ARTÍCULOS

MAPPING MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY INSTRUMENTS IN SPORTS JOURNALISM

Mapeo de los instrumentos de rendición de cuentas en el periodismo deportivo

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Abstract

Sports journalism has been characterized by a series of ethical deficiencies that have challenged the normative standards of the profession. Media accountability instruments can play an invaluable role in addressing these shortcomings. With this in mind, this article identifies and examines the most relevant accountability instruments in the field of sports journalism, including those produced within media organizations and those created outside of them. The researchers have scrutinized the specialized codes in this area and the stylebooks promoted by major sports media, as well as the recommendations proposed by news agencies, general information outlets and key stakeholders worldwide. Innovative practices such as chats, social media, online ombudsmen, observatories and blogs have also been identified as positive examples of the cultivation of a two-way conversation about the standards for and quality of sports content.

Keywords

Accountability; Sports journalism; News quality; Ethics; Instruments; Systems.

Resumen

El periodismo deportivo se ha caracterizado por una serie de deficiencias éticas que han soslayado los estándares normativos de la profesión. Los instrumentos de rendición de cuentas pueden jugar un papel valioso para superar estas disfunciones. Teniendo esto en mente, el artículo identifica y examina los mecanismos de rendición de cuentas más relevantes en el ámbito del periodismo deportivo, incluidos aquellos producidos de forma interna y externa a los medios. Los investigadores han inspeccionado los códigos éticos en esta área, los libros de estilo promovidos por los principales medios deportivos y las prescripciones formuladas por las agencias informativas, medios de información generalistas y organismos clave a nivel

internacional. Prácticas innovadoras como los chats, redes sociales, defensores del lector en línea, observatorios y blogs también se han identificado como ejemplos positivos del cultivo de una conversación bidireccional sobre los estándares y la calidad de los contenidos deportivos.

Palabras clave

Rendición de cuentas; Periodismo deportivo; Calidad informativa; Ética; Instrumentos; Sistemas.

1. Introduction[1]

According to their normative public service role (**Singer**, 2013) and their centrality as architects of the public agenda and transmitters of values in democratic societies, quality media should treat all areas of the news arena, including sports, comprehensively and ethically. In the current landscape, which is characterized by citizen's increasing preoccupation with the ethics of media professionals (**Plaisance**, 2013), sports journalists should also commit to the generation of high-quality content and the pursuit of excellence in their field.

Given these considerations, in the field of sports journalism, extensive literature has shed light on a series of problem areas that have occurred frequently and that have challenged the normative standards and conventional criteria of the profession. These widespread questionable practices include the blurring of the frontiers between journalistic genres; the pervasiveness of rumour; the "tyranny" of a narrow range of sports; sensationalism; the use of warlike language; the lack of a public service mission; the inequalities in relation to gender, race and disability, and the lack of variation in the news sources employed (**Hardin**; **Whiteside**, 2009; **Horky**; **Stelzner**, 2013; **Rojas-Torrijos**, 2011b). As **Oates** and **Pauly** (2007, p. 333) emphasize,

> "sports coverage routinely violates the ethical norms by which the profession asks to be judged".

All these ethical shortcomings have diminished the credibility of the professionals working in the sports journalism field, an area that is still stigmatized by long-held notions that it is a "toy department" or that it consists of "fans with typewriters" (**Rowe**, 2007). That is, a section

> "divorced from the rigorous constraints applied to other areas of the trade" (**Boyle**, 2006, p. 12).

To address these shortcomings, sports journalists must gain awareness of their accountability (**Wulfemeyer**, 1985) and assume that

> "sports journalism should not be exempted from scrutiny regarding conventional criteria within the news area" (**Rowe**, 2007, p. 385).

Accountability is a central concept that entails

> "accepting certain responsibilities, tasks and objectives" (**Christians** *et al.*, 2009, p. 132).

In particular, from the normative approach to journalism studies, media accountability refers to the media's commitment to answer for their professional practice to society at large (**Bardoel**; **D'Haenens**, 2004; **Harro-Loit**, 2015; **Pritchard**, 2000). According to **McQuail** (2003, p. 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".

> Media accountability instruments can play an invaluable role in helping journalists and users monitor and criticize the quality of sports content

To be accountable, media organizations should embrace three cornerstone components: self-regulation, transparency and citizens' participation (**Ramon-Vegas**; **Mauri-Ríos**; **Alcalá-Anguiano**, 2016). Based on these elements, media accountability instruments (**Bertrand**, 2000) can play an invaluable role in helping journalists and users monitor and criticize the quality of sports content.

According to **Eberwein** *et al.* (2011, p. 20), media accountability instruments (MAIs) are

> "any informal institution, both offline and online, performed by both media professionals and media users, which intends to monitor, comment on and criticize journalism and seeks to expose and debate problems of journalism at the individual, media routines, organizational and extra-media levels".

