news content that was spread.

Illustration 2: Italian football journalist Tancredi Palmeri's statement on Twitter



Tancredi Palmeri 
@tancredipalmeri



The hoax on Fiorentina extending post-mortem contract with Astori has been started by Troll Football India.

I said Troll Football India.

...

Really, let's just stay in silence.

1:39 AM - Mar 6, 2018

Illustration 3: Fiorentina statement appears to confirm Davide Astori gesture was a hoax (Joe.co.uk)



Shortly after the sad news of his passing was confirmed, a story began circulating online that the club had indefinitely extended his contract and donated the salary to his partner Francesca and their two-year-old daughter Vittoria.

Serie A Commissioner Malagò even congratulated Fiorentina for the gesture during a press conference, but sadly, it appears as though it was a hoax.

Italian football journalist Tancredi Palmeri has tweeted that the story was fabricated by social media account Troll Football India.

Illustration 4: The tragic death of Davide Astori and the fake contract that followed (Forbes)

13,563 views | Mar 6, 2018, 09:59am

The Tragic Death Of Davide Astori And The Fake Contract News That Followed



Bobby McMahon Contributor 
SportsMoney

Illustration 5: Monetising the death of a footballer: Day four (Football365)

Then, the third wave: the news accounts. Or, as they should be known, 'those who should know better'.

'Fiorentina extend David Astori's contract for life with salary going to his wife and daughter,' was **Joe's** headline.

Wonderful gesture 🌟🌟 <https://t.co/TAZW2fH9vV>

– SportsJOE (@SportsJOEdotie) [March 5, 2018](#)

'TOUCHING TRIBUTE Davide Astori to have his new four-year contract honoured by Fiorentina – with wages paid to wife and daughter,' was **The Sun's** take.

'Fiorentina to renew Davide Astori's contract to support the family of club's late captain,' said **MailOnline**.

So the journey is complete – from spurious Facebook account to banterous Twitter accounts to newspaper websites.

Mediawatch can understand the first two not bothering to check for accuracy, for that is par for the course. But how can a newspaper with a massive staff pile in without knowing if it's true? Has the need for engagement really suffocated decency and professionalism to that extent? (*Ed. – Yes*).

By Tuesday, Fiorentina were forced to deny the story, releasing a statement saying that they were still coming to terms with how to honour their captain. That, unfairly, makes them look a bit mean – simply because somebody, somewhere invented a story saying otherwise.

As of 10.30am on Wednesday, Joe.ie have at least taken down the story (although their tweet remains). The MailOnline's story links to a piece on Serena Williams.

The Sun? Oh they have left it up for all to see. It's only more unsubstantiated reports about a man's death, after all.

Tell you what would be a 'touching tribute'. Having a little f*cking respect.

4.2.2 Speculative reports concerning Liverpool winger Sadio Mane's move to Real Madrid

Illustration 6: Speculative reports from France claim that Real Madrid have a preliminary agreement with Liverpool winger Sadio Mane



Read Liverpool
@ReadLiverpoolFC

🤔 | Speculative reports from France claim that Real Madrid have a preliminary agreement with Liverpool winger Sadio Mane: bit.ly/2sCaWZ3



2018/06/04, 18:21

Source: Twitter/ Read Liverpool. Accessed on the 4 June 2018.

News content

After English Premier League side Liverpool's Champions League final defeat to La Liga's Real Madrid, speculative reports suggested that the Liverpool winger Sadio Mane, was interested in a move to the Spanish giants in the summer of 2018. *Read Liverpool* and *France Football* both reported that Real Madrid had reached an agreement in principle to sign Mane.

Checking the website's credentials

The first indicator that this is a fake sport news story is the caption on social media and the headline to the article are different. Twitter reads as follows, "Reports from

France claim that Real Madrid have a preliminary agreement with Liverpool winger Sadio Mane”; whereas the headline to the article on their website states “Real Madrid had reportedly reached Mane agreement prior to Zidane exit”.

Disclaimer

Although this story was located on Twitter’s *Read Liverpool* account; the website that the full story appeared on was *Read Everything*. In the ‘about section’ it states that, “This website is operated by Fresh Press Media and forms part of the Read Everything network. We concentrate on a variety of content to keep you up to date with what you love.” There is no indicator here that the website is fake in nature as no disclaimer is put out to their readers to be aware of in the about/contact us sections (Bath, 2017).

Credibility

The article does not give much detail about the agreement, neither does it have official comments from the player or club. Jolley et al. (2017) states that if a story is written by a journalist with a sound reputation than it can be trusted however, no mention of sources or official statements were made which raise red flags. This article is a short read and is most likely syndicated content, which means this information is not primary but secondary.

The impact of this news story affects not only the player but two clubs and the fans of these respective clubs. Stories like these create doubt in team-mates minds and this also effects the supporters of clubs, who start thinking a player is disloyal and will betray the club. Another story that resulted from this article was “Mane to Madrid” by well-known website and social media account *B/R Football*. The constant regeneration of a story that is fake means people still talk about it or retweet the information, this cycle continues and is usually discrediting to journalists as speculation is often taken more seriously than truthful information.

This story eventually lost traction and subsided as the transfer window for the English Premier League closed in August 2018. Later, towards the end of the year (November), Mane signed a long-term contract extension with Liverpool Football Club saying; “I am very happy, very happy to extend my time at Liverpool. I’ve always said, when I knew I had a chance to come here I didn’t have to think twice. The right club in

the right moment and with the right coach as well. I came here and was very happy.”
- Liverpoolfc.com. This confirms that the player had no intention of moving to another club.

News classification

Sport news story

Illustration 7 is an example of some of the stories generated from this fake sport news story on Sadio Mane. It also illustrates cynicism towards the player and his club. Illustration 8 provides evidence that the story was indeed fake as the player signed a long-term contract with his club.

Illustration 7: Mane to Madrid? (B/R Football)



If you can't beat 'em... 🙈



**Illustration 8: Sadio Mane agrees new long-term Liverpool contract
(Liverpoolfc.com)**



4.2.3 Story on Paul Pogba's alleged move to Barcelona

Illustration 9: Paul Pogba 'agrees five-year deal worth £100m with Barcelona'



Mirror Football ✓
@MirrorFootball

Paul Pogba 'agrees five-year deal worth £100m with Barcelona'
mirror.co.uk/sport/football...



2018/08/07, 10:16

55 Retweets 110 Likes

Source: Twitter/ Mirror Football. Accessed on the 7 August 2018.

News content

This illustration cites the following story: Spanish giants Barcelona have reportedly agreed to sign Paul Pogba with a massive bid for the midfielder. The La Liga champions offered Manchester United £45m for the midfielder, together with Yerry Mina and Andre Gomes. Reports from Italy suggested that the World Cup winner was unhappy under Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho after returning to the Premier League for a second spell. Barcelona are “desperate” to land Pogba and are willing to sell either of the players.

Credibility

The main identifier that this story is fake is the fact that one year later Pogba remains a Manchester United player. Furthermore, Pogba did not mention showing any serious interest in joining Barcelona, no comment from him was made on the topic. As stated above, when reports come out from a particular European country, a lot is lost in translation. Information can be misinterpreted and sensationalized as noted by Kempen (2017), this adds to the short commentary in the article about the agreement.

Checking the website's credentials

The website also has a number of pop-up videos including other articles between the original article which encourages the reader to click on different stories relating to the Manchester United player and this particular transfer, which was untrue.

The implications of such a news story for Paul Pogba is both emotionally provoking and career-wise could be a 'game changer' for the player. However, this speculation hurts his reputation and makes him look like a player that chases money and fame. Often, the media play on this image and individuals on social media tend to jump on the hate bandwagon against the player. Pogba played for Juventus in Italy before he made his big money move back to Manchester United; a story such as this one continues to poke at the player and his apparent thirst for more money. There were 55 retweets and 110 likes on this particular post which seems like an insignificant number; however, this still has a noteworthy reach to unknown bigger audience numbers. This is because retweets and likes still appear on one's followers' timeline. Hence, it has reached more than 165 people.

Some of the resultant backlash after this story was published were more rumours of Pogba's exit from the club. An example of this was an article from *The Telegraph* stating "Paul Pogba tells Man Utd he wants to go – or get 200k pay rise if he has to stay". These stories were further said to be fake when the apparent bad blood between Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho and Paul Pogba were proven wrong when the manager started Paul Pogba in their next match against Leicester City and made him the captain.

Disclaimer

Mirror Football is a subsection of *Mirror Online*, the 'about us' section in their website comprising of 8 subsections namely letter from the editor; how our journalists work; corrections policy; tell us what you think; our people; our business; diversity policy and equal opportunities. There is no indicator from any of the above subsections that the website is fake, however the journalists abide by an ethics policy, verification and fact checking as well as "relying on integrity, experience and professionalism" when using unnamed sources. *Mirror Online* correction policy allows readers to contact the editorial team if they have published something inaccurate (Otto & Köhler, 2018).

News classification

Sport news story

Implications on standard news practice

Stories such as these make sport reporting difficult because as these fake stories float around; if they are not also reported on, media companies look misinformed on the topic. Online readers are already consuming such information on other social media platforms and websites. *Soccer Laduma* international news editor David Kappel took the responsibility into his own hands by tweeting what was fake news by *The Telegraph* and comparing it to the reality of the Paul Pogba situation; that he was the captain and happy with his position in the team. This ties with both the social responsibility (Fourie, 2007) and information society theory (Fuchs, 2013). As the editor of one of the biggest publications in Africa, he felt the need to inform his followers that what was circulating in the news was untrue. Although, these communication technologies such as social media has made the world more connected it has also hindered the amount of truthful information that is present on the internet.

Illustrations 10 and 11 provide evidence of the type of speculations that are generated from fake sport news reporting, where the stories add to the news indicating that the player wants a pay rise.

Illustration 10: Paul Pogba tells Man Utd he wants to go – or get 200k pay rise if he has to stay (The Telegraph)

**Football transfer news and rumours:
'Paul Pogba tells Man Utd he wants to go - or get £200k pay rise if he has to stay'**



Save 23



Illustration 11: Soccer Laduma international news editor David Kappel on Twitter



David Kappel
@kappilinho

Fake news 👉

Reality 👉



2018/08/10, 20:41 from Milnerton, South Africa

4.2.4 Allegations about Liverpool fans plotting a hostile reception for Manchester City

Illustration 12: Liverpool fans plotting hostile, and illegal, reception for Man City



Stuart Brennan ✓
@StuBrennanMEN

I'm sure #MCFC's Argentines and Brazilians will have seen a lot worse!



Liverpool fans plotting hostile, and illegal, reception for Man City
manchestereveningnews.co.uk

2018/03/19, 17:00

21 Retweets 90 Likes

Source: Twitter/ Manchester Evening News. Accessed on the 19 March 2018.

News content

The UEFA Champions League is one of the most sought after trophies for any football team around the world. One of England's most successful teams Liverpool, were up against newcomers to the Champions League quarter-finals, Manchester City. After a social media campaign by the loyal Liverpool supporters went sour, Manchester City turned to the police to take matters in their own hands. The social media campaign was set to welcome both team buses ahead of the first-leg tie at Anfield Liverpool's home stadium. Supporters were informed that no pyrotechnics or violence should erupt at this time otherwise they would have to face the consequences.

Credibility

The credibility of this story comes into question when the journalist who wrote this, Stuart Brennan, works for a bias news outlet that portrays Liverpool supporters as hostile for coming out and exhibiting their undying love for their team during a crucial match. The reason why this can be identified as a fake news story is because throughout Liverpool's Champions League campaign in the 2017/18 season, at almost every home game the team buses were greeted by supporters with no hostility. Although, the police from Manchester and Merseyside became involved with the matter, nothing bad transpired before or after the complaints.

The biggest implications of this news story come with fines for the club in question, Liverpool. If anything were to happen they would have to cough up the money to rectify the wrongdoings. However, the Liverpool support has now grown a reputation because of these kinds of stories. This reputation is not a pleasant one, as harsh words are thrown around to describe them. Other stories that resulted came again from the same journalist (Stuart Brennan) reporting for *Daily Record*, with the same tone and words used in his article for *Manchester Evening News*. Furthermore, *Sport Bible* whose recorded following on social media is 1.3 million on Twitter and close to 12 million on Facebook, also spread the news to their following. What this means is that a specific perception was sent out to 13 million people about something that was not necessarily true in nature. Otto and Köhler (2018) further argue that the concept of trust is diminished and the credibility of journalists can be threatened by such a widely circulated article. Popular amongst Liverpool supporters and on social media, *The Redmen TV* stood firm in their tweet and counter-attacked these articles when they said "Liverpool fans plot to create an atmosphere".

News classification

Sport news story

Checking the website's credentials

The social media campaign was made for fans to encourage the team and not 'scare' Manchester City. No comments from the alleged people who tweeted about this campaign were mentioned in the article as they were not given a chance to have a voice in the matter (Harrington, 2014). The word "hostile" and "illegal" in the headline

suggests that the fans do not care about anyone or anything and this is an unfair portrayal.

