

Final report

Project title

Stable Cultures in Cyberspace

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Part 1: Detailed summary

Syftet med projektet var att analysera stallbackskulturer i cyberrymden i Sverige och Norge. Under senare år har frågor om hästhållning och omsorg om hästen debatterats i sociala medier och på nätet skapas normer för hur hästar ska tas omhand. Dessa normer ges i projektet samlingsnamnet stallbackskulturer. Att kunskap som sprids vilar på forskning och beprövad erfarenhet, inte tyckanden, är av vikt för hästars välfärd. Först kartlades hur ryttare betar sig på internet och normer kring detta beteende genom en enkätstudie. Därefter intervjuades ryttare för att skapa förståelse för vilken (och varför) information om hästar som hittades på internet som tillerkänns värde. Slutligen studerades sociala medieplattformar för att öka kunskapen om vilka normer som sprids av så kallade influencers i hästsfären. Studien pekar på att ryttare i olika åldersgrupper använder och påverkas av sociala medier på olika sätt; att ryttare använder sociala medier på olika sätt i förhållande till hästars hälsa och träning; att ryttare måste förhålla sig till de kommersiella budskap som blandas med information om hästars hälsa och träning. Sammantaget visar studien på att det finns ett stort behov av ökad kunskap om hur människor använder sociala medier och hur dessa fungerar inom hästsportens organisationer och de utbildningar som leder till professioner inom hästsektorn.

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Part 2: Main report (max. 10 pages)

Introduction

In recent years, questions about horse-keeping and the welfare of horses have been debated in social media. Voices of researchers, elite and leisure riders are heard, and different ideas about horse-keeping meet, clash and are discussed. The purpose of this study was to analyze stable cultures in cyberspace in Sweden and Norway. Horse riders' communication in social media in relation to horse-keeping will be focused. For the welfare of horses, it is important to bridge the gap between research and practice.

Material and methods

Data was collected through three methods: online survey, focus group interviews and netnography.

Survey

A Swedish and a Norwegian online survey was published in Norway and Sweden from May 2018 and to September 2018. The survey consisted of 44 questions covering the use of social media related to gender, age as well as horse and riding experience with focus on internet and horse-keeping and the welfare of horses in Sweden and Norway. The survey was published on Facebook through the project page as well as through the Norwegian and Swedish Equestrian federations together and the Swedish Equestrian Centre's Flyinge and Strömsholm. In total, 1650 respondents filled in the survey (1265 and 386 in Sweden and Norway respectively).

Interviews

In the project, twelve focus groups were interviewed in Sweden and Norway respectively. Participants in the focus groups were riders at riding schools and riders owning their own horse. An interview guide was created for the focus groups interviews. The questions posed in the focus group interviews concerned how people seek information about horse-keeping and the welfare of horses; what information about horse-keeping and the welfare of horses they are searching for online; and how this information is granted value.

Nethnography

The project group observed six "influencers" connected to equestrian sports in Sweden and Norway. They chosen based on popularity and relevance to the aim of the project. Nethnography was used to observe the "influencers" on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube during four months each. Expect their own posts (pictures and captions) comments to their posts were analyzed.

Results and discussion

According to media researcher Martin Berg (2015), it is increasingly difficult to understand social events, interactions, social processes, or anything that in one way or another relates to human life, without taking Internet into account. A broad definition of social media focusing on communication and user-driven aspects, where users create, initiate, disperse information for the purpose of collaborative teaching and learning about products, brands, services, persons and issues is used in this project (cf. Eek-Karlsson, 2015; Kavanagh et al., 2016; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). In the title and the purpose of the study the concept "cyberspace" is used. This may be seen as an old fashion term and has to be problematized. Berg argues that historically there has been a division between "virtual reality" and "real life" in studies connected to Internet, and the term cyberspace has since long come to imply the use of

Internet as a sort of reality escape. Despite this, cyberspace is used in this project, as to underline that focus will be on thoughts, ideas, scientific research and proven experience presented in social media. Yet, like Berg and others have done in previous studies, we emphasize that it is important to understand Internet as integrated in human interaction and not as reality escape (Berg, 2015). In other words, social interaction on Internet can not only be seen as an isolated phenomenon, as people move between social spaces both online and offline. These spaces are interconnected and interdependent (cf. Eek-Karlsson, 2015).