Thus far, the majority of academic studies on media accountability instruments have focused on the general description of traditional or established tools, such as ethical codes and stylebooks (**Alsius**, 1999; **Aznar**, 1999; **Hafez**, 2002; **Himelboim**; **Limor**, 2011; **Limor**; **Himelboim**, 2006; **Nordenstreng**: **Hannikainen**, 1984; **Roberts**, 2012), ombudsmen (**Evers**; **Groenhart**; **Van-Groesen**, 2010; **Maciá-Barber**, 2006; **Starck**, 2010), letters to the editor (**Pastor**, 2010), media journalism (**Malik**, 2004) and other institutional instruments anchored within the profession, such as professional associations (**Almiron**; **Narberhaus**; **Mauri-Ríos**, 2016). Recent studies have

highlighted how accountability systems have experienced a dramatic evolution in the digital environment, where innovative instruments to hold the media into account, such as online ombudsmen, editorial weblogs, readers' comments, error buttons, observatories or media critique on *Facebook* and *Twitter* have vigorously expanded across the board (**Craft**; **Vos**; **Wolfgang**, 2015; **Eberwein**, 2010; **Eberwein** *et al.*, 2011; **Fengler** *et al.*, 2014; **Mauri-Ríos**; **Ramon-Vegas**, 2015; **Rosique-Cedillo**; **Barranquero-Carretero**, 2016). Finally, other contributions within the *Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe* (*MediaAcT*) project have examined how journalists perceive and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of both old and new media accountability instruments. More precisely, **Fengler** *et al.* (2015) conducted a comparative survey with 1,762 journalists from 14 countries to establish professionals' perceptions of media accountability instruments across Europe.

Regarding sports communication, authors such as **Horky** and **Stelzner** (2013) have underlined the discrepancies between the sports journalism field and the ethical norms that should guide the profession. **Wulfemeyer** (1985) analysed the *Ethics guidelines* produced by the *Associated Press Sports Editors* (*APSE*) and proposed further guidelines to foster the accountability of media professionals in the field. **Rojas-Torrijos** (2011b) even designed a stylebook intended for Pan-American sports reporters. However, no study to date has provided a map of the existing media accountability instruments in sports journalism. To fill this gap, this article offers an overview of the most relevant established and innovative accountability instruments in this field of specialization.

> ' Despite the social transcendence of sports journalism, few specialized media outlets in this area have stylebooks '

2. Methodology

The objective of this article has been to identify and analyse the most relevant accountability instruments in the field of sports journalism. Given that the research presents an exploratory overview of the major instruments in this field, the sample could not be determined beforehand. Bearing this aspect in mind, researchers employed a methodology based on *snowball sampling* (**Goodman**, 1961). This chain-referral technique is mainly carried out within qualitative research frameworks (**Brickman-Bhutta**, 2012; **Bryman**, 2016) and is characterized by the process of identifying experiences that are progressively incorporated into the sample. With the aim of locating the most relevant examples across different media systems and journalism cultures around the world, a transnational approach was pursued for this exploratory work.

First, the researchers gathered all the data provided by previous investigations (**Fengler** *et al.*, 2014; **Rojas-Torrijos**, 2011a; **Wulfemeyer**, 1985) and online resources, with the aim of compiling an initial set of accountability instruments.

Subsequently, the fieldwork consisted of monitoring the Internet during a timeframe of 12 months (October 2015 – September 2016) to enhance and complete the initial list and locate the most relevant accountability systems in the field of sports journalism.

Once the relevant accountability systems were identified, the researchers proceeded to examine each one of those instruments using the qualitative content analysis technique (**Bryman**, 2016). The steps highlighted by **Wimmer** and **Dominick** (2000, pp. 141-144) were thoroughly followed. The categories of the analysis included the following:

- instruments produced inside or outside of media,
- description of the specifications for and use of the instruments, and
- evaluation of the mechanisms from the accountability perspective.

Finally, all the detected experiences were classified and categorized.

3. Results

The research identified the following accountability instruments, which are classified in two categories: those produced within media organizations and those created outside of them.

3.1. Instruments produced inside media companies or groups

The instruments that have been implemented by companies are the following:

- stylebooks promoted by major sports media;
- recommendations regarding sports coverage proposed by agencies and general information outlets;
- online ombudsmen;
- online chats; and
- social networking sites.

This section specifies the characteristics of these instruments and highlights relevant examples positioned within the international context.

Table 1. Media accountability instruments in the field of sports journalism

Produced inside media companies or media groups
Stylebooks and guidelines promoted by major sports media
Recommendations for sports coverage proposed by agencies and general information outlets
Online ombudsmen
Online chats
Social networking sites
Produced outside media companies or groups
External codes: specialized codes and general codes of media ethics
Recommendations for sports journalists issued by key stakeholders
Other external recommendations
Media observatories and specialized publications in media criticism
Scholars' and citizens' blogs

3.1.1. Stylebooks and guidelines promoted by major media

One of the fundamental accountability instruments is in-house stylebooks (also known as company editorial guidelines). As a social responsibility instrument, they establish an implicit contract between media professionals and citizens, and they are therefore a crucial component in promoting news quality. The *MediaAcT* survey project found that European journalists consider stylebooks to be the instruments that have the greatest impact on their professional performance (3.74 out of 5 points) (**Fengler** *et al.*, 2014).