Disclaimer

Similar to *Mirror Online*, in the *Manchester Evening News* website the 'about us' section is almost a cut and paste compromising of 8 subsections namely letter from the editor; how our journalists work; corrections policy; tell us what you think; our people; our business; diversity policy and equal opportunities. There is no apparent disclaimer on the website, finding the 'about us' section was very difficult as it was at the bottom of the page in small font compared to being at the top on the main tabs section of most websites.

Illustrations 13, 14 and 15 provide evidence of the stories that were generated from this fake sport news story. This example shows the willingness of individuals to take advantage of the known rivalry between the two soccer clubs and to sow mischievous stories to add to the rivalry.

Illustration 13: *Liverpool fans plotting to give Manchester City an explosive but ILLEGAL welcome to Anfield in Champions League (Daily Record)*

Liverpool fans plotting to give Manchester City an explosive but ILLEGAL welcome to Anfield in Champions League

The Reds will host Pep Guardiola's stars on Merseyside on April 4 for a crunch quarter-final clash.



By **Stuart Brennan**
16:47, 19 MAR 2018

SPORT

Illustration 14: Liverpool fans create poster of hostile plans for Champions League clash against Manchester City (Sport Bible)

Liverpool Fans Create Poster Of Hostile Plans For Champions League Clash Against Manchester City

FOOTBALL



Liverpool fans are setting up a heated and potentially illegal reception for the Manchester City squad before the pair's much-anticipated Champions League quarter-final clash.

This planned meet up of Reds supporters transpired through the circulation of a poster, which warns that the Man City squad should not expect a particularly warm welcome when they arrive by coach at Anfield.

Illustration 15: Liverpool fans plot to create an atmosphere (The Redmen TV)



The Redmen TV 
@TheRedmenTV



“Liverpool fans plot to create atmosphere”
manchestereveningnews.co.uk/sport/football...

♡ 469 9:18 PM - Mar 19, 2018



Liverpool fans plotting hostile, and potentially illegal, receptio...

Manchester City go to Anfield on April 4 for the first leg of the Champions League quarter-final but supporters are planning a
manchestereveningnews.co.uk

4.2.5 Sky Sports apology to Raheem Sterling

Illustration 16: Sky Sports apology to Raheem Sterling



News content

Sky Sports News issued a public apology after incorrectly quoting Raheem Sterling's statement regarding his recent gun tattoo. The ramifications of this story hurts Raheem Sterling's character which can affect him both personally in his career and emotionally in his family set-up. A precedent about his reputation has been set by the media as the young bad boy who follows money. The Manchester City player explained the meaning behind his tattoo only for the well-known and renowned media outlet to misquote him on international TV and social media. An uproar was caused due to what *Sky Sports* published and many of the English fans were not impressed with the winger's choices.

Checking the websites credentials

Many online websites reported about his gun tattoo and *Sky Sports* apology, some of these were found on the *Daily Mail*, *Mirror*, *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* to name a few. "Raheem Sterling is a victim of vicious tabloid snobbery... Pictures of the footballer's gun tattoo have led to calls for him to be dropped from the World Cup squad. It's the latest twist in an endless, and bizarre, character assassination." – *The*

Guardian. *The Sun* has also relentlessly attacked Raheem Sterling in articles about his personal life which in most instances were incorrect information spread about the football player. Due to the representation of what the media shows Sterling to be, many rival fans dislike him. Early in 2019, in a pivotal English Premier League clash between Chelsea and Manchester City, Sterling received racial abuse from the Chelsea supporters during the game. The player recently took a stand by speaking in an exclusive interview with *The New York Times* pointing out how young black footballers are treated compared to their white counterparts. "I don't want players to go through the evil that I went through", Sterling said as he launched a campaign against racism in the Premier League which is raising more awareness around the subject.

Credibility

Sky Sports credibility dropped significantly after this negative portrayal of one of their country's upcoming stars. Unfortunately, they took down their initial comments as soon as they issued the apology but many were aware of their incompetence and negligence of the situation (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017). Raheem Sterling explained the inspiration behind the recent tattoo on his right leg and the story behind his father, who passed away when he was two years old. The broadcaster suggested that the Manchester City forward had previously touched a gun, but have now moved to correct the error. A tweet read: "Last night we made a mistake in our reporting of Raheem Sterling's statement on his tattoo. We apologize for this error and any distress it has caused Raheem and his family". – *Sky Sports*

News classification

Sport news story

Disclaimer

Well known worldwide, *Sky Sports News* does not appear to have any disclaimer on their official Twitter account but state in their bio that they are "your home of sports news on channel 409."

Implications on standard news practice

What this means for sport reporting and journalistic practice is that sports journalists need to start recognizing their bias in reporting and ensure that the manner in which

they are representing players is crucial to the public's perception of the player. Representation is essential in a way a player is perceived, therefore misrepresentation should be avoided. This can be done by publishing accurate information about players whilst recognising that false statements about their personal lives are always going to be present. Raising mindfulness around topics like race and representation is crucial in ethical journalistic practice.

Illustration 17 is a good example of how reputable news outlets sometimes get embroiled in fake news reporting. Illustration 18 gives evidence of the action that was taken to rectify the fake sport news story. This points to the importance of ethical journalism practices such as taking responsibility and rectifying fake news stories.

Illustration 17: *Raheem Sterling's gun tattoo has made him an easy target (Daily Mail)*

Raheem Sterling's gun tattoo has made him an easy target

- Raheem Sterling has come under scrutiny this week for his latest tattoo
- The winger has had a large M16 rifle silhouette emblazoned on his right leg
- Sterling took to social media to explain why, and has been backed by the FA
- The uproar has come just before England travel to Russia for the World Cup

Illustration 18: *Sky Sports apologize for Raheem Sterling 'mistake' over England star's tattoo statement (Mirror Online)*

Sky Sports apologise for Raheem Sterling 'mistake' over England star's tattoo statement

The broadcaster made a false accusation over the Manchester City forward's past with guns

4.2.6 Patrice Evra's return to Manchester United

Illustration 19: ***BREAKING: Patrice Evra to make STUNNING return back to Manchester United!***

FootballFunnys Retweeted

 **Man Utd FF**
@ManUtdFF

BREAKING: Patrice Evra to make STUNNING return back to Manchester United! 🤯



Patrice Evra to make STUNNING return back to Manchester United
www.caughtoffside.com

2018/11/18, 00:02

4 Retweets 5 Likes

Source: Twitter/Man Utd FF/ Caught Offside. Accessed on the 18 November 2018.

News content

The above fake news story centred around former Manchester United defender Patrice Evra, who was said to be on the verge of re-joining his beloved English Premier League team from France Ligue 1's Marseille in the January transfer window in 2019. The defender had spent eight years with the English side from 2006 to 2014 before joining Italy's Juventus. No fee was disclosed but negotiations had begun.

Checking the website's credentials

This story can be identified as a fake story as the website (*Caught Offside*) that had reported on this 'breaking news' no longer had the article on its website. There is no sense of credibility that comes with a story like this because once it is taken down, it suggests it was not true to begin with.

Credibility

The headline on this social media page tempts the reader to click on the article which directs them to a *wish-wash* story. The story plays on fans' emotions as Patrice Evra used to be an integral part of the Manchester United team, it sells hope to the reader as a "dream move back to Old Trafford" is on the cards for the former player. An article that does not contain sources is not entirely credible, this further dampens the level of credibility of the story.

Illustration 19 was tweeted by *Man Utd FF* which has 24 300 followers, this was subsequently retweeted by *Football Funnys* to their 825 600 followers. Although, the engagement of the article is fairly low on the screenshot; the reach is a tremendously huge number. This shows that the implications of a news story of this magnitude can become out of hand; the spread across social media platforms displays the depth of how far one wrong article can go. Andrews (2011) mentions the negatives of social networks which poses a challenge to sport journalists' because everything happens at such a rapid speed online. Due to information in the social world being so vast, one cannot constitute the level of impact a fake news story such as this can have.

News classification

Sport news story

Disclaimer

The 'about section' on this website states that, "CaughtOffside is the world's most popular independent football blog." This means that anyone can contribute to the bog and not succumb to any consequences if incorrect information is published by the website.

Implications on standard news practice

A transfer back to his old club would have been a dream come true for Evra but the reality of the matter is that it was unable to take place because it was never on the table to start with. Some sport journalist's fall for stories such as these and also write articles about such rumours, but by doing so, it tears down their credibility. The defender ended up returning to the English Premier League with another side, West Ham United and continued his career there instead.

4.2.7 Liverpool's alleged bid for Real Madrid's Dani Carvajal

Illustration 20: *Breaking: Report boldly claims Liverpool will make a move for...*



 **indykaila News** @indykaila

Breaking: Report Boldly Claims
Liverpool Will Make a Move for bit.ly/2FpgrUI

2018/03/09, 09:12

2 Retweets 38 Likes

 **indykaila News** @indykaila · 7m

The reports are from @realmadrid base reporters. Interesting.

   3 

Source: Twitter/ Indykaila News/ 90min.com. Accessed on the 9 March 2018.

News content

According to claims made by Spanish rumourmongers *Don Balon*, England side Liverpool were set to launch a bid to sign Real Madrid full-back Dani Carvajal in July 2018. The Reds as affectionately known by their fans, were looking for a stable right

back player to join the Liverpool ranks. Although, the position is not short of any competition, with both Joe Gomez and Trent Alexander-Arnold playing fairly well during the 2018/19 season. There were countless reports in the media regarding who Liverpool would sign in the summer and Carvajal was among them.

Credibility

This can be identified as fake news; as there was no foundation set in the article that the information was at all truthful. The credibility of the fake sports news story is also lost as the author tweets “The reports are from Real Madrid base reporters. Interesting.” However, in the article no source is attributed to the content, neither is there comment from the Liverpool side about wanting to buy Dani Carvajal (Bath, 2017; Kempen, 2017).

Liverpool’s manager, Jurgen Klopp, made specific transfers in areas he deemed as weak and the position of right-back was not one of them. Information is power and this article lacked sufficient depth, it was not spread as widely as other articles. The resultant backlash of this news story is not as big as others that have been previously discussed. This story was not published by other media as they recognized it as information that will not come to pass.

Checking the websites credentials

The headline also attracts the reader to click on the link and find out who Liverpool wants to supposedly buy, which drives traffic onto the online website.

News classification

Sport news story

Disclaimer

In a lengthy ‘about us’ section, the website disclaims that, “90min’s mission is to champion fan-generated media as a key ingredient of sports journalism. 90min’s content is consumed by a global audience of millions via online media, mobile platforms and handheld devices. 90min receives over 250 million page views and over 500 million Facebook and Twitter impressions monthly.” Fans of rival clubs can easily spin stories as they please on this website as citizen journalism, technology and

interactivity is what the website aims to use in generating story ideas and content for its audience.

4.2.8 Fake news about Antonio Conte's appointment as Real Madrid manager

Illustration 21: *BREAKING: Antonio Conte's first signing as the manager of Real Madrid has been revealed. WOW!*



FootballFunnys @FootballFunn... · 4h ✓
BREAKING: Antonio Conte's first signing as the manager of Real Madrid has been revealed.. WOW!



BREAKING: Antonio Conte's first signing at Real Madrid will be..
www.caughtoffside.com

2 1 18

FootballFunnys @FootballFunn... · 4m ✓
Conte's first signing as Real Madrid's future manager has been revealed 🙌

2

Source: Twitter/ Football Funnys/ Caught Offside. Accessed on the 20 October 2018.

News Content

Another popular fake story concerned former Chelsea manager, Antonio Conte, who was said to take over the Real Madrid job in late 2018 and buy a number of players

from around the world to boost his new team. The article speaks about the unconfirmed appointment of Conte as the new Real Madrid manager and his plans for the future. The implications of such a news story directly affects Conte personally and emotionally, because it is his career as a manager that is called into question. This also puts pressure on Real Madrid to announce a new manager because of the speculation caused.

Credibility and checking the website's credentials

This can be identified as fake news as the appointment of Conte was unconfirmed by Real Madrid, they remained without a manager when this article was published. The credibility of the fake sports news story is driven to the ground as there are no sources, the headline in the article is misleading and cannot be found on the *Caught Offside* website any longer (Van Wyk, 2016). As seen in Illustration 8, below the original tweet another tweet states; "Conte's first signing as Real Madrid's future manager has been revealed" and this was not the case.

News classification

Sport news story

Disclaimer

Adding to 90min's disclaimers is, "We set out to push the boundaries of combining journalism and technology, and achieved a highly scalable media platform which gives fan opinions a single global voice." In other words, football fans around the world can become 'fan journalists, information however is not tracked nor scrutinized by fact checkers or through a verification process. Their already existing media partners include Daily Mail, The Mirror, USA Today, The Independent, MSN Sport, Huffington Post, GQ, and London24 which are all distributed worldwide. Hence, the spread of harmful information can be endless.

