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ISSN (Online): 2322 – 4479

ISSN (Print): 2476–4981

**Original Article**

[www.AESAsport.com](http://www.AESAsport.com)

Received: 27/05/2016

Accepted: 07/08/2016

## **Ethical Issues in the Iran's Sport Media: Perceptions of National Team Coaches**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Objectives.** The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of National team coaches on the obedience of the Iran Sport Media to journalistic ethical codes.

**Methods.** This study was based on feedback received from 100 National team coaches and assistant coaches whose Different ages ranged, representing teams participating in Iran's teams. Each participant evaluated a series of five statements related to the media's news gathering techniques, treatment of their personal lives, prevalence of gossip, general accuracy of news stories, as well as the tendency of the media to stimulate and encourage violence.

**Results.** It was determined that the ethical codes, namely gossip, private life and honesty are frequently violated, and the ethical codes, namely newsgathering and violence are sometimes violated.

**Conclusion.** According to these results, Iran sport media outlets are plagued with significant ethical code difficulties.

**KEY WORDS:** *Sports Media, Ethics, Professional Football Players.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The media's ability to function constructively in these roles is directly related to its acceptance of and adherence to certain ethical codes. Therefore, all media workers are required to abide by the official ethical codes regardless of the country from which they report as governed by the members of various regional and international media associations. The media plays a significant role in today's world. Of importance is its effect on the general perception within a society and the provision of a public forum for debate about important social issues (1).

These universally accepted ethical codes speak directly to items such as conflicts of interest (2), honesty (3), receiving gifts, newsgathering methods (4), fairness (5), privacy(1, 6); moonlighting and news sources and plagiarism(7, 8).

For this reason, media employees must evaluate their professional practices within the framework of socially accepted ethical standards, the ethical codes that govern their professional study areas, as well as their own consciences. As a result, journalists may implement different principles that can be defended morally (3).

In journalism, as with other media, common manifested ethical values generally determine the written ethical codes. By agreeing on these standards, organizations provide a solid ethical foundation for the journalists (9). It is important to remember that ethical codes are not related only to journalists. They also apply to educators in the field of journalism, as well as to the society as a whole. However, while the list of ethical codes helps to explain ethical issues,

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determine preliminary and behavior standards and is accepted as valuable for journalism, it cannot guarantee the ethical behaviors and cannot resolve ethical problems. For this reason, ethical codes remain a problematic area in journalism (10).

sport journalism is widely viewed as the media discipline in which the majority of these ethical problems are experienced (10). Similar observations are noted in the Turkish sport media and sport journalism. The practice is widely tolerated since media outlets are conveying non-ethical news, especially by sport clubs, coaches, managers and players (11). These infractions take their toll on football clubs, players, coaches and club managers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine public perceptions of the extent to which professional football players and the Iran sport media abide by the ethical codes. sport with higher revenue potential command greater privileges than sport aimed at active participation (12). This cycle is further perpetuated as demand for these sports also generate revenue for media outlets, encouraging a greater emphasis on sport with commercial opportunities (13).

Developments in the Iran sport media continue to run parallel to developments around the world. For example, at the end of the 1980s, with footballs ever-increasing popularity, it became the primary focus of the sport media in Iran. As a result, for some countries, broadcasting more live football matches/games not only increases ratings and football news, but it also is directly proportional to the increase in sales of newspapers and sport magazines. For example, 69.2% of the columnists and sport correspondents in Iran cover football news (14), 72.9% of the news on sport pages in daily newspapers is related to football (11) and sport programs on television are largely dominated by football.

Therefore, this level of coverage means that sport organizations and people in these organizations are influenced by the unethical news, images and comments in the Iran sport media in much larger percentages than other organizations and people.

As in other areas around the world, sales and rating concerns driven by commercialization are the major factors contributing to Iran's violation

of ethical codes. Add to this the fact that various media tools with recently developing technology, such as the Internet, allow for the instant dissemination of information. Thus, legal controls are becoming harder to impose. Some of the ethical codes recognized by the Iran Press Council are considered in this study and examples are given below.

**Private life:** The journalistic code of ethics prevents making news about people's private lives without their consent. As in many countries, sport fans are more interested in the images, personalities, nightclub adventures and especially private lives of football players than their professional performance (8). Naturally, public demand drives sport media outlets to cover these areas. Newspapers, in particular, see the coverage of the private lives of the players as essential to be able to compete with the television networks and not lose readership (11). In Iran, it is the professional football players and coaches whose private lives are frequently intruded upon who most often complain about this coverage.