Despite the social transcendence of sports journalism, few specialized media outlets in this area have stylebooks. In Spain, we highlight *Mundo deportivo*, the first sports daily newspaper to launch its own stylebook based on a previous study conducted by Josep-Maria Casasús (*Mundo deportivo*, 1995), and *Marca*, which published its 358-page handbook in 2012 (**González-Palencia**; **Mendaña**, 2012). The defunct football weekly *Don balón* (2004) also created its own stylebook for internal use. Other media in this country have created stylesheets (*Sport*, *Estadio deportivo* or *Superdeporte*) or have adopted their corporations' stylebooks as a frame of reference.

Among the major sports dailies in Latin America, only two have their own stylebook. In 2000, the Argentinian magazine *El gráfico* created a handbook for internal use (**Rojas-Torrijos**, 2011a). The Brazilian daily *Lance* (2008) designed a document that includes guidelines for style and the ethics and behaviour of professionals, and it pays particular attention to news sources and the use of the Internet and social networking sites.

One of the only sports outlets that has adapted its stylebook to the new digital environment is *Bleacher report*. http://bleacherreport.com/pages/styleguide

As its creators note, it is a

> "new resource for a new era: a document designed to keep pace with 24/7 news and to-the-minute information".

It provides guidance on online newswriting and includes a dictionary with more than 300 sporting references. Another American outlet concerned with accountability is *Editorial guidelines for standards & practices* (*ESPN*), which has published its editorial guidelines (*ESPN*, 2010) and its guidelines for the use of social media (*ESPN*, 2011). *Grantland*, which discontinued operations in 2015, elaborated several terminological glossaries.
http://grantland.com/tags/grantland-dictionary

3.1.2. Recommendations on sports coverage proposed by agencies and general information outlets

News agencies and general information outlets worldwide have also proposed recommendations for sports journalists. In Europe, the *Reuters sports style guide* is one of the key documents available:
http://handbook.reuters.com/index.php?title=Sports_Style_Guide

This guide offers insights into the coverage and styles of six sports with a long tradition in the United Kingdom (cricket, golf, motor racing, football, tennis and winter sports). The stylebook in Spanish by *Deutsche Presse Agentur* (*DPA*), edited in 2006 (**Salazar-del-Barrio**, 2010), includes a chapter devoted to sports in which the crucial value of rigour and seriousness is highlighted. The need to preserve these core values is also stressed by the code adopted in 2008 by *Westdeutsche Rundfunk* (**Prinzing**, 2008), one of the affiliate stations of German public service broadcaster *ARD*[2]. Similar to the situation in Latin America with *Empresa Brasil de Comunicação* (2013), other European PSBs (public service broadcasting) such as *Raidió Teilifís Éireann* (*RTÉ*, 2012) focus predominantly on the need to guarantee the diversity of sports coverage.

In Spain, *RTVE* (the Spanish public broadcasting corporation), *CCMA* (the Catalan corporation of audiovisual media), and *Canal Sur* (**Allas-Llorente**; **Díaz Salgado**, 2004) have specific sections devoted to sports in their in-house handbooks.
http://manualdeestilo.rtve.es
http://www.ccma.cat/llibredestil

In complying with their social responsibility as PSBs, those institutions stress the importance of disseminating the positive values associated with sport. Other documents issued by privately owned outlets such as *El país* (2014), *El mundo* (2002) and *La voz de Galicia* (2011) place more emphasis on style and the various genres within sports writing.

Moving on to North America, the *Ethical journalism* handbook from *The New York times* (2004, p. 40) outlines three rules (131-333) addressed to the sports department. More precisely, it mentions that journalists should avoid gambling on sports events and serving as scorers and that they should not
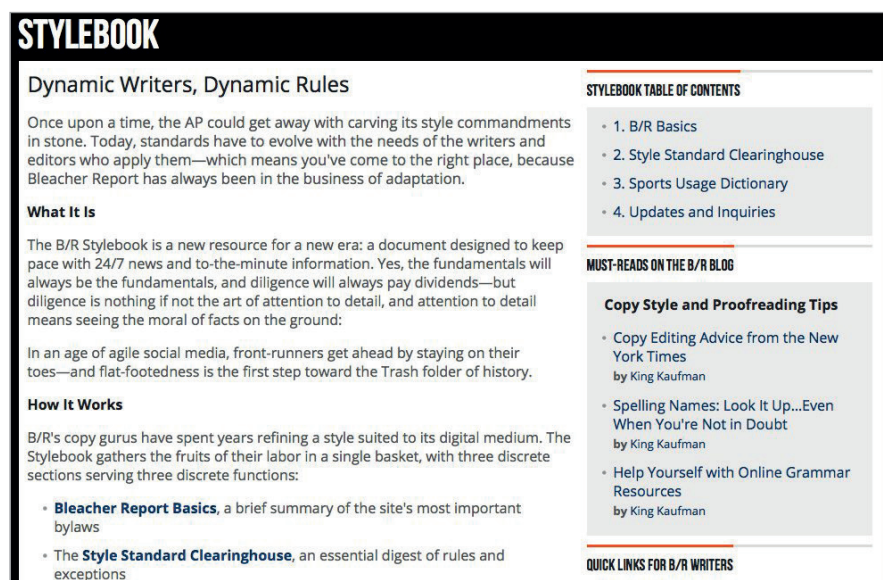