Social media has changed communication dramatically and today anyone can share anything anytime. News, rumours, ideas, opinions are spread on Internet and social media is interpersonal, intercultural and imbedded in everyone's lives. Bruce (2016) states that "the ability to access, create and exchange ideas and cultural artefacts outside the gatekeeping function of traditional media has exploded in the wake of Web 2.0 technologies that enable relatively cheap and easy sharing" (p. 368). In addition, social media can be seen as a stage for empowerment and democratization. Some researchers point to that voices of groups that previously have been relatively quiet in public discourse are now given new opportunities. According to Bruce (2016) young women today understand and use the power of social media: they tell and create their own stories, "creating Internet-based sites and media that tell stories traditional media have ignored", and she concludes that this shift in media production can highlight female agency (p. 369). In a study on social media and the horse world, Dashper demonstrates that Internet is extra important for horse people, as traditional media fail to cover the horse world (Dashper 2017). Research has, however, challenged the positive image of Internet interaction and demonstrated that social media is also a stage for performance of power and gender struggles (Radmann & Hedenborg, 2018). The project has resulted in four different sub-studies:

Stable Cultures in Cyberspace. A study about equestrians' use of social media as knowledge platforms (published)

New media habits in the era of digitalization challenge previous understandings of who and what receives media coverage. Research shows that practitioners in self-organized lifestyle sports consistently use social media to attain and exchange information and knowledge about their sport. Is this also the case in organized sport? The Internet has become a great resource for horse-enthusiasts and the online horse world can be described as an extension of the physical horse world. Equestrian sport is particularly interesting to analyze due to the fact that there is an animal involved. Still, there is little knowledge of how horse enthusiasts use social media in relation to their interest in equestrian sports. The aim of this article is therefore to chart and analyze how equestrians use social media, how they communicate horse-related content on social media, and how social media can be seen as a source for knowledge exchange. Our investigation focuses on how equestrians use social media to acquire information about horses, and how this usage can be explained in connection to age and experience. A mixed methods design is used and data is collected from 28 focus group interviews with equestrians in Sweden and Norway and a survey with 1,628 respondents. Our study indicates that practitioners of self-organized sports are not unique in using social network sites (SNS) to exchange and attain knowledge about their sport; equestrians in general are shown to be frequent users of SNS such as Facebook and Instagram. Although our results show a few significant differences in SNS use in relation to age; the riders in the different age groups have surprisingly similar views of their SNS use in relation to attaining information about the horse. 'Stable cultures' and the organized structure of equestrian sports appear to create boundaries determining where a 'good equestrian' should seek information about horsekeeping. However, the organized structure and traditional nature of this sport do not stop equestrians from turning to SNS.

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Super equestrians – the construction of identity/ies and impression management among young equestrians in upper secondary school settings on social media (published)

The aim of this study is to analyze and increase the understanding of how young equestrians, in a sport school context, perceive, construct, negotiate and manage identities on social media. This article presents how a specific group of young athletes (equestrians) use social network sites (SNS), such as Facebook and Instagram, in relation to their everyday lives as students attending upper secondary schools with an equestrian sports profile. Social media is increasingly important for young people's perceptions, constructions, and managing of identities. Using a multifaceted theoretical framework, including Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959), we will explore how young equestrians perceive the content on SNS and analyze how they act and create content in relation to existing norms and cultures. Equestrianism is one of the largest sports in Sweden and several upper secondary schools in Sweden offer programs with an equestrian profile. Studies on sport schools evince a focus on elite sport and competition, which affects norms and ideologies at these schools. Through focus group interviews with 25 students, we show that the situation is complex and contradictory. The results indicate that young riders have identified an online stable culture where high performance equestrianism is the norm. Our study shows that the educational environment is not the only factor affecting the students, but that social media is also a part of the young athletes' constructions of identity. The image of the employable 'super equestrian' who is attractive, wears the 'right clothes', is successful, and acts 'professionally' is the most desirable representation online. The young equestrians are critical of what is communicated on SNS in relation to horses and riding, and they are uncertain of how to position themselves in relation to this communication.