**Honesty:** Honesty, is at the top of the list of the ethical codes (3, 12). Honesty affects the news, items, photos and the images reflecting reality. For this reason, journalists have the responsibility to be absolutely honest in their work and writing (12).

**Newsgathering:** Another ethical issue refers to the searching for and gathering of news in appropriate ways and methods. Of particular concern is the rise of modern technology such as micro and hidden cameras and sound recorders, which facilitate the work of reporters. People in the public eye now find themselves subject to intensive hidden surveillance. Magazines concentrating on sport news often use this method. In addition, news may be simply created by finding photos and fabricating captions beneath the images My boss will write it (14).

He will write in any way even if you do or do not have your photo taken..." **Violence:** News items, photos and images should not include elements of violence, which encourage people to be violent. the following factors contribute to violence in sport: team sports whose teams are comprised of men, sport practiced at the elite level, and financially profitable sport. The connection between sport and violence has

become an area of interest especially in recent academic studies (15). This, in turn, has increased the level of media coverage related to acts of violence observed in sport (15).

**Gossip:** This particular code states that news, items, photos and images should not be exaggerated and should not emanate from gossip. In the Iran sport media, there are reporters assigned to follow each club and are tasked to create news every day for the media that employs them. This pressure to find news items in a limited time results in reporters resorting to gossip to create the news stories (11).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Data Collection.** The constant media exposure of National team coaches and their perceptions of the extent to which the Iran sport media abide by journalistic ethical codes was the basis for this study. The research statements of this study which were based on Iran Press Council Journalism Principles and literature were as follows: 1. Sport media make the private lives of sport-related persons the subject of the news even though their private lives do not benefit the public. 2. Sport media make news from incorrect or inaccurate information, and do not attach importance to honesty. 3. Sport media research news through inappropriate ways and tools, such as using news of other sources without approval and via hidden cameras. 4. Sport media encourage violence. 5. Sport media provide a forum for gossip.

Perceptions of football players regarding these five items about the codes of ethics in Iran sport media tools, showed some meaningful differences on statements according to the level of following the media tools, the level of appearing in the media tools and age.

This study was executed during the 2013-2014. The sample consisted of 100 National team coaches in Iran. Their ages ranged from  $\leq 30$  (n=30), 30-50 (n=53) and  $50 <$  (n=17). The participants of this study were randomly selected and were attractive news material and were affected by unethical news, images and comments of the Iran sport media.

**Data Analysis.** In the first step, the 16 Media Principles recognized by the Press Council were examined, and a literature survey on media ethics was undertaken and various issues were determined and discussed with experts (N=7) in this field. Based on recommendations from the experts, 5 items (gossip, honesty, newsgathering, encourage violence, private lives) related to ethical issues were deemed to be sufficient in measuring of the ethical codes in Iran Sport Media. The participants rated the 5 research statements ranging from 1 (indicating never) to 5 (indicating always) accordingly. The demographics and age of the respondents, their following level of sport media tools and their appearing level in the sport media were determined initially.

In the statistical evaluation of the study, the following data were collected: Age of the participants, the frequency of following the media (6-7 days per week, 3-5 days per week, 1-2 days per week and never), and the frequency of players, teams, coaches and managers appearing in the media (6-7 days per week, 3-5 days per week, 1-2 days per week and no coverage). These variables were analyzed in terms of frequency (f) and percentage (%). Differences between the perceptions of players were assessed by applying the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) in terms of „age“ and „media coverage“ and the Kruskal- Wallis Non-Parametric test in terms of „following media tools“.

## RESULTS

Based on players following sport media tools, it was found that 70 coaches (70%) follow the media for „6-7 days“ per week, 20 coaches (20%) follow the media for „3-5 days“ per week and 10 coaches follow the media (10%) for „1-2 days“ per week. In this study, the coaches' perception of the observation of the ethical codes by the Iran Sport Media was measured across 5 items. The perceptions of the subjects are presented in Table 1 with frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation values.

According to Table 1, the coaches generally marked frequently and always regarding their perceptions about the violation of the above ethical codes by Iran sport media.