Figure 1. *Bleacher report* style guide

Figure 2. Section devoted to sports in the stylebook of the *Catalan Corporation of Audiovisual Media* (*CCMA*)

"accept tickets, travel expenses, meals, gifts or any other benefit from teams or promoters". Further references to conflicts of interest are included in documents issued by US publications such as the

- *Los Angeles times*
  http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/readers/2011/02/la-times-ethics-guidelines.html

- *Daily tar heel*
  http://www.dailytarheel.com/page/policies

- *Minnesota public radio*
  http://www.mpr.org/about/news_ethics

In the same vein, *The Canadian Press* advocates that reporters

"deliver comprehensive, objective, impartial, accurate, balanced and fair news" (**Wenner**, 1998, p. 102).

Conversely, other news organizations such as the *Associated Press* (which has a section entitled *Sports guidelines and style*) (*AP*, 2016) and the *Columbia Missourian* (2009) focus predominately on providing guidance on sports language.

3.1.3. Ombudsmen

The *ESPN* public editor

The presence of ombudsmen is limited among general information outlets (**Maciá-Barber**, 2006). While in certain countries such as France, the Netherlands or United Kingdom several media organizations have an ombudsman, this role has not been traditionally enforced in other territories such as Germany. Overall, this instrument has been much more common in the United States than in Eu-

rope (**Starck**, 2010). However, it is worth noting that the role of ombudsmen is nearly non-existent in sports media outlets.

The exception can be found in *ESPN*'s public editor, a pioneering post created in 2005 to ensure that the content of the network complies with its *Editorial guidelines.* The public editor fosters transparency and helps fans understand *ESPN*'s journalistic culture and the editorial criteria behind the content.
http://espn.go.com/blog/ombudsman

He writes a monthly column on the website, reflecting on core aspects such as the loosening of standards with the treatment of *ESPN body issue* photographs, the use of sponsored content, the criteria employed by the company to select their an-

chors or the debates about conflict of interest. He also maintains an open forum so that users can send him questions, complaints and suggestions via email or social media about the news and the programming of the network. Afterwards, the public editor gives an answer to those complaints and suggestions on the website, fostering a two-way dialogue with the audiences. Since November 2015, the public editor has been Jim Brady, former sports editor at *The Washington post*. Previously, the post was occupied by George Solomon (2005-07), Le Anne Schreiber (2007-2008), Don Ohlmeyer (2009-2010), *The Poynter Institute* (2011-2012) and Robert Lipsyte (2013-2014). *ESPN* indicates that the ombudsman can be appointed for a maximum of 18 months.

Discussions about sports journalism issues by other ombudsmen

Other ombudsmen also reflect on the quality of sports content and give salience to audiences' comments, complaints
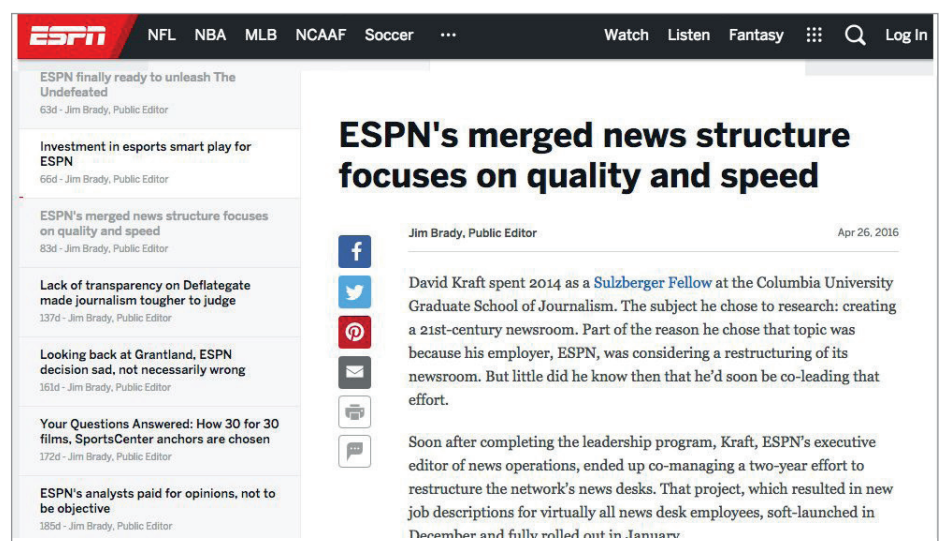

Figure 3. *ESPN* public editor

and criticism. To illustrate, *The New York times*' former public editor, **Margaret Sullivan** (2014), expressed readers' concerns about the limited space allocated to women during the *NCAA* tournament. In the same vein, *The guardian*'s ombudsman discussed sexism in tennis coverage (**Elliott**, 2014). **Edward Schumacher-Matos** (2014) wrote about *US National Public Radio*'s decision to pull back on its use of the *Washington Redskins* nickname. The *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*'s former ombudsman **Kirk LaPointe** (2011) discussed issues connected to fairness and balance. *El país*' ombudsman **Lola Galán** (2015) remarked on the use of warlike language. These are only a handful of examples that provide a sense of the importance of ombudsmen in discussions of quality and standards in sports journalism.

