

Has Public Opinion of Equestrian Sport Changed Since 2020?

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Has Public Opinion of Equestrian Sport Changed Since 2020?

*Davies, H., Donovan, M.A., Elton, R.L., Rossi, M.L. & Cameron L.J.**

INTRODUCTION:

- Social license to operate (SLO) is the unofficial agreement between the public and an organisation that an activity is considered acceptable to continue operating (Morrison, 2014; Demuijnck & FASTERLING, 2016).
- Equine welfare in sport is a societal concern due to increasing social media coverage of equestrianism.
- Equestrian sport may be at risk of losing its SLO and right to self-govern if there is widespread public outrage.
- This enquiry has aimed to identify any change in public opinion of equestrian sports since 2020.

METHOD:

- Data were gathered from three public Facebook™ news pages and two 'equestrian' based public pages.
- 'horse sport', 'dressage', 'showjumping', 'eventing', 'horse', 'horseracing' and 'social license' were searched.
- 88 posts were recorded, the top 10 comments were included.
- Data were categorised into 'positive', 'neutral' and 'negative' and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS:

- Analysis of the general news sources found the number of negative posts and reactions increased post-2020 (figure 1).
- Dr David Marlin's page received increased engagement post-2020, however Horse & Hound had decreased engagement.
- Thematic analysis found four positive comment themes: 'equestrianism is unique and inspiring', 'it's in their genes', 'good that [equipment] wasn't used' and 'it's no worse than other animal use'.
- Themes from negative comments included: 'use of equipment and tack', 'hatred of equestrian sport', and 'greed/human gain'.
- Neutral commenters did not care about horse sport or were neither for nor against.

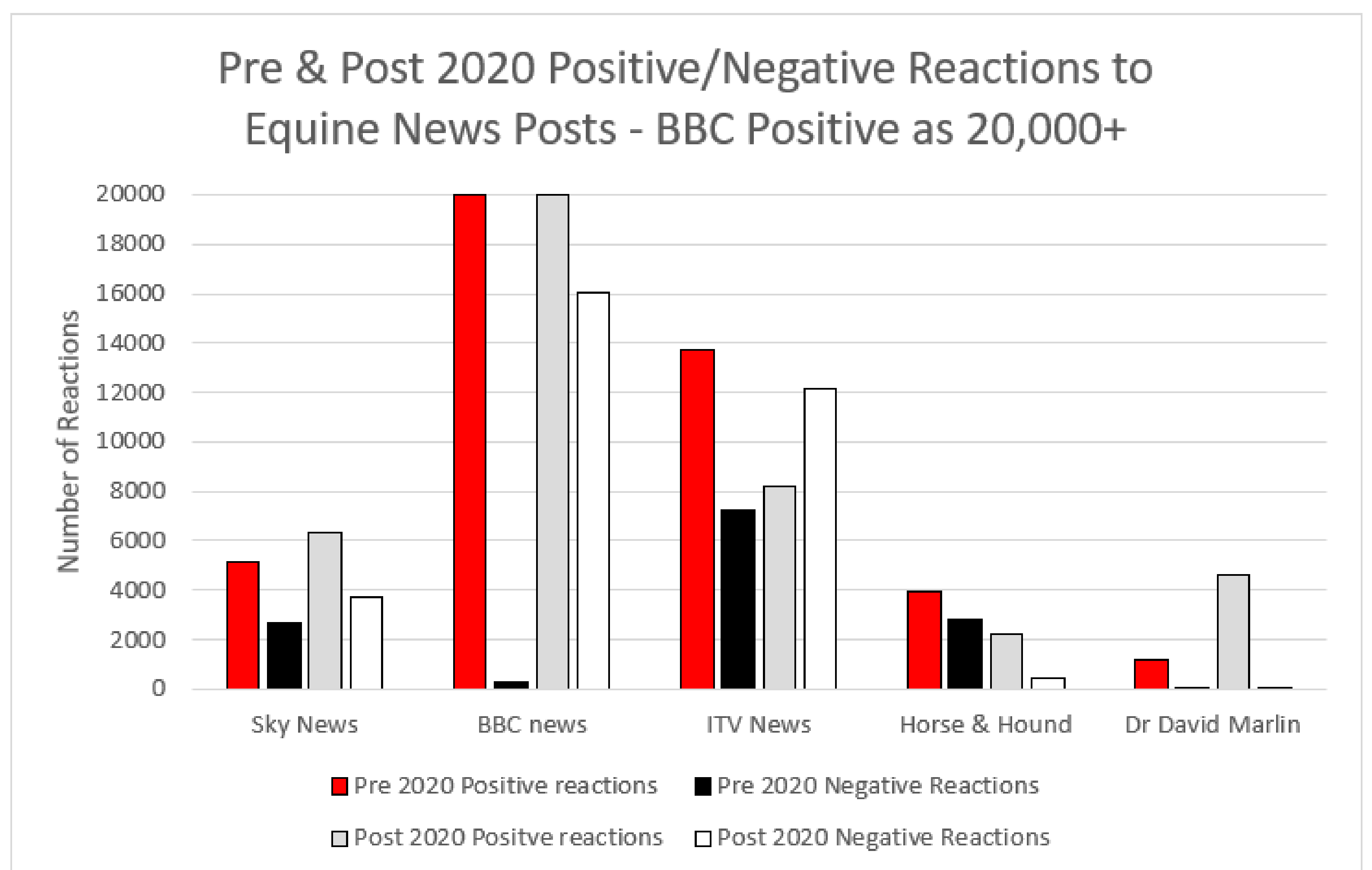


Figure 1 Pre & Post 2020 Positive & Negative Reactions to Equine News Posts (BBC positive reactions capped at 20,000+ as pre 2020 positive = 158450, and post 2020 positive 34454)

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS:

- Key concerns regarding horse sport included use of whips, difficulty of competition, and prevalence of death and injury during and post competitive career and even positive posts received negative responses.
- Some felt that equestrianism is inspiring and unique to watch.
- The number of negative posts from news pages and number of negative interactions/comments in relation to equestrian sport has increased since 2020.
- The industry must prove its legitimacy and credibility to maintain public trust and improve and justify industry practice where needed (figure 2).



Figure 2 Recommendations for the equine industry moving forward (adapted from Douglas, Owers and Campbell, 2022)

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