**Table 1.** Perceptions of Ethical Coaches in Relation to the Iran's Sports Media

	Never	Rarely	Some times	Frequently	Always		
Ethical codes	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (x)	f (%)	Mean	SD
Private life	-(·)	6(6)	14(14)	60(60)	20(20)	4.17	0.44
Honesty/Truthfulness	6(6)	4(4)	20(20)	40(40)	30(30)	4.27	0.89
News gathering	6(6)	6(6)	20(20)	47(47)	23(23)	3.64	0.21
Stimulate/Encourage violence	-(-)	6(6)	16(16)	49(49)	19(19)	3.47	0.65
Gossip	-(-)	1(1)	24(24)	65(65)	48(48)	4.16	0.73

Generally, the results of this study provide valuable support for the research statements of the study. There was a meaningful difference between the points related to the „private life“ of coaches ( $F(2-100) = 4.889$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) as related to age. According to the results of the Tukey HSD test, for the „private life“ item, a meaningful

difference was found between the points of  $\leq 30$  age group (Mean=4.78), 30-50 age group (Mean=4.12) and  $50 \leq$  age group (Mean=4.21) related to the age variable. Subjects who were younger ( $\leq 30$ ) scored higher than older subjects (30-50 and  $50 \leq$ ) (Table 2).

**Table 2.** ANOVA Results According to Age

Ethical Codes	<30 (n=30)		30-50 (n=53)		$\geq 50$ (n=17)		F-value
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Private life	4.78	0.69	4.12	0.59	4.21	0.62	4.889
Honesty/Truthfulness	4.93	0.80	4.00	0.85	4.22	0.57	3.095
News gathering	2.00	0.77	2.06	0.78	2.95	0.68	0.671
Stimulate/Encourage	3.23	0.61	2.84	0.66	2.96	0.72	1.632
Gossip	4.17	0.79	4.12	0.77	4.18	0.70	0.473

As suggested in the research statements, there were meaningful differences between the groups regarding the items of „honesty“ ( $F(2-100) = 3.095$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and „newsgathering“ ( $F(2-100) = 0.671$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) as covered in the media. According to the results of the post hoc multiple comparison test, a meaningful difference was found between the variables of those appearing in the media on „6-7 days“ per week (Mean=4.24), for „3-5 days“ per week (Mean=4.17) and on „1-2 days“ per week (Mean=3.75) for the item

„honesty“. For „newsgathering“, a meaningful difference was found for „6-7 days“ per week (Mean=4.05), „3-5 days“ per week (Mean=4.08) and „1-2 days“ per week (Mean=3.70) in accordance with the duration of appearing in the media. It was determined that the participants who appeared in the media more („6-7 days“ per week and „3-5 days“ per week) scored higher than those who featured less in the media („1-2“ days per week) (Table 3).

**TABLE 3.** ANOVA Results According to Coverage in Media

Ethical Codes	.days p.w 6-7 (n=70)		.days p.w 3-5 (n=20)		.days p.w 1-2 (n=10)		Fvalue
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Private life	4.17	0.24	4.03	0.69	4.03	0.71	4.889*
Honesty/Truthfulness	4.24	0.63	4.17	0.72	3.75	0.85	3.095*
News gathering	4.05	0.89	4.08	0.72	3.70	0.52	0.671
Stimulate/Encourage violence	3.87	0.92	4.03	0.62	3.77	0.20	1.632
Gossip	4.18	0.72	4.20	0.69	4.09	0.80	0.473

The analysis also indicates that „private life“ scores of participants differentiate meaningfully regarding their status of “following media tools”

( $\chi^2 (2)=6.78$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). This finding shows that the duration of following media has different effects in the aspect of „private life“ (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Kruskal-Wallis Test Results according to Following of Media Tools

Ethical codes	6-7 Days p.w (n=70)		3-5 days p.w. (n=20)		1-2 days p.w. (n=10)		$\chi^2$
	MR	df	MR	df	MR	df	
Private life	74.47	2	67.65	2	48.29	2	6.78
Honesty/Truthfulness	69.16	2	71.48	2	64.71	2	0.40
News gathering	70.73	2	57.52	2	73.29	2	0.55
Stimulate/Encourage violence	11.85	2	65.82	2	69.93	2	0.83
Gossip	73.95	2	64.16	2	64.91	2	2.21