> ‘The presence of ombudsmen is limited among general information outlets and nearly non-existent in sports media outlets, with the exception of *ESPN*'s public editor’

3.1.4. Online chats

Online chats, which help foster live interaction between readers, editorial teams and experts, have expanded in recent years and have proved to be powerful tools for accountability purposes (**Fengler** *et al.*, 2014; **Mauri-Ríos**; **Ramon-Vegas**, 2015). *ESPN*'s programme *Sportsnation* has promoted live chats since 2008. All the live conversations can be retrieved at any time from *ESPN*'s website:
http://espn.go.com/sportsnation/chat/archive

Three illuminating examples reveal the usefulness of these chats for discussing about editorial criteria and handling errors[3]. First, *ESPN* football reporter Mike Reiss answered readers' questions about journalism ethics, reflecting on why sometimes it is required to grant anonymity to sources, provided that they are "close enough to the story to really know the truth and complete context of the truth". Second, *ESPN Southeastern Conference* (*SEC*) blogger Edward Aschoff responded to users' concerns about how does he balance school loyalty with journalistic integrity, stating that he does not root for anyone when covering football. Third, a chat with blogger Andrea Adelson allowed her to acknowledge two factual mistakes in her reporting.

Drawing from this model, several sports-oriented outlets, such as *Marca* or *As* regularly hold live meetings with editors, reporters and analysts.
http://www.marca.com/encuentros
http://opinion.as.com/opinion/entrevistas.html

Other general information outlets, such as *El país*, offer chats with the sports editor, but they do not occur on fixed or regular schedule.
http://elpais.com/elpais/entrevistasdigitales.html

From time to time, these conversations include enlightening discussions about ethics and editorial criteria. To illustrate, a chat with José Sámano, sports editor of *El país*, allowed for a discussion on the space allocated to various teams in news

reports. The conversation also delved into the need to ensure further controls to avoid hatred language in the online comments posted in sports news[4]. Despite this, consistent with previous findings (**Mauri-Ríos**; **Ramon-Vegas**, 2015), this study found a common problem: a vast number of the questions reflect the personal stance of the journalist/editor regarding current news in sports, instead of critically reflecting on the task carried out by media.

3.1.5. Social networking sites

Social networking sites are not solely a platform for disseminating sports content, they can also be powerful accountability instruments. According to **Fengler** *et al.* (2015, p. 259), there is

> "clear evidence that journalists are increasingly aware of, and responding to, comments made by the public on social media platforms".

In fact, journalists are being criticized

> "via online MAIs (media accountability instruments) more than in many other, more traditional ways" (**Fengler** *et al.*, 2015, p. 259).

Through *Twitter* and *Facebook* accounts, sports media outlets such as *Sports illustrated* (@SInow), *FourFourTwo* (@FourFourTwo) or *Mundo deportivo* (@mundodeportivo), plus general-information outlets with sports sections, such as the *BBC* (@BBCSport) or *The guardian* (@guardian_sport), handle users' criticism and issue corrections for the content published in their websites and print/audio-visual products. In addition to their general profiles on social media, news organizations have created specific accounts to allow readers to submit their comments, complaints and suggestions. An illustrative example can be found in *ESPN*'s public editor *Twitter* account.
https://twitter.com/espnpubliced

Through this specific account, Jim Brady has published more than 200 messages, has received suggestions and criticism and has fostered an open-minded debate about balance in sports reporting, the coverage of social and political issues connected to sport or the role of entertainment at *ESPN*, to list only but a few.

3.2. Instruments produced outside media companies or groups

Thus far, this article has examined instruments developed within media companies. This section will focus on presenting instruments developed outside of these organizations: external codes of media ethics, recommendations for sports journalists issued by key stakeholders, other external recommendations, media observatories and blogs.

