

Supplementary File

Automation in Sports Reporting: Strategies of Data Providers, Software Providers, and Media Outlets

Jessica Kunert

Institute for Journalism and Communication Studies, University of Hamburg, 20146 Hamburg, Germany; E-Mail: jessica.kunert@uni-hamburg.de

Abstract

This study examines how algorithmic processing affects structures and practices in sports journalism in Germany. A multi-level perspective is used to determine which strategies data providers, software providers, and media outlets use to develop automated reporting, which compiles perspectives across the entire line of news production. The results of 11 in-depth interviews show that non-journalistic actors are vital partners in the news production process, as all actors work together in data handling, training, and software development. Moreover, automation can generate additional content such as match and historical coverage to help address shortfalls in capacity. However, given the business case for automation, amateur football (soccer) is currently the only viable candidate for its use. Many actors involved in the process argue that automated content is an added value for their readers, but claim that content quality has to be put before quantity. This means that some media outlets edit automated articles to increase the quality of their sports journalism, but that this is done only on a small scale. Media outlets do not perceive their roles to be changing, but see automation as a helpful tool that complements their work; a few use automatically created articles as a baseline for in-depth reporting. Moreover, the so-called 'meta-writer' has not become a reality yet, as data-processing and news writing are still kept separate. This article sheds new light on the use of automation in the sports beat, highlighting the growing role of non-journalistic actors in the news production process.

Keywords

algorithmic journalism; automated journalism; automated news; data journalism; football; Germany; meta-journalist; robo-news; soccer; sports journalism

Issue

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Interview Outline

The outline was adapted to each individual interviewee's background. When necessary, follow-up questions were asked.

Note: "DFB" stands for the German Football Association (Deutscher Fußball-Bund). The DFB provides automatically created articles, but is not a news outlet and is thus listed individually.

1. Workings of Automation

- For data providers only:
 - How does the data collection system work?
 - For which sports are data collected?
- For software providers only:
 - How does the software work?
 - Which functions are particularly important for sports reporting?
 - For which sports is (or can) the software be used?
 - Which sports are unsuitable for automated text creation?
- For news outlets/the DFB only:
 - Why and when was automation introduced?
 - Which sports are covered automatically?
 - Which leagues are covered automatically?
- What successes have you enjoyed?
- What obstacles have you encountered?
- Where do you see potential to optimize the use of automation?

2. Working with Automated Articles

- How do you rate the quality of automatically created articles?
- Which new stories can be told through data use?
- For data providers and software providers only:
 - What non-media customers do you serve?
 - How do clubs use the data?
 - Where do you see further opportunities to expand data use by customers?
 - Where do you see limits to expanding data use?
- For news outlets/the DFB only:
 - Are the automatically created articles edited afterwards, or are they published as is?
 - If they are edited, what kind of changes are made?
 - Which topics are still covered manually?
 - Where do you see further opportunities to expand the use of automation?
 - How do readers perceive the automatically created articles?
 - Are the articles labelled as “automatically written”? Why? Why not?

3. Working with the Software

- How is the software trained?
- What kinds of skills does an editor need to be able to work with the software?
- Where do you see further possibilities to expand the use of the software?
- Where do you see limits on expanding the use of the software?
- For data and software providers only:
 - How is your working relationship with news outlets?
- For news outlets/the DFB only:
 - How is your working relationship the software provider?

4. Data Availability and Maintenance

- Which data depth is (or can be) used?
- What are the data sources?
- How are the databases maintained?
- What errors are possible?
- How do you react to errors?

5. Change of Sports Reporting Through Automation

- Who is an advocate of automation? Why?
- Who is resisting automation? Why?
- Do you believe that the increased use of automation will lead to fewer employees being needed?
- In your opinion, how does the role of sports journalists change with the increased use of data and automation software?
- Do you think the use of automated reports in sports reporting will continue to increase? Why? Why not?
- What dangers do you see for sports reporting through automation?
- What ethical problems may arise when using automation? Have you been involved with any of those?
- Where are the limits on the use of automation?
- Does automated reporting go hand in hand with a loss of emotion in sports reporting?
- What can a human journalist do that the algorithm cannot do?
- Do you see the use of data as a fundamental change in sports journalism as we know it, or as a new addition, a new tool? In short: is automation an evolution or a revolution?