

BRAD PRICE

PRO SPORTS, LOCKOUTS, AND IMPACT ON FAN INTEREST

THE QUESTION

- ▶ Major League Baseball (MLB) is currently in a lockout. Because the players' union and MLB could not ratify a new collective bargaining agreement, MLB has closed its doors to players. This means that for the time being, MLB players are not employees of MLB. Players are not allowed to use team facilities in any capacity (hence, "lockout") but MLB is also not allowed to market the players to fans. This means that there is little-to-no MLB media of any form right now. I *suspect* that this drives fan interest in MLB down and hurts revenue in the short term (maybe one calendar year?).
- ▶ I can test this hypothesis by analyzing fan interest (in this case, book and DVD checkouts from the Seattle Public Library) over time while paying specific attention to changes during recent lockouts in the other major pro sports (NBA, NFL, NHL).

THE QUERY

```
USE spl_2016;
```

```
/* I got help writing this query from the Volume and Multi-dimensions section of https://www.mat.ucsb.edu/~g.legrady/academic/courses/15w259/d/SQL\_demos\_.pdf */
```

```
select year(cout), month(cout),
```

```
sum( case when (title like "% NHL%" or LOWER(title) like "% hockey%")
```

```
then 1 else 0 end) as hockey,
```

```
sum( case when (title like "% MLB%" or LOWER(title) like "% baseball%")
```

```
then 1 else 0 end) as baseball,
```

```
sum( case when (title like "% NBA%" or LOWER(title) like "% basketball%")
```

```
then 1 else 0 end) as basketball,
```

```
sum( case when (title like "% NFL%" or LOWER(title) like "% football%")
```

```
then 1 else 0 end) as football
```

```
from outraw where year(cout) != "2022" and (itemtype like "%bk" or itemtype like "%dvd")
```

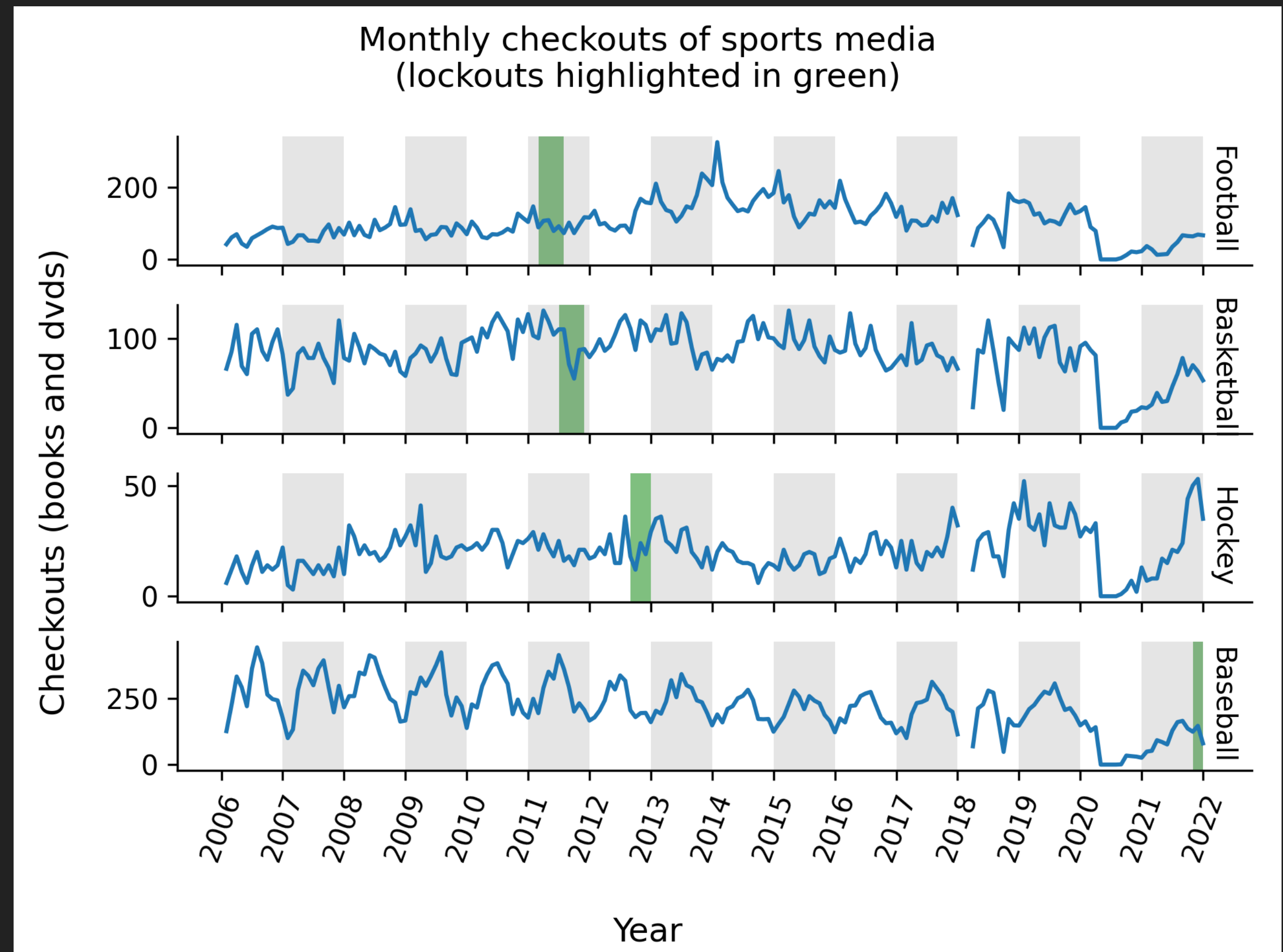
```
group by month(cout), year(cout)
```

```
order by year(cout), month(cout)
```