3.2.1. External codes

Specialized codes

The range of external codes devoted exclusively to sports journalism is fairly limited. The most recognized document is probably the *Ethics guidelines* promoted by the *Associated Press Sports Editors* (*APSE*). The code, created in 1974 and revised in 1991, is built around seven cornerstones that urge journalists to safeguard professional independence,
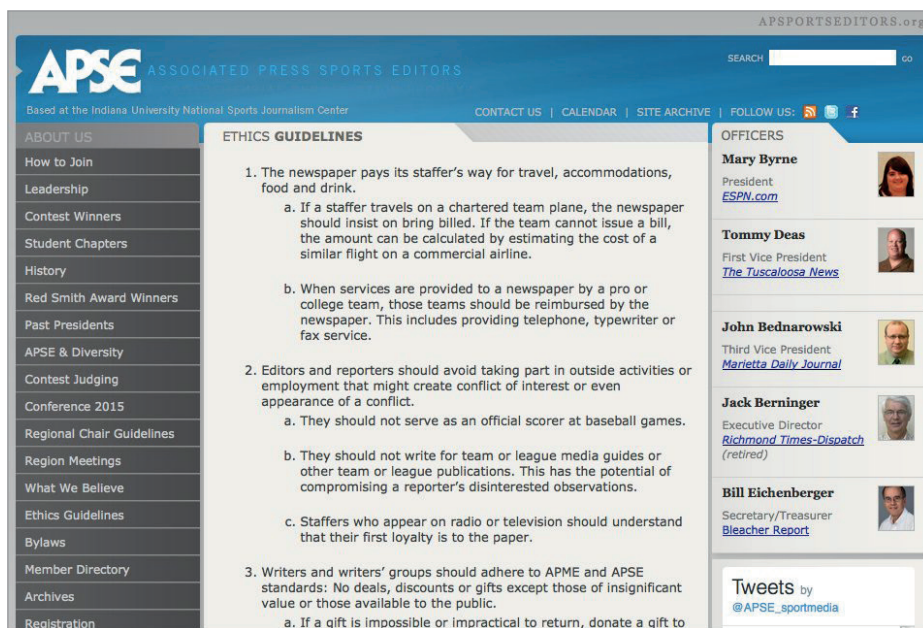
Figure 4. Ethical guidelines of the *Associated Press Sports Editors* (*APSE*)

verify information, be attentive to sources and avoid gender and race discrimination.
http://apsportseditors.org/apse-ethics-guidelines

The *Football Writers Association of America* (*FWAA*) provides recommendations in four areas: the search for truth, minimizing harm, professional independence, and accountability.
http://www.sportswriters.net/fwaa/about/ethics.html

The ethical code of the *Automobile Journalists Association of Canada* (*AJAC*) also considers the avoidance of any conflict of interest a cornerstone.
http://www.ajac.ca/web/about/ethics.asp

In the European context, we should highlight the Italian *Media and sports code.*
http://ethicnet.uta.fi/italy/media_and_sports_code

> News agencies, general information outlets and key stakeholders worldwide have also proposed useful recommendations for sports journalists

Drawing from the notion of the social transcendence of sport, this code is organized in six chapters that advocate for justice, dignity and the citizens' right to receive information.

In the German context, the eight guidelines promoted in 2010 by the German association of sports journalists, the *Verband Deutscher Sportjournalisten* (*VDS*), are noteworthy. These recommendations emphasize the public function of sports journalism and advocate for non-discrimination. The *VDS* also highlights the importance of maintaining independence, respecting individuals' privacy and ensuring accuracy (**Horky**; **Stelzer**, 2013).

In 2014, the *International Press Sports Association* (*AIPS*, 2014) approved its code of professional conduct, supervised

by the veteran American sports broadcaster Jimmy Magee. The code, available in English, French and Spanish, provides 13 guiding principles, including the need to be knowledgeable about the law, work with honesty and integrity, provide information about potential conflicts of interest, correct errors and avoid publishing false information. In addition, professionals are reminded about their duty to update their knowledge.

General codes of media ethics

In addition to specialized codes in sports, professionals can consult the website *Accountable journalism* created by the *Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute* at the *University of Missouri.* The site contains more than 400 general and specialized deontological codes from around the world.
http://accountablejournalism.org

3.2.2. **Recommendations for sports journalists written by key stakeholders**

Sports journalists can also review the recommendations issued by key stakeholders in the world of sport. First, the Bye-law to Rule 48 of the *IOC charter* reminds professionals that

> "the media coverage of the Olympic Games should spread and promote the principles and values of Olympism" (*IOC*, 2015, p. 92).

Second, *Unesco*'s *Sports ethics code* (*Unesco*, 1992), the *Code of Sports Ethics* (*Council of Europe*, 1992) and the *Charte d'*é*thique et de d*éontologie *du sport Français* (*Cnosf*, 2012) emphasize the media's responsibility to promote fair play and set a positive example to children and young people. Third, the *Code of sports ethics*, devised by the *Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth* (2015), includes a section on recommendations with regard to objectivity, truth and privacy.

To address the long-standing lack of knowledge of disability sport (**Pate**; **Hardin**, 2013), journalists should pay attention to two essential documents. The *International Paralympic Committee* (2014) created a 18-page document entitled *Guide to reporting on persons with an impairment.* This easy-to-use guide provides journalists with general rules and a list of preferred terminology and incorrect terms. The *British Paralympic Association* (2012) published a 5-page reference guide to help professionals use appropriate language. Regarding intellectual disability, the *Special Olympics* (2014) *Style guide* is available to professionals.