Implications on standard news practice

The resultant backlash after the story was published were more rumours of Conte landing the job with no verification. After these events, other stories that resulted were why Antonio Conte ruled himself out for the Real Madrid position by *Talksport*, *The*

Independent and Goal. What this means for sport reporting is to verify the information that is set to be published before writing articles that are incorrect.

4.2.9 Allegations of Tottenham signing Manchester United forward

Illustration 22: READ #MUFC & THFC fans!/: Tottenham shortlist Man Utd forward as top priority with club searching for reinforcements



News content

In a fake news story: according to reports English Premier League club Tottenham Hotspur have made French player Anthony Martial their top priority during the summer transfer window. The Manchester United forward had fallen out of favour at Old Trafford in the season, with recent speculation suggesting that the Frenchman could be moved on by José Mourinho the following summer. The uncertainty surrounding Martial's future at the club caught the attention of a number of clubs across Europe, but it is understood that Spurs are willing to go all out to sign the 22-year-old. Tottenham were desperate to sign a new striker ahead of the new season, with the club's hierarchy eager to see someone challenge Harry Kane for a place in the starting line-up.

Credibility

A report from the *Standard* outlines how Tottenham's recent history of attacking signings have made Martial, who has predominantly been deployed as a winger at Manchester United, a top priority for the club ahead of the first season at their new stadium. This story can be identified as fake news because the credibility of the story is low due to it not having enough information about the possible transfer. Anthony Martial ended up staying at Manchester United despite stories like this circulating social media. *Indykaila News* has close to 280 000 followers on Twitter so the impact of a story of this nature could reach many people. These fake sport news stories died down, however it still makes the practice of journalism difficult as Lewis and Crick (2014) argue due to lack of time and the different media outlets portraying a story, the consumer makes a judgement on the information available.

News classification

Sport news story

Disclaimer

Indykaila News on Twitter has no disclaimers, however in its bio it reads: "Home of breaking football news and transfer updates. Respected sources." It would seem that this individual uses 90min.com as a fan journalist and posts information from the website (that he has written) onto his Twitter page. There is no credibility in this as he does not answer to an editor or is driven by any ethics/policies (Jolley et al.,2017).

4.2.10 Arsenal to part ways with manager, Arsene Wenger after the 2017/18 season

Illustration 23: *Exclusive Arsenal news. CONFIRMED news from our source!*



News content

The following story was published: English Premier League club, Arsenal seemed certain to part company with manager Arsene Wenger at the end of the 2017/2018 season. The Frenchman's time at the helm at *The Emirates* seemed to be ending on a sour note, with the *Gunners* unlikely to finish in the top-four in the Premier League that season. If Arsenal fans were looking for possible names, then one that stood out above all the others was Carlo Ancelotti. The Italian tactician had already told his country's football federation that he did not want the national team job and wanted to return to club management. Having won the Premier League title with Chelsea, Ancelotti loves London and was understood to be keen on returning to England in the

following. Arsenal and Arsene Wenger parted ways at the end of the 2017/2018 season, however, Carlo Ancelotti was not his replacement as manager but it was Unai Emery. This is a difficult story for journalists as negotiations usually happens with a number of different people for replacement positions, especially that of manager. Furthermore, the misleading headline suggests that Ancelotti would take over the job but this was not the case. Bath (2017) as well as Jolley et al. (2017) agree that “unbelievable” or “catchy” headlines are one of the things readers should be weary of as these stories may be fake in nature.

Credibility

This can be recognized as a fake news story as the headline on Twitter “Exclusive Arsenal news. CONFIRMED news from our source!” differs from the one represented on 90min.com; “Possible Wenger replacement ruled out of the running for Arsenal job.” The credibility of the fake sports news story is dwindled when the tweet states that, “The news is from a very respected contact at #AFC” however no source is attributed.

Checking the website’s credentials

It is not the first time this particular account has gotten information incorrect, yet the account continues to spread speculation to all their followers and seems to have a partnership with *90min.com* who endorse the unknown authors’ work.

News classification

Sport news story

Disclaimer

Indykaila News on Twitter has no disclaimers, however in its bio it reads: “Home of breaking football news and transfer updates. Respected sources.” There is no disclaimer stating that the content is satire/truthful, *Indykaila News* hides behind cartoon images and a fake name therefore the content cannot be fully trusted. It uses 90min.com to air its views on matters without naming sources or facing actions when reporting inaccurately.

4.3 FINDINGS FROM FAKE SPORTS NEWS STORIES AND WEBSITES

- The sole purpose of these fake news stories and websites are to create sensationalism. Wild and erratic story headlines lure the reader into clicking the article, only to find a watered down story with little or no sources.
- Digital media is exploited because of the instant and rapid spread of news. Twitter is one of the social media platforms that has continuous instantaneous updates. Nine of the ten fake sport news stories came from accounts or websites found on Twitter, therefore due to the nature of this platform it allows for fake sport news to thrive.
- These stories cause damage to the people who are being reported on in them and the organisations who perceive the news to be true. It sheds a bad light on journalism and the professional journalism industry.
- Fake sport news reporters make money by selling fake news, it has become a means to an end, poking fun at athlete's lives and circumstances with inaccurate information.

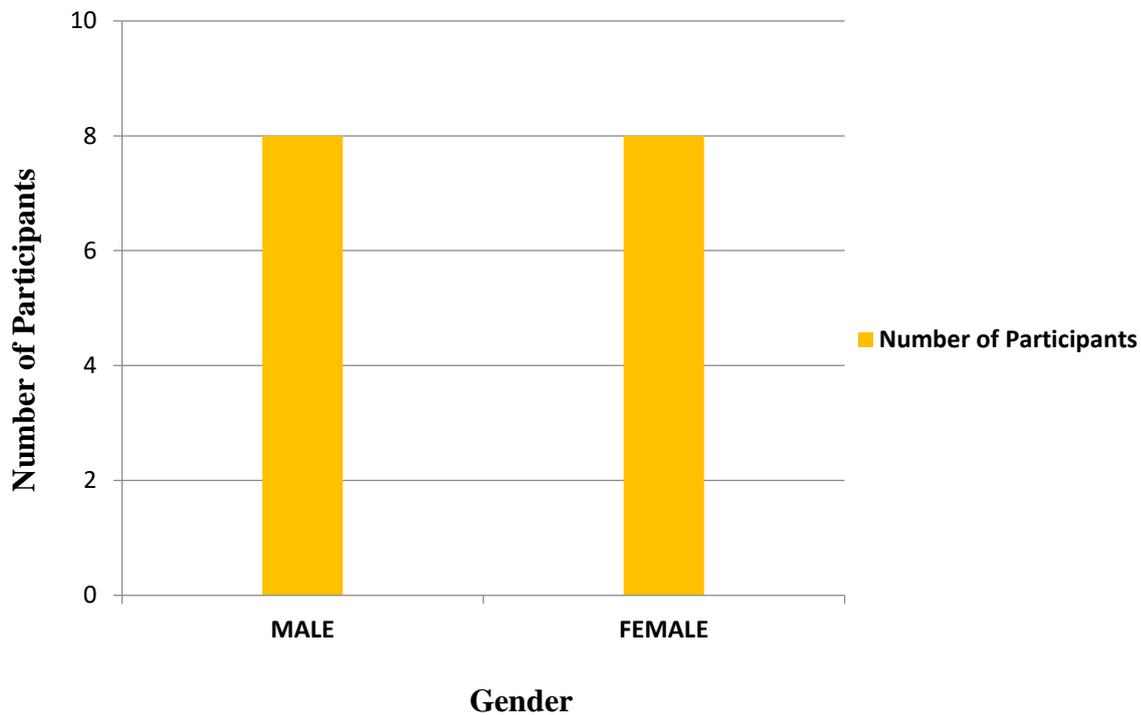
4.4 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

In order to determine the implications of fake sport news stories and websites on standard news practice, media experts in the form of sports journalists, online editors, social media analysts and media academics were interviewed. A total of ten sports journalists, online editors and social media analysts were interviewed, as well as three media experts and three academics. The purpose was to elicit their experiences about fake sports news on digital platforms, the impact this has on sports journalism, the measures that can be put in place to prevent or minimize the rise and spread of digital fake sports news stories and websites. The data is presented in two parts: biographical data of interviewees and themes which were derived from the responses to the various questions. The data is qualitatively analysed under each theme, linked to theory and related literature and findings are drawn from the themes.

4.4.1 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF INTERVIEWEES

Biographical data were obtained from the interviewees on the following: gender of participants, age of participants, educational qualifications of participants, occupation of participants, media organisations of participants, and geographic location of participants

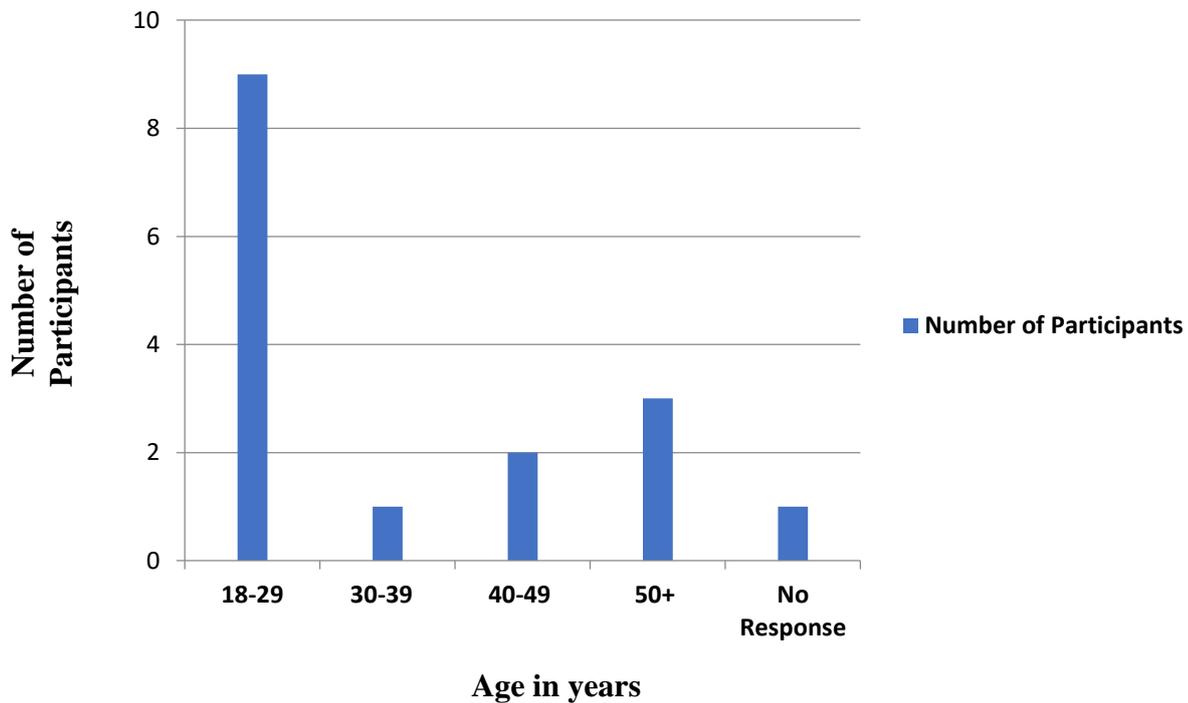
Distribution of participants by gender



Graph 1: Distribution of Participants by Gender

The interview participants comprised 8 males and 8 females. The gender was not purposively selected, however, equal representation in terms of gender is significant in sport because gender representation in terms of females is often an area of concern. There is under representation of female sports journalists in general. This has an impact on the number of stories covered by female journalists and the role played by female sport journalists when it comes to fake sports news stories and websites.