- ▶ I wanted to get the timestamp and number of checkouts of books and DVDs for each major sport
- ▶ I included the name of the sport and the league to get the largest response I could to minimize noise in the data
- ▶ I had to add blank rows of zeros for Jan.-Mar. 2018 because there was no checkouts for this timeframe
- ▶ I also wanted to throw away any data from 2022 because Jan. 2022 is incomplete – it didn't stack up well with the other months

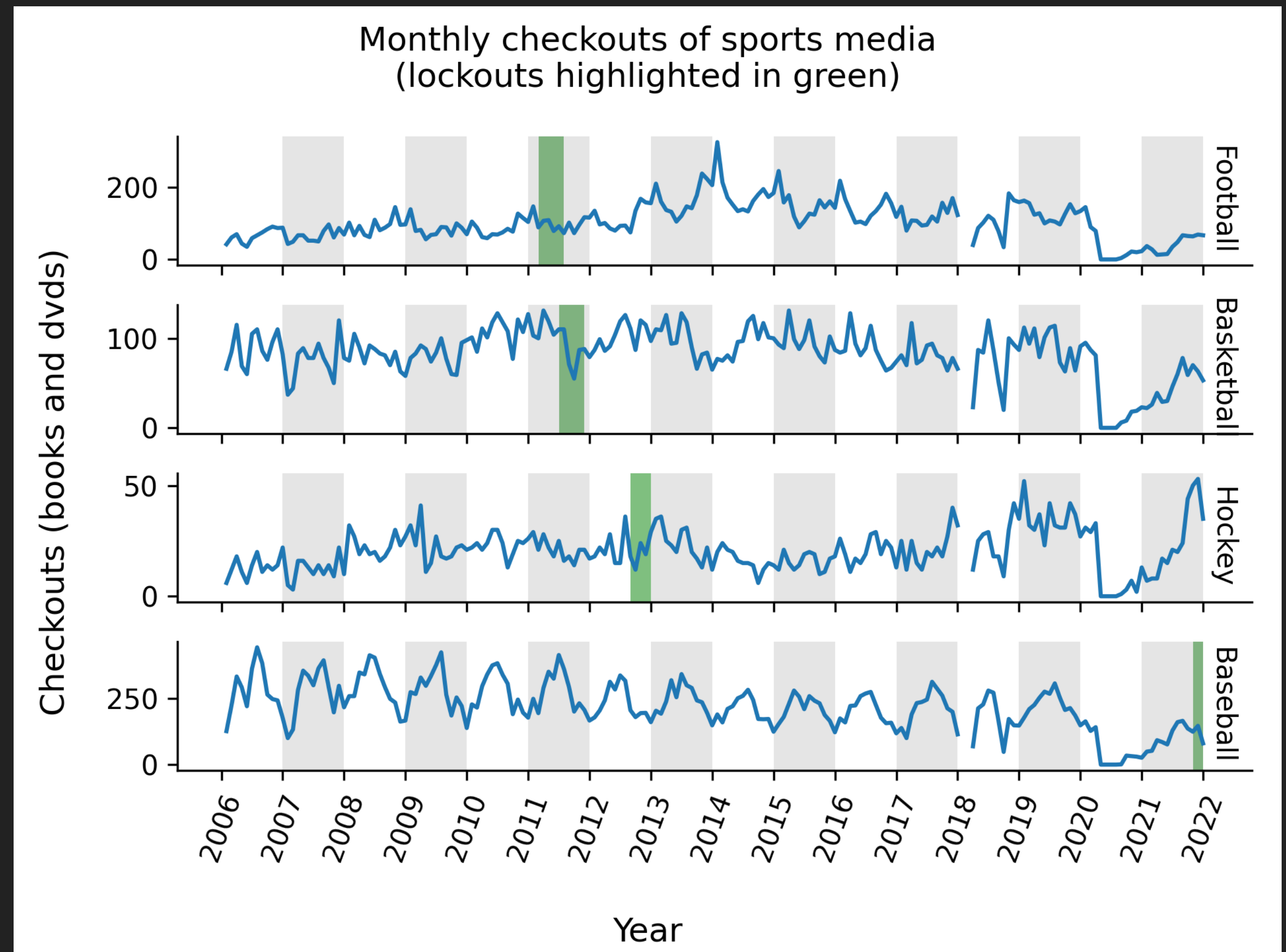
THE RESULTS

- ▶ There does not seem to be a significant correlation between checkouts and lockouts
- ▶ Basketball has a steep drop in interest after the lockout begins, but this is inconclusive – hard to say it was caused by the lockout for sure



DISCUSSION

- ▶ There are seasonal dips in interest during all major sports – they all happen during the sport's offseason
- ▶ MLB likely will not have a noticeable change in fan interest for the 2022 season, assuming the lockout is resolved and games are played as normal
- ▶ 2014 showed a significant increase in football interest – it is hard to say for certain why this is, but I suspect that it may have been caused by widespread access to fantasy football (available on a smartphone)



CONCLUSION

- ▶ I did not see a large, reproducible decrease in fan interest during lockout periods of major North American sports organizations
- ▶ Any changes I observed were not significant enough to make a reasonable guess that MLB will have a drop in fan interest

REFERENCES

- ▶ Data is courtesy of the Seattle Public Library database (2016)
- ▶ Query syntax was aided by class sample SQL 'Volume and Multi-dimensions'
https://www.mat.ucsb.edu/~g.legrady/academic/courses/15w259/d/SQL_demos_.pdf
- ▶ Lockout dates provided by <https://abc17news.com/news/2021/12/04/p...t-facts-2/>