3.2.3. Other external recommendations

Additional recommendations are promoted by institutions that promote the appropriate use of language, such as *Fun-*

dación del Español Urgente. In 2013, *Fundéu* created a specific section on the language of football, entitled *Liga BBVA del español urgente*. Other guidelines can be found in its book *El español más vivo* (*Fundéu*, 2015).
http://www.fundeu.es/especiales/liga-del-espanol-urgente

As noted throughout the article, disability and women sport are two sensitive areas that require a higher degree of attention from sports journalists. Regarding disability, along with the recommendations issued by *International Paralympic Committee*, *British Paralympic Association* and *Special Olympics*, governmental institutions have promoted guides for reporting on disability, such as those issued by *Junta de Andalucía* (**Álvarez-Pérez**, 2013) and the *Spanish Committee of Representatives of Persons with Disabilities* (**Cermi**, 2011). We also highlight the stylebook by *Servimedia* (**Belda-García**; **Maíllo-Belda**; **Prieto-Ampudia**, 2007). The following three documents should be considered with respect to the coverage of female sport: *Guía de lenguaje para el ámbito del deporte* (**Lledó-Cunill**, 2009); *Hablamos de deporte. En femenino y en masculino* (**Alfaro-Garandilla**; **Bengoechea-Bartolomé**; **Vázquez-Gómez**, 2011); and *Deporte y mujeres en los medios de comunicación* (**López-Díez**, 2011).

3.2.4. Media observatories and specialized publications in media criticism

Although there are no media watch observatories exclusively devoted to sports journalism, the largest publications related to media criticism around the world examine the good and bad practices of sports media. To illustrate, *Columbia journalism review* has raised a public debate about anonymous sourcing in *NBA* trade scoops (**Biasotti**, 2016). *Media matters for America* has shown the importance of responsibility in the sporting coverage of transgender individuals (**Percelay**, 2016). In addition, the *Poynter Institute* provides resources for reporters who cover LGBT athletes (**Klinger**, 2014).

Figure 5. Blog of the *National Sports Journalism Center* at *Indiana University*

The *European Journalism Observatory* offered a platform for professor **Suzanne Franks** (2015) to discuss the absence of women in sports journalism. In Spain, *Mèdia.cat* (2015) has devoted space to reflect on sexism in sports media. In Latin America, **Ética s**egura, created by *Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano*, regularly promotes debates on *Twitter* and archives the most relevant messages in *Storify*.
https://storify.com/EticaSegura

Before the *Rio 2016 Olympics*, it also disseminated a set of guidelines to promote ethical sports coverage.
http://eticasegura.fnpi.org/2016/07/26/decalogo-una-cobertura-deportiva-responsable

> The range of external codes devoted exclusively to sports journalism is fairly limited

3.2.5. Scholars' and citizens' blogs

Other innovative instruments such as scholars' and citizens' blogs also promote reflection on news quality. In Spain, we highlight *La buena prensa*, and *Periodismo deportivo de calidad.*
http://labuenaprensa.blogspot.com.es
http://periodismodeportivodecalidad.blogspot.com.es

In the international context, two key examples should be considered: the blogs from the *National Sports Journalism Center* at *Indiana University* and the *Center for Journalism Ethics* at the *University of Wisconsin-Madison*.
http://sportsjournalism.org
http://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu

The latter provides students and citizens with many materials and resources about journalism ethics. It should be borne in mind that this institution hosted the conference *Fair or foul? Ethics in sports journalism* in 2015. The event included several sessions that revolved around the conflicts of interest and the editorial and commercial criteria that impact on ethics and quality of content in current sports journalism.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis has provided illuminating examples of established and innovative media accountability instruments in the international context that have been created both within and outside media companies. The map that emerges (see figure 6) showcases a great variety of instruments of accountability. The range of resources shown in this article can serve as a "moral compass" (**Kovach**; **Rosenstiel**, 2001, p. 181); that is,
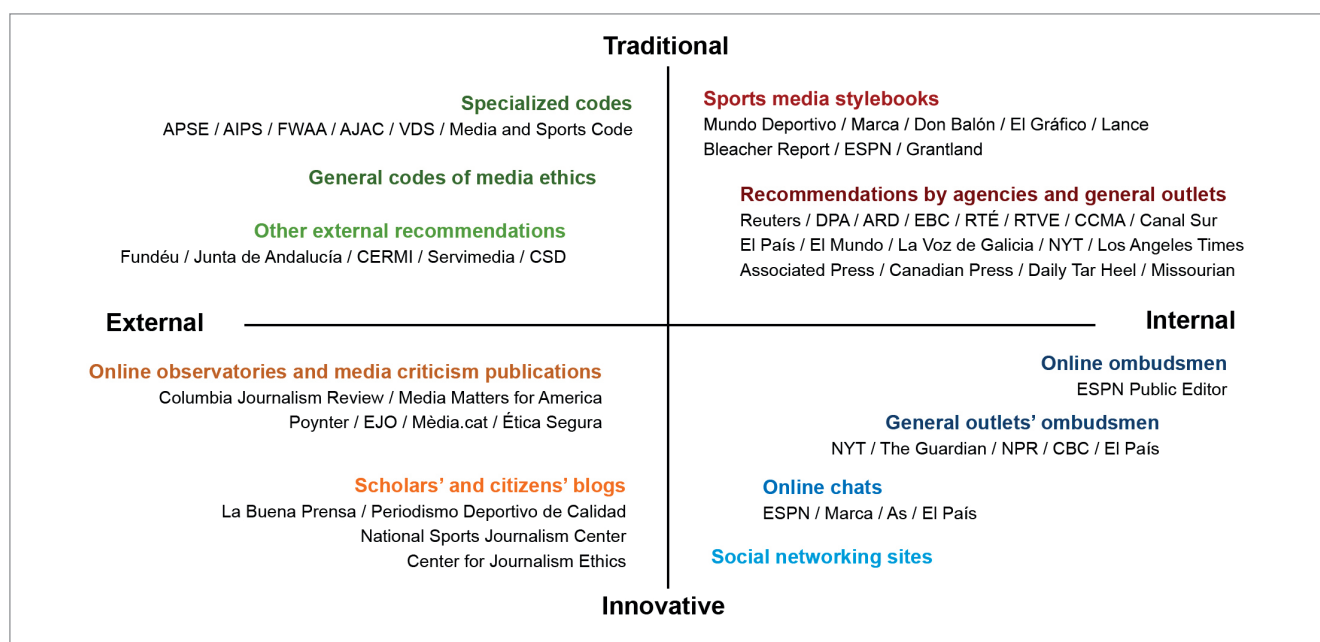
Figure 6. Map of the media accountability instruments examined in the research