## DISCUSSION

Recently, issues related to sport media such as violence, gender, marketing and commoditization, race and sport, fandom and spectator experiences (15) have shed light on issues related to the code of ethics for sport media. Despite being a frequently discussed topic, relatively few studies about sport media and ethics in Iran have been reported. The most important aspect of this study is that it is based on the perceptions of professional football players who themselves often appear in the media as the subject and source of news and follow sport media as reader/audience. The most important finding of this study is that national coaches perceive that the Iran sport media continually violate the ethical codes. Media employees who cannot find adequate news about these clubs and football players attempt to remedy this shortfall by using gossip as news. As a result, the ethical code is violated. The private lives of people who appear in the public eye are always of interest. The objective of the media in making news about these people is to increase the interest in their media tools. However, in the news made regarding these people, it should not be forgotten that the confidentiality of a person's private life should always be respected. Football players whose private lives become the subject of the news believe that this ethical code is severely violated.

Furthermore coaches who follow the sport media more („6-7 days“ per week and „3-5

days“ per week) and those who follow less („1-2 days“ per week) and players at the age of 30 and over all perceive that the ethical code of „private life“ was continually violated. This stems from the fact that football players, who have the opportunity to follow the news in sport media closely, can evaluate the current situation better. Also, the private lives of coaches at the age of 21 and over are covered more in the media than younger coaches.

According to the perceptions of coaches, the ethical code of „honesty“, which is seen as the basis for the ethical codes in general, is frequently violated by Iran sport media. Furthermore, it is considerably meaningful that coaches whose team's or own life is frequently subjected to news („6-7 days“ per week and „3-5“ days“ per week) find the sport media to have more issues in the ethical code of honesty. This finding corresponds with the general conviction of the public that “falsified and sensational news” concerning sport is fabricated in order for the Iran sport media to increase interest and market share in media.

While the media is being commercialized, the emerging media culture has started to accept sport, particularly football, as a commercial tool and abandoned its social and cultural importance. Therefore, sport has begun to be seen as purely a commercial commodity, which attracts the interest of the customer and increases the consumption. Thus, economic policies drive the need to increase sales and advertisement

incomes for the media outlets. When journalism studies are examined, variables related to commercialization, such as news organization ownership, newsroom influences, competition, subjects and sources, advertisers, audience, and organization size, all affected the ethical decisions of media employees.

Apart from the four ethical codes mentioned earlier, news research methodology is an ethical code that sometimes is violated coaches who themselves are many times the source of news are able to observe the sport media's research methods more easily. The general consensus of the players is that ethical code violations are also experienced widely. This is a striking finding in terms of the Turkish sport media.

The ethical code which was believed to be violated the least in this study was the idea that the sport media encourages violence. These perceptions of the coaches are very interesting since the sport media is often the first element blamed by the coaches, club managers, sport circles, even politicians and the general society for inciting violence.

## CONCLUSION

As with other media outlets around the world, the task of the sport media in Iran should be to inform, educate, entertain and create a healthy society through the news it delivers. Its goal should be "to increase the popularity of sport in general and contribute to its spread in society" (Girgin, 2000; TGNA, 2005:53). It can be said that the realization of these tasks and the benefits of the media for society is directly proportional to its adherence to the ethical codes.

In conclusion, this study has shown that professional coaches perceive that Iran sport media frequently violate ethical codes. This

result supports the determinations of the Commission Report of Research in Sport Violence of the Iran Grand National Assembly (TGNA, 2005:54) and Uzun's (2004:19) opinions: "reasons such as preventing promotion of some responsible journalists who do not make sensational news due to commercial concerns, the presence of many journalists who are not concerned about the validity of the information and research, and the inconsistency of the news and comments, some sport reporters behaving like they are the friends of the club inadequacy of the sport knowledge and culture are seen as the most criticized issues and the obstacles to behaving in accordance with ethical codes".

## APPLICABLE REMARKS

- The results of this research will be dedicated to compliance with various media outlets, especially soccer realized in compliance with the ethics charters.
- The results of this study can be the adopted codes of ethics in media activities.
- The results of this study can be used to complete the sports media ethics codes used in the sport and the media practitioners revealed.
- The results of this research will be necessary measures to prevent violations of media in the private lives of the athletes.

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