Distribution of participants by age (in years)

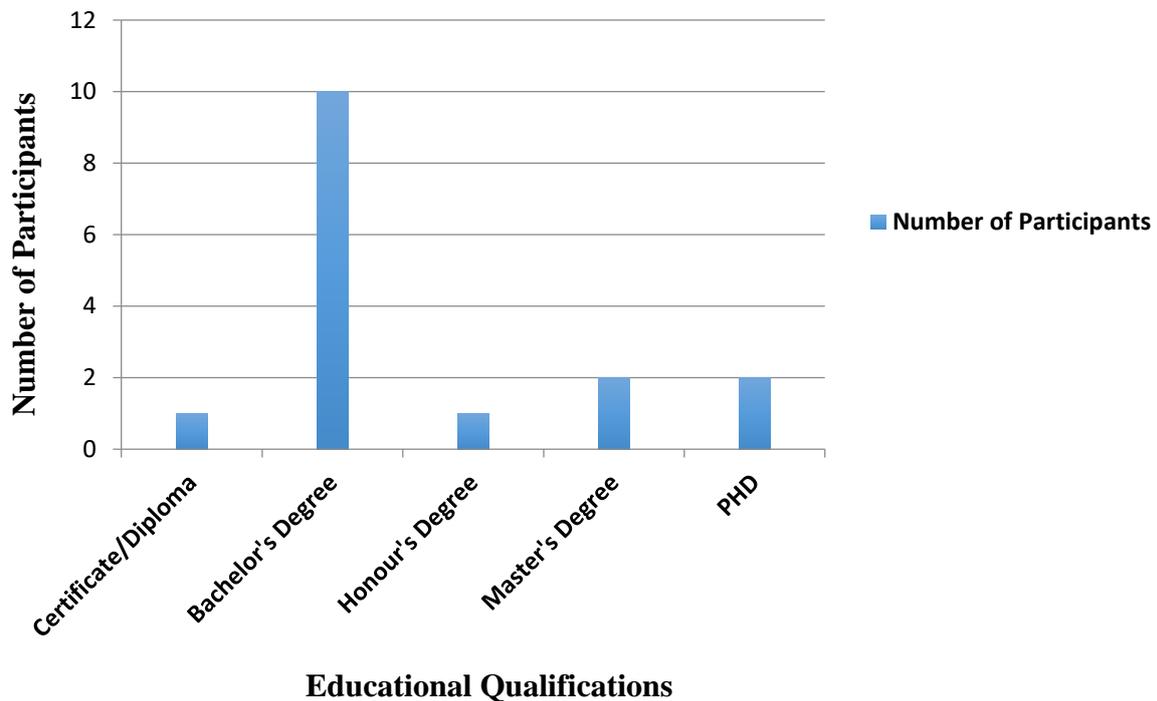


Graph 2: Distribution of Participants by Age (in years)

Graph 2 depicts the age of all the participants. There were nine participants in the 18-29 age group; one each in the 30-39 age group and the 'no response' age category; two participants in the 40-49 age group; and three participants in the 50+ age group. The majority (9) of the participants were in the 18-29 age group. This group reflects a young group who are social media savvy and are more aware and experienced with the fake news phenomenon and also interact more often with various websites.

The data showed that the participants in the other age groups come from developed countries. Technological advancement using social media is not a new phenomenon in the developed world, in fact South Africa is around 20 years behind the developed world. This implies that the older journalists have had significant experience with social media, as evidenced from the age category data.

Educational qualifications of the participants



Graph 3: Educational Qualifications of the Participants

Of the sixteen participants, ten had Bachelor's degrees; one had a certificate/diploma; one an Honour's degree and two each had Master's and PhDs. These qualifications place the respondents in the 'educated' category. This implies that they have received journalistic training of some sort which qualified them to enter the journalism field. This also means that they had experience in sports news reporting and in particular would most probably have come across fake sports news reporting. It also means that their collect experience in sports news reporting enabled them to participate fully in the interviews. The inference here is that there was a high possibility of getting informed, credible and professional information due to their level of intellectual, social and work-based experience.

Career of the participants

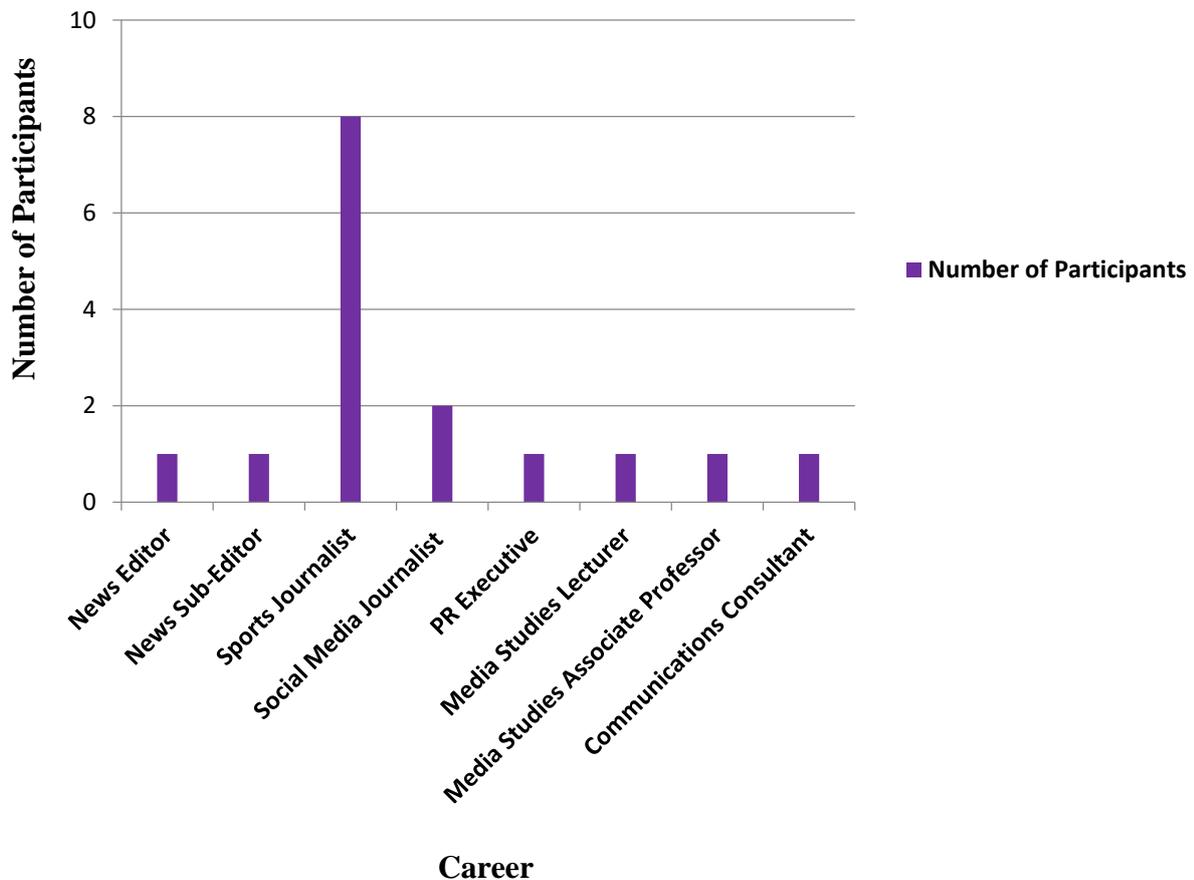


Figure 4: Career of the Participants

Half (8) of the interviewees were journalists; two were social media experts; with one each in the following occupations: Editor, Sub-editor, Media/PR, Lecturer, Associate Professor and Communications consultant. This spread of occupation categories was ideal for eliciting different perspectives on the phenomenon of fake news reporting and fake news websites. Their various responses were given from these perspectives and this deepened the type of information collated. This is evident in the individual quality responses that they gave in the interviews that were conducted with them.

Media organisations of the participants

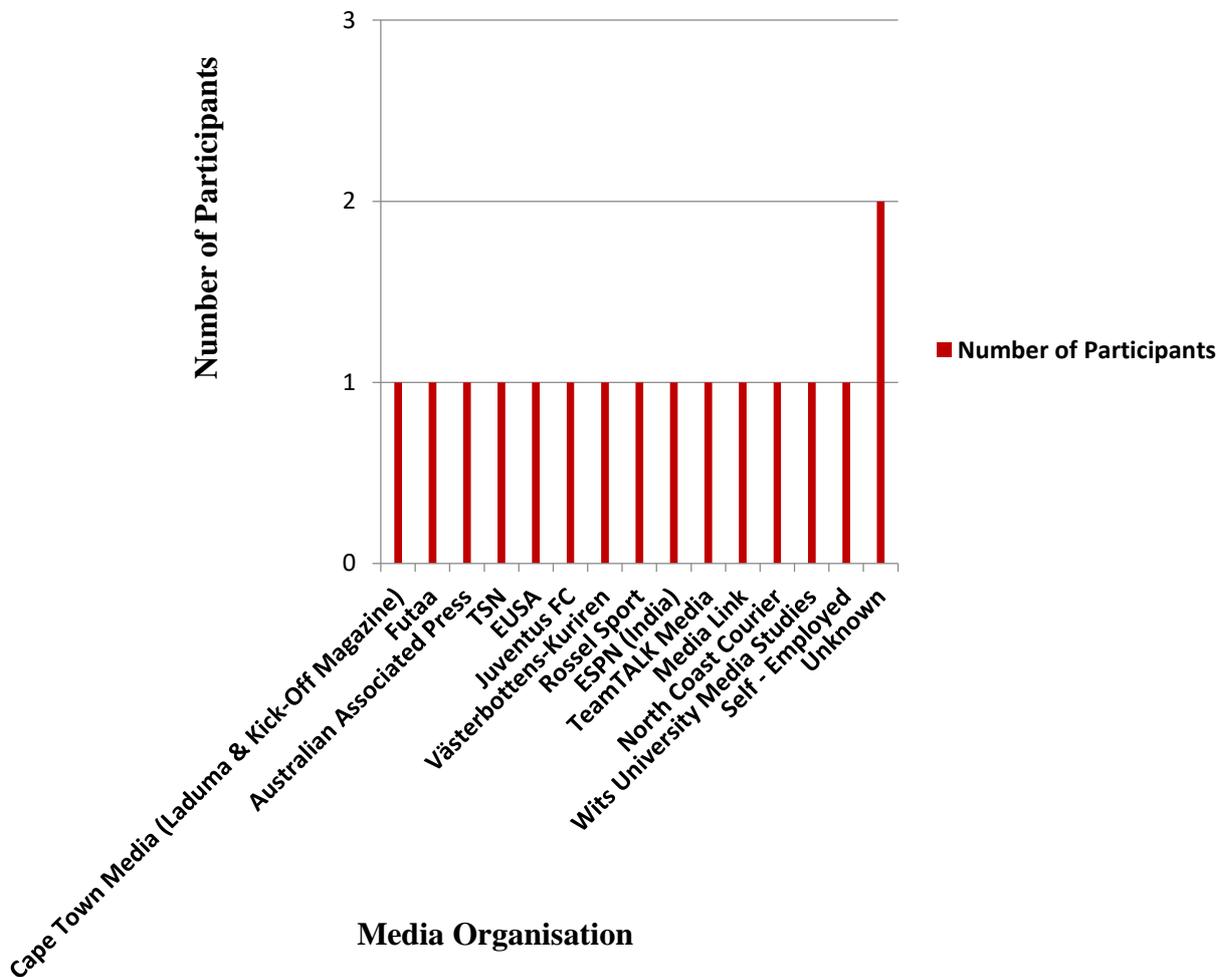


Figure 5: Media Organisations of the Participants

The participants represented from different media organisations across the world. Most were from sports media groupings, local media outlets and a South African university. One was self-employed. Two interviewees chose not to disclose the media organisation they represented. Naming the media organisation was optional due to privacy reasons, which is acceptable. These organisations are primarily news organisations with different backgrounds like sport clubs, media houses and universities. Most of them are sport-linked. All of them use online reporting as a tool to disseminate sports news. The media and sport organisations are global players, for example, Australian Associated Press, ESPN (India), Futaa and TSN. They have a well-established footprint globally.

Geographic location of the participants

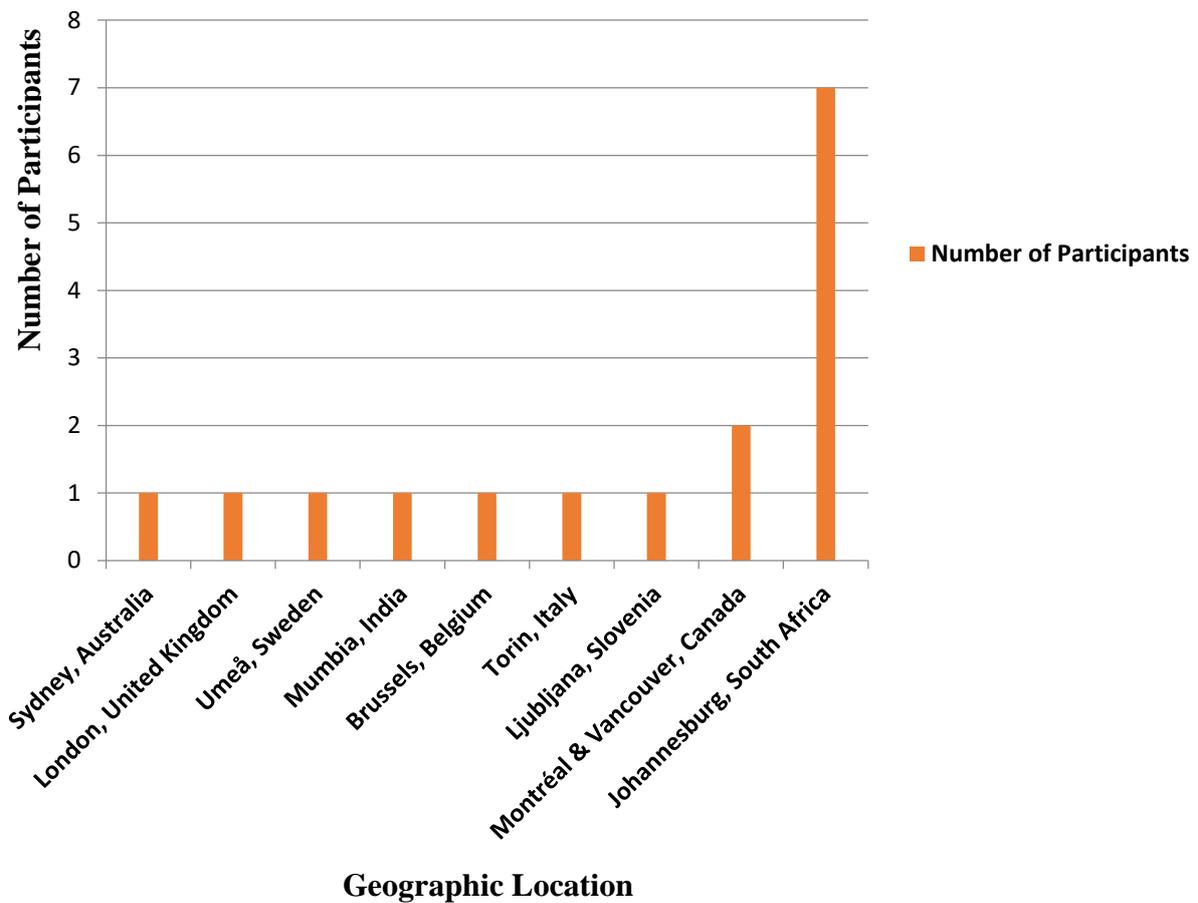


Figure 6: Geographic Location of the Participants

The majority (7) of the interviewees came from South Africa where the study was conducted. Two interviewees were from Canada. The rest were from: Australia, the United Kingdom, Sweden, India, Belgium, Italy, and Slovenia. The wide range of countries also allowed for different experiences on the same issue to be shared, for example, their experiences of fake sport news stories. The interviews took place through various online tools such as Skype and WhatsApp video calls, which were transcribed for data analysis purposes. The wide spread of locations also pointed to the international impact of fake sports news stories and websites.