a valuable toolkit for professionals. These assets, combined with education and continuing professional development (CPD), can help practitioners increase their self-awareness of the many ethical constraints and practices embedded in journalistic routines. Most importantly, they can ultimately point journalists in the right direction with regard to language and the highest of standards of reporting.

Given the above, a closer scrutiny of the map also reveals that in some areas there are imbalances that should be addressed. First, it is noteworthy that there are only a handful of examples of codes that are specific to sports journalists and that there is a limited range of guidelines devised within and outside media companies. Bearing this in mind, media organizations and external agents (institutions, professional associations, academia), particularly those in countries outside the North Atlantic/liberal model (**Hallin**; **Mancini**, 2004), should work harder to create additional recommendations. Those would certainly contribute to improving the credibility of sports journalism and its image of rigour in relation to society.

> Chats, social media, online ombudsmen, observatories and blogs are positive examples of the cultivation of a two-way conversation between journalists and users about the standards for and quality of sports content

Second, it is true that innovative instruments such as ombudsmen, blogs and online chats have been discovered in the sports journalism arena. It is evident that certain organizations such as *ESPN* have been pioneering various media accountability initiatives. Nevertheless, it is equally true that other tools that have not been detected in this field

(editorial videos, open news lists, online broadcasting of newsrooms' meetings, error buttons, and so on) should also be encouraged given the beneficial impact that these instruments could have on journalistic practice. The lack of consistency and the deviation from accountability purposes observed in some instruments (for instance, chats that are driven mainly by opinion rather than criticism of content) should be addressed. Finally, in order to counteract the unawareness of accountability instruments among citizens highlighted by previous research (**Alsius**; **Mauri-Ríos**; **Rodríguez-Martínez**, 2011), the dissemination of information about the existence of all the detected mechanisms should also be enhanced so that users can be fully aware of the usefulness of these mechanisms in monitoring the quality of the journalistic task.

Scholars should remain particularly attentive to the area of accountability in sports journalism. This investigation can serve as a valuable springboard for further inquiry into the accountability instruments detected and analysed here. Future research must monitor and examine the emergence of new accountability systems in the international context. In addition, there is considerable need to assess the impact of accountability instruments among citizens and media professionals. It will be essential to achieve closer links between the industry and users (through the use of surveys, in-depth interviews and other methods) to gain a deeper insight into how these instruments work and to assess how they are perceived by all the agents involved in the sports media environment.

Notes

1. An early version of this article was presented at the *IAMCR Ethics of Society & Ethics of Communication Working Group* 2nd preconference, held at *CEU Cardenal Herrera University* (Valencia) in July 2016. The contribution was appointed as second best scientific presentation.

2. *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (*ARD*).

3. The examples highlighted when discussing *ESPN*'s *Sportsnation* chats can be found in the following links:

Mike Reiss:
http://www.espn.com/sportsnation/chat/_/id/50130/patriots-with-mike-reiss

Edward Aschoff:
http://www.espn.com/sportsnation/chat/_/id/38526/ncaa-fb-with-ed-aschoff

Andrea Adelson:
http://m.espn.com/general/chat/chat?eventId=46012&page=0

4. The example of discussion with José Sámano from *El país* can be retrieved at:
http://deportes.elpais.com/deportes/2015/10/26/actualidad/1445851555_221430.html

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