1. Aim and Background

In recent years, information about horse-keeping and the welfare of horses have been debated in social media. Online platforms are proven to be great resources for horse-enthusiasts. Above all, Internet is possibly extra important for this group, as traditional media does not cover the horse world to any significant extent (Dashper, 2017). Different ideas of researchers, elite and leisure riders meet, clash and are discussed online. The purpose of this paper is to deepen the understanding of how and in what way social media prosumers act and interact in relation to finding information about sports via social media. Equestrian sports will be used as a case as it is one of the most popular sports in Sweden, especially among girls and women. Despite engaging about 500 000 participants, research on equestrian sports is scarce in comparison to many others sports.

2. Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Social Information Seeking (SIS) describes the process through which users locate and share information in participatory online forums, such as Social Networking Sites (SNS) and question-answer websites (Shah, 2017). When it comes to information-seeking, online sources have a large impact on specifically youth (Boyd & Ellison, 2010; Borah & Xiao, 2018). Research has shown that SNS can be a convenient space for health promoting practitioners and organizations to disseminate health related information and knowledge (Borah & Xiao, 2018). There is however lack of research about the possible effects of Social Media as an interactive knowledge base within the sport sector.

For most people it is important to take part in the social setting through new media. The social value constructed in human interaction online through for example “likes” is crucial. The culture in social media is, however, characterized by a great vulnerability in the fear of being exposed, criticized or simply not getting the confirmation that is sought (Eek-Karlsson, 2015). Social media affects many parts of our lives and therefore it is crucial for the modern sports movement to adjust and develop in pace with digitalization. Knowledge about sport consumers’ patterns online and specifically what information and knowledge is seen as trustworthy within different sport contexts will be valuable for stakeholders within the sport sector.

The results in this paper are analyzed using Goffman’s theories on social interaction. Yet Goffman’s ideas about regions where people meet either face-to-face or persona-to-persona (Goffman, 2014), will be problematized as social media offers an arena on which face-to-face and persona-to-persona are possibly intertwined. For today’s prosumer it is impossible to certify whether another profile on a social media platform presents a real person in an authentic way, a persona or even a profile generated by an algorithm (Eriksson et al, 2019). In what way and how do social media prosumers act and interact in order to find information and knowledge about sports via social media?

3. Research Design and Methodology

Twenty-four focus group interviews (2-6 participants in each group) in Sweden and Norway constitute the source material. Questions regarding how equestrians seek information about equestrian sports and horse-keeping; and how this information is granted value have been posed. Participants in the focus groups are riders at riding schools and riders owning their own horse. They are divided in to two groups in relation to age: 15–25 and 26 and above. The empirical data has been analyzed through thematic analysis.

4. Results
In this study the equestrians give contradictory answers. They underline that another equestrian or a veterinary whom they meet face to face is more trustworthy than random online information. Yet they report that they use various media platforms to collect information about horses. Online platforms used differ between the age groups. The respondents argue that less experienced riders and riders of other ages than themselves use social media uncritically as sources of information. They also underline the right to voice and visibility through social media and emphasize that there should be no restrictions on what is published. In contrast to this, and as a paradox, they suggest that online codes of conduct and new platforms – safe zones – ought to be established in which information has to be controlled.

5. Conclusion, Contribution and Implication

The results clearly show that there is a need for sport stakeholders to adapt to the online patterns in everyday life. Creating safe zones online could be a way for sport organizations to safeguard social space online and at the same time keep being relevant. The result show that accessible online platforms where research, trustworthy information and knowledge is shared is needed within the equestrian sport. This because it can be difficult to determine whether the shared information is an empty shell created by someone using impression management, an algorithm related to commercial interests or if it is trustworthy information.