4.4.2 THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

The following themes emerged in analysing the data: characteristics of fake sports news (question 10, 11); fake news landscape (responses from questions 1, 2, 3); identifying fake news stories and websites (question 4, 5, 6, 9); content of fake news stories and websites (question 7); media's response to fake news (question 8); effect of fake sports news and websites the credibility of online news sources (question 12); implications of fake sports news and websites on media experts (question 13); and interventions in addressing fake sports news stories and websites (question 14). INT refers to interviewee with the corresponding participant's number to uphold anonymity and confidentiality (INT1 to INT16).

4.4.2.1 THEME 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF FAKE SPORTS NEWS

Interview questions 10 and 11 elicited responses concerning characteristics of fake sports news. The questions were as follows: in your experience of working with news, what descriptions would you associate with the nature (characteristics, features) of fake sport news? and; are there any additional comments you would like to make regarding the operational dynamics of fake news? The characteristics of fake sport news sports is significant to the study in that it educates consumers of sports new stories about the existence of fake stories, how to identify such stories and also the importance of not spreading fake sport news stories.

The following is a selection of some responses on of the characteristics fake news:

INT2: *Stories focusing on players lives away from sports. That's usually when there could be something fake.*

INT3: *I am not endeared to the term "fake news" - incorrect news, yes. The only time I will use the term "fake news" is when newspapers and websites deliberately publish incorrect news. And this happens all around the world on April 1 - April Fool's Day.*

INT4: *Sensationalism, incorrect facts on coaches and players, insightful and instigating anger towards teams and players.*

INT5: *That's something I'd like someone else, someone more experienced, to tell me. What is 'fake news' vele? How do we define it? What are its commonly held characteristics? These are all points of interest that I'm looking for someone else to*

school me on. It's not a clean cut case, you see. The matter of characteristics and motives has many subjectivities to it.

INT7: *They tend to be very weird (people like a crazy story). Or stories to make people look better or worse.*

INT8: *Deceptive headlines. Controversial headlines. Aiming towards successful athletes.*

INT9: *The only comment I can make is that readers should always be aware of these websites. There's nothing different, they will always follow the same trend because there will always be those that fall into the traps of 'clickbait' and find themselves reading an article that doesn't serve any purpose of what was initially sold to them.*

INT10: *Agents telling fibs to sell their clients. Free-writing type features without any sources.*

INT11: *Poorly worded (sloppy copies), lots of "according to sources close to (*insert name of the organisation)", and a generic reluctance to attribute to quotes to the source.*

INT12: *Personal – shocking – out of the ordinary, but plausible. Videos published online where you could recognise someone but nothing can really confirm it.*

INT13: *Sensationalist, outrageous, unbelievable, bizarre, and more often than not, no quotes or 'word of the expert' to clarify the information, nor is there a source referenced to where such information could have stemmed from.*

INT14: *Strong headline, sensationalist claims, no source, bad researched, easily sharable.*

INT15: *They are more personal in nature, meaning the stories would probably be about an athlete's (or another person's) personal life.*

Not all interviewees responded to this question as some alluded to it earlier in their interviews. For those who responded, they identified the characteristics broadly as stories seeking sensationalism; stories with no reputable sources; headlines aiming to deceive readers; incorrect facts; stories that comment on players' personal lives. Fourie (2001) further attests to the accuracy of what all the interviewees have said and these views relate closely with the social responsibility theory. It was also interesting to note that two of the respondents had different views. INT 3 indicated that she was

not comfortable with the term 'fake news'. She called the term 'incorrect news'. This indicates that not all journalists identify with fake news. The other interviewee (INT5) indicated that she wants to know the characteristics of fake news because it is not as clear cut as it appears to be. This response indicates that the concept of fake news is a complex one and the characteristics are not easily identified in news stories. The implication is that instant news may not be such a good idea after all, as authentic verification may not always be possible.

However, if readers are aware of the characteristics of fake news; they are able to change the culture surrounding it. Knowing the characteristics of fake sport news helps because people will no longer waste their time on inaccurate information. The characteristics fake sport news correlates with the data discussed from the ten illustrations on fake sport news stories earlier in the chapter, especially those stories linked to soccer players and their movement between clubs. These characteristics make it is easy to identify that the stories are fake; especially the stories that are purely sensationalist in nature. The reason for this is stated above by INT9 who reiterated that readers should remain aware of these sorts of websites and stories as the trends never changes (Otto & Köhler, 2018).

4.4.2.2 THEME 2: FAKE NEWS LANDSCAPE

The fake news landscape has been on a steady rise after the advent of social media; information spreads around the globe faster than it used to previously (Laird, 2012). The rapid spread of information means that journalism as a profession and journalistic practice have directly been affected by the change in this landscape. Audiences want information at the click of a button and are somewhat ignorant to their news consumption, for example, they do not realise that they are retweeting fake news; hence websites and social media accounts thrive off these kinds of media users.

Interview questions 1, 2 and 3 elicited responses on the fake news landscape. The following questions were asked: In your opinion, have fake sport news stories and websites increased over the years? If yes, state why this is so, with reference to any example you have seen online; What is your experience on fake sports news stories and websites in the current media landscape? Are there specific websites or accounts on social media that you think generate fake sports news stories?

The responses that best summarise the questions asked were grouped together and are presented as follows:

INT13: *In the ever-increasing technological age we live in, and the increase in usage of social media, information is disseminated a lot easier and quicker than in the past. With the vast amounts of news hubs and outlets spread across the world, it becomes increasingly easier to deceive naïve consumers as these outlets are not checked/verified/scrutinised.*

INT7: *In today's journalism landscape, it's very important to be quick and fast with all the news. There's always a competition to be first. Unfortunately; I believe this has affected the way many newspapers publish their news. When the main focus is to be quick – it's very common that journalists don't have to time to double-check if a story is true or not.*

INT14: *We live in era of sensationalism and traditional news articles are getting less and less reads. The more audacious the news, the more people will read it.*

INT8: *A lot of journalists and media organisations promote misleading headlines to draw the attention of the reader so that they could get more than their usual amount of views and interaction. The fake headline and story will have nothing to do with the actual article, but it is a way to draw people in.*

INT4: *Fake news has increased rapidly due to it generating money... people are encouraged to click on links that lead to pages with false information that sell ads (clickbait). People cannot decipher what is true or what is not.*

INT12: *Nowadays, it is easy for anyone to open a website/blog and publish anything. The same goes for Twitter, which is I think the biggest carrier of fake news.*

INT1: *The problem with social media is that it is such an insecure platform, that there are countless websites and accounts that crop up regularly. In my opinion any news outlet should be registered with the press council of South Africa to help curb the dissemination of fake news.*

Issues raised by interviewees under this theme were that the current technological age lends itself to an increase in use of social media and due to this increase, it is easier to deceive naïve consumers (INT13). There is an increase of users because news sites are more accessible and more importantly, as pointed out by INT7, people want quick and fast news. Therefore, there is competition to break the news first. This

often leads to unverified stories and unscrupulous reporting. Added to this is the need to create headlines that sell the story (INT8). INT14 calls this the 'era of sensationalism', where 'the more audacious the news, the more people will read it'. This demand has driven some journalists to less than ethical behaviour (like unverified information) in order to create a 'catchy' headline. It was also confirmed that these news hub creators are people who want to make money (INT4). They make money those selling adverts, where unsuspecting readers who are captured by the headlines and want to read more (clickbait), visit sites where they need to pay in order to access a story. Additionally, disinformation and misinformation may also be intentional as in the case of opposing political parties and business competitors.

Interviewees agreed that fake news is on the rise and see it in their daily consumption more often, especially on social media. Interviewees also noted some sources of fake news that they have spotted either on a website or social media. According to INT12, it is easy for anyone to open a website and publish anything. The respondent identifies Twitter as the biggest carrier of fake news. This indicates that sport journalists have to constantly keep an eye out on where and who they are receiving their information from. If journalists know better, they will be able to report more accurately and stay away from misleading sources of information. This is a step in the right direction as curbing fake news will only happen if the journalist fraternity unite together and fight against the spread of fake news.

The interviewees recognise that fake sport news is currently a problem in the media landscape, they have acknowledged its existence and what it means for journalism as a profession moving forward. For the average person, it has become easy to share information online even more so because of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. According to INT1, these social media platforms pose a serious problem in that they are not secure. However, from what the interviewees have said, members of the media have now taken the onus upon themselves to frown upon fake sport news website and accounts. This implies that although society has the means of rapid information communication technologies; the combat against fake news will be fought by the people who understand the complexities of why these stories are released to the public. Making the public aware of what not to read is crucial in the dissemination of not only fake sport news but fake news in a broader sense. This is reiterated by

INT1 who indicates that “any news outlet should be registered with the press council of South Africa to help curb the dissemination of fake news”. Since this is a recommendation, it is discussed further in chapter 5.

4.4.2.3 THEME 3: IDENTIFYING FAKE NEWS STORIES AND WEBSITES

Interview questions 4, 5, 6 and 9 elicited responses about fake news stories and websites. The following questions were asked: how do you as a media practitioner identify fake sport news stories or websites?; are there any guidelines/tips you consider when reading information online?; in your opinion, what are some of the media fraternity’s responses to fake news stories and websites/accounts? and; what are some of the popular/significant fake sports news stories or websites that you have come across in your daily work?

Identifying fake sports news stories or websites

Interviewees identified some common things to look which identify websites/stories as fake sport news. Their responses were as follows:

INT9: *The headlines tend to speak for themselves but one will see if it involves slander, gossip, and anything towards the negative front it should already be a red flag. This is also clear if you go into the story and you eventually discover that there is nothing to the story, this is usually the tactics of these kind of publications who aim to lure fans in by strong headlines and images.*

INT11: *Poorly worded (sloppy copies), lots of “according to sources close to *insert name of the organisation*”, and a generic reluctance to attribute quotes to the source.*

INT8: *I have a list of websites and social media users mentally known in whom I trust; you gather this when you have been in media for a long time. You get to know who is reliable and who is not. Especially being in Sport, during transfer windows, there will be a lot of fake rumours and you have to know what and who to trust.*

INT3: *When outlets quote unnamed sources or attribute quotes to social media, a lot of the time these stories are not properly sourced. Hence the news can be incorrect.*

INT2: *Any top-10 list, I’m immediately sceptical of. Headlines like “You won’t believe how much money [insert athlete] has” also are a big red flag.*

INT13: *A simple background check or phone call can always verify whether or not the information we receive is fake or indeed true. As a company, we have a policy in which we do not publish a story without quoting a source, thereby making both our journalists and ourselves accountable to the news we publish.*

Things like a contact page, headlines, sources, a team/employee page, proper by-lines, and different webpage tabs should all be available on the website. These, as mentioned by the interviewees, go a long way in helping one establish how credible the website or organisation is. According to Kempen (2017), there are a few markers one can look for such as: where the website originates from (location/base), how long have they been around, who their parent/sibling companies are, their associations and affiliations, logos, banners, endorsements, the kinds of advertising available on their site, ratings, reviews, even check the comments section.