Safe Zones on the Internet: the use of social media as knowledge platforms among equestrians (manuscript).

In this study, we aim to explore and analyse how equestrians value information attained through social media by using the notion of *online repertoires* and the *information assessment stereotypes matrix*. An exploratory sequential mixed method design was used (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study began with a qualitative phase of focus group interviews and followed by a quantitative phase with a survey study built on the participants' views from the first phase. Within the equestrian community, social media and internet is proven to be a highly important asset when it comes to exchanging ideas, knowledge and information about horses and riding (Byström, 2015; Dashper, 2017). Recent research show that equestrians are more likely to use social media when it comes to acquiring general knowledge and inspiration about horses and riding than for instance more sensitive information about horses' injuries and diseases (Broms et al. 2021). Yet, there are numerous Facebook groups displaying equestrians using the platform as a knowledge-exchange forum for equestrianism. Riders speak about how other riders use social media to learn how to take care of injured horses and stresses that riders with less experience than themselves lack insights on how to use social media to attain information about horses and riding in an informed way. This study shows that, online, equestrians trust information and knowledge distributed by institutions such as the Equestrian federations', magazines and researchers. The respondents, however, value and trust information delivered to them by persons in their nearby environment, offline, regardless of these persons' background or education. Personal experiences either expressed through others in their nearby environment or their own experiences seem to be more valuable than other riders' posts on social media.

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Social Media Influencers in Equestrian Sport (published)

The study analyzes and explains the impact of social media influencers on stable cultures in Sweden and Norway, contributing to the understanding of the complex relationship between equestrian sports and social media – a relationship that is important for the welfare of horses. Since equestrianism is one of the most popular sports in Sweden and Norway, influencers' social media communication greatly impacts follower's perception of the human-animal relationship. Despite the popularity of equestrian sports, studies thereof are rare, and research combining equestrian sports and social media is almost non-existent, making this study important and relevant. The analysis focuses on the six biggest equestrian influencers in Sweden and Norway and their social media accounts. Goffman's (1967) micro-sociological perspectives, alongside previous research on social media, are used to discuss knowledge exchange, co-creation of authenticity and intimacy and sponsorship and advertisement. The influencers mainly focus their communication on horse-related issues, and their (and their followers) love of horses create the intimacy needed as a base for other messages (perceived knowledge and advertisement). The intimacy and authenticity are strengthened in the interaction between followers and influencers, and the latter receive positive feedback for their way of handling their horses' lives. The expressive order of stable culture(s) is seldom questioned and the acceptance of this order is likely to make the commercial endorsements less visible and more convincing.

Conclusions

The study indicates that riders in different age groups use and are influenced by social media in different ways; that riders use social media in different ways in relation to horses' health and training; that riders must relate to the commercial messages mixed with information about horses' health and training. Overall, the study shows that there is a great need for increased knowledge about how people use social media and how these work in equestrian sports organizations and the training that leads to professions in the equestrian sector. In future studies, the organizations within the equine sector's social media communication must be studied and developed in collaboration with the sector and aligned with stakeholders in the sector.

Relevance for the practical horse sector incl. recommendations

In the application for this project, we planned for creating an online knowledge platform for the equine sector. During the project period several platforms have been developed and our results point to that, instead of developing a new platform, it is more important to work with increased awareness in organizations and educations within the equine sector.

For veterinarians, trainers, riding instructors and stable managers it is important to recognize how riders seek and value information online and offline to be able to influence their clients. We recommend that time for education on media habits is allocated in the education of these professional groups and that media researchers are invited to take part in the education of future veterinarians, trainers and riding instructors.

Social media habits vary with age and is dependent on what kind of information people are seeking. Social media communication is also governed by commercial companies. Therefore, it is important for organizations within the equine sector to adapt their online messages in relation to what they want to communicate with whom.

In this project we demonstrate that social media communication is often related to the perfect super equestrian within a traditional sport context. For organizations within the

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equine sector, it is essential to communicate other role models, to reach new groups and to facilitate the development of healthy stable cultures.