From the examination of the fake sport news stories/accounts/websites, they all had the following in common: strong headline, sensationalist claims, poorly researched, no sources, and they were easily sharable on social media. Strong headlines are headlines that capture readers' immediate attention and draw them into wanting to read the whole story. The headline does not necessarily describe the content accurately. The intention is to lure the reader into reading the full article. Sensationalist claims often pique the reader's curiosity and the need to know the full story. Poorly researched stories often do not contain all the necessary information; information is disjointed and different points of view are not considered; they also contain no sources. No sources consulted is one of the key indicators that one is dealing with fake news stories. Claims made are not substantiated through the use of sources or a primary source.

The above mentioned were commonalities found in the interviewees responses as well as in the data presentation of digital sport accounts/websites in almost every illustration (*Sunday Times*, 23rd December 2018). It is clear that these accounts and websites keep to the same theme throughout their reporting and therefore can be spotted easily.

Examples of fake news websites/stories

Some of the websites and stories identified by the media experts include:

INT8: *The Daily Mail on Twitter are known for their outrageous takes on sports athletes and fake news, especially with footballer Raheem Sterling where it almost seems as if it is targeted racism. They target Sterling as it seems easy to create a story out of nothing.*

INT7: *There is a horrible example about the English football player Raheem Sterling who's getting a horrible treatment by the English tabloid press. They don't invent stories, but they twist them to make him look bad.*

INT14: *An easy example in my field is a Spanish publication/website called 'Don Balon'. Initially we also posted their stories (we are doing re-writes of the biggest European football stories, which we think are of interest for the South African reader) because we actually thought they were true. But they came up with new ridiculous headlines every day, which made us doubt the truth of their stories and we eventually decided against using them as a source, even though their stories would often give us very good reads and page views.*

INT2: *I think websites like The Sportster, which has hundreds of top-10 lists, and they often include stories that aren't accurate.*

INT14: *There are many, but the ones that come to mind are Don Balon, Diario Gol, with Daily Express in England.*

INT3: *The Sun in the UK often gets it wrong. But it disguises its content on the premise of speculation and rumour mongering, which generates interest among its readers.*

INT3: *The Sun (the UK), the Daily Telegraph and the Daily Mail (Australia). These websites are based on sensationalism and often carry "gutter press" If you had to compare them to the Times of London for instance, The Independent (both UK) you will find a difference in the quality of the reporting. In general, you will invariably find more unnamed sources in the tabloids rather than the broadsheets.*

INT12: *Davide Astori contract extension after his death was started on social media and, because a public person gave credit to it, various other publications reported on it too. Fiorentina (Astori's club) said that this person talked to soon and gave credit to a fake news.*

INT13: *The often-used stat that Milan defensive duo Baresi and Maldini played 196 matches together as centre-backs and conceded only 29 goals. Obviously game stats were not as easily captured and available as now, but just reading this sounds*

ridiculous, but is still often spread around. Then, recently, various accounts were spreading news that Nigerian star Emmanuel Eminike divorced his wife who was a former Miss Nigeria 2017 to marry Miss Nigeria 2018. As soon as I read this I didn't believe it, and a quick Google search prove just that. The player himself then took to Instagram to deny it.

The interviewees had consumed fake sport news in their day-to-day news consumption. A few of their stories relate directly to illustrations mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. For example, in Illustration 5.1 (*Raheem Sterling's gun tattoo has made him an easy target (Daily Mail)*) correlates to what INT8 and INT7 have mentioned about the website targeting the football player and spreading fake news about his personal life whenever they please. Another example of this comes from Illustration 7 (*Breaking: Report boldly claims Liverpool will make a move for...*), *Don Balon* is mentioned in the story claiming a particular transfer that was fake in nature. INT14 said he stopped using them as a source as “*they came up with new ridiculous headlines every day*”. The awareness of these unreliable sources helped journalists keep their credibility by not using information that is not accurate.

Participants' experiences of fake news

The following excerpts were the interviewees' experiences with fake news:

INT8: *Transfer rumours are the most popular fake sport news stories and it is backed up by Match of the Day presenter and former England player Gary Lineker recently tweeted: "90% of transfer stories are guesswork in the hope of getting lucky."*

INT7: *I believe that the journalism about football transfers – commonly called Silly Season – is horrible. It has almost become a thing to just publish everything. If there is a rumour – publish it! Don't double-check it. The weirder the rumour, the better. I think this is very unfortunate cause it affects football journalism in a very bad way. I don't consume football journalism related to Silly Season because it's often just fake and people consume it as entertainment.*

INT14: *I always tell my journalists to find the primary source of a story. Many English publications write similar stories, but at least they usually quote the primary source. It is our duty to check the main source and read the original article, because often quotes*

are also misinterpreted or mistranslated. If a headline or storyline sounds very suspicious the alarm bells should ring and we need to make sure the story is true.

INT8 is fully aware that the most fake sport news spreads during the transfer window in football and tries to stay clear of any such information; INT7 shares the same sentiment and shy's away from any stories related to buying and selling players. Awareness about the trends in fake sport news stories, as explained by the interviewees, makes them avoid stories during what they describe as 'the silly season'. A common word that was used throughout interviewees' responses was the word 'reliable'. In journalism if a source is not reliable there is no point of publishing a story. INT14 insists that his journalists find primary sources for their articles thus avoiding inaccurate storytelling.

Guidelines/tips for online readers

Interviewees were asked to suggest a few guidelines/tips to consider when reading information online. These were their responses:

INT3: *Always do a thorough check on the background of your source. Is he or she an expert in the field of comment. How correct has your source been in the past? Does he or she have a vested interest on the matter of discussion. If they do, this could affect their partiality on the matter.*

INT1: *As a media practitioner, I would ensure that the sources of the news are reliable through verification by author by-line as well as to ensure these sources are registered with a legitimate news council. That way if there are any reprisals or claims of incorrect reporting, there is a body this can be reported to.*

INT4: *You cannot believe everything you read, you have to make sure that the news source is credible and that the content is not only alluring you to click through for advertising purposes.*

INT6: *Choose your brand of news organisations carefully.*

INT8: *Don't believe everything you read online. Do your own research and make sure you have a set of reliable news websites/journalists you trust and follow them.*

The guidelines/tips that interviewees provided related primarily to verification of source/s. INT3 suggested a thorough check to verify the credibility of the source; some

of the checks include: expertise of the source, track record of the source, vested interest of the source in the subject matter. INT1 indicated other ways of verifying the source, such as checking the author by-line and ensuring that the source is registered with a legitimate news council. INT4, on the other hand, indicated that the source needs to be credible. INT8 also emphasised the need to do one's own research and to rely on reliable websites and journalists.

The thread that runs through the responses is the use of credible sources. This also resonates with Van Wyk's (2016) Fake News and Bath's (2017) Fake News Monitor, where credibility of sources/websites are quoted as signposts of fake news stories. This section of the data required respondents to offer guidelines, which also can be regarded as recommendations from the study. Therefore, the guidelines/tips are also discussed in the next chapter, in the recommendations section.

4.4.2.4 THEME 4: CONTENT OF FAKE NEWS STORIES AND WEBSITES

The content of fake news stories and websites are usually player movements, club takeovers and unconfirmed, sensational reports of professional players misbehaving. These types of news get a major run in newspapers, radios, TV and websites. Often trivial incidents of players misbehaving are magnified and tend to become massive breaking news. Player-deals worth millions are often reported on incorrectly and met by refusals by the clubs themselves to comment on such information. Below are some of the remarks made by the participants.

INT14: *Sensationalistic, exaggerated and outrageous content. I have even seen stories reporting on celebrities' and football stars' deaths.*

INT12: *Kind of content: personal matters, money related matters. In my line of work, it usually concerns football which seems normal as it is a big sport where lots of things are at stake (reputation, money).*

INT8: *In terms of sport and specifically football, transfer rumours are the biggest content that websites generate fake news stories from. It is easy to gain thousands of views as football supporters want the latest news and to find out what player will be joining their club. Really easy clicks and views.*

INT16: *Usually fake news is created on the back of another news story. Most fake news reports don't have a paper trail, respected source or real quotes.*

INT13: *It ranges, from misquoted players or quotes taken out of context, to the spread of incorrect facts or rumours about possible transfer destinations – the latter being one of the most popular fake news angles in the football industry.*

The nature of the content involves famous sports stars and their lifestyles which encroaches on their personal privacy. Fake sports news reporters choose this content because they know it will entice the reader to click on the article to find out more about their favourite players, be it true or not. Humans want connection and this stretches as far as to knowing what athlete's favourite movies are, simple yet mind-blowing stuff for people who do not know these players personally. The idea of knowing someone but not knowing them directly is a trend social media brought about. Having your favourite player at the other end of a cell phone screen is something most people never thought would happen, interaction and engagement stems from stories like these. Although freedom of performing certain functions in society, for example stories of social interest about football players, is in the interest of society, the Social Responsibility Theory posits that this freedom also comes with the upholding the responsibility of reporting truthful news (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012).

What can be deduced from the content is that these fake sport news websites want to sell news and create rumours by using the same typical content because this continues to get them readers. As long as your readership continues growing then content like this will continue appearing. What this implies is that sensational and tabloid content is usually the area in which most fake sport news stories stem from (Kempen, 2017). These stories make their way onto social media platforms and become viral for all the wrong reasons. The implications of sensationalism, subjectivity, lack of verification of sources, on journalistic practice is that journalists must be aware of these and avoid them when developing their stories as it is harmful to the profession as a whole.

4.4.2.5 THEME 5: MEDIA'S RESPONSE TO FAKE NEWS

Some of the media fraternity's responses to fake news stories and websites/accounts appear below:

INT3: *Disgust, disappointment and shame. With the media industry undergoing rapid change, the industry is facing increased strain to maintain its relevance, given the advance of social media and the availability of news for free. Hence the importance to get stories right to protect the integrity of the industry. Often fly-by-night websites with little overhead costs have less to lose - hence their bravado at times to publish stories that may generate readership but not the truth.*

INT9: *The publications that aim to be truthful and factual will never support fake stories. We will aim to call them out especially in public so that the fans can know who to trust and not to trust.*

INT14: *Too many publications, journalists and editors are happy to report on fake news to gain page views. If no one would share the fake news stories and websites, they would soon die out, but sharing the news just makes them stronger.*

INT15: *Here in North America, the sports media fraternity is very competitive but also very close. Everyone knows everyone. Sports reporters act as their own watchdogs. If someone was caught spreading fake news, they would be exposed very quickly.*

NT1: *I think they should embark on a collective action which will see fake news operators penalised or even charged with fraud. Currently not enough is being done in this regard.*

INT2: *I think they're (the media) trying to rebuild trust with the public, so they're being more transparent with both their methods (how they gain information) and decisions on publishing content.*

Journalists have a role to play in the prevention of the spread of fake news. Usually this depends on the experience and maturity of the media and what intentions they have. Some of the quotes above is evidence that some of these media practitioners act as watchdogs for society and assume social responsibility for information close to their hearts. This type of journalistic practice is at the heart of Social Responsibility Theory (Fourie, 2007), whose main premise is to reconcile the ideas of freedom and independence with responsibility towards society. However, the opposite is also true;

there are some individuals who could not bother about the lives involved in a story and how spreading fake information collects likes, retweets and most importantly more followers. So whilst there are people looking to stop the spread of fake sport news, others feed off using false information to further promote themselves, a website or a social media page. It is for this reason that ethical behaviour of journalists and the need for them to be affiliated to credible media outlets is what many of the respondents in the study have called for.

4.4.2.6 THEME 6: EFFECT OF FAKE SPORTS NEWS AND WEBSITES ON THE CREDIBILITY OF ONLINE NEWS SOURCES

The effect of fake sports news and websites the credibility of online news sources is a response to question 12 of the interview. The responses were as follows:

INT13: *Fake news becomes a major irritation, as it jeopardises credibility of our industry. As much as we are objection and true to our values and ethics, many who are not trained in the industry try to disrupt our field with fake news to push their agenda or for their mere amusement, which often leads to all media practitioners being painted with the same brush, and unfairly so.*

INT15: *They hurt the credibility of the whole news industry, once a website has published fake news it's very difficult to regain the readers' trust.*

INT7: *Credibility is such an important thing today. It's the newspapers most useful tool. If you lose your credibility, you're not a good journalist any more.*

INT8: *Nowadays, you can't trust anything, especially online. Companies will make up stories or news to benefit from controversy and a few minutes of fame.*

NT2: *It affects the credibility greatly. Readers won't go somewhere to read stories if that source has potentially untrue stories.*

INT3: *I believe once an online news source or any other source is deemed to be unreliable, the outlet - be it a newspaper, TV station or radio station - loses credibility. Once you cannot be trusted, your readership/listenership/viewership will begin to dwindle. When this happens, advertisers will back off and that will send any business model spiralling in the wrong direction.*

Credibility is at the heart of this study. The effect of fake sport news stories and websites on the credibility of online news sources causes less trust and more scepticism around facts, sources, intentions and motivations; as indicated by all the interviewees. Fake news makes everything harder to prove, under very intense time constraints and under very different circumstances. The stories affect journalists directly because they lose their credibility and become unreliable to media consumers. Sports journalists must continually better their knowledge in their field and commit to high-quality content (Ramon-Vegas & Rojas-Torrijos, 2017:160). It also makes one question the authenticity of any news received whether it is through a digital platform or traditional media. The long-term danger of online disinformation is the erosion of trust. People start disbelieving everything they read and this negatively impacts the relationship journalists have with their readers. What this means for online news sources is that they can also be affected. However, they can maintain their credibility by using trustworthy sources and attributing them, researching and fact-checking stories before they are published.

4.4.2.7 THEME 7: IMPLICATIONS OF FAKE SPORTS NEWS AND WEBSITES ON MEDIA EXPERTS

Question 13 read as follows: In your view, what implications do fake sports news and websites have on your work? This question was important in that it points to what most journalists feel about unethical journalistic practice and more importantly the impact it has on their work and the profession as a whole. Below are some responses from the media experts on the implications of fake sports news and websites:

INT13: *It makes our jobs a lot harder in trying to make our voices heard above the 'riff-raff' of others who are trying to build their following and entice consumers to click on their stories.*

INT15: *They remind us that we as sincere and credible journalists need to work harder in order not fall for fake news stories, but they are also some sort of motivation to continue your job and bring proper actual news to the readers.*

INT2: *At times, it seems like you're competing with fake news sites for views. Sometimes, it's hard because those sites are getting easier viewership because their articles, though untrue, have an audience.*

INT3: *Gives the industry an extremely poor name. Reliable and worthy sources begin to withhold information from you because of a lack of trust. This has the potential of having far-reaching consequences for both the careers of aspiring journalists and media outlets trying to establish themselves in the industry.*

INT8: *I always try and deliver the most up to date and honest news to the following. If fake stories are published and I fall for the trap, believe them and end up promoting the fake news, I would face backlash and this would affect my following from trusting me. Trust between yourself and the public is so important, especially on social media.*

INT12: *Have to be more careful when reporting on something. Can't trust just one source, have to take some minutes to look into it. The problem today is that everything goes fast, and that's not what matters the most. We have to be quick, true, but also reporting correctly on things.*

INT13 raised the issue of numbers as opposed to the truth. The social media scene focuses on the numbers in terms of followers, likes and retweets. This puts pressure on sport journalists to produce stories that capture and maintain the interest of their audience. INT15 is of the opinion that the rise of fake news places more responsibility on ethical journalists to do their work well as they are the ones responsible for credible sport news stories. This can have either a positive or negative effect on ethical journalism; positive in that they are sport journalists who are willing to abide by ethical journalism practice but negative in that ethical journalists face increasing threat from unethical behaviour of unscrupulous sport journalists.

INT2 talked about objectivity in news reporting where authentic journalists are forced to compete with writers of fake sport news stories. These stories are more popular due to the deceptive techniques used. INT3 was of the view that fake sport news stories give the industry a poor name and this affects aspiring journalists and their employees, which in turn affects the sustainability of the profession. IT8 is of the opinion that trust is an important element of good journalistic practice. Again, this view highlights the importance of the Social Responsibility Theory as it speaks to the trust relationship between audience and writer. INT12 highlighted two important issues that have arisen from various sections of the data collection, that is, news sources and the importance of professionalism.

4.4.2.8 THEME 8: INTERVENTIONS IN ADDRESSING FAKE SPORTS NEWS STORIES AND WEBSITES

In the final question during the interview, interviewees were asked to share some of the possible interventions towards addressing the effect of fake sports news stories and websites. This question was pertinent as it enabled them to provide possible solutions to the challenges they are presented with. The interviewees had the following to say concerning interventions:

INT2: *I think that if the leagues monitor these sites and threaten legal action, then the problem will get solved. These sites won't be as willing to publish fictitious articles because they know they'll get in trouble.*

INT3: *A way forward is for the industry to ensure their top university graduates should serve further cadetships (in-house training) with their new employers before being handed specific beats. Progression should be through excellence and not entitlement.*

INT12: *Social media platforms need to clamp down on these sites, and remove them, those responsible for these sites need to be prosecuted.*

INT7: *Try to build good relationships, be honest and give it some time. Eventually people will realize that you're honest and can be trusted in your reporting.*

INT8: *One way of conquering fake stories is to actually have a pay per view website, so the journalists and company get paid but also you know that what you are reading is reliable and trustworthy.*

INT9: *The media should also be on the forefront of making sure they rebuke this trend of fake news and bring back factual and honest content to keep online journalism alive and worthwhile for readers alike.*

The interviewees provided a variety of interesting possible interventions to address fake sport news stories and websites. INT12 and INT2 indicated that there is a need for legal action to be taken against culprits and for better security to be in place. Whilst this is a good suggestion, it is virtually impossible to carry out and these fake news creators remain faceless in cyberspace and laws in different countries differ, thereby adding many complications to the legal process. INT3 focussed on the need for graduates to be thoroughly trained so that they land jobs because of excellence instead of entitlement. In the South African landscape, this suggestion makes sense

as entitlement is on the rise, as compared to excellence. This means that excellence is comprised and this can make way for fake sport news stories to thrive.

INT7 has good intentions of being an ethical journalist by building honest relationships that lead to long lasting trust. The researcher agrees that this practice should be the building block of all good ethical journalistic practice. However, it is also realistic to realise that this may not necessarily get rid of fake sport news stories/websites. In any society, evil elements exist alongside good elements. INT8 indicated that a pay per view website would eradicate fake news stories as sources can be verified and credibility of the website established; this would make the both the producer and consumer of the news responsible and accountable. It is the researcher's view that this is a valuable suggestion but it is also open to manipulation by fake news creators as they use clickbait to lure consumers of news. INT9 is of the opinion that the media need to take the responsibility for ensuring that they eradicate fake news and promote factual content. This would be ideal, however, all stakeholders involved in this process need to take responsibility to eradicate fake sport news stories and websites. Some of these interventions will be further addressed in the recommendations section of the study.

4.5 FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH MEDIA EXPERTS

The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What is the nature of internet-based fake sport news stories and websites?
- Is there any credibility of sport news disseminated through fake news sites?
- What are some of the implications of fake sport news stories and websites on standard news practice?

4.5.1 Characteristics of fake sport news stories/websites

The fake news landscape is constantly changing and difficult to trace but there are telling signs that can be identified. Although, the landscape is evolving the interviewees were aware of what is has changed into and look out for specific identifiers that suggest a story is fake. These were identified as characteristics of fake sport news stories/websites. Some of these include: stories seeking sensationalism;

stories with no reputable sources; headlines aiming to deceive readers; incorrect facts; stories that comment on players' personal lives. Characteristics of fake sports news can be determined by using the fake news monitor; look for the following: "*Sensationalism, incorrect facts on coaches and players, insightful and instigating anger towards teams and players.*" (INT4)

4.5.2 Identifying fake sport news stories/websites

It is very difficult to identify fake news stories and website creators because they hide their identity in the digital space, often there is no by-line or the author using pseudonym. Fake news stories can, however, be identified by common traits such as a gripping headline, outrageous comments, little or no attribution and can also be shared across social media platforms. Content is often chosen to create sensationalism; famous sports stars are often targeted. This is due to the personal description of the content; ordinary people want to know more about their favourite superstar athletes.

4.5.3 Responses by the media to fake news stories/websites

Responses by the media practitioners is varied depending on experience, intentions and ethical practices. Some act as the watchdogs in society and are true to the social responsibility theory as a journalist, nonetheless others have witnessed greed in a sense of using fake sport news to gain fame or a following. Fake sports news and websites has a negative effect on the credibility of online news sources. The work of all sports journalist is called into question and is under scrutiny. Distrust is created in the profession.

4.5.4 Implications of fake sport news stories/websites for practitioners

Implications of fake sports news on the media experts is dependent on the nature of their work. For example, academics might have to teach ethical behaviour with more rigour and also the techniques of identifying fake sports news; sports journalists will have to exercise more caution with the stories they write and follow on digital platforms.

4.5.5 Interventions to address fake sport news stories/websites

Findings indicate that there are certain interventions that can be put in place to prevent the rise and spread of fake sports stories and websites. These interventions include:

ethical practices; legal recourse, confirming/verifying sports news stories before placing on digital media platforms; name and shame culprits.

4.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter presented the data from the research study using social media screenshots and interviews. Data were then analysed qualitatively using both content and thematic analysis methods. Findings from both instruments used was then presented. The screenshots were presented and discussed according to specific verification criteria from Bath's and Van Wyk's credibility criteria. The data from the interviews was first presented according to biographic data elicited from the interviewees. This was presented using graphs and figures and discussed with reference to the relevant literature. The data from the interviews was presented according to eight themes that emerged during the data collection process. The data was presented using excerpts from the interviews, followed by discussions which included references to the literature and the two theories that framed the study. Chapter 5 contains the summary of the findings; recommendations of the study, comment of the achievement of the objects and the conclusion to the study.

CHAPTER 5

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study examined how fake digital sports news reporting impacts on professional journalistic practice. The sporting fraternity across the world rely on the media to broadcast all aspects related to sport. In the current digital age, this is made possible through live broadcasts and through social media. Social media is very popular as it attracts a large audience, is instant, and allows for interaction and feedback. However, with innovations in communication technology also come challenges such as fake news reporting. This has an impact on all people involved in sport, including journalists.

In this chapter, the researcher ties both the findings of the study with salient literature and the objectives of the study. A summary of the findings from the analysis of data is presented. The most pertinent findings on fake news sport stories and websites are included in the discussion. The researcher then provides recommendations to address the spread of fake sport news and also ways in which to identify fake sport news and websites. Since this topic is very broad and covers various angles and given that this study had its own limitations, suggestions for further research are provided. The limitations of the study are also outlined in this chapter. Finally, the conclusion closes this chapter and the study as a whole.

5.2 RE-STATING OF THE STUDY OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research was to examine how fake digital sport news reporting affects professional journalistic practice. To attain this aim, the researcher identified specific objectives that needed to be met in order for the aim of this research to be achieved. This study stated three objectives.

5.2.1 Objective One: To describe the nature of internet-based fake sport news stories and websites

To achieve this objective, the researcher used screenshots to illicit data. These screenshots formed part of two data collection tools which the researcher used in the study. Ten screenshots were analysed through content and thematic analysis and all were retrieved from social media platforms. Of the ten, nine were found on Twitter and one was found on Facebook. Commonalties were grouped together and discussed in the findings.

Each of the ten stories were described in detail, giving the background of the story and the fake news identifiers in each story. In this way, the researcher was able to establish the nature of the fake news stories and websites by cross-referencing with other platforms where these stories were exposed. The nature of fake news stories and websites have certain characteristics which were identified, for example, such stories are common during transfer windows; they target popular players where there is intense interest about these players and they are purely sensationalist in purpose.

Therefore, the researcher can claim that this objective was achieved through the examination of fake sports news stories and websites.

5.2.2 Objective two: To assess the credibility of sport news disseminated through fake news sites

To achieve this objective, the researcher used personal interviews to assess the credibility of sport news disseminated through these fake news websites. The interview formed part of two data collection tools that the researcher used in this study. The interviewees described in detail the fake news landscape, identified fake news stories and websites, described the present in these fake news stories and websites, gave their opinions on the media's response to fake news, and finally listed the characteristics of these fake sports news stories. Thematic analysis was used in order to represent the most salient responses/views that the interviewees stated pertaining to this objective.

The researcher presented the data according to themes which emerged from the interviews. The themes related to objective 2 were:

- Characteristics of fake sports news

- Fake news landscape
- Identification of fake news stories and websites
- Content of fake news stories and websites
- Media's response to fake news
- Effect of fake sports news and websites the credibility of online news sources

In each of the themes, interviewees provided data that enabled the researcher to assess the credibility of sport news disseminated through fake news sites. Direct quotes of the respondents were used when discussing the themes. In this way, the study achieved the objectives set out.

5.2.3 Objective three: To determine the implications of fake sport news stories and websites on standard news practice

The researcher used personal interviews to determine the implications of fake sport news stories and websites on standard news practice. The interview formed part of two data collection tools that the researcher used in this study. Interviewees answered a series of questions that related to journalism practice and what impact fake sport news stories and websites have on this. The effect of fake sports news and websites on the credibility of online news sources and what implications this had on media experts was discussed. Lastly, interventions in addressing fake sports news stories and websites were suggested. Thematic analysis was also used in eliciting relevant information for this objective. The two themes related to this objective were:

- Implications of fake sports news and websites on media experts
- Interventions in addressing fake sports news stories and websites

For each of these two themes, interviewees provided data that enabled the researcher to determine the implications of fake sport news stories and websites on standard news practice. The lived experiences of the interviewees and their recommended interventions to prevent the spread of fake sports news was very useful in achieving this objective.

5.3 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The study examined the phenomenon of fake sport news and websites through the descriptive phenomenological design within the qualitative approach by using content and thematic analysis. The aim of this research was to examine fake digital sport news reporting on professional journalistic practice. The data collection instruments were designed in a way that the data could be corroborated with each other; and from the instruments and analysis, the following were the main findings of the study:

From the Screenshots: Fake Headlines

From the various screenshots, fake headlines were identified as a contributing factor to the rise of fake news stories. These headlines are what draw the reader in and it has become a common trend, especially on social media. Regrettably, a lot of people believe everything they read, hence a misleading headline will gain the attention of thousands.