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Part 3: Result dissemination

Scientific publications, <i>published</i>	Broms, L, Hedenborg, S & Radmann, A, (2020) Super equestrians – the construction of identity/ies and impression management among young equestrians in upper secondary school settings on social media. <i>Sport Education and Society</i> (published online), https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2020.1859472
	Broms, L, Bentzen, M, Radmann, A & Hedenbors, S, (2021) Stable Cultures in Cyberspace: A study about equestrians' use of social media as knowledge platform. <i>Scandinavian Sport Studies Forum</i> , vol.12. https://idrottsforum.org/bromsetal210406/
	Radmann A, Hedenborg S and Broms L (2021) Social Media Influencers in Equestrian Sport. <i>Front. Sports Act. Living</i> 3:669026. https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2021.669026
Scientific publications, <i>submitted</i>	<i>Author(s), title</i>
Scientific publications, <i>manuscript</i>	<i>Author(s), title</i>
	Broms, L, Radmann, A & Hedenborg, S , Safe Zones on the Internet: the use of social media as knowledge platforms among equestrians, manuscript.
Conference publications/ presentations	<i>Author(s), year, title, conference name, location and date, (link if applicable)</i>
	Broms, L, Hedenborg, S & Radmann, A, 2018, Stable cultures in Cyberspace, The Equine Cultures in Transition Conference, Leeds, United Kingdom, 19–21 June 2018, https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:1408224
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	Broms, L, 2019, Safe Zones on the Internet: the use of social media as knowledge platforms among equestrians, European Association for Sport Management Conference, Seville, Spain, 3–6 September 2019, https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:1412974
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	Broms, L, 2019, Rykten, kunskap eller kommersiella intressen – ryttares användning av sociala medier som kunskapsplattform, Stockholm, Sweden, 21–22 Novemebr 2019, https://www.gih.se/SAMVERKAN/Evenemang-av-GIH/SVEBI-konferens-2019/Program-for-SVEBI-konferensen/
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Other publications, media etc.	<i>Title, year/date, place of publication (link if applicable)</i>
	Stallbackskulturer i cyberrymden, rapport från projektet <i>Stable Cultures in Cyberspace</i> , 14 November 2019, Delivered to the Swedish Equestrian Federation. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:1548669
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	Super equestrians: the construction of identity/ies and impression management among young equestrians in upper secondary school settings on social media - A Summary, 24 March 2021, Idrottsforum.org, https://idrottsforum.org/feature-bromsetal210324/
	Social Media Influencers in Equestrian Sports – A summary, 15 June 2021, idrottsforum.org, https://idrottsforum.org/feature-radmannetal210615/
	Stable Cultures in Cyberspace: A study about equestrians' use of social media as knowledge platform, 25 May 2021, idrottsforum.org, https://idrottsforum.org/feature-bromsetal210525/
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Media: Hatet gör ryttarna försiktiga på sociala medier, 8 March 2021, https://www.tidningenridsport.se/hatet-gor-ryttarna-forsiktiga-pa-sociala-medier/	
Oral communication, to horse sector, students etc.	<i>Title, year/date, group presented to (link if applicable)</i>
	Meeting with representatives from the horse industry (Swedish and Norwegian equestrian federations etc.), researchers and HNS, 11–12 April 2018.
	Workshop Sveriges ridgymnasium, 4 December 2018, 3 groups of upper secondary school students.

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	Seminar and presentation, 8 April 2019, teachers and staff at Flyinge AB.
	Lecture, 10 October 2019, Sport Science students, Sport and media course, Malmö University
	Lecture, 10 December 2019, Sport Science students, Sport and marketing course, Malmö University
	Presentation article 1: seminar at the Sport Science department, Malmö University, 13 January 2020, Researchers and staff at the sport science department, Malmö University
	Presentation article 2: PhD student seminar, 15 April 2020, PhD Students, Sport Science, Malmö University
	Lecture, 3 December 2020, Sport Science students, Sport and media course, Malmö University
	Lecture and workshop, 7 & 8 December 2020, Sport Science students, Sport and marketing course, Malmö University
	Lecture, 11 March 2021, Equine science students Ridskolan Strömsholm.
	Presentation and workshop, 26 May 2021, Teachers and researchers in the Equine science programme at Flyinge AB, Ridskolan Strömsholm, Wången and SLU.
Student theses	<i>Author/Student, co-authors/supervisors, year, title, type of thesis (doi/link if applicable)</i>
Other	

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