Regulation of websites

Poor or no regulations exist for sport websites. This means that anyone, anywhere can develop and run a website, and attract viewers/readers under false pretences. In addition, fake sport news stories can be placed on these websites and there are no regulations governing these websites/stories. It was also found that security on these websites is non-existent. This makes users vulnerable to clickbait.

Exposure of journalists to fake news sport websites/stories

Most practicing journalists were able to identify the characteristics of fake sport news websites/stories as stories seeking sensationalism; stories with no reputable sources; headlines aiming to deceive readers; incorrect facts; stories that comment on players' personal lives. However, they are unable to compete with these websites/stories as fake sport news websites/stories use false information to create sensational headlines and they are unethical in their behaviour and practice. The characteristics of fake sport news stories are exaggerated, misleading, have no source or attributions, no by-lines or unknown authors and misrepresent so-called facts. The content featured on fake sport news website span from the 'lavish' lifestyles of professional athletes to the

details of their private lives, other common stories on these websites are about transfers to other clubs.

Lack of awareness of fake news websites/stories

There is general lack of awareness by the public about fake sport news websites/stories. The nature of fake sport news websites/stories is deception and there are no dedicated intervention/s, programmes or awareness strategies to create awareness about fake news. The public is lured by clickbait without being aware of its purpose.

Fake sport news websites are easy to establish and run

It was established from the interviewees that fake sport news websites are easy to develop, set up, and run. In addition, anonymity is common among these fake websites which make it difficult to apprehend the people behind the fake websites; they may be in another country which makes legal regulations virtually impossible.

Citizen journalism is negatively impacted by fake sport news websites/stories

It was found that journalists want to practice citizen and ethical journalism. This means that they are committed to social responsibility and spreading the use of online information responsibly and ethically. However, they are in competition with unscrupulous creators of fake sport news stories and headlines.

Fake sport news reporting is a threat to professional journalism practice

Fake sport news is a global phenomenon and is a threat to professional journalism practice. Fake sport news has a negative effect on journalism practice, as it spreads lies, makes people more interested in emotional stories and forces credible news agencies to also use sensational headlines to gain the attention of an audience. Some media houses and companies encourage it and try to use same inaccurate content, as they see their competitors doing it and doing it well. Others call the companies out and make sure that they are held accountable for their actions and call for them to stop spreading fake news stories to benefit themselves and their pockets.

No collective approach to deal with fake sport news websites/stories

News rooms have no standard guidelines on how to deal with fake sport news. Since there is no collective approach, *ad hoc* measures are applied and these cannot

address the problem permanently due to the complex nature of the fake news reporting.

Credibility of sports news reporting

Due to fake sport news stories, journalists' credibility comes into question, fake sport news websites/stories have brought disapproval into the profession. Interviewees said that they normally highlight their credibility and try to earn the readers' trust. Trust is of utmost importance and cannot be gained overnight. The interviewees also tried to build good relationships, remain honest and not publish stories without fact-checking. Eventually people realize that such reporting is authentic and can be trusted. Moreover, media practitioners have had to ensure that the sources of news are reliable through verification by author by-lines as well as ensuring these sources are registered with a legitimate news council. In this way, if there are any reprisals or claims of incorrect reporting, there is a body this can be reported to.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research, the following recommendations concerning sports news are offered by the researcher:

Proper training and assertion of certain rules, regulations and ethics that new reporters and journalists should follow and stick to.

Most of the people who write and spread fake sport news stories do not follow any ethical guidelines (Omenugha, 2012). In addition, since they are not known, they are free to write and publish anything without facing any repercussions. Therefore, it is important that all credible sources know and train their journalists.

There must be thorough research and cross checking of information gained from a secondary source.

In a world where instant news sells faster, credibility of sources is important, especially secondary ones. Rules on the use of secondary sources should be strictly adhered to (Fourie, 2007). Respondents in the study indicated that they only use trusted sources; in this way, they can go back to their sources because they trust the sources and the sources are reputable.

A governing body to possibly monitor and crack down on serial offenders and spreaders of fake sports news stories.

Large media houses, publishers and outlets should look into the possibility of introducing a governing body which can monitor and trace serial offenders and spreaders of fake sports news stories and websites (Kempen, 2017). This can be done in collaboration with platforms such as Google. In this way, censoring can take place on a broader scale and possibly minimise fake news stories and websites.

More fact-checkers/credible sources ousting

It is only users of these fake websites who can play an active role in identifying, and naming/shaming fake news outlets. Fact-checkers play a pivotal role in quick identification of fake sports stories; these should be publicised as quickly as possible. In this way, there is little gain for the initiators of fake news stories. The best intervention in addressing fake sports news stories and websites is simply to ensure that all sources are checked, and that they are legitimate. Africa Check as mentioned earlier in the study (Kempen, 2017) is a fact checking resource that users can use to verify information. Another recommendation in this regard is that if fake sports news stories on a particular website are encountered, simply stop using that website as a source of information, or better yet, report them. The media should fulfil their responsibility to society by supplying truthful information, being objective, accurate and balanced in reporting (McQuail, 2013). Some preventative measures can be adopted, for example, teaching media ethics that involves identifying fake news stories; confirming/verifying sports news stories before placing on them on digital media platforms is vital in addressing the issue at hand; culprits should be continuously named and shamed publicly so that media consumers know not to trust their stories because they are unreliable and untrustworthy.

Sport journalists should alert readers of fake sport news and fake sport news websites, as these are common in sport due to the popularity of sport news sites.

The role played by sports journalists will go a long way in preventing the spread of fake news stories and websites. By alerting the public constantly about any new fake news stories, they are able to provide a policing service that the sporting public rely on and come to trust (McQuail, 2013). Interventions into preventing the spread of fake

news come in many forms. Firstly, making the public aware of certain characteristics or websites that public fake sport news. The onus for this falls upon the media practitioner and the media consumer, with their collective contributions to stopping fake sport news, this will put a dent in these reporters and websites. Triple checking whether the information is true and the source is credible helps with maintaining credibility as a news organization.

Sport journalists should stay away from reporting/re-writing and sharing fake news in order to maintain credibility and ethics in sport news reporting.

Sport journalists should be held accountable by their employers for the type of stories they report on, re-write or share. In this way, they gain the trust of their audience and build credibility of the journalism profession as a whole (Kruger, 2004). Sports journalists have to establish a coherent networks and strong readership that do not follow fake news websites and accounts (Ramon-Vegas *et al*, 2016). Staying away from stories that are not always believable is the first step and making the public aware of these fake stories on websites helps the credibility of their work. Credibility as discussed in the theme 6 is very important to media practitioners, once the trust of the audience is lost, it is not likely that this trust will return (Omenugha, 2012). Therefore, keeping that trust is of utmost importance by being authentic in reporting and reliable with the information one publishes. Both online editors and social media analysts need to be very cautious, their jobs require quick response times with no time wasting but it is vital that stories are verified before published. Quality, accurate information is better than the wrong information.

5.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

As this is the first known inclusive research into the fake sport news phenomenon, the study highlights various opportunities for further research into this area. Perhaps the most important is the need for research that should include a wider demographic across the world, or specifically in the United Kingdom as most of these stories originate from websites based there.

It would be important to conduct further research on this aspect of fake sport news and websites as it will also provide evidence on the long-term impact of it on journalism credibility and journalistic practice.

A bigger sample size of stories and interviews with journalists could be of better influence in understanding the impact of fake sport news. In order to give more depth to the content and thematic analysis, one can consider a longer interview process to determine more precisely what journalists say about their fake sport news experiences and its presence on social media. This would make it possible to explore different stories and journalists understanding of fake sport news across sporting disciplines.

5.6 RESEARCHER'S REFLECTIONS

The interest in this topic was first sparked when the researcher realised the presence of fake sport news on social media platforms. Although, fake news in general has been widely spoken about by many public figures and media companies, the niche of fake sport news has not been explored or researched on. Therefore, the researcher embarked on describing the nature of internet-based fake sport news stories and websites, assessing the credibility of sport news disseminated through these fake news sites and determining the implications they had on standard news practice.

This was a very interesting journey as it provided the researcher with the opportunity to meet and interact with a fairly large group of sports journalists and media practitioners who shared valuable insights into the topic. In addition, the respondents were genuinely concerned about the credibility of their own work in light of the fake sports stories and websites. This was encouraging in terms of protecting the credibility of journalistic practice.

5.8 CONCLUSION

From the literature to the analysis the study has effectively described the phenomena of sport news and discussed the implications fake sport stories and websites have on journalistic practice and the credibility of journalism. Fake sport news may be on the rise nevertheless; some media practitioners remain true to their journalistic responsibility by firstly recognizing these fake sport news stories and websites; enlightening the public about it and reporting them to the higher powers that be. Although the media landscape continues to change; objective and truthful reporting may still remain at the forefront of real journalism which continues to fight back against inaccurate stories/websites.

From the in-depth discussion of the data and results, the main highlights of the study are: creating awareness about fake sport websites/stories; exposing fake sport stories from Facebook and Twitter; interviewing media practitioners about their views on fake sport news stories, and presenting recommendations of addressing this problem. Totally eradicating fake sport news websites/stories remains the greatest challenge, together with instilling ethical practice across the journalism profession. It is incumbent upon the main players such as journalists, news outlets, governments and society in general to act collectively to address the problem of fake sport news websites/stories.

Some of the lessons that can be derived from this study include: the global nature of fake sport news makes it possible to understand this phenomenon on a global scale which then lends itself to providing global interventions to this problem; unethical practice and behaviour has the potential to corrupt all sport consumers but there is also potential to showcase the benefits of ethical practice and behaviour and the positive impact it can have on professional journalist practice; and social media has enabled instant news, however, instant news can have negative effects if it is not produced and consumed ethically, as evidenced in this study.

Through this study, it is hoped that the findings and recommendations will spark further studies and debates around this topic. Since sport unites communities and countries, any news about sporting codes and personalities attracts enormous attention from the general public. In modern society, sports news is closely associated with professional athletes and obscene amounts of money; this in itself is fodder for the growth and dissemination of fake stories and websites. Therefore, this topic is of current relevance and interest and it continues to grow daily as social media plays a more prominent role in the lives of all people.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Section A: Demographic profile of participants

Age in years	18-29		30-39		40-49	50+
Gender	Male		Female			
Highest level of education						
Occupation						
Media organisation						

Nature and implications of fake sport news and websites on journalism

1. In your opinion, have fake sport news stories and websites increased over the years? If yes, state why this is so, with reference to any example you have seen online.....
2. What is your experience on fake sports news stories and websites in the current media landscape?
3. Are there specific websites or accounts on social media that you think generate fake sports news stories?
4. How do you as a media practitioner identify fake sport news stories or websites?
5. Are there any guidelines/tips you consider when reading information online?
.....
6. In your opinion, what are some of the media fraternity's responses to fake news stories and websites/accounts?
7. What kind of content is contained in fake sports news stories and websites?
.....
8. In your view, what is the common trend in the type of stories that are contained on fake sports news websites?
9. What are some of the popular/significant fake sports news stories or websites that you have come across in your daily work?

10. In your experience of working with news, what descriptions would you associate with the nature (characteristics, features) of fake sport news?
11. Are there any additional comments you would like to make regarding the operational dynamics of fake news?
12. To what extent do you think fake sport news and websites affect the credibility of online news sources?
13. In your view, what implications do fake sports news and websites have on your work?
.....
14. Share some of the possible interventions towards addressing the effect of fake sports news stories and websites.....

APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

Dissertation title: An examination of digital news reporting on professional journalism practice: a study of fake sport news and websites.

Dissertation by: Kimara Singh

I,hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the following project: "An examination of digital news reporting on professional journalism practice: a study of fake sport news and websites."

I understand that:

1. My responses will be treated with confidentiality and only be used for the purpose of the research.
2. No harm will be posed to me.
3. The research project aim has been explained to me.
4. I do not have to respond to any question that I do not wish to answer for any reason.
5. Access to the records that pertain to my participation in the study will be restricted to persons directly involved in the research.
6. Any questions that I may have regarding the research, or related matters, will be answered by the researcher.
7. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and I can withdraw my participation at any stage.
8. I understood the information regarding my participation in the study and I agree to participate.

Signature of interviewee

Signature of interviewer

Signature of witness

Signed at _____ on this _____ day of _____ 20_____

ANNEXURE 3: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



University of Limpopo
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TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING: 09 October 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: TREC/188/2018: PG

PROJECT:

Title: An examination of digital news reporting on professional journalism practice: a study of fake sport news and websites.

Researcher: K Singh

Supervisor: Dr T Muswede

Co-Supervisor/s: N/A

School: Languages and Communication studies

Degree: Masters in Media Studies


PROF. TAB MASHEGO
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: REC-0310111-031

Note:

- i) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee.
- ii) The budget for the research will be considered separately from the protocol.
PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

Finding solutions